

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor Announces 2012 Water Policy Legislation

Future public meetings will give stakeholders chance to learn more

Topeka - Governor Sam Brownback announced today his administration's 2012 legislative proposals to promote water conservation grow the economy and create jobs in western Kansas.

"Without the Ogallala Aquifer, agriculture and all of its related businesses could not be sustained, manufacturing could not continue, recreational opportunities would diminish and the towns in the area would cease to exist," Governor Brownback said. "Our proposed legislation will help to conserve and extend this vital resource so important to our state's economic future."

Brownback said the work on the proposals began at the Governor's Economic Summit on the Future of the Ogallala Aquifer in held Colby last July. The Summit provided a forum for stakeholders to discuss their concerns, ideas and visions for the future.

Following the Summit, the Kansas Water Authority (KWA) appointed the Ogallala Aquifer Advisory Committee (OAAC), a 21-member committee consisting of KWA members and Ogallala stakeholders, to review short and long term solutions.

"The Ogallala Aquifer is the primary source of water for the western third of Kansas," KWA Chair Gary Harshberger said. "It is essential to find ways to help extend and conserve the life of the aquifer."

Following the OAAC's and stakeholder input, the KWA developed the recommendations for the Governor's 2012 water legislation proposals:

- Amend appropriation act to eliminate "use it or lose it" for groundwater rights in areas closed to new water right development to protect those rights from unintentional forfeiture;
- Support legislation to provide a process for a proactive conservation plans (called Local Enhancement Management Plans, or LEMAs) that can have mandatory reductions, if supported by the Groundwater Management District, has corrective measures that address conservation needs, and is approved by the Chief Engineer;
- Allow development of additional groundwater Water Banks for a market-based program to relocate water use and provide conservation in water short areas; and
- Amend the multi-year flex accounts to give irrigators expanded capabilities to manage their crop water over a five year period, a useful tool when there is limited water.

"The proposals are an important step towards addressing the depleting aquifer issues," said Tracy Streeter, Kansas Water Office Director and Kansas Water Authority Secretary. "The OAAC will continue to meet in 2012 to further discuss options to define and reach the goal to conserve and extend the useful life of the Ogallala aquifer as it is stated in the *Kansas Water Plan*."

Governor Brownback made the Ogallala a high priority while he served as the Secretary of Agriculture more than 20 years ago. Current Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Dale Rodman also understands the importance of implementing water legislation.

"We need to build the Kansas agriculture economy and agribusiness opportunities in our state while also extending the Ogallala Aquifer for future generations of Kansans," Secretary Rodman said. "The Department of Agriculture, along with the rest of the Brownback administrative team, has worked diligently to listen to our stakeholders on how we can develop solutions that work for Kansas farmers and ranchers. We look forward to continuing to work with Kansans as we move towards implementation and consider future alternatives for balancing conservation and economic development."

The KWA, Kansas Water Office and Kansas Department of Agriculture staff will hold four public meetings around the state so stakeholders can learn more about the proposed 2012 legislation.

- **Thursday, Dec. 8**
 - Wichita, REAP Policy Summit, Drury Plaza Broadview Hotel, 2:30-5 p.m.
- **Friday, Dec. 9**
 - Topeka, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, Marvin Auditorium, 10 a.m.
- **Tuesday, Dec. 13**
 - Garden City, Lee Richardson Zoo, Finnup Center for Conservation Education, 9:30 a.m.
 - Colby Community College, Cultural Arts Center/Frahm Theatre, 2p.m.

NOTE: Any individual with a disability may request accommodation to participate at least five working days before the meeting by contacting the Kansas Water Office at (785) 296-3185.

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As the state's water office, KWO conducts water planning, policy coordination and water marketing as well as facilitates public input throughout the state.

The agency prepares the KANSAS WATER PLAN, a plan for water resources development, management and conservation. KWO also reviews all water laws and makes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature for needed legislation.