



FRANKLIN COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Your Conservation Partner Since 1941

April 11, 2016

Blue Ribbon Task Force
c/o Kansas Water Office
900 SW Jackson, Suite 404
Topeka KS 66612

Thank you for allowing us to provide input during your planning meeting as the task force discusses funding demands pertaining to the *Vision for the Future of Water Supply in Kansas*. The Franklin County Conservation District has had staff attend both the 2014 and 2015 Governors Water Conference and both of the *Vision* outreach and education planning meetings held so far this year. In addition, we are currently represented on the Marais des Cygnes Regional Advisory Committee. We are attempting to keep up with the developments of *The Vision* as this multiyear project evolves so that we can play an active role in the implementation and advocacy of *The Vision*.

In attending the outreach and education planning meetings we have heard discussion regarding many beneficial aspects to achieve the goals of *The Vision*. A majority of the proposals and ideas require funding and several would even require development of new organizations/positions for oversight and implementation. We would encourage the Blue Ribbon Task Force to look at the resources already available before making recommendations to allocate funds to the development of new organizations or positions. Organizations such as 4H, FFA, KACEE and KFAC are already providing quality outreach and education to Kansans about water; we would encourage the Blue Ribbon Task Force to advocate for providing funds to these organizations in lieu of using funds to duplicate services and programs already available.

Another beneficial resource for the implementation of multiple *Vision* goals are conservation districts. Kansas conservation districts are political subdivisions of state government charged with the vital role of conservation of natural resources, including water. Funds given to conservation districts to assist with *The Vision* goals could be used for on the ground water conservation and education, without having to utilize funds for program development or staff. Conservation districts maintain an active presence in all 105 counties and have the potential to be a key partner for the Blue Ribbon Task Force and *The Vision*. Conservation districts are the primary local unit of government responsible for the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources within the county boundary and with a conservation district in every county *The Vision* suddenly has statewide advocates for outreach at a local level without the creation of any new staff or organizations. Conservation districts have been in the business of conservation in Kansas since the years immediately following the Dust Bowl; 2016 marks the 78th anniversary for Labette County and the 62nd anniversary for Shawnee County, the first and last of the 105 conservation district formed in Kansas. Franklin County will celebrate our 75th anniversary on April 25, 2016.

Using the resources and the agencies responsible for the conservation of water and other natural resources as *The Vision* implementation develops seems like a natural partnership. A beneficial funding decision would be to reinstate funds to conservation district for information and education. Conservation District

received \$3,000 through the Kansas Water Plan specifically for information and education programs until SFY10. These funds were taken from conservation districts due to shortages in the Kansas Water Plan fund. We would encourage the Blue Ribbon Task force to make recommendation for the reinstatement of the \$315,000 needed annually to give each conservation district \$3,000 in information and education funds to be used for water conservation education.

We would also strongly encourage the Blue Ribbon Task Force to make recommendation for fully funding State Aid to Conservation Districts as another means of funding to implement *The Vision*. According to state statute 2-1907c, conservation districts are eligible to receive an amount not to exceed \$25,000 annually per conservation district in state funds. Franklin County played an active role in the process of gaining legislative support for HB2048 and SB60 during the winter of 2007. Our staff traveled to Topeka in January 2007 and gave testimony to both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees along with other representatives from the State Conservation Commission and Kansas Association of Conservation District in support of the bills. Unfortunately conservation district have only received the full \$25,000 once since Governor Sebelius signed HB2048 on April 9, 2007. The State Aid to Conservation Districts has continued to decrease annually to a low of \$21,975 in July 2015. Budget shortages are causing conservation districts to reduce information and educational programing; many of which were focused on water, and even to reduce staff in some counties. If the Blue Ribbon Task Force were able to petition for funds to fully fund conservation district at the \$25,000 annual amount conservation districts would be able to provide local programs to help the Kansas Water Office meet the education and outreach goals within *The Vision*.

In summary we would encourage the Blue Ribbon Task Force consider providing funds to existing agencies and programs before funds are used to create new materials, new staff positions, and new programs. Kansas has the tools needed to provide quality water conservation education statewide; and Kansas has conservation districts and organizations such as KACEE, KFAC, 4H and FFA who have been providing water conservation programs for years; we just need to provide sufficient funds to those agencies and organizations through *The Vision* to help reach everyone's goals and missions.

On behalf of the Franklin County Conservation District Board of Supervisors,



Keri Harris, District Manager

Stephen Curtis, Chairman
Doug Smith, Vice Chairman
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