



# United States Department of the Interior



## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Mountain-Prairie Region

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
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OCT 22 2018

Josh Meyer, Superintendent  
Chad Fisher, Board President  
St. John – Hudson USD 350  
505 North Broadway  
St. John, Kansas 67576

RECEIVED

Nov 15 2018

Big Bend GMD #5

Dear Mr. Meyer and Mr. Fisher:

Thank you for your letter dated September 13, 2018, regarding the water impairment conflict. Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is disappointed with the decision made by the Board of Education to prevent schools from participating in activities hosted by Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) staff, we understand the frustration and concern regarding the impairment proceedings.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act identifies education and interpretation as compatible uses on the Refuge and staff considers these two activities as fundamental to achieving the mission of the Service, which is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We have enjoyed our relationship with the local schools, however, maintaining the Refuge water right is necessary to achieving the purpose of the Refuge established by the Congress of the United States, which is for use as an inviolate sanctuary. The Refuge is a critical migratory stopover site for a diversity of waterbirds as evidenced by designation as a Ramsar wetland of international significance, a Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network site of regional importance, and an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. In addition, the Refuge provides critical habitat for the only naturally migrating population of endangered whooping cranes.

The Service has worked diligently with stakeholders in the Rattlesnake Creek Basin over the past 25 plus years to resolve water resource concerns; however we have been unable to find a mutually agreeable solution. As a result, the Service requested an impairment investigation by the Kansas Department of Agriculture-Division of Water Resources to avoid jeopardizing our ability to achieve the purpose of the Refuge. The Service remains committed to working with all stakeholders in the Rattlesnake Creek Basin find a solution that works for everyone involved.

The Refuge is aware of the responsibility we have in working with local communities to achieve a shared vision of the Rattlesnake Creek Basin and also values local community support and

collaboration. We are genuinely concerned about the sustainability of water resources in central Kansas, not only for the refuge, but for all stakeholders in the Rattlesnake Creek Basin. The Refuge will continue to remain open to the public for wildlife-dependent activities, including educational opportunities with all interested school districts. We encourage the Board of Education to reconsider their decision and encourage interaction between the Refuge and the school district to facilitate communication and education of issues that impact us all.

If you need further information, please contact the Assistant Regional Director for the National Wildlife Refuge System in the Mountain-Prairie Region, Will Meeks, at (303) 236-4303.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will Meeks", written over a horizontal line.

*Deputy* Regional Director