



# SKYLINE SCHOOLS U.S.D. 438



SUPERINTENDENT  
BECCA FLOWERS

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November 2, 2018

Big Bend Groundwater Management District 5  
125 S. Main St.  
Stafford, KS 67578

To Whom it May Concern:

I am the superintendent of Skyline Schools, a rural school district located in Pratt County in South Central Kansas. I have been a part of this school district and this community since 1989. Over the last three decades the individuals that provide the pulse for the rural and small town way of life have become very near and dear to my heart. It is on behalf of these people and that way of life that I write this letter.

I am aware of the concerns voiced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service claiming that the water flowing from the Rattlesnake Creek into the Quivera National Wildlife Refuge has diminished over the years as more water rights were granted to farmers. As a result, without an adequate plan, the water level at Quivera cannot meet the future needs of the migratory birds as they pass through the area.

I am aware of various draft proposals that would mandate that farmers remove the end guns of their irrigation systems in an effort to reduce the water used for crops with intentions of increasing the water flow to Quivera. I appreciate the commitment the F.W.S. and the people of Kansas have to protecting the migratory birds. I would hope that the same consideration would be given to protecting the well being of the individuals involved in the agriculture industry as their work feeds the world and maintains a thriving rural way of life and economy in Kansas.

The economy of the area within our school district is driven by agriculture. A great deal of that agriculture revenue depends on strategic use of the water rights granted to the growers. Reducing the amount of irrigated acres in this district will have a detrimental impact that starts with reduced production and then ripples out to every segment of the community. Following is a very limited list of the impact this will have on our rural communities:

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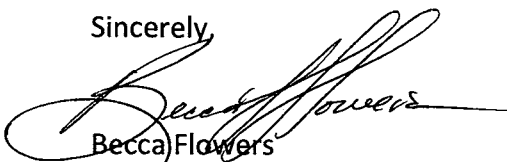
Big Bend GMD #5

- The obvious reduction of revenue from commodities will result in reduction of spending everywhere, from restaurants to implement dealers. Local retailers will feel the impact, leading to tough decisions about the future of these businesses.
- The valuation of the land will significantly decrease. As the valuation decreases, the money flowing to all taxing entities will decrease.
- At the school districts, the impact of the change in valuation will reduce the capital outlay fund that is used to maintain, build new, and replace school facilities. The reduction will also increase the tax burden on local taxpayers to fund the supplemental general fund, as the number of mills will need to increase in order to provide the same amount of money in that fund. The future of our communities depends on the next generation, but the funds allocated to effectively educate and empower them will be reduced, further contributing to a failing economy.
- As the agriculture economy declines due to a reduction in production, the population will migrate away from this area as they search for jobs to provide for their families. Technology and the already suffering agriculture economy have caused this to happen to some degree, we cannot afford for it to worsen.
- The stress of a declining economy has already had a detrimental impact on the mental health of the citizens of many areas of rural Kansas. This will only complicate that issue in a time when funds for mental health services provided locally have already been drastically reduced.
- As people leave, community centers and churches will be forced to close their doors and lock up for good. The closing of these centers of collaboration and support serve to further the mental health challenges noted above.

By no means is this list complete. As you look for solutions to get more water flowing into Quivera National Wildlife Refuge to meet the needs of the wildlife, I implore you to also seriously consider the impact on the people of the communities impacted by the solutions being evaluated. There is no doubt that conservation of water is a high priority for the future of Quivera, and more importantly for the sustainment of agriculture in this part of Kansas. But I also know that if we adopt policies and practices that sustain and empower the human resources in our communities we are far more likely to encourage innovation and implementation of conservative strategies.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my thoughts on this issue. Best wishes as you seek answers to this challenge and the many other issues that you deal with on a daily basis. Thank you for your service!

Sincerely,



Becca Flowers  
Superintendent