



FRITZEMEIER FARM  
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We are writing to express our concerns regarding Audubon of Kansas (AOK) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's call for water at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. We are recently retired farmers living on the Stafford/Reno County line, just a few miles from Quivira. Randy operated our non-irrigated farm for more than 50 years, and we have been farm partners since our marriage in 1981. We still own farm ground and a cow/calf operation.

The discrepancies between Quivira and landowners is nothing new. However, back in 2020, it appeared that the two entities had found a way to work together toward a solution that would be palatable for both parties. However, it takes time and money to develop plans like augmentation wells. As landowners and residents of the area in which augmentation is proposed, we believe it's vital that stakeholders thoroughly study the possible consequences. The groundwater is already high in salt content in the area. The proposed position of the wells could negatively impact water quality for homesteads and livestock tanks in that area, including ours. We believe it should be done along the creek itself, away from farmsteads, or at Quivira itself.

In addition, our area has been experiencing drought for the past two-plus years. Even though our area got some rain in late July, the latest drought monitor (dated August 17, 2023) shows that we are still in severe drought. For months, we've been in the extreme drought category, the harshest ranking. During a drought, nobody has enough water – whether that's farmers or a refuge wanting to attract migratory birds.

Since 2020, entities like Groundwater Management District No. 5 and WaterPACK have been working with engineers to further develop an equitable plan. However, AOK and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are asking for immediate action to severely curtail water access for junior water rights holders. This would be devastating to our area's economy. Rural Kansas is already struggling with a declining population, fewer businesses and fewer services. Agriculture is Stafford County's No. 1 industry. Our school districts, hospitals, grocery stores, cooperatives and other smaller businesses are dependent upon a strong agricultural community. Kansas State University Agriculture Economics Department estimates that a dollar generated in a rural community will circulate the local economy five to seven times. If landowners lose their irrigation rights, there will be a significant reduction in land value. This translates to lower tax revenues for local taxing entities, causing our schools, municipalities and rural healthcare systems to suffer.

GMD5 representatives say that the data used to formulate DWR's 2016 Impairment Report was actually taken when the Quivira Wetlands had been drained for ongoing habitat improvements. Though the counties which pull water from the Rattlesnake Basin for agriculture purposes have been in a drought for nearly four years, the Quivira salt marsh has been refilling on its own, even before the recent rains in July of this year. It is working as a healthy ecosystem should. In addition, Kansas Department of Agriculture Chief Engineer of Water Resources David Pope said in a letter written to the U.S. Department of Interior in 1993: "It is quite probable that the natural flows of water to the full extent of this right will not be available in normal years. Management plans for the refuge area should be based on probable flows of Rattlesnake Creek." We own a Farm Bureau Century Farm pasture along the Rattlesnake. In Randy's youth – before irrigation was as prevalent – he remembers years when the Rattlesnake ran dry and years when it left its banks. That cycle has continued throughout nearly 68 years of living on and working the land.

We believe continued negotiations between U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NRCS, KDA, GMD5, WaterPACK and other entities can yield an amicable solution, if given time and resources to develop and carry out the plans.

Respectfully, *Randy & Kim Fritzemeier*