

STATE OF KANSAS



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GOVERNOR LAURA KELLY

September 8, 2023

Martha Williams, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Williams,

As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) is a key partner in the conservation of Kansas's natural resources and the health and vitality of the central Kansas region, I am writing to share my concern and the community's concern for the economic effects that an immediate call for the Service's senior water rights in the Rattlesnake Creek Basin would have on the surrounding community's economic vitality.

In addition to being home to the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (the Refuge), an important sanctuary for many migratory and resident species, central Kansas is home to an essential and robust community of agriculture producers and associated rural businesses that constitute the largest industry and private sector employer throughout much of this region of the state. Despite at times challenging conditions, including the current and persistent drought, the Refuge and surrounding farms have existed alongside each other for much of our state's history, each serving as stewards of the surrounding land and water and providing habitat for local wildlife.

As a result of these producers' contributions to the surrounding economy, an abrupt change in farming practices—which would be required by an immediate call for the Service's senior water rights—could devastate the entire region, including municipalities, schools, residents, and businesses not directly involved in the agricultural sector. I would refer you to the letter sent by a group of 32 local officials dated August 29, 2023, which I have attached to this letter, that attests to the effects this action could have.

I commend you for your previous work to collaborate with the regional Groundwater Management District #5 (GMD #5), agreeing to a framework in 2020 that provided a collaborative approach to increase streamflow in the Rattlesnake Creek and begin to address the impairment issue identified by the Kansas Department of Agriculture Division of Water Resources. I would call on you to return to that framework, including continued engagement with regional leaders, members of Congress, my administration, the Kansas Department of Agriculture, and GMD #5.

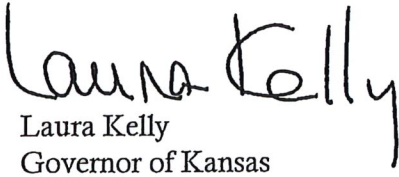
Sustained collaboration could be especially helpful in developing innovative solutions that provide for restoration of adequate streamflow in the basin when water for the refuge is most needed and providing a path forward that avoids acute economic harm to local communities, without the Service losing any rights.

Failure to reach a collaborative and gradual solution will create unnecessary economic hardships for local businesses and communities that will ripple across the state and region.

Letter to Martha Williams, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Re: QNWR Request
September 8, 2023
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Thank you for considering the economic impact to producers and communities. We seek a solution that is collaborative in nature, gradual in its implementation, and that will ensure the long-term health of the Refuge.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Laura" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Kelly" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The signature is positioned above the printed name and title.

Laura Kelly
Governor of Kansas