

Western Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 1
Katie Durham, District Manager
TESTIMONY SUPPORTING HB 2634
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
March 13th, 2024

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Regarding HB 2634:

The Western Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 1 (GMD1) strongly supports HB 2634, and the flexibility it provides to producers who are operating within a Locally Enhanced Management Area (LEMA) or other conservation management plans.

GMD1 currently has two LEMA's, the Wichita County Water Conservation Area (WCA), and several other small WCAs. Typically, producers are provided with a five-year allocation of acre feet that cannot be exceeded during the period of time identified in the management plan or LEMA. However, regardless they still must stay under the annual authorized quantity in any given year. To date, the only way to enhance flexibility is to enroll into a MYFA which allows for the annual authorized quantity to be exceeded in any given year, by establishing an additional five-year quantity and paying a one-time monetary fee. As one can imagine, this can create some difficulties in accounting water use, as the five-year time periods of each program may not be aligned.

Additionally, the Wichita County LEMA prohibits enrolling into a MYFA after the first year, which was 2021. In circumstances of severe drought as was seen in 2022, this significantly reduced the flexibility that producers had to adapt to unforeseen drought circumstances. In some cases, in 2022, if they would have had additional flexibility, they would have been able to utilize more of their LEMA quantity to save their crop. Lastly, there are several instances where two or more wells may all be tied together to irrigate the same acres which can cause confusion if each well has a separate LEMA allocation, as well as a different annual authorized quantity.

Over the last few years, GMD1 has held numerous outreach meetings, and overwhelmingly, feedback from producers has indicated that additional flexibility within a LEMA or management plan would be greatly appreciated. The flexibility that could be incorporated into a LEMA or management plan by HB 2634 would assist producers in adapting to unforeseen circumstances, drought, and would provide a greater flexibility in planning and management while operating within the confines of a LEMA, WCA or other management plan focused on the conservation of water. Therefore, for the reasons stated above, GMD1 is strongly supporting HB 2634.