

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 145
On behalf of The Nature Conservancy in Kansas
To the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

March 12, 2021

Dear Chairman Billinger and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 145 on behalf of The Nature Conservancy in Kansas (TNC) and our 6,500 members across the state. For more than 30 years, The Nature Conservancy in Kansas has worked to fulfill our mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have permanently protected 141,021 acres across the state, including five preserves that are open to the public. These preserves provide access for outdoor recreation and showcase our conservation practices and the natural beauty of Kansas. Every year they attract visitors from dozens of states and many countries abroad.

Less than two percent of land in Kansas is publicly owned. Public lands and waters connect people and nature and drive the outdoor recreation economy. The current bill to allow the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) to acquire land to expand and enhance the Byron Walker Wildlife Area will significantly increase the recreational opportunities in southern Kansas. It will expand access for watersports, hunting, and fishing, and provide additional habitat management to sustain wildlife populations, including migrating shorebirds and waterfowl. Ducks Unlimited has partnered with KDWPT to improve the natural habitat at Byron Walker, including invasive tree removal and other upland management. Wetland restorations are planned after the transfer. The preservation and restoration of wetlands in Kansas is key to The Nature Conservancy's mission and is vital to protecting Kansas water quality, as well as the diversity of shorebirds and waterfowl that depend on them.

Access to natural areas for recreation can inspire, educate, and influence the public to support conservation. TNC recognizes the importance of connecting people and nature, and providing invaluable educational and recreational experiences for Kansans. Therefore, TNC encourages the committee to recommend the passage of SB 145. Thank you for your time.