

February 5, 2023

Testimony to the House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

NAME: **Leslie D. Mark**

TITLE: **Kansas Citizen / Voter**

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BILL NUMBER: **SCR1602, *Disapproving the designation of the lesser prairie chicken as a threatened species in Kansas by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.***

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: **Opponent**

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: **Written Only**

Dear Chair Rahjes & Members of the Committee,

I write to voice opposition to SCR 1602, disapproving the designation of the lesser prairie chicken as a threatened species in Kansas by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

It's always struck me as odd the vehemence and speed with which opposition surfaces to a threatened designation under the Endangered Species Act re: the lesser prairie chicken. Why do some humans feel more existentially threatened by conservation than the poor creatures at the brink and the ecosystems undergirding them? A proposed listing is automatically deemed bad news. Of course, it is true that, for the birds, their plight must be really dire to have arrived at this action. For the humans, it seems fear centers on regulatory and bureaucratic concerns getting in the way of "just doing their thing."

But what if an ESA designation actually proves advantageous? First, it draws attention to the diminishing of the entire southern Great Plains prairies, not only the chicken. A 2022 study showed precipitous drops in all grasslands bird populations — more than any other avian category. Second, it can help address soil and water quality / quantity issues, as well as carbon sequestration, through habitat conservation.

We've had the required year of public comment and the final Federal rule drafts are a couple of months away. Once the chicken is listed we can then develop the guidelines and targeted programs for the areas of greatest need and most impact. Over 94% of the chicken's habitat is on private lands, mostly small family ranchers and a few family farmers, most all committed to conservation but in need of financial support to make a long term commitment feasible.

For the lesser prairie chickens' habitats there remains a continuing threat from oil, gas and wind energy development. Understandably, businesses want predictable, stable regulatory environments. Your financial supporters and industry lobbyists clearly believe the best way to get that is with no regulation. Another way is by applying sensible regulation evenly across the five states of the southern Great Plains. This should be seen as an opportunity to work with oil/gas and wind energy industries for best outcomes, ensuring that rules are evenly applied in each state in the region.

If we can turn the corner with this designation on habitat quantity to match the success we have had with habitat quality, the roughly 30,000 remaining chickens are a large enough cohort to make a real comeback. Hundreds of thousands of acres of our country's "last best places," which include southern and western

Kansas for the lesser prairie chicken, have already been preserved using existing programs created from previous farm legislation. It's taken a whole suite of fiscal incentives and tailored programs to help landowners and conservation groups achieve common goals and support our national interests.

I expect you to work with our Kansas congressional delegation to ensure the new five year bill supports conservation efforts. Now is not the time to throw down the gauntlet before the lesser prairie chicken — vote no on SCR1602.

Leslie D. Mark
Mission Hills, HD 25 / Sen 7