



**Date:** February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**To:** House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Representative Ken Rahjes, Chair

**From:** Justin Cobb, Government Relations Manager  
The Nature Conservancy in Kansas

**RE:** Oral Neutral Testimony – SCR 1602

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SCR 1602. The Nature Conservancy is a nonpartisan, conservation nonprofit that has worked for over 30 years in Kansas to fulfill our mission of conserving the lands and water on which all life depends. We have permanently conserved more than 150,000 acres in Kansas including five preserves that are open to the public. We are dedicated to conserving the natural heritage of the state by pursuing science-based initiatives, including habitat conservation.

The Nature Conservancy supports the purpose of the Endangered Species Act and conserving lesser prairie-chickens under the Endangered Species Act is supported by science. Lesser prairie-chickens require large tracks of contiguous grasslands, but nearly 90% of suitable habitat has been lost or fragmented. The Nature Conservancy believes recovery of the lesser prairie-chicken is possible.

More than half of all lesser prairie-chickens in the world are now found in western Kansas, between the Arkansas and Smoky Hill rivers. This small area is also the only area where the lesser prairie-chicken population is either stable or increasing. One example where the species has increased is on The Nature Conservancy's Smoky Valley Ranch, an 18,000-plus acre shortgrass prairie preserve in Logan County. Smoky Valley Ranch is a key site for implementing grassland grazing techniques that enhance nesting and brooding habitat. The Nature Conservancy also works with other private landowners in the area to maintain and improve habitat conditions for prairie-chickens on their land without sacrificing agricultural profitability.

The Nature Conservancy's Southern High Plains Initiative focuses on voluntary, long-term conservation strategies across the lesser prairie-chicken's five state range. The Nature Conservancy will continue collaborating with the landowners, state and federal agencies, and private investors who are all needed to bring this emblematic bird back from the brink.

The Nature Conservancy has also been a leading influence on improving and implementing voluntary conservation programs such as CRP State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE). Programs such as these promote both agriculture and conservation interests and need support at the state level.

This voluntary, incentivized conservation approach is the most important to achieve conservation of the lesser prairie-chicken at an adequate scale. We encourage legislators



and stakeholders at all levels to actively engage in the process to find a solution that provides the conservation measures necessary for both long-term conservation of the lesser prairie-chicken and the economic prosperity of Kansas.