**FARM BILL AND KANSAS WATER POLICY**

Crop irrigation account for 85+5 use of water in Kansas. In 2017, 2.5 million acres were irrigated on 5,147 farms. Kansas had 58,569 farms so 10% had irrigation and 10% of the 21.8 million harvested crop acres were irrigated. Farm Bills drive cropping patterns in Kansas. Annual Farm Bill farm payments in Kansas total $1+ Billion and 75% of these farm programs are commodity payments and subsidized crop insurance that go for four crops – wheat, corn, soybeans and sorghum. 88% of these farm payments go to just 20% of Kansas farms thus driving further consolidation. In 2017, Kansas had $18.78 Billion in farm sales and 2,881 farms (5% of farms) accounted for 75% of these farm sales. In comparison to the Farm Bill subsidies, the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Water Office State Water Plan Fund and the Division of Environment at KDH&E budgets total $125 million.

15-20% of these annual Farm Bill farm subsidies go for conservation programs. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – created in 1985 - idles land for 10-15 years for wildlife habitat and ecosystem restoration. Today Kansas has 1.7 million acres in CRP. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – developed in 2008 – provides funding for working farms and their whole-farm conservation plans. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides funding for one-time conservation projects on working farms. In 2020, CRP + CSP + EQIP in Kansas totaled over $200 million compared to the Kansas State Water Plan Fund of $20 million.

CRP is an entitlement fully funded program that is being expanded from 24 million acres to 27 million acres nationally this year with an emphasis on grasslands and climate impacts. Unfortunately, CSP and EQIP are underfunded. In 2020, only 18% of eligible CSP applicants in Kansas were funded and only 23% of eligible Kansas EQIP applicants were funded. The good news is that in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), EQIP received an additional $8.5 Billion and CSP an additional $3.5 Billion over five years. The updated 2022 Kansas Water Plan does not specifically site the role of these conservation programs and the funding to Kansas. How can Kansas expand the use of CRP and CSP funds for more buffer strips, crop rotations and cover cropping?

Sadly, Farm Bill forums or information sessions do not occur under the dome in Topeka despite the overwhelming impact these
cropping patterns have on soil depletion, sedimentation loss into the reservoirs and monoculture plantings driving crop irrigation. There should be a Farm Bill Summit this summer or fall with the key Congressional members (Rep. Mann and Rep. Davids are on the House Agriculture committee, Sen. Marshal is on the Senate Agriculture committee and Sen. Moran on agriculture appropriations), the Farm Service Agency director (that administers CRP), the NRCS director (that administers CSP and EQIP) and Kansas Legislative leaders.

In terms of the ‘over-appropriated’ water rights (1950’s to 1980’s) in Kansas, there should be established this summer an interim Kansas Legislative committee on water to fully understand who owns these 34,500 water rights, the status/value of these water rights and finding a funding source to start recapturing some portion of these water rights. Kansas now has $1 Billion dollars in a separate ‘Budget Stabilization Fund’ (rainy-day fund). Some portion – say $100 million – should be earmarked for such a ‘water rights recapture fund’.

*Civil Eats: This Farm Bill Really Matters. We Explain Why.*

**WATER LEGISLATION PROGRESS REPORT**

House Bill 2279 mandates that Groundwater Management Districts (GMD’s) file annual progress reports with the Kansas Legislature and conservation action plans with the Chief Engineer at The Kansas Department of Agriculture Division of Water Resources. The Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources committee held hearings on the bill before amending certain portions of the bill and sending it to the full Senate. House Bill 2302 dedicates certain sales tax revenues to the State Water Plan Fund with specific directions to create technical resources for GMD’s and water project grant funds. This bill was also heard in the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources committee. This bill was heavily amended. The funding source was changed from a dedicated sales tax revenue source to funding coming straight from the State General Fund (SGF). The House version and now the Senate version strive to increase the State Water Plan Fund from $25 million to near $70 million annually. These Senate-amended versions of HB 2279 and HB 2302 (now changed to Senate sub. for HB 2302) will pass the full Senate next week and be put into a House-Senate conference committee to find an acceptable compromise.
SOUTHWEST POWER POOL (SPP)

SPP coordinates the movement of high-power electricity among 14 central U.S. including Kansas. There are 1,000 power plants in the SPP region and 70,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines serving 18 million people. In 2022, renewable energy (primarily wind) accounted for 37% of power production with coal at 33% and natural gas at 21%. SPP is one of seven Regional Transmission Organizations (RTO’s) in the country and has the lowest wholesale electric rates of the seven given the expansion of wind energy. There are now 15,000 wind turbines in the SPP.

SPP plays a role like that of an airport traffic controller. SPP does not own any of the power plants or the transmission lines. SPP coordinates the movement of power around the 14 states. Power generators bid an amount of power into the SPP wholesale market a day ahead of time and SPP determines the least cost and most reliable power generation. The 1,000 generating units are controlled by 300 marketing participants from investor-owned utilities to rural cooperatives to municipal power companies. This coordinated SPP electricity wholesale market topped $50 Billion in sales in 2022.

For a new power producer to join the SPP, they must request participation years ahead of producing power. SPP now has over 600 requests in line for future addition to the system including a number of battery storage projects. SPP has new power projections going out 25 years. It is essentially all renewable sources (wind and solar) and utility battery storage. SPP has increased its expertise in handling renewables the last twenty years, especially by being good at forecasting wind. Twenty years ago, SPP thought they could handle at most 30% of power production by wind, but now that figure can be 65-70%. There have been days when all the electricity on the SPP grid came from wind. Today (without adequate battery storage yet) - SPP relies on a 150 fast start natural gas plants (25 – 200 MWs) that can start up in minutes and balance the variability of wind and solar production.

Kansas is a net power producer for the SPP by producing 60,000 MWs of power but the load in Kansas is 40,000 MWs. For the SPP system, Kansas produces 21% of the power and uses 16% of the demand. While there are 7 RTO’s nationwide that covers 2/3’s of the country, 1/3rd has no coordinated grid, particularly in the west (except for California). SPP is now providing certain transmission forecasting services and reliability tests to some of the western states. For ten years, there have been 7 high voltage direct current transmission lines tying SPP to the western states. These lines are fully subscribed and too small to significantly increase renewable power going west from Kansas. A large number of the existing coal plants were built in the 1970s and early 1980s, so age is becoming a real factor. SPP believes they can get to 75-80% renewable energy around the clock. It seems very possible that the western states will develop their own RTO as a portion of the SPP system.

On this video presentation, there are maps showing where RTO’s operate. There are the charts on power production and power demands. There are some insightful committee questions at the end of the presentation.

House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee

STATE BUDGET AND PUBLIC EDUCATION MANIPULATIONS
After weeks of committee and subcommittee work on the State Budget, Senate leadership on the Senate Ways & Means committee trashed that hard work and inserted arbitrary, undiscussed reductions to the proposed Governor’s budget and the thoughtful recommendations of Senate committees. On the Senate floor, an arbitrary 3.5% cut was made to most of State government except for education, medical programs and interest on the debt. The proposed 5% state employee salary increase was stripped out as was the state savings from expanding Medicaid. This altered budget was voted out of the full Senate while the House struggles to pass their version of a State budget. The House will pass a budget early next week and these two versions of the State budget will be put into a House-Senate conference committee to hammer out some compromise. This compromise will be brought to the floor of both chambers with no opportunity for any amendments. Legislators have two choices – pass the compromise or send it back to the six-member conference committee. While House-Senate conference committees start with 4 Republicans and 2 Democrats. If no consensus can be reached, legislative maneuvers will eventually give the 4 Republicans complete control. The floor votes will depict the unanimity of Republican lawmakers and the Governor’s power in this process. The Senate’s budget and its drastic cuts were made to provide greater latitude to cut more taxes for their donors.

While the House has struggled over the State budget, they have isolated public education in two bills – SB 83 and SB 113. SB 83 has the funding for special education along with expanded support for private school tax credits and vouchers. SB 113 has the rest of the budget for public schools along with amendments allowing private school students to participate in public school athletics and allowing school districts to pay school board members. These two bills have passed the full House and will be considered by the Senate. The Senate could vote to accept these heavily amended bills at which time they would head to the Governor’s desk for a certain veto. The other course of action would be for the Senate to non-concur in these two bills and place them in a Senate-House conference committee. April 6 is the final day of the regular session. Heavy-lifting remains to pass a constitutionally mandated balanced State budget that includes education funding along with tax cuts. The veto session begins April 26 and time will tell how many fundamental policy issues remain?

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**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OBSERVER CALLS**

During the legislative session, the League of Women Voters of Kansas (LWVK) hold weekly Friday (4 pm) zoom calls with their policy observers. The League has offered to open up these calls for interested Policy Watch readers. Cille King is the policy coordinator for the League. You will need to email Cille @ cilleking@gmail.com to be added to the notice list. Agendas come out a day or so before the call.

[Here](#) is the link to the LWVK 2023 Legislative Priorities:

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**Kansas Legislature Website**

For Legislative Committee and Hearing Information, and how to contact your legislator, and view floor and committee remotely, go to:
Contributors to KRC are automatically on the Policy Watch e-list, if they provide an e-mail address. KRC provides Updates to the sponsoring organizations including League of Women Voters of Kansas, Kansas Natural Resource Council, Kansas Farmers Union, Climate and Energy Project, Audubon of Kansas, and Friends of the Kaw, Jayhawk Audubon Society, who make the Updates available to their memberships.

If you are receiving KRC Policy Watch through one of these organizations and have questions, contact the organization directly.

If you wish to be removed from the KRC list, contact info@kansasruralcenter.org

For questions about Policy Watch content, contact Paul Johnson at pdjohnson@centurylink.net