

Before the House Water and Environment Committee
Presented by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club
Opponent Testimony on HCR 5008
February 7, 2017



Chairman Sloan and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HCR 5008, which codifies the Blue Ribbon Task Force recommendation of a tenth-cent sales tax dedication to the State Water Plan Fund.

The Sales Tax Dedication for water is not fair for Kansans because of disproportional water use.

The Kansas Chapter of Sierra Club suggests that the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force recommendation is an idea that does not balance the financial burden with the consequential benefit when it comes to water use.

Certainly, we support the effort to raise \$55 million to fully fund the Water Vision, but HCR 5008 applies the cost burden to Kansans as a whole unfairly, because it is only a small percentage of Kansans that are using the greatest share of our water. Again, 85% of our state's water is used by irrigators, who represent only 15-20% of the total acreage of Kansas agriculture. It is simply not fair for a small percentage of farmers to take the largest proportion of our state's water – for mostly private gain – and contribute just as much financially in sales tax dollars for the State Water Plan Fund as the average Kansan who uses very little water in comparison. We feel it is appropriate for irrigators to pay into a greater portion of the State Water Plan Fund because of their disproportionate impact on our state's water consumption.

HCR 5008 is NOT fitting without some sort of proportional financial match, specifically from irrigators.

Because water is not used equally, nor is benefitting our people equally economically, we need to consider a better proportional obligation to the funding stream. If indeed the sales tax is our best policy option to raise money for the State Water Plan Fund, then we would suggest our biggest industry beneficiaries of water use, such as irrigators, devise a strategy to proportionally match any funds that our public as a whole raises.

The State's financial dedication to the State Water Plan Fund is already created. We just need to fund it!

We remind the committee that state taxpayers already chip in when it comes to sharing the financial burden of the State Water Plan Fund; it is the annual \$6 million State General Fund transfer. This statutory requirement, enacted by lawmakers in 1989, is the proportional share Kansans make to the State Water Plan Fund. However, because lawmakers have ignored their responsibility to make this transfer in the last several years, the State Water Plan Fund is not receiving its dues from state taxpayers at-large. Please reverse this trend and make the statutory transfer, and allow the people to pay for their most precious natural resource as it was originally designed. We can raise the \$55 million in more equitable and fair manner than just a sales tax dedication alone.

Sincerely,

Zack Pistora | Legislative Director and State Lobbyist, Kansas Chapter of Sierra Club

zackpistora@gmail.com | 785-865-6503

The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to preserving, protecting, and enjoying our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter represents our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for more than forty years now.