

Before the House Agriculture Committee
Presented by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club
Opponent to HB 2669
February 18, 2020



Chairman Highland and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit oppositional testimony on HB 2669, which would amend existing law concerning state protections for threatened and endangered species. I am speaking today on behalf of the Kansas Chapter of Sierra Club.

As the oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization in the country, the Sierra Club is committed to maintaining the world's remaining natural ecosystems, and, where feasible, to the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems. Wildlife, plants, and their ecosystems have value in their own right, as well as value to humans and to the health of the biosphere. Because of species' value to ecosystems and to humans and for their intrinsic values, every effort should be made to prevent the extinction of species due to human activities. The Sierra Club vigorously supports strong and vibrant federal and state endangered species acts and related laws as well as recovery programs that protect wildlife, plants, and natural ecosystems.

The Kansas Sierra Club, which has about 5000 members across Kansas, wishes to express our very serious concerns about the Kansas Legislature trying to limit the ability of Kansas Department Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism (KDWPT) and its scientific advisory bodies to conserve our wildlife and wildlife habitat through the measures proposed in HB 2669.

As the Legislature considers HB 2669, remember that the state protection of Kansas' threatened and endangered species via an expanded and specific state listing is squarely within its mission and has overwhelming public support.

Within the mission statement of KDWPT, there is one sentence that epitomizes the role of the agency with regard to protecting "Wild Kansas": *To conserve and enhance Kansas' natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats to ensure future generations the benefits of the state's diverse living resources.*

KDWPT's survey "Kansas Resident's Opinions on Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Actions to Protect Wildlife" (Duda 2011) showed that almost all Kansas residents (91%) agree that KDWPT should continue to identify and protect critical habitat to maintain the existence of threatened and endangered wildlife.

States are best able to protect our threatened and endangered species, as current law provides. KDWPT is best suited to this duty for Kansas and ought to keep its current protection authority.

The federal Endangered Species Act recognizes that state managers are in the best position to understand and to protect wildlife; funds to help conserve nongame species at risk are provided through federal programs, including State Wildlife Grants.

The current processes of identifying Kansas species at risk and using the best available science to address habitat conservation issues at the state level have been well-tested and have proven effective because our wildlife experts understand best what is going on here.

KDWPT staff work effectively with landowners and municipalities to resolve problems regarding critical

habitat designation and protection.

Some species, not currently on the Federal list, need protection at the state level, especially at the edges of their normal ranges. Failure to do so, further restricts the range and long-term viability of the species.

Protecting species at the state level helps to prevent future population decline, which, if not addressed locally, can result in their status being elevated to federal protection levels, where habitat conservation measures are mandated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

HB 2669 and the consequential delisting of state protections would have the opposite effect of its legislative intent.

If state protections for threatened and endangered species are eliminated, endangered species groups will immediately petition the federal government to put the species on the federal list, and without protections at the state level, there is a strong chance that the federal government will have to list the species. If so, federal authorities will undoubtedly cause Kansans more trouble with a slower, less-locally knowledgeable protection effort with more complex and inconvenient permitting. Ultimately, this situation would be inevitably worse for the species too.

For those reasons, the Kansas Sierra Club respectfully asks the committee to oppose HB 2669 and to speak for the benefit of continued protection for wildlife species which belong to all the people of Kansas.

Sincerely,

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