



REAP Executive Committee Meeting Agenda
Wichita Workforce Center - 2021 N. Amidon, #1100
OR Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87961157122>
December 7, 2023 @ 11:30 AM

1. **Welcome and Introduction:**
2. **Approval of Minutes REAP Meeting: November 12, 2023:** (pp. 2- 5)
3. **REAP Organizational Committee: Nominations and Review of By-Laws:** Kelly McElroy (p. 6) (11:40)
 - Nominations for the 2024 REAP officers will be presented
 - Discussion (if needed)
 - Recommended Action:*** *Approve nominations as presented*
4. **Regional Legislative Priorities:** Keith Lawing (pp. 7-8) (11:45)
 - A draft of the REAP 2024 regional legislative priorities will be presented
 - Discussion to follow
 - Recommended Action:*** *Approve 2024 Legislative Priorities*
5. **2024 Work Plan & Budget Review:** Marcy Aycock and Keith Lawing (pp. 9-10) (12:15)
 - A draft of the 2024 REAP Work Plan and Budget will be presented
 - Discussion to follow
 - Recommended Action:*** *Approve 2024 Work Plan and Budget*
6. **Executive Director's Report:** Marcy Aycock (pp. 11-19) (12:35)
 - a. Review of November events/engagements
 - b. Proposed meeting date changes*
 - c. Packet attachments - FYI
 - d. Communications update
 - i. Community visits
 - ii. Calendar of events
 - iii. Community Spotlights
 1. McPherson – January
 2. February volunteer?- Recommended Action:*** *Approve 2024 REAP Meeting Schedule*
7. **REAP Member Updates, Best Practices and Opportunities:** Members (12:45)
 - REAP member sharing of news and happenings of interest in the region
 - Action:*** *Share upcoming events, photos, etc.*
8. **Adjourn:** (1:00)

NEXT MEETING: *TBD



REAP Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Wichita Workforce Center

2021 N Amidon Ave, #1100

Wichita, KS 67203

November 2, 2023 ~ 11:30 am

1. Welcome and Introductions:

- Kelly McElroy, Vice, Chair called the meeting to order at 11:33 am and began introductions.

2. Approval of Minutes from the Executive Committee Meeting from October 2, 2023:

ACTION TAKEN: Kelly McElroy moved to approve the October 2, 2023, REAP Executive Committee Meeting Minutes as presented. Mayor Ashley Velazquez (Kechi) seconded. ***MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.***

3. Digital Literacy Presentation: Councilman Nick Engle, Derby

- Councilman Engle discussed how the City of Derby is sharing information about the Broadband opportunities throughout the community.
- Councilman Engle mentioned that it is challenging to push out the information in an appropriate way due to the population that qualifies for the program.
- The recipients in the program do not have to switch providers once accepted into the program, so it is a smooth transfer.
- Councilman Engle also said that there are a significant number of providers that are supporting this initiative.
- Mayor Tom Brown (McPherson) stated that he attended the Broadband Summit and that his community is installing a lot of fiber optic lines to accommodate the Broadband initiative.

ACTION TAKEN: Report was received and filed

4. Regional Legislative Priorities: Kimberly and Josh Svaty

- Josh defined legislative priorities as a broad statement of the values an organization has and that most of the 2023 priorities will be carried over to the 2024 Legislative Session.



- Josh also mentioned that in the past REAP did not have Topeka-based representation in the past years but that has since changed and REAP is being asked about the regional priorities.
- Keith stated that REAP focuses on issues that impact Economic Development and the factors driving the economy in South Central Kansas.
- Josh urged REAP members to express any issues that they would like to be addressed in the upcoming Legislative session because the time is now to introduce the initiative.
- Mayor Tom Brown suggested that the first item listed under each category should be the most important issue that needs to be addressed.
- Kimberly shared that tax revenue was down and a major tax bill would be coming in 2024.
- Josh mentioned that there is value in flexibility but our main focus is on the workforce, economic development, and infrastructure.
- Keith mentioned that the Legislative Planning Committee met to discuss the options for the annual delegation meeting. We are working on remodeling engagement activities so that we can get more Legislators involved. We are looking at early January instead of December for the delegation meeting. The goal of this year's meeting is to develop more opportunities for conversation instead of a presentation.
- Staff will present a draft plan for the delegation meeting at the December REAP meeting.
- Mayor Tom Brown of McPherson suggested that the process needs to be changed because most of the delegation members leave before the event is over.

ACTION TAKEN: Report was received and filed

5. REAP Organizational Committee: Nominations and Review of By-Laws: Marcy Aycock

- Vice Chair Kelley McElroy stated that we are trying to involve more outside areas other than just the Sedgwick.
- Keith thanked the nominating committee for serving on the committee.

ACTION TAKEN: Councilman Justin Shore motioned to accept the nominations. Second Mayor Ashley Velazquez, Kechi. Motion passed

6. MHSAC 2023 Fall Community Update and Legislative Luncheon: Marcy Aycock

- Marcy Aycock presented a Mental Health Awareness event on November 16, 2023, and encouraged all REAP members to attend.
- Keith stated the South-Central Legislative Delegation is invited to attend.
- Marcy also mentioned the Local Elected Official Reception held by the Wichita Chamber



of Commerce on November 29th, 2023. She stated that if any REAP Members would like to attend please let her know.

ACTION TAKEN: *Report was received and filed*

7. REAP Members Updates, Best Practices and Opportunities: Marcy Aycock

- Mayor Tom Brown, McPherson; on November 15, 2023, McPherson will be having a Purple Heart Ceremony.
- Mayor Bryan Chapman, Sedgwick; on December 2, 2023, Christmas in the Country.
- Council Member Homer Henry, Andover; November 13th, 2023 is Youth Day at Andover High School and Hometown Christmas on December 14, 2023.
- Council Member President Jason Shore, Clearwater; vote on November 7, 2023.
- Daniela Rivas, McPherson; Classic Car Show going on now at McPherson College.
- Vice Mayor Rod Kreie, Newton; stated that Pancake Feed on November 7th, 2023 and the Parade of Lights on December 7th, 2023.
- Marcy Aycock, REAP, highlighted the Veterans Parade on November 11, 2023 in Wichita. She also encouraged communities to share information with veterans about the Kansas Honor Flight: www.kansashonorflight.org
- County Commissioner, Mike Hoheisel, Wichita; said that Wichita is opening a 250-bed Emergency Shelter.
- Diane Tinker Hurst, WSU, mentioned that the Biomedical facility is moving forward. She encouraged members to tour Wichita State if they have not done so recently.

ACTION TAKEN: *Report was received and filed*

8. Adjourn

- Meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: *Our next meeting will be Thursday, December 7, 2023, at 11:30 a.m.*



Attendees:

Name	Community/Partner	In Person	Zoom
Commissioner Pete Meitzner, REAP Chairmen	Sedgwick County		X
City Manager Kelly McElroy, REAP Vice Chair	Garden Plain	X	
Council Member Justin Shore	Clearwater	X	
Council Member Nick Engle	Derby	X	
Mayor Tom Brown	McPherson	X	
Commissioner Charles Jennings	Arkansas City		X
Mayor Bryan Chapman	Sedgwick	X	
Commissioner Don Schroeder	Harvey County	X	
Mayor Tom Somers	Mount Hope	X	
Council Member Homer Henry	Andover	X	
Commissioner Michael Hoheisel	Wichita		X
Vice Mayor Rod Kreie	Newton		X
Director of Community Development Zack McHatton	Newton	X	
Assistant City Administrator Daniela Rivas	McPherson	X	
Kimberly Svaty	Gencur Svaty Public Affairs		X
Josh Svaty	Gencur Svaty Public Affairs	X	
Chip Westfall	Community Partner, Harvey County	X	
Tom Boese	GMD2	X	
Diane Tinker Hurst	WSU		X
James Williams	Black Hills Energy		X
Superintendent Justin Henty	Goddard Public Schools	X	
Keith Lawing	Workforce Alliance	X	
Dr. Marcy Aycock	REAP	X	
Kim Uttinger	REAP	X	

Background:

At the November REAP meeting the following members were appointed to serve on a special committee to present nominations for REAP officers to serve in 2024 at the December meeting, and to review the current by-laws and make recommendations if changes are needed at the January 2024 meeting.

- Kelly McElroy, (Committee Chair) City Administrator, Garden Plain
- Randy Frazer City Manager, Arkansas City
- Council President Justin Shore Clearwater
- Mayor Tom Brown McPherson
- Mayor Terry Somers Mt. Hope

Analysis:

The Committee met on November 14 and consensus developed to modify the current leadership structure to create a visible succession plan. This action would require the by-laws to be updated, and if REAP approves the proposed leadership structure for 2024 the Committee will return in January with updates and revisions to the by-laws.

Proposed REAP Leadership Structure:

- Chair
- 1st Vice Chair
- 2nd Vice Chair
- Treasurer
- (1st and 2nd Vice Chairs to move up to Chair and 1st Vice Chair the following year.)

For 2024 the Committee submits the following nominations:

- Chair: Commissioner Pete Meitzner, Sedgwick County
- 1st Vice Chair: Mayor Ashley Velazquez, City of Kechi
- 2nd Vice Chair: Commissioner Rod Kreie, City of Newton (Mayor-elect)
- Treasurer: Mayor Russ Kessler, City of Haysville

Recommended Action: Approve nominations as presented.



2024 Legislative and Policy Priorities

REAP's purpose is to provide a unified voice for the region at the state and national level to advance greater economic prosperity from regional cooperation and address issues that cross political boundaries. The following issues have been identified by members of REAP to help grow the economy in South Central Kansas.

REGIONAL JOB GROWTH & BUSINESS EXPANSION

- REAP supports state investments targeting workforce development and skills training strategies in high-demand areas vital to job growth in South Central Kansas including, but not limited to:
 - Excel in CTE
 - Work Based Learning for High School Students
 - Expansion of Registered Apprenticeship
- REAP encourages state support for the Kansas Air Service Development (KASD) program to expand commercial air service and enhance the competitiveness of seven commercial airports in Kansas including Eisenhower National Airport.
- REAP supports increased need-based aid funding for first generation or non-traditional students aiming for higher education to bolster workforce talent.
- REAP supports public policy that increases access for workers to quality and affordable childcare opportunities to increase labor force participation.
- REAP supports economic development incentives, programs, and tools to keep the state competitive regionally, nationally and globally.

HEALTH & SAFETY

- REAP encourages additional investments to address access to mental health support and treatment, beginning with youth and serving all age groups, as well as the associated facilities in South Central Kansas.
- REAP supports innovative partnerships among state and local governments to address the issues of homelessness in South Central Kansas.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- REAP encourages utilization of available federal funding to support infrastructure investments in broadband, water and wastewater systems, resiliency in the energy industry, cybersecurity protections and enhancing the regional transportation network.
- REAP is a member of the South-Central Kansas Transportation Coalition and supports the regional projects identified as priorities for growing the regional economy and vital to business and industry.
- REAP supports state funding for existing freight rail service and expansion of passenger rail in Kansas, specifically passenger rail service expanding the Heartland Flyer from Dallas/Ft Worth and Oklahoma City connecting through Wichita to Newton and the Southwest Chief.
- REAP supports policies and strategies to protect water resources critical to the economy of South Central Kansas including protection of the Equus Beds Aquifer that supplies water for

- 20% of the Kansas population.
- REAP encourages equitable representation on the Groundwater Management District 2 (GMD2) Board of Directors.
- REAP recognizes the importance of energy to the regional economy and supports access to, and production of a variety of energy sources from oil and natural gas to clean energy to help drive economic development while providing affordable, reliable power.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- REAP favors maintaining existing Home Rule protections for cities.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- REAP supports full funding for employment and skills training projects like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to enhance sector-based partnerships to meet the needs of employers and job seekers in South Central Kansas.
- REAP supports federal funding for expansion of passenger rail in Kansas, specifically expanding the Heartland Flyer from Dallas/Ft Worth and Oklahoma City connecting through Wichita to Newton and the Southwest Chief.

CONTACT

REAP Executive Director

Dr. Marcy Aycock

maycock@workforce-ks.com

316.771.6603

REAP Chair

Commissioner Pete Meitzner, Sedgwick County

Pete.Meitzner@sedgwick.gov

316.660.9300

REAP Vice-Chair

Kelly Mc Elroy, Garden Plain City Administrator

kmcelroy@newtonkansas.com

316.727.6567



The overall goal of this work plan is to align local governments in South Central Kansas to enhance and increase cooperation and collaboration with regional organizations, councils of governments, education institutions, and business and industry.

Focus Areas:

Regional Priorities

- Talent Pipeline and Workforce Sustainability
- Mental Health
- Broadband Access/Digital Literacy
- Transportation Infrastructure
 - Highways
 - Commercial Air Service
 - Passenger Rail Service
 - Regional Public Transportation
- Water Protection and Supply
- Affordable Housing

REAP Membership, Services & Outreach

- Increase services and value to current members
- Coordinate relationships and raise awareness about regional policy priorities with the South Central Kansas Legislative Delegation and the Federal Congressional Delegation
- Expand membership across the REAP region
- Redefine tools for ease of use and increased communication
 - Website
 - Social media strategies
 - Provide a “calendar of opportunities” for REAP members
 - Calendar of topics for monthly meeting topics

REAP Representation

- K254 Corridor Association – Marcy Aycock
- South Central Kansas Transportation Task Force – Keith Lawing & Marcy Aycock
- Talent Roadmap Leadership Coalition – Keith Lawing
- Wichita/Sedgwick County Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition – Marcy Aycock
- Childcare Advocacy Task Force – Keith Lawing & Marcy Aycock
- Wichita Airport Advisory Board – Randy Frazer
- WAMPO Technical Advisory Committee – Marcy Aycock
- WAMPO Economic Development and Transportation Committee – Keith Lawing and Justin Shore
- Wichita Transit Advisory Board – Justin Shore

	2023 Budget	
Wages	\$ 135,000.00	
Benefits	\$ 8,400.00	
Taxes	\$ 6,600.00	
Sub Total		\$ 150,000.00
Overhead		
Rent	\$ 7,200.00	
Utilities	\$ 2,200.00	
Insurance	\$ 2,200.00	
Website (12 x200)	\$ 2,400.00	
Supplies	\$ 1,000.00	
Copies	\$ 500.00	
Postage	\$ 100.00	
Professional Development	\$ 1,000.00	
Dues/Subscriptions	\$ 500.00	
Contract Services	\$ 20,000.00	
Outreach	\$ 2,500.00	
Fiscal & Audit	\$ 2,500.00	
Travel	\$ 750.00	
Sub Total		\$ 42,850.00
Meetings		
Regional Convenings	\$ 2,500.00	
Exec Comm (8 x \$350)	\$ 2,900.00	
TAC (2 x \$100)	\$ 200.00	
Meetings total		\$ 5,600.00
Project		
City to City	\$ 7,500.00	
	\$ -	
Unrestricted Project Funds	\$ 10,000.00	
Projects Total		\$ 17,500.00
2022 Total Projected Expenses		\$ 215,950.00
Anticipated Revenues		
Projected Carry over	\$40,000	
SCAC & K254	\$6,300	
Meeting Sponsorships	\$2,500	
2023 Total Projected Income (Assessments Only)	\$171,792	
Total Projected Revenues	\$220,592	
		\$ 4,642

	2024 Budget	
Wages	\$ 120,000.00	
Benefits	\$ 8,400.00	
Taxes	\$ 6,600.00	
Sub Total		\$ 135,000.00
Overhead		
Rent	\$ 7,200.00	
Utilities	\$ 2,200.00	
Insurance	\$ 2,200.00	
Website (12 x200)	\$ 2,400.00	
Supplies	\$ 500.00	
Copies	\$ 500.00	
Postage	\$ 100.00	
Professional Development	\$ 250.00	
Dues/Subscriptions	\$ 250.00	
Outreach	\$ 1,250.00	
Fiscal & Audit	\$ 2,500.00	
Travel	\$ 750.00	
Sub Total		\$ 20,100.00
Meetings		
Regional Convenings	\$ 2,000.00	
Committee (8 x \$350)	\$ 2,000.00	
	\$ -	
Meetings total		\$ 4,000.00
Project		
Project Funds	\$ 17,500.00	
Projects Total		\$ 17,500.00
		\$ 176,600.00
2024 Total Projected Expenses		\$ 176,600.00
Anticipated Revenues		
Projected Carry over	\$0	
K254	\$6,000	
Meeting Sponsorships	\$2,500	
2024 Total Projected Income (Assessments Only)	\$171,792	
Total Projected Revenues	\$180,292	
		\$ 3,692

Proposed REAP Meeting Dates 2024

*Reflecting the THIRD Thursday of each month

January 18

February 15

March 21

April 18

May 16

June 20

July 18

August 15

September 19

October 17

November 21

December 19



The Wichita Eagle



CHRIS OCHSNER cochsner@kstar.com

Kansas farmer Brett Oelke in mid-October showed how the recently updated spray heads on his sprinkler systems have been engineered to produce droplets of water that are big enough to not evaporate before they hit the ground.

After decades of inaction, state politicians stir on aquifer

BY DANIEL DESROCHERS AND
KATIE BERNARD

ddesrochers@kstar.com
cbernard@kstar.com

STANTON COUNTY

The water here is old.

Around 20 million years ago, as wind and streams whittled away at the Rocky Mountains, the debris was dumped in the High Plains, a dusty bed of sand and gravel.

Water flowed across those

plains. It rained and snowed and hailed and rained again. The water leaked into the nooks and crannies of the sediment. There it has sat, for tens of thousands of years, sometimes as deep as 1,000 feet, over a span of 174,000 square miles — an underground water deposit the size of Lake Huron called the Ogallala Aquifer.

On a sweltering afternoon this August, Brant Peterson's black Dodge Ram 3500 threw

grasshoppers out of the way as he drove to check on one of his wells drawing water from the Aquifer.

When Peterson was a kid on this farm, some wells pumped more than 1,000 gallons of water per minute. Now, his best wells pump closer to 300.

Even before researchers truly understood the Aquifer, they knew it was a resource that could drain away.

Kansas officials allowed too

many wells anyway.

The water spurred economic growth in the region. The growth led to more jobs, more revenue for the state and lower prices for food. The Legislature loosened pumping regulations and continued to over-distribute water rights.

"Ever since 1975 every well that was drilled out here was approved in Topeka, Kansas,"

SEE AQUIFER, 4A

FROM PAGE 1A

AQUIFER

Peterson said.

Several administrations have taken incremental steps to address the problem. Mapping groundwater. Setting up local governing boards. Funding studies. Requiring meters on wells.

Nearly every year, the water level is dropping. Wells that used to be able to easily pump hundreds of gallons of water are dry. More farmers are starting to give up their farms or turn to less profitable dryland methods. Farmers who work the same fields as their fathers and grandfathers are worried their children won't be able to do the same.

A depleted Aquifer would likely mean economic devastation for the state — driving up food costs, cutting Kansas' tax base and displacing thousands of people in the west. But for years, politicians and officials have avoided the political maelstrom they'd face if they significantly intervened, while nursing a hope that farmers will figure out how to make a smooth transition away from irrigated crops.

Officials say this moment is one of the last chances the government has to intervene, even as some are saying it's already too late.

"If we can't save water now we might not ever be able to," said Weston McCary, a water office technology projects coordinator. "This is the perfect condition of all the right technologies, all the right knowledge. There's attention on it front and center. We have growing momentum on the legislative side of things and there's a lot of incentive money out there."

"Only time will tell if we got to this on time or not."

Reporters pored through scientific journals and reports on groundwater issues in the Ogallala and conducted more than 40 interviews with experts and policymakers to figure out how an existential threat identified 68 years ago continues to be one of the most pressing political problems in 2023.

What emerges is a microcosm of global climate politics. Policymakers recognize a looming problem and state agencies have the legal authority to step in. But, at risk of alienating voters and hurting the economy, officials fail to use their substantial political power to avert disaster, kicking the metaphorical can down the road.

Farmers are limited to how much they can draw from their wells. But those limits are generous and rarely enforced. There are more than 34,548 wells with water rights in the 35 Kansas counties that lie over the Ogallala. And yet, since 2004, there have only been 2,016 fines for over-pumping water across the state. Even as the Legislature toughened water use fines in 2017, there were fewer penalties issued across the state than there are water-rights

"I can understand why others didn't [fix it] for a whole host of reasons but I really would have a hard time living with myself if I did not address what I know to be a huge problem," Kelly said.

Nevertheless, she remains reluctant to impose any major state mandate on water.

Her solution relies on the same premise as her predecessors: Farmers must voluntarily reduce how much water they use.

Agriculture producers — who use about 94% of the water pulled from the Aquifer — have some culpability in the problem, Peterson said. Just because the speed limit is 65 miles per hour, you don't go that fast when there's black ice and white-out conditions. But, he said, the whole state has benefited from the "economic monster" out in western Kansas.

A gallon of water grows a bushel of corn. That bushel goes to the feed yard. The farm has employees and the feed yard has employees. Then it goes to the packing house, where more people work.

"And that's a lot of churn. Right? That's a lot of state revenue," Peterson said. "And kids in school, businesses in town, housing market, taxes, all of it, and it's just, it's just the way capitalism works, right?"

Peterson firmly believes that someone will fix the water problem, helping to keep the current farming economy in western Kansas. To think otherwise, he said, would be devastating.

"Entire communities will be decimated," Peterson said. "Jobs, all of that, will just crumble."

THE POLITICS WERE NEVER THERE

A blue binder in the Kansas State Library contains a warning from 1955.

The yellowing, type-written pages never mention the Ogallala by name, but they cautioned that, at least in southwest Kansas, the groundwater may not be renewable.

"If total discharge from a ground-water reservoir is so great that it is not balanced by the recharge even in wet years, the storage in the reservoir is inevitably reduced," researchers wrote. "Groundwater mining is a serious problem."

Two years later Kansas lawmakers loosened state water law, testing the prophecy.

Before then, the law prevented farmers from draining the Aquifer, because depletion would intrude on older, established water rights. But, with an eye on economics, lawmakers changed the definition of intruding on an older right; a newer water user could deplete the Aquifer as long as it didn't cost an older water user money.

"The assumption there was that senior water rights would protect themselves... that's not what happened," said Burke



Kansas farmer Brant Peterson says he has been reducing the amount of land he irrigates due to a declining water table in the Ogallala Aquifer.

pumping limits and the office wasn't funded until the next administration.

"The experts understood we had a problem," he said. "The masses weren't ready and so the politics was never there."

That remained true more than 15 years later when former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, a Topeka Democrat, told the Star this year she did not prioritize water because the crisis wasn't immediate. Even if she had sought to address the issue with executive regulations, Sebelius believed the Republican-controlled Legislature would have objected.

She called it a failure not to have tried to solve the problem while she could, because she thinks it will only be fixed by the government.

Republican Gov. Sam Brownback wanted to focus on water. He worked on the issue as agriculture secretary, but said even writing a report on the Aquifer was "seen as very aggressive."

As governor, Brownback developed Kansas' 50 year water plan, but — amid major budget shortfalls — it wasn't funded. He doesn't think that funding would have made a difference.

"The water plan funding would have been helpful, but most of these are individual or community decisions on whether you're going to pump or not," he said.

In the absence of significant intervention from Topeka, local water users pushed for more power, particularly as they felt officials were cavalier in approving new wells.

"You had wells on each side of the county road," said Clay Scott, the owner of West Acres Grain. "It made no sense. Why isn't there spacing? Well, because there was no need because nobody complained yet."

Scott's region — southwest Kansas — is widely regarded as one of the most resistant to changes in water policy. It's also where the Ogallala is the deepest.

It is easy to think of an Aquifer as an underground lake, connecting the land underneath the High Plains. It's not.

"The Aquifer itself is not a big hole in the ground, a big cavern, at least in our state, that you

movement, there aren't multi-state compacts for the Ogallala, even though it spans from Wyoming to Texas. There's no standard between states on how to conserve Aquifer water and, even if there was, the federal government can't step in if the states disagree, the way it has with southwestern states negotiating over the Colorado River.

That makes it a local problem, turning it from something argued between state governments to one that requires a pact between neighbors.

But locally, water rights aren't clear cut; it's a tangled web where farmers often own older and newer rights. If someone went to court to prevent their neighbor with newer water rights from overpumping, it could create a ripple effect that would threaten their own newer wells.

In the 1970s — when groundwater withdrawals were at their peak — the Legislature passed a law that allowed irrigators to form groundwater management districts, also known as GMDs, lending cooperative power to efforts to reduce water use.

There are five GMDs in Kansas — three cover areas where water is supplied by the Ogallala. Voting members of the district own irrigated land, which means residents without irrigation rights have no direct say in how their water is managed.

At first, the districts could only recommend policy changes to the state and require users to install and monitor water meters. But, after farmers and feedlot managers in northwest Kansas asked for more control over pumping limits, the Legislature passed a law in 2012 that would allow irrigators to set limits and mandate conservation: Local Enhanced Management Areas, or LEMAs.

LEMA restrictions have extended the lifespan of the Ogallala in northwest Kansas but they only impact water within their boundaries — a farmer with land inside and outside a LEMA can simply move their wells.

Earlier this year the Legislature required groundwater management districts to identify how to best protect their water by 2026. If that doesn't hap-

pen, you mandate across the board cuts, he said, you're punishing people who have already reduced their water use because they would have to cut the same percentage as people who haven't saved water at all. He said the threat of government intervention incentivizes people to pump more because it gives more room to cut back.

Instead, Rude wants financial compensation for people who conserve water. And his GMD has pushed a plan to take water from the Missouri River, recharge the Aquifer and sell the rest to Colorado. Officials have dismissed the plan as unrealistic.

Others — like Vijay Ramasamy, Kelly's special advisor for water — hope that as LEMAs prove that farmers can cut water use while still producing profitable crops, it will convince other water users that more conservation is possible.

Rep. Jim Minnix, a Scott City farmer and Republican chair of the House Water Committee, said he's hoping to use current momentum to make up for decades of lost time before the Aquifer gets so low that water quality becomes a bigger concern. The Legislature infused a historic amount of funding into water conservation this year.

"It should have been dealt with a long time ago," Minnix said. "With what we're dealing with today I want to do everything we can to get to that static point as soon as we can."

Kansas' chief engineer has long had the authority to impose sweeping restrictions to protect older water rights from infringement by newer water rights. If the situation is particularly dire, he could establish a high priority conservation area and limit pumping for the entire Ogallala region.

But Lewis said he's reluctant to issue a mandate because it has always lacked public support and he'd be obligated to prove he's acting in the public interest. For decades, he said, there was more support for mining the Aquifer than saving it.

The agriculture community, which draws the

majority of the water from the Aquifer, also holds significant power over policies that would drastically reduce water use. Kansas chief engineer is under unique political pressure. Unlike in other states, the engineer is hired by the Secretary of Agriculture, a political appointee.

The secretary cannot fire the chief engineer but they can overturn some of their decisions. And, at this point, the governor has made it clear she doesn't want her administration to mandate cuts.

"You don't solve problems by forcing," Kelly said. "Let's say it solves the water problem, the other problems that it would create would be massive and I'm not sure redeemable."

That leaves one solution: The agriculture industry has to make cuts.

EFFICIENCY IS KEY

This year was wet in southwest Kansas. Farms in Finney County got more rain in three months than they had the past year. In August, ditches on the side of the road still had water in them, weeks after the last rain.

But because the region is semi-arid, most years are pretty dry. Between 2021 and 2022, much of western Kansas faced extreme drought conditions. Raccoons nibbled through the plastic of Peterson's irrigation system, searching for water and taking it from his crop.

Efficiency is key to nearly all of the plans to save the Aquifer. The agriculture community can cut its water use through new technologies — genetically modified crops that drink less, pesticides that knock out weeds and advanced irrigation systems.

Irrigation systems have evolved from flooding entire fields to center pivot systems with flexible plastic tubes that water crops at the base.

In Sheridan County, where Brett Oelke farms, wells in the region have been incapable of pulling all the water they're allowed for years. Oelke's father and grandfather placed meters on their wells before it was required. The decline was clear.

"I could have rode off irrigation into the sunset and been the last Oelke to irrigate corn in Sheridan County," Oelke, whose farm is in a LEMA district, said.

When he spoke with The Star in October, Oelke was changing the heads on his sprinkler to a more efficient design. He's also conserved water by changing his planting patterns, leaving the debris from the prior crop on the soil to limit evaporation. Since he made this shift, Oelke's farm has made more money. His yields aren't as high but he's spending less money on the front end.

Irrigated land has more value than dryland, when crops depend on rain rather than irrigation. So when

SEE AQUIFER, 5A

FROM PAGE 4A

AQUIFER

a farmer stops using a well, they lose value.

Matthew Sanderson, a social science professor at Kansas State University, found that two things drive a farm's profit – if they irrigate their crops and if they get government subsidies.

Kansas farmers received more than \$27.6 billion in federal farm subsidies between 1995 and 2021, according to the Environmental Working Group, an environmental activist group that opposes subsidies.

Federal subsidies are based on the market values of crops. So growing corn, which has a high market value in Kansas, can mean a farmer still gets a decent return in a bad season.

For years former Sen. Pat Roberts, a Kansas Republican, was the highest ranking Republican on farm policy. He hoped to use that power to build a coalition to get federal subsidies or incentives for farmers to switch to more efficient irrigation technology. It never came together.

"We would always have something else come in away and it just didn't happen," Roberts said. "And that's, that's very regrettable."

The state and federal government have offered hundreds of millions to farmers in programs that incentivize them to use less water and conserve the land. In late October, the Biden administration announced a \$24.9 million grant for the Kansas Department of Agriculture to specifically deal with Kansas groundwater.

It still may not be enough. One GMD manager said she gave out \$65,000 in cost share incentives last year. It was

only about a third of the demand.

REVERENCE FOR FARMERS

For all of the attempts at a solution, the alphabet agencies and the technological advances, there's a big reason it's been easy for politicians to stay out of the way: A lot of people don't want outsiders getting involved.

They don't want the chief water engineer. Nor the Legislature. Nor the governor. And certainly not the federal government.

Over trips to western Kansas people repeatedly said the problem should be solved locally.

"Nobody in Topeka knows what in the world is going on out here," Shannon Kenyon, who manages the Northwest Kansas GMD, said. "They think we just do what we do throughout the day, we start drinking beer at two o'clock in the afternoon and drive around in pickups all day. And that's not how it works out here."

It's a long-held sentiment. For years, as Roberts was hoping he might be able to get something done in Congress to address the water issue, he was warned off by constituents.

"In southwest Kansas, you didn't want to touch that third rail," Roberts said. "They always worried about a mandate coming down from Washington that would put them out of business."

Farmers have long held power in the American political imagination, to the point where working the land is more than a profession – it's a national identity.

"We revere farmers," Sanderson said. "They're a part of a national myth

about who we are as a country. They went out, they tamed the land, they subdued it, they used it. And they are the basis for democracy, according to Jefferson."

Sanderson said preserving the Aquifer involves a series of challenges. You have a technical challenge, of trying to make irrigation and crops more efficient to reduce water use. You have an economic challenge both in making the economy of western Kansas work without irrigated farmland and without driving up food costs. You have a political problem, determining whether to step in and save the Aquifer.

And then there's the challenge of farming culture.

Kansas has the 7th highest agricultural production of any state – much of it irrigated by the Ogallala, which accounts for 75% of the groundwater use in the state. There's a sense in western Kansas that the eastern part of the state ignored the Aquifer depletion while simultaneously blaming farmers.

"People in urban areas, they don't know what they don't know," said Katie Eisenhour, who runs economic development in Scott County. "We're not misusing water when we're trying to grow your food."

Northwest Kansas isn't close to reaching the level where they stop taking out more water than is replenishing the Aquifer, a concept referred to as sustainable yield, static or status quo. But after slow, and sometimes painful culture change, farmers have doubled the lifespan of the Aquifer in that area.

In the early days of local restrictions, Kenyon worried about slashed tires after meetings. Now, some of her biggest adversaries brag about their conservation.

And, as more people

recognize a changing climate, it has become clear that water is a finite resource. Amid political battles over access to water in the southwest, the governor plans to take advantage of the recent attention, her political capital and the state's budget surplus.

"It's one of those things that has to be done or there's no Kansas, or certainly not Kansas like we know today," Kelly said.

To lose water, to lose the ability to farm, is akin to losing one's identity.

Sen. Jerry Moran, a Kansas Republican, mused about what western Kansas would look like if farmers can't produce a profitable crop. Already, there's a mental health crisis among farmers.

"There's a depression that can come from your inability to do what your predecessors, what your family members did," Moran said.

"While I tell you the depression that comes from that, there's as many farmers who would say, 'it's gonna rain. It always does,'" Moran said. "I mean, I've heard that hundreds of times."

Few people were willing to speculate on what it would mean if the Ogallala dried up.

That's partially because the water won't dry up all at once – some areas have more than 100 years left. It's also because it's still possible to transition away from irrigation – while the water is ancient, reliable irrigation is a relatively modern invention.

There was speculation about what it would mean for food costs (they'd skyrocket) and the Kansas economy (it'd crater) if the region can't successfully transition to dryland crops. There are sandy regions in western Kansas where dryland farming might not work. Or some-

thing might grow, but it wouldn't be profitable.

"If we don't change our behaviors, and change them enough, there will be no Ogallala Aquifer for us to use," Owen, the head of the water office said.

"There'll be nothing. There will be no agriculture. There will be no communities. There will be no hospitals, no schools, no towns."

But farmers are optimistic. The Northwest Kansas GMD not only found a way to reduce water use, it's shown that it can be profitable. There's new technology every day. There's political momentum.

In other words, it's gonna rain. It always does.

Daniel Desrochers:
drdesrochers
Katie Bernard:
(816)234-4167,
@KatieJ_Bernard

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**Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition
Hughes Metroplex
11/16/2023**

2024 MHSAC POLICY PRIORITIES

1. Assist and Support the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Coalition to Develop a Workforce Pipeline, Attract New Workforce, and Support Current Behavioral Healthcare Staff
2. Protect and Create State Laws that Encourage Collaboration with Local Governments and Financially Support Efforts to Provide Affordable Accessible Housing
3. Increase Medicaid Rate for all In-Patient and Out-Patient Behavioral Health Services
4. Reinstate Kansas House Bill No. 2377
5. Increase Access for Behavioral Health Care

AM Programming

- **Approximately 152 in attendance**

S. Brunner	State Behavioral Health Hospital	Governors Executive Panel, Community Discussion Opportunities
J Roberts	Homeless Task Force	HTF updates
G Schmitt	MHSAC Legislative Policy Priorities	Panel: S Utash – Workforce C Schneiders – Housing J Tammany – Medicaid Rate Increase H Casey – 3 rd & Subsequent DUI R Chadwick – Medicaid Expansion Q&A

PM Programming

- **Approximately 52 in attendance**

Open discussion of the MHSAC legislative policy priorities

- Keith gave an overview of the morning panel discussion to the Legislative Delegation
- Dawn stated that the policy priorities are open for discussion and making them sustainable.

Discussion Highlights

1. Workforce pipeline, attract new workforce, and support current behavioral healthcare staff

- The career ladder education and education levels needed in mental health careers were discussed.
- Ascension is interested in working within the pipeline and has taken steps to address the issues of the lack of professionals entering the mental health career field.
- Incentives to encourage more people to enter the mental health field were discussed.
- Some hospitals are lowering the hiring age to expand their workforces.
- The possibility of apprenticeships for mental health workers was discussed

- Keith explained that Workforce Alliance has acquired grants that could address the apprenticeship for mental health.
- The obstacles to find staff to train in mental health especially clinical supervisors were discussed
- KPERS barriers – individuals receiving KPERS could be employed and help fill gaps
- Other suggestions included Student Loan forgiveness and offering incentives for people to move to the area.

2. Protect and create state law that supports housing.

- Once someone has found housing then other issues also arise and those issues need to be addressed.
- Rules and red tape (legal) often prevent progress when it comes to housing
- Comcare said that housing comes first before other issues are addressed

3. Medicaid

- Ascension is asking for a 15% inpatient increase for the rising costs of Medicaid.
 - Ascension and Comcare are the backbone and have to think about the rising costs of Medicaid.

4. House Bill # 2377 Reinstatement

- Supervision during the treatment period is very beneficial and it needs to continue.
- The patients are directed by the courts what treatment plan is set for them.
- Success has been good with the program which is 70%

Key Takeaways

- Homelessness and mental health issues are a statewide problem.
- There must be a continued conversation between city, county, and state officials to address these issues.
- **Legislators asked for a plan**
 - They want collaboration to write a bill
 - This must happen soon for the 2024 session
- **A driving force/leadership to create a plan address the issue of mental health – who will lead?**



Please Join Us in McPherson

DEC 11 2024	Delegation Tour & Working Lunch RSVP by Thursday, December 7 to Kimberly@gencursvaty.com
9:30AM to 11:30AM	Tour Pfizer Manufacturing Facility 1776 Centinnial Drive McPherson, Kansas 67460
11:45AM to 1:00PM	Kansas Municipal Utilities Training Facility Discussion about Energy & Water Issues in Kansas 2090 East Ave A, McPherson, Kansas 67460

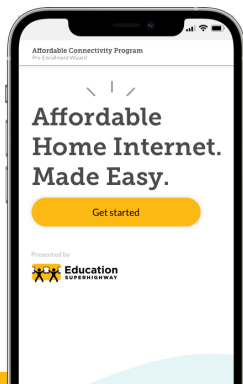
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