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Earl Lewis, Director

Laura Kelly, Governor

August 6, 2020

Karen A. Woodrich  
State Conservationist  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
760 South Broadway Blvd.  
Salina, Kansas 67401

Dear Ms. Woodrich:

I am writing in support of Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 (District) and their current request for assistance totaling \$650,000 under the PL-566 Watershed Act. This request and the proposed effort to plan, design, and construct an augmentation project, along with water conservation measures in the watershed, is needed and time-sensitive in nature.

The adequacy of the water supply to meet all of the local irrigation needs, along with the senior water rights at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), has been at issue for many years. Ultimately, the Chief Engineer of the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources found that upstream junior irrigation wells have been impairing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Refuge water rights.

The District and the Service should be commended for working together over the last 9 months to craft an agreement in principle to address the water right impairment while limiting the negative economic impacts of water right administration. Strict administration of water rights to fulfill the Refuge's water right could mean more than 400 irrigation rights, each with an associated center pivot, would be shut down. The economic impact of this type of action would be significant to the individual producers and the region.

Key to implementation of the agreement is development of an augmentation project to deliver water to the Refuge during times of low streamflow. The PL-566 program provides an opportunity to develop water infrastructure that benefits both the agricultural community and the wetland ecosystem provided by the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Full implementation of the augmentation project is currently estimated to cost approximately \$12 million.

I ask that you provide your support for this project and recommend its swift approval. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Earl Lewis, P.E.  
Director