

## Senate Confirms Connie Owen as Director of Kansas Water Office

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly, on November 2, 2020, nominated Constance (Connie) Owen to replace Earl Lewis as Director of the Kansas Water Office. The Kansas Senate confirmed her on January 21, 2021. Connie is a licensed attorney and has practiced Kansas water law for more than 25 years. She most recently served as Chair of the Kansas Water Authority. The Kansas Water Office (KWO) was established in 1981 as the water planning, policy, coordination and marketing agency for the state. The primary statutory function of the agency is the development and implementation of the Kansas Water Plan. State law requires the Kansas Water Office to "Formulate on a continuing basis a comprehensive State Water Plan for the management, conservation and development of the water resources of the state".

The Kansas Water Office, in coordination with the Kansas Water Authority, also reviews all water laws and makes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature for needed legislation to ensure water policies and programs address the needs of all Kansans. All budgeting, purchasing, and related management functions of the agency are administered under the Director's direction and supervision. Additionally, the director approves all vouchers for expenditures from appropriations to or for the Water Office.



## Earl Lewis Named Chief Engineer, Division of Water Resources

Kansas Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Beam, named Earl Lewis as the new Chief Engineer of the Division of Water Resources (DWR), on Oct. 7, 2020. Lewis has dedicated his career to water resources in Kansas. He began his career at DWR in the early 1990s, where he worked on various issues ranging from management and compliance of water rights to interstate litigation. Earl then worked for the Kansas Water Office, beginning in 1999, then as KWO Director since 2018. He oversaw the Kansas water planning efforts and management of the state's reservoir storage system. He also served on the Water Vision Team, developing the Long-Term Vision for the Future of Water Supply in Kansas. "The breadth and depth of experience in the field of water resources that Earl brings to this position will serve Kansas well," said Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Mike Beam in a KDA press release. "We look forward to the leadership he will provide to this critical division within KDA."

The Chief Engineer and the Division administer 30 laws and responsibilities, including the Kansas Water Appropriation Act which governs how water is allocated and used. The Chief Engineer also oversees policies related to these laws, conducts hearings related to groundwater areas across the state, and represents Kansas in interstate water matters. In one of his first actions as Chief Engineer, he signed an

order approving the Local Enhanced Management Area (LEMA) plan for all of the area in Wichita County, lying within Western Kansas Groundwater Management District (GMD) No. 1. The Wichita County LEMA will be the third LEMA in Kansas and was motivated by local users' desire to conserve water and ensure the region's continued economic viability. Lewis signed the LEMA on December 30, 2020, and will be effective for a five-year period beginning January 1, 2021.