

Water Plan initiatives advanced by Kansas Water Authority

Kansas water resources got a big boost when Gov. Kathleen Sebelius included funding in her budget for the far-reaching water resource projects identified in the Water Plan Projects Initiative. Her willingness to submit the \$2.5 million package to the Kansas Legislature demonstrates her determination to act now to make both a short-term and long-term difference in our state's water future. Kansas Water Authority members, including me, have walked the Capitol's halls in support of the Initiative.

*Dennis Schwartz
Member, Kansas
Water Authority*

The projects in the Initiative fit into four broad categories. They are: extending and conserving the life of the Ogallala aquifer and sustainable

water management of the High Plains aquifer; developing effective watershed protection and restoration strategies; facilitating regional public water supply strategies and financing long-term water storage debt and recreational access.

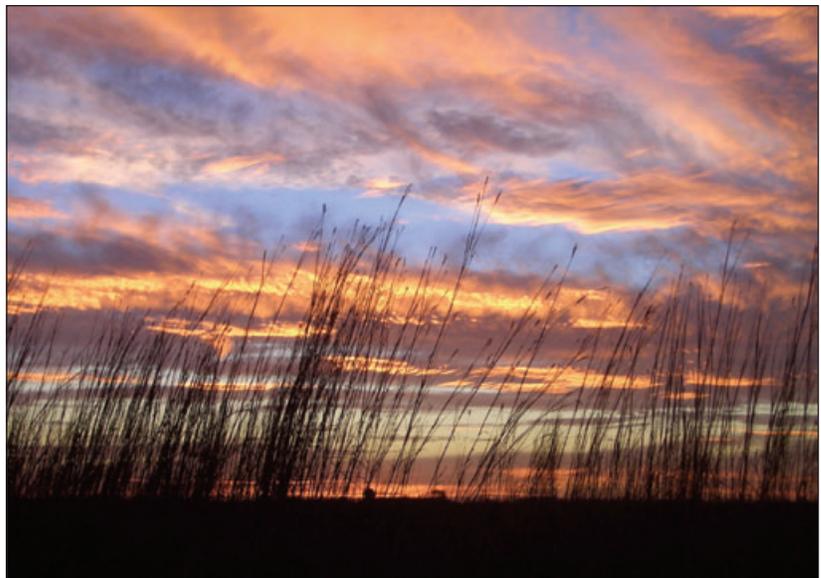


My interest in the public water supply strategies and ties to the KRWA led to my testifying in support of a measure to credit revenue from the Clean Drinking Water Fee to the State Water Plan Fund beginning next year. The money would be earmarked to protect and renovate lakes used for public water supply, on-site technical assistance to public water supply systems and compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. All of this is contained in House Bill 2017.

The State Water Plan's Watershed Protection and Restoration Strategy, or WRAPS, is a process designed to bring together members of a watershed community to identify watershed needs and goals, develop cost effective strategies and put them into action.

The Clean Drinking Water Fee of three cents per 1,000 gallons sold at retail is an alternative to the challenge of publicly-owned water systems paying sales tax on purchases. About 800 water suppliers pay the Fee. Based on total receipts for the Clean Drinking Water Fee during fiscal year 2004,

the endorsement of the Kansas Water Authority to find a small lake public water supply source that could be used to demonstrate renovation and protection techniques. The Water Office has received letters of interest from 14 cities. A multi-agency committee is developing selection criteria.



A Kansas sunset over a watershed in southeast Shawnee County.

it is estimated that the changes in HB 2017 would generate about \$2.7 million. The recommended fiscal year 2006 State Water Plan Fund totals \$17.6 million.

Steps already have been taken by the Kansas Water Office with

The Governor also supported the recommendation to include \$800,000 for watershed protection and restoration as proposed in the Water Plan Projects Initiative. A lot of work is already going on as was evidenced by the attendance at

a January workshop. Almost 170 people, many of whom already are working to protect their watersheds, came to Topeka. Rather than the state's water resource professionals preaching to the choir, they asked the choir to provide them with practical tips. Those tips will be incorporated into a basic tool kit for watershed stakeholders developing their own practical and effective approaches to protect and restore their watersheds.

Under WRAPS

The State Water Plan's Watershed Protection and Restoration Strategy, or WRAPS, is a process designed to bring together members of a watershed community to identify watershed needs and goals, develop cost effective strategies and put them into action. Flood control, wildlife habitat and recreation complement water quality as WRAPS' goals. Watersheds above federal reservoirs that provide public water supply benefits are areas of particular importance for WRAPS development and implementation.

One of the liveliest discussions at the Water Authority was streambed degradation of the Kansas River. It's not a new topic, nor one unique to the Kansas River. It evokes both economic and environmental concerns. I dealt with it when I served my first stint on the Kansas Water Authority, but like all chronic challenges, it has a way of resurfacing.

I've been intrigued by rivers ever since I learned to swim at age five in the Little Blue River. Stream degradation is a natural progression; the most dramatic example being the Colorado River's passage over eons to create the Grand Canyon. There are, however, other causes of degradation and I thought they should be explored. That's why I

voted in favor of the Water Authority directing the Water Office to look at available data, tapping the best technical experts and reporting back at the June meeting.

River degradation

The results of the degradation are generally accepted; the relative contribution of various causes and corrective actions are not. When a streambed degrades, river banks erode and farm ground is lost. Water utilities have to extend their intake pipes during times of drought to reach water. The mix of aquatic life is changed and any pollutants that have settled to the bottom are stirred up. Two of the possible causes are construction of reservoirs and dredging for sand and gravel.

At the Authority meeting, other topics of discussion were economic development around reservoirs, public input for water planning, and the state's role in water conservation. But that's grist for my next column.

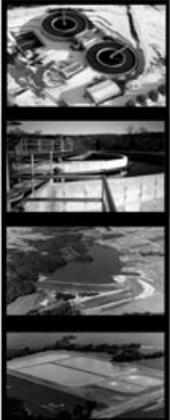
The next KWO meeting

The Kansas Water Authority will meet Thursday, March 31 and Friday, April 1 at the Radisson Broadview in Wichita right after the Kansas Rural Water Association Conference and Exhibition. As public water system managers, employees and home and landowners who care about Kansas' resources, we can make a difference. Take time to join me and my fellow Authority members at the meeting. The agenda will be posted on the Kansas Water Office Web site, www.kwo.org. I'm always available to talk to you about the issues and your concerns. Again, I encourage you to bring to my attention any concerns you have regarding the programs that are funded through the Kansas Water Plan. You may email me directly at nrwadennis@aol.com. I'll also be attending the KRWA conference for three days; I'll be pleased to discuss topics with you.



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9200 Ward Parkway, Suite 400
Kansas City, Missouri 64114
Phone: (816) 361-0440
Fax: (816) 361-0045
Toll Free: (800) 488-5275
www.larkin-grp.com

