



2019 Legislative Priorities

The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to protecting and enjoying our great outdoors. Comprising over 5000 members, the Kansas Chapter represents our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for more than forty years.

Water Conservation

We must create strategies to conserve our most precious resource, so that our water is safe and sustainable for years to come. Irrigation agriculture, nonpoint pollution, and sedimentation represent our major water challenges. Here are some smart options for the Legislature to consider this session:

- **Restore annual budget transfers for the State Water Plan Fund** (\$8 million total) for critical water programs.
- **Create a Buffer Strip Incentive Program:** Like South Dakota and Minnesota, Kansas should reward farmers who put in conservation buffers aside rivers, lakes, and streams to improve water quality.
- **Enact a Water Depletion Trust Fund:** Since 85% of our water is used for 15% of Kansas farming (irrigation), we need to start incentivizing smarter agricultural practices to save water. The Legislature should create a future fund that will have heavy-water consumers contribute to local water strategies and restore property values.

Clean Energy Solutions

Kansas is at a turning point when it comes to energy. With the highest electricity rates around, our state desperately needs to take action to help Kansans and businesses reduce their energy bills. Wind energy has demonstrated its potential for economic and environmental benefits, and the same can be done with energy efficiency, solar, and energy storage. Lawmakers need to embrace smart policy mechanisms to strengthen its market appeal for clean energy infrastructure and conservation to advance our economic potential, add new jobs, and lower the price of electricity. Some ideas include:

- **State Energy Efficiency Program:** Kansas is continually ranked as one of the worst states when it comes to energy efficiency (EE) programs. State leaders should realize that a state energy efficiency program can both lower rates and create jobs. The legislature ought to explore ways to advance energy conservation, such as restoring Efficiency Kansas, establishing PACE-like financing and/or a voluntary EE goal for utilities.
- **Utility Asset Refinancing:** Another way to bring down high electricity costs is to allow utilities the ability to refinance their capital when retiring or transitioning their power-generating assets. By using ratepayer-backed bonds, utilities can reinvest their depreciated costs into new cost-saving energy projects.
- **Updating the Voluntary Renewable Energy Goal:** Kansas has surpassed its 20% by 2020 renewable energy goal with much more room for growth. It is time to up our goal and entice more business development in Kansas.

Climate Resilience

Our state, like other states, is facing more perils from extreme weather and climatic volatility. In the past 3 years, Kansas has faced increasingly dangerous and costly climate-related disasters, including its two largest wildfires in Kansas history, treacherous flooding events, and emergency-level droughts. Furthermore, record-breaking monthly temperatures, high-force winds, and unseasonal weather events have become more common, threatening our communities and economic sectors, especially agriculture. Fortunately, a majority of Kansans and a number of local and state leaders are becoming increasingly interested in our safety and future prosperity when it comes to climate change's effects in Kansas. This session, the Kansas Legislature can make progress on this issue by:

- **Increasing Funding for Disaster Response and Infrastructure Improvements**, such as wildfire suppression and stormwater management.
- **Signing a Climate and Health Declaration:** We need to demonstrate to Kansans that Kansas leaders do care about our state's health and future prosperity when it comes to the challenges of human-led climate disruption.

Oversight on Class II Disposal Wells

Kansas property owners and taxpayers have continued to bear the costs of damages from recent manmade earthquakes; earthquakes scientifically-attributed to Class II disposal wells. Currently, no accountability or liability measures have been installed upon the oil and gas industry to protect Kansans from cumulative or future harm. Additionally, there is not a public-friendly process for challenging Class II well permits based on seismicity concerns. Options include:

- **Seismic Risk Analysis** required for Class II disposal well permit applications.
- **Liability Risk Pool** insurance or increased bonding requirements to protect the oil and gas industry and cover associated damages from induced seismicity events.
- **Establish a CURB-like, consumer protection group** to pay specialized attention to injection/disposal well issues affecting citizens and to make recommendations to the KCC (potentially paid for by a small fee on disposal).
- **Modernize the KCC's protest process** for oil and gas well applications; allowing standing for seismicity concerns, opening cases to public comment, forming a 60-day protest period, a public data repository on the KCC website, and permitting electronic submission of forms.

Advancing Agriculture

Agriculture has always been a top industry and lifeblood for our state. Growing food and fuel are all-important to our state, country, and the world. However, our Kansas farmers and ranchers are confronting real challenges within their industry; farm income, resource availability, uncertain futures with pricing and climate instability, responsibility for nonpoint pollution and pest control, and an aging producer population are all serious concerns. Kansas leaders can help farmers revitalize Kansas agriculture with new markets, innovative strategies, and robust policymaking. Incentivizing local food systems and conservation agriculture will help both the economy and environment of Kansas.

- **Eliminate Sales Tax for Food at Farmers' Markets:** Kansas farmers and consumers both benefit from this locally-driven market and provides new economic stimulus for Kansas-based agriculture.
- **Enhance Pesticide Protections:** Pesticide usage has become more convoluted with increased drift concerns, pesticide-resistant weeds, and impacts to human health and pollinators. Better applicator recordkeeping, education, farmer-to-neighbor mediation opportunities, and support for integrated pest management practices can all help farmers deal with the pesticide issue.
- **Commercialize Industrial Hemp:** The 2018 U.S. Farm bill enables states to commercialize hemp production, yet current Kansas law allots hemp production for research only. The Legislature needs to update our law to allow free enterprise of hemp to fully realize its benefits for farmers, state and local economies, and the environment.

Other Considerations

There are many ways that Kansas can make additional gains in jobs, safety, and enjoyable living in Kansas:

- **Enrich Ecotourism and Outdoor Recreation:** Kansas is blessed with alluring wildlife, remarkable ecosystems, and a kindhearted citizenry that is well-suited for further investments in ecotourism and outdoor recreation. By continuing environmental stewardship and adding public places, we add more value and revenue to our state.
- **Protect Home Rule for Local Environmental Improvements:** Many communities and business entities are progressively seeking new ways to help their constituents, company, or customers be more sustainable. Our State Government should commend these efforts and let decision makers make such positive improvements.
- **Promote Alternative Transportation:** Electric vehicles, public transit, and alternative commuting (like biking, scootering, and walking) are becoming more popular among consumers. Kansas needs to embrace these modes of transportation and not penalize more eco-friendly, safer, or cost-effective transportation options.

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As the lobbyist of the Kansas Chapter of Sierra Club, I am at your service in helping our state and the environment. I offer accurate information, partnership, and constituent support. Please reach out to me at any time.