

Creation of a Watershed Management Group to Address Concerns in the Upper Arkansas River Basin, Kansas

Applicant: Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District Number 3
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Technical Proposal and Evaluation Criteria

Executive Summary

January 19, 2021

Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District Number 3

City: Garden City

County: Hamilton, Kearny, and Finney

State: Kansas

The upper Arkansas River watershed serves as a source of water for a diverse array of stakeholders, including municipalities, irrigators, feedlots, dairies, power plants, domestic users, and the environment, either through direct use or recharge to the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer in western Kansas. Potential stakeholders who have already expressed interest in group participation include:

- Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District 3
- Kansas State University Research and Extension
- Kansas State University's Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment
- City of Garden City
- City of Holcomb
- Finney County
- Sunflower Electric Power Corporation
- Ducks Unlimited
- Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams
- The Kansas Department of Health and Environment
- Water right owners and landowners

All stakeholders share concerns regarding declining water quality, insufficient supply to meet demand, especially during drought, and intermittent streamflow. The Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District Number 3 (GMD3) is requesting funding in the amount of \$100,000 from the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 Grants program for the formation of a watershed group that would allow this diverse array of stakeholders to form a local grassroots organization, composed of representation from the private sector as well as local and state government entities, to develop plans to restore and enhance the local watershed. The proposed project will begin in the winter of 2021 and will last for 2 years, ending around fall, 2023. The proposed project is not located on a Federal facility.

Background Data

The proposed watershed group boundary is the extent of the Middle Arkansas – Lake McKinney Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) area set by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). See Figure 3 on p. 7 for a project area map. The primary source of water within the area is the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer. The Arkansas River also serves as an important renewable source

of water for many users and provides substantial local recharge to the aquifer. The proposed watershed group boundary will encompass a portion of the Arkansas River basin that has been experiencing diminished and degraded flows and water quality. This has affected several ditch companies, municipalities, and most other water users within the watershed. It is in the best interest of all project partners to ensure that the Arkansas River within the proposed group area maintains a reasonable flow and water quality.

The water quality within the upper portion of the Arkansas River in Kansas is very poor due largely to diminished stream flows, underlying geology of fields upstream of the proposed area, and other uses. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has identified this stretch of the river as impaired waters due to gross alpha (bundled with uranium), fluoride, total suspended solids, boron, selenium, and sulfate.

The contamination of the Arkansas River water, especially the high levels of salinity and uranium, is diminishing the usefulness of the water, and in some instances, is creating problems that must be addressed at great cost to local stakeholders. Local irrigators who rely on surface water from river flows must run water through plastic pipes beneath their pivot systems because the saline river water is highly corrosive and will corrode and collapse a galvanized steel pipe sometimes within a single growing season. Higher volumes of river water must be used for irrigation than would be the case if the water were less saline, and often producers must either blend or run groundwater onto their fields after applying the water from the river to mitigate the effect of the salinity of the river water.

The Ogallala Aquifer is located beneath the High Plains of the United States, extending northward from western Texas to South Dakota. The Ogallala is the leading geologic formation in what is known as the High Plains Aquifer System. The entire system underlies about 450,000 square kilometers (174,000 square miles) of eight states. Although there are several other minor geologic formations in the High Plains Aquifer System, such as the Tertiary Brule and Arikaree and Dakota formation of the Cretaceous, these several units are often referred to as the Ogallala Aquifer. It is the largest single water-bearing unit in North America. Agricultural irrigation from the Ogallala is depleting the aquifer, which increases the rate of recharge from the Arkansas River and diminishes streamflow. See Figure 1 for a map of the extent of the High Plains Aquifer.

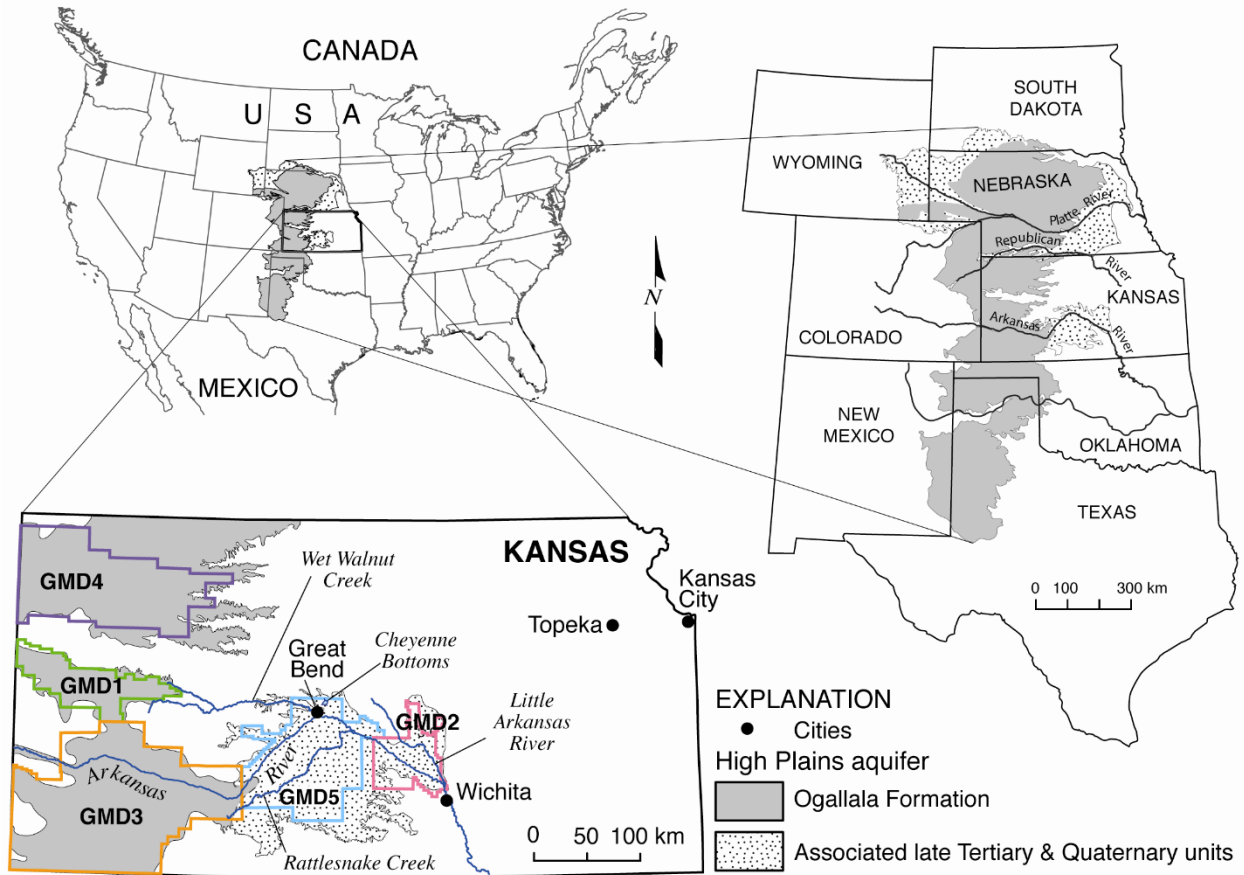


Figure 1. Extent of the High Plains Aquifer. Created by the Kansas Geological Survey

The cities of Lakin, Deerfield, Holcomb, and Garden City, KS rely on groundwater from the High Plains Aquifer to meet their municipal drinking water demands. The well fields supplying Lakin and Deerfield are being contaminated by infiltration of water from the Arkansas River. The city of Lakin recently constructed a nano-filtration facility and deep wastewater disposal well, at a cost of about \$6 million, to meet the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) standards for uranium. This is a significant cost for a community with a population of 2200. The cities of Deerfield and Holcomb do currently meet the EPA’s maximum contaminant level (MCL) for uranium, but uranium levels have been getting higher over time.

Streamflow in the Arkansas River is intermittent. Flows rarely reach Garden City. Due to slowed rate of flow, infiltration, and diversions, bedload sediment accumulates within the river channel, filling the river system and reducing the overall efficiency of flow and ability to divert through existing infrastructure. This not only creates concern for those who divert surface water but adds concerns by altering the extent and elevations of the floodway. Figure 2 shows year to year flows and losses in the Arkansas River Channel.

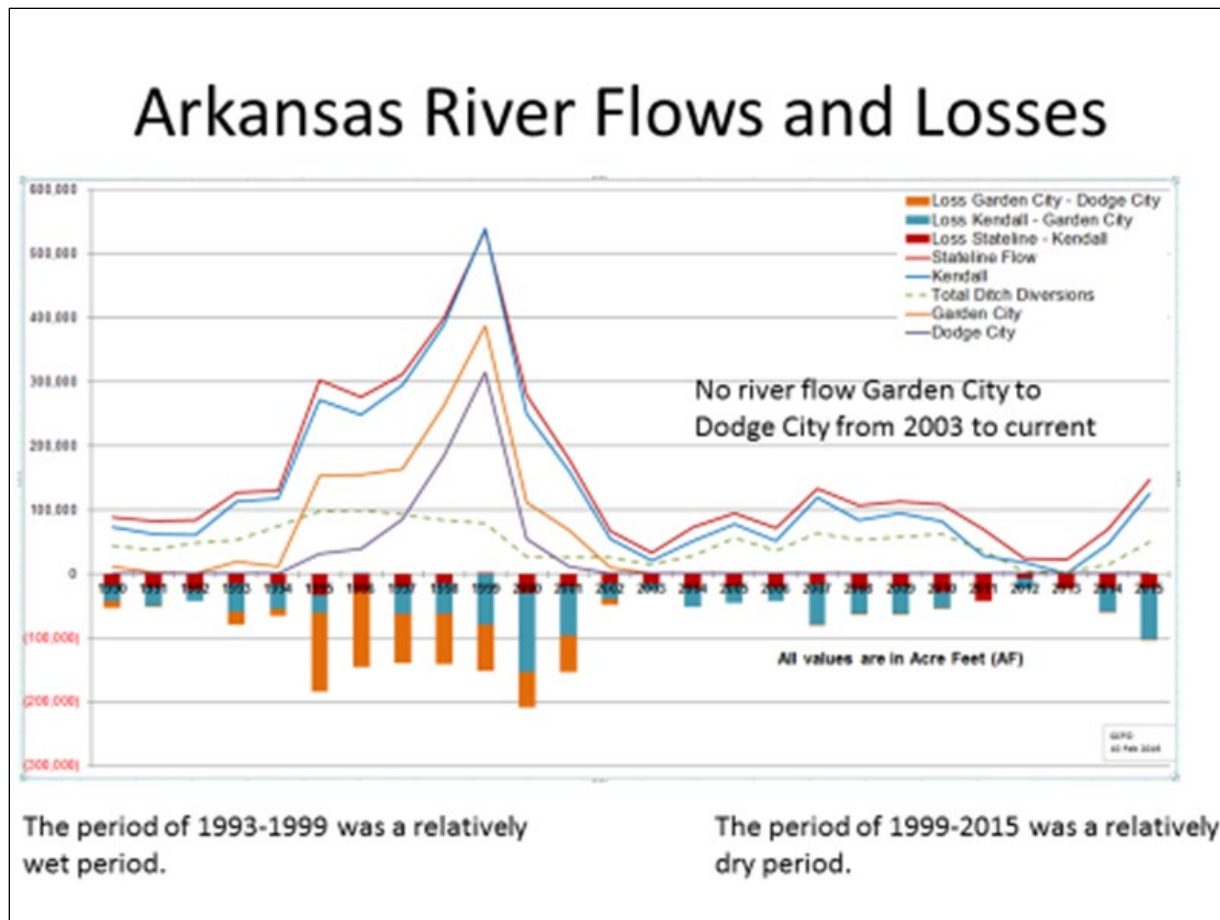


Figure 2. Year to Year Arkansas River Flows and Losses. Created by the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Water Resources

The proposed watershed area includes 2,412 water right points of diversion (PD), including 2,026 irrigation PDs, 87 industrial PDs, 152 municipal PDs, 12 recreational PDs, 5 thermal exchange PDs, 127 stock water PDs, and many domestic PDs. Average annual reported water use within the watershed area over the past 10 years was 360,257 acre-feet (AF).

The proposed watershed area includes some county and state fishing parks, which are operational when there is sufficient streamflow to elevate the local groundwater level, providing the water for the fisheries. These parks provide recreation for the surrounding communities and wildlife habitat.

Project Location

The watershed is located within portions of Hamilton, Greeley, Wichita, Kearny, Scott, and Finney Counties, Kansas. The watershed covers 1,471,856 acres and includes the cities of Coolidge, Syracuse, Lakin, Deerfield, Holcomb, and Garden City. The group will work within the portion of the Middle Arkansas-Lake McKinney HUC designated by the USGS that is located within Kansas. See Figure 3 for a map of the project area. The map is also attached to this proposal as a PDF.

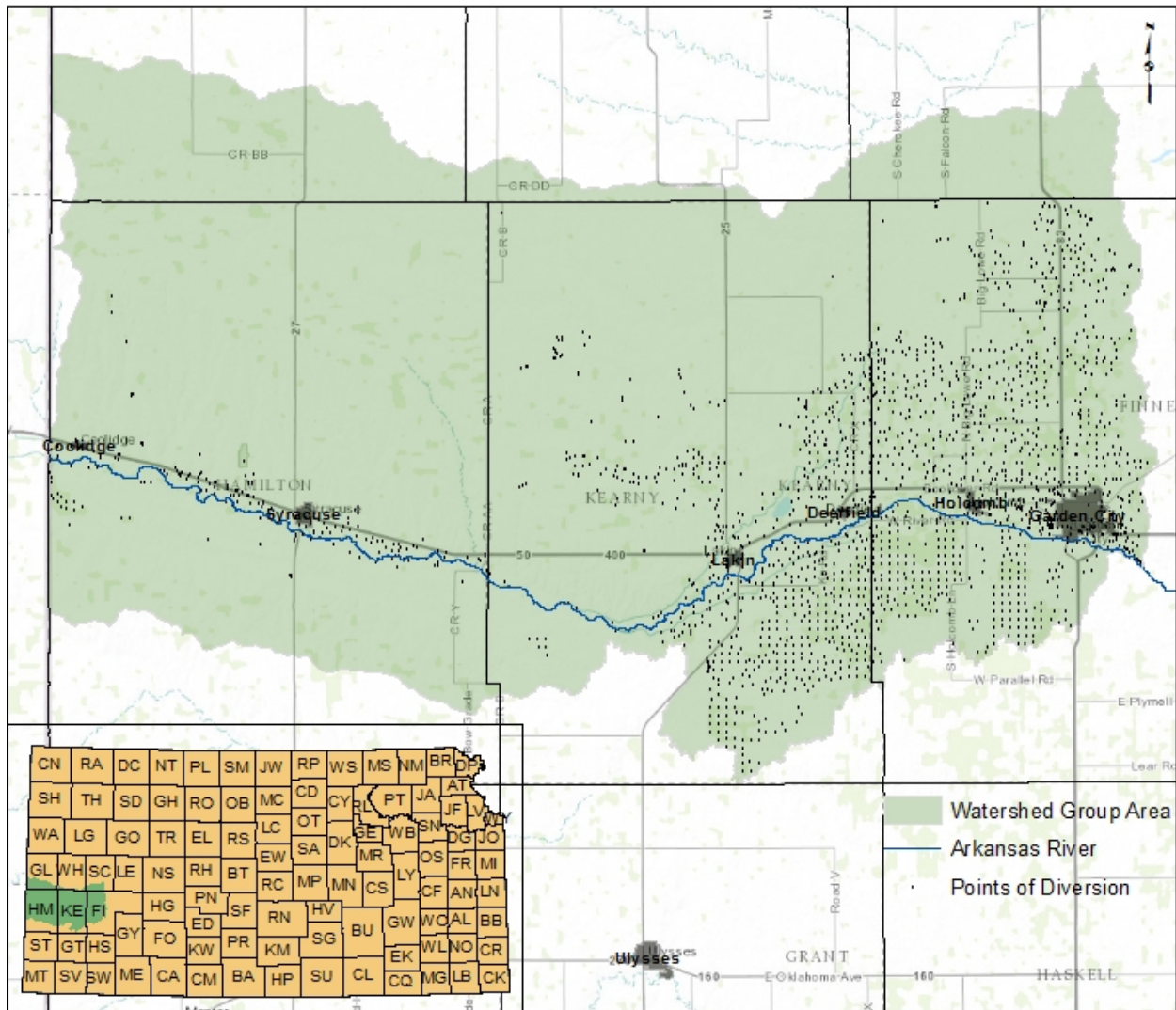


Figure 3. Watershed Group Area

Technical Project Description

Applicant Category

GMD3 is seeking funding for the creation of a new watershed group for the area of the Arkansas River shown in Figure 1. This category was chosen because there currently is not a watershed group working in this area.

Eligibility of Applicant

GMD3 is a local government entity created with the mission to conserve groundwater resources, prevent economic deterioration, and provide for the stabilization of agriculture by accepting the right of local users to determine their own destiny with respect to the use of groundwater as

provided by the Kansas Legislature. All groundwater users and all people who own 40 or more contiguous acres within the district boundary are members of GMD3.

GMD3 members located within the proposed area are significantly affected by both the quality and quantity of water within the watershed. The Arkansas River is a renewable source of groundwater recharge throughout the area, slowing the overall rate of aquifer decline. However, the poor quality of the water in the river system has a negative impact on the ability of GMD3 membership to use and enjoy the water resources. As groundwater levels continue to decline, the overall quality of the groundwater will continue to deteriorate until it becomes like the poor-quality river water that is replenishing the aquifer.

Goals

If this proposal is successful, a local watershed group made up of a diverse group of local stakeholders to address the problems with the upper Arkansas River in Kansas, advised by local, state, and Federal partners, will be formed. The group will work toward identifying sources of river contamination and developing projects and partnerships to remediate the water supply concerns in the watershed, provide for public education, and create opportunity for outdoor recreation. The activities the watershed group will undertake over the duration of the two-year grant period to accomplish these goals are as follows:

1. Establishment of the watershed group.
2. Development of a mission statement.
3. Development of watershed management project concepts.
4. Development of a watershed restoration plan.

The group will be facilitated and coordinated by GMD3 until bylaws are created. At that time, a coordinator/facilitator will be selected according to those bylaws. The group will establish its bylaws and articles of incorporation. It will hold regular meetings. The group will also develop an outreach plan to provide information to stakeholders in the area and establish broad-based membership. A mission statement will be adopted after holding meetings with stakeholders. The mission statement will be selected on a consensus basis.

The watershed group will include members of local water users and relevant local and state agencies. These agencies will assist the group in developing watershed management project concepts. The group will perform an analysis of the watershed to identify and prioritize watershed management projects. These will include projects that:

- Enhance water conservation, including alternative water uses.
- Improve water quality.
- Improve the ecological resiliency of a river or stream.
- Reduce the potential for water conflicts.
- Advance any other goals associated with water quality or quantity.
- Create outdoor recreation and education opportunities.

The Arkansas River watershed within the proposed area rarely provides enough water at suitable quality to satisfy the demands of local stakeholders. The proposed watershed group will identify projects geared toward water conservation so that water users are able to better operate on a limited water budget. The group may also identify alternative water uses.

The Arkansas River in the proposed area is very high in salinity, uranium, and other elements. These saline waters are highly corrosive, with the potential to burn out an irrigated field in the absence of adequate rainfall or fresh groundwater comingling. This has caused problems for local irrigators who are relying on the river water as an irrigation source. The high uranium levels have contaminated some municipal groundwater wells in the project area and numerous private drinking water wells.

The watershed group will take into consideration the impact on any federally listed species that are threatened, endangered, or in recovery before moving forward with any project. The group also may develop projects specifically for habitat remediation of a threatened, endangered, or candidate species. Federally listed species located within the counties included in the watershed basin include:

- Whooping crane
- Lesser prairie chicken

In addition to working toward limiting impacts on endangered species, the watershed group will also work to foster an appreciation for all wildlife, including creation of wildlife viewing opportunities, education kiosks, boating access, and management of habitat that facilitates hunting and fishing.

Approach

GMD3 will use this grant opportunity to complete the following Task A watershed group development activities:

- Develop a mission statement, vision statement, and goals for the watershed group.
 - The mission statement, vision statement and goals will be developed cooperatively by group members.
- Hire a facilitator/coordinator to assist with outreach to stakeholders.
 - GMD3 will serve as facilitator until one can be hired.
- Conduct outreach activities, such as the creation of an outreach plan and information materials and conducting stakeholder meetings to establish broad-based, diverse membership.
 - GMD3 will conduct all initial outreach. Options for additional outreach will be discussed at the first meetings to ensure that membership is as diverse and all-inclusive as possible.
- Gather information about issues and needs related to water quality and quantity within the watershed.
 - State and local government entities will be invited to all meetings and invited to be members of the watershed group. Federal agencies will be offered an advisory

role to the group. The group is also expected to work with universities to obtain recent, relevant scientific data to aid in decision making and planning.

- Conduct pre-planning activities, including outlining a watershed restoration plan, researching existing plans related to the watershed, collecting baseline information, and identifying restoration needs for the watershed.
 - A watershed restoration plan is expected to be outlined within two years of the group's establishment. This plan will consider other existing plans related to the watershed to maximize effectiveness.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria A: Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

Subcriterion No. A1 – Watershed Group Diversity

The proposed watershed group will be made up of a diverse group of competing interests that share the common goal of securing high-quality water sufficient for environmental restoration and irrigation, municipal, and domestic water supplies. Entities that have already expressed interest in membership include GMD3, the City of Garden City, City of Holcomb, Finney County, Ducks Unlimited, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas State University Research and Extension, Kansas State University's Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment, and Kansas Wetlands and Streams. See attached letters of support. This proposal presents an opportunity for all stakeholders, including government agencies, farmers, and environmental groups, to work together toward common interests to improve the watershed. This will help greatly to minimize conflicts that may arise due to future projects affecting the watershed.

The watershed group will include interests from the following sectors:

- Water right owners and landowners
- Livestock grazing
- Land development
- Recreation or tourism
- Irrigated agricultural production
- The environment
- Power and energy
- Potable water purveyors and industrial water users
- Private property owners
- Research and outreach
- Federal, state, and local agencies that have authority with respect to the watershed

The entities representing these sectors include, but are not limited to:

Water right owners and landowners: GMD3 was formed in 1976 under the State of Kansas's GMD Act (K.S.A. 82a-1020 et. seq.), which grants the right of locally formed districts, acting

through their governing body politic and corporate, to determine their destiny regarding water use and conduct the affairs of groundwater management as a policy agency. GMD3 is a special district that conducts local activities in water planning, policy development, and use and supply evaluation. GMD3 participates in state administration matters affecting groundwater and economy and represents members in matters concerning groundwater management. GMD3 functions under an elected board, representing water users from 12 counties in Kansas, with water rights amounting to about 3.6 million acre-feet per year and average use totaling about 1.8 million acre-feet. The board has 3 representatives elected from the project area to represent the water users and landowners.

Livestock grazing: Several independent ranches and dairies are located within the proposed watershed group. Most of these ranches and dairies are members of GMD3.

Land development: Representatives from the cities and counties within the watershed district will be invited to be members of the group. These representatives have a vested interest in land development. The cities of Garden City and Holcomb, as well as Finney County, have already expressed interest in the watershed group.

Recreation or tourism: The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism will be invited to be a member of the group. This entity is responsible for promoting and regulating hunting, fishing, and tourism within the watershed area. Ducks Unlimited has also expressed interest in being a member of the group. Ducks Unlimited has a mission to conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These wildlife conservation efforts create outdoor opportunity for hunters and others who appreciate nature.

Irrigated agricultural production: The Associated Ditches of Kansas and GMD3 will be invited to membership of the proposed watershed group. The ditches divert river flows for irrigated agricultural production. GMD3 membership consists of all groundwater users in a large part of southwest Kansas. Most members of GMD3 divert groundwater for irrigated agricultural production.

The environment: The Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, and Ducks Unlimited have expressed interest in the watershed group. These state departments are responsible for regulating water quality and protecting threatened and endangered wildlife species. The Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams has a strong track record in assisting the Kansas Watershed Restoration Protection Strategy (WRAPS) in all stages of progression. Their network of partners helps each WRAPS group fully develop and implement their plans. Their staff is dedicated to protection, restoration, and creation of wetlands, streams, and their associated riparian areas. Ducks Unlimited is committed to conserving, restoring, and managing wetlands and associated habitats for waterfowl.

Power and Energy: Sunflower Electric Power Corporation (Sunflower) has expressed interest in the proposed watershed group. Sunflower provides electricity to about 400,000 people and operates within the Arkansas River Basin.

Potable water purveyors and industrial water users: There are 6 cities located within the project area. The cities of Garden City and Holcomb have already expressed interest in the group. Other cities will be invited to participate.

Private property owners: All private property owners in the watershed boundary who do not fall into other groups will be notified of meeting dates through radio and newspaper advertisements. These property owners also are represented by local leadership in GMD3, who will be a member of the watershed group.

Research and outreach: Kansas State University Research and Extension (KSU R&E) has expressed interest in the watershed group. KSU R&E is a statewide network of educators sharing unbiased, research-based information and expertise on issues important to Kansas. Their expertise will be an invaluable resource for the group. Kansas State University's Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment (KCARE) has also expressed interest in the watershed group. KCARE is focused on science, research and education supporting agricultural potential and protecting natural resources across Kansas.

Federal, State, and local entities: GMD3, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the City of Garden City, the City of Holcomb, and Finney County have expressed interest in the group. The cities of Lakin and Syracuse, and Kearny and Hamilton Counties will also be invited.

Any other private or governmental entity that is a good fit for the watershed group will be free to join.

Subcriterion No. A2 – Geographic Scope

The proposed watershed boundary encompasses the Kansas portion of the Middle Arkansas – Lake McKinney HUC. HUC boundaries are set forth by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). See Figure 3 on page 7 for a map of the proposed watershed group. This HUC was chosen as the watershed boundary because it includes all of an impaired stretch of the Arkansas River that runs from the Kansas state line to Garden City. Instances of river flow immediately downstream of Garden City are exceedingly rare.

GMD3 has already reached out to many stakeholders and several have expressed support for the group. GMD3 will continue to reach out to stakeholders to ensure that the watershed group is representative of all stakeholders of the watershed. Every effort will be made to ensure that there is participation throughout the entire watershed area.

Evaluation Criterion B – Addressing Critical Watershed Needs

Subcriterion No. B1 – Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The proposed watershed group area feeds the Arkansas River and its tributaries. River flows typically do not leave the area but are rapidly infiltrated into the underlying Ogallala Aquifer. Low rainfall and heavy water use create a severe water shortage, with a declining groundwater table and no surface water discharge. In Kansas, the water right demands of the irrigation ditches

total 141,946 AF, but the average total ditch diversions from 2010-2019 were only 41,474 AF. This water shortfall, along with the saline nature of the river water, forces irrigators to rely heavily on the Ogallala Aquifer to meet water demands and mitigate water quality. Due to water level declines, the option of turning to groundwater to meet irrigation needs will not exist forever.

Low river flows have led to increased salinity and a higher concentration of uranium. Multiple tons of uranium enter the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer within the project area through river infiltration. (Whittemore 2017). The high salinity has caused issues with local producers due to its corrosive nature, as well as its effect on crops in some instances. There are also some cases of dairies shutting down within the watershed group boundary due in part to the water being too poor for the dairy cattle to produce good milk, as well as the laxative nature of the water impairing production. High selenium content in the river channel threatens aquatic species habitat. Figure 2 shows the results of a study conducted by the Kansas Geological Survey detailing the sulfate concentration of the Arkansas River alluvium in western Kansas (Whittemore 2000).

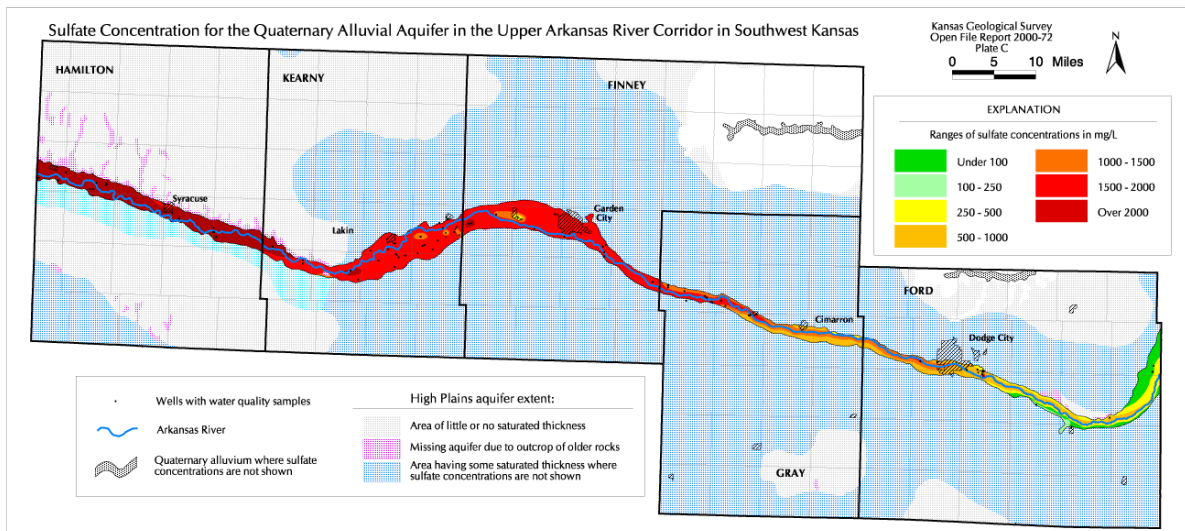


Figure 2: Sulfate Concentration in the Arkansas River Alluvium in Western Kansas

The uranium in the river water has also contaminated groundwater wells placed in the river alluvium as well as some parts of the Ogallala Aquifer. Some municipal wells now need treatment to meet the EPA drinking water standards for uranium. Garden City and Lakin have approaches in place to reduce contaminants and are able to meet EPA standards. In Lakin, uranium levels in the city’s main well recently failed to meet the EPA standard over a four-year monitoring period. The EPA established the MCL for uranium as a primary standard, meaning it was enacted to protect public health and is legally enforceable. Lakin has constructed a nano-filtration facility and deep injection well to address this issue, at great cost to a small community. This issue is also a major concern for Deerfield and Holcomb, as well as domestic drinking water wells throughout the watershed.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) also monitors ambient water quality and has classified the Arkansas River at Coolidge as Category 5 Impaired Water for water supply with low priority for water supply due to gross alpha particles (bundled with uranium) and fluoride. The Arkansas River near Deerfield is also classified as Category 5 Impaired Water for water supply with low priority due to fluoride. Category 5 waters are declared impaired and in need of a total maximum daily load (TMDL) standard to comply with the Federal Clean Water Act.

TMDLs have been developed for the Arkansas River at Coolidge and Deerfield for boron (medium implementation) and at Coolidge and Deerfield for sulfate for water supply (medium implementation priority).

In 2007, the KDHE completed a TMDL to address selenium water quality impairments along the Arkansas River from the Colorado/Kansas state line to Pierceville, KS.

The whooping crane and lesser prairie chicken are Federally listed animal species within the counties included in the watershed group. The reduced streamflow within the watershed makes this a delicate region for some fish and bird species. There are currently no projects underway that are expected to have a negative impact on critical wildlife habitat, but there are also no projects underway that are expected to improve upon this habitat. This watershed group will ensure that representatives from federal, state, and local wildlife groups will have the opportunity to influence future projects so that these projects not only benefit local water users, but the local ecology as well.

Subcriterion No. B2 – Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

During the grant period, the watershed group will primarily address the items listed under Task A in the Funding Opportunity Announcement. The group will facilitate discussions about land use planning processes and land use designations that govern public use and access. The group will work to ensure that current recreation activity, such as all-terrain vehicle (ATV) traffic in dry portions of the river channel, and fishing in state-controlled ponds fed by the alluvial aquifer, remain safe and viable. The group will designate the watershed as a critical groundwater recharge area and work to ensure that critical water diversion structures are clearly marked and inaccessible to vehicle traffic that could compromise them.

This group will be composed of and supported by numerous state agencies and other organizations that will allow for a scientific approach to planning. The organizations that have already expressed interest come from a diverse set of backgrounds. This group will facilitate coordination and cooperation between groups that often have competing interests, such as environmental groups, industrial enterprises, and irrigation districts.

The group may begin some of the processes identified under Task B during the 2-year period covered by the grant. The watershed group will outline a watershed restoration plan that identifies needed projects for enhancement of water conservation and water use efficiency within the watershed and identifies potential funding sources to facilitate these projects. The plan will

be formed in a method consistent with bylaws to be adopted by the watershed group. The plan will be used to address water quantity, quality, and management issues within the watershed.

Evaluation Criteria C – Implementation and Results

Subcriterion No. C1 – Project Implementation

The proposed watershed group will be established through a series of meetings in which stakeholders will be invited. The following steps will be taken to establish the watershed group:

- Information gathering.
- Developing a mission statement, forming articles of incorporation, and hiring a coordinator.
- Conducting outreach to establish or expand membership of the watershed group, including efforts to ensure the diversity of the group.
- Identifying problems and needs within the given watershed.
- Developing a watershed restoration plan, including establishing goals and identifying and evaluating potential watershed management projects.
- Creating a plan of action for the timing and implementation of activities.

GMD3 staff will gather information on the watershed related to historic water availability, use, demand, and quality. This information will be used to help identify problems within the watershed, potential solutions, and other topics for discussion at the watershed group meetings.

Shortly after formation of the group, a mission statement will be created on a consensus basis by group stakeholders. The mission statement will be broad enough to address the known problems and concerns of all stakeholders. Articles of incorporation will also be created on a consensus basis. These articles of incorporation will address the method used to select the group coordinator. GMD3 will serve as the group facilitator and coordinator, at least for the first year of the group's existence.

As facilitator, GMD3 will conduct outreach to establish membership of the watershed group. GMD3 will use mailings, phone calls, and radio advertisements to increase awareness of the group, and will make every effort to ensure that the group's representatives come from a diverse array of backgrounds.

Quarterly meetings will be held where stakeholders will be able to identify specific problems and needs within the watershed. The group will create a watershed restoration plan that addresses the problems and needs of stakeholders to the maximum extent practicable. This plan will include establishing goals and identifying and evaluating potential watershed management projects. The watershed group will consist of enough entities with authority in the watershed to ensure that projects identified in the watershed restoration plan have the potential to be completed.

The plan of action for the timing of implementing the mandatory activities as defined in the funding opportunity announcement is as follows:

Table 1. Plan of Action

Date	Activity	Description
12/01/21	Group Outreach	GMD3 staff will begin to advertise the group to potential membership through mailings, phone calls, and radio.
01/20/22	Kick-Off Meeting	The first meeting of the watershed group will be held. This meeting will allow all stakeholders to become acquainted with each other and begin to lay the groundwork of the group's mission statement.
04/21/22	Quarterly Meeting	Group members will identify problems and needs within the watershed. A mission statement will be created.
07/21/22	Quarterly Meeting	The group will meet to discuss potential bylaws and articles of incorporation.
10/20/22	Quarterly Meeting	The group will continue to work on bylaws and articles of incorporation.
01/19/23	Quarterly Meeting	The bylaws and articles of incorporation will be finalized. The group will begin searching for a coordinator and facilitator in accordance with the adopted bylaws.
04/20/23	Quarterly Meeting	The watershed group will meet to discuss project concepts and the watershed restoration plan. A group facilitator and coordinator should be hired by this time.
07/20/23	Quarterly Meeting	The watershed group will meet to discuss project concepts and the watershed restoration plan.
10/19/23	Quarterly Meeting	The watershed group will pass a watershed restoration plan. The plan is to include a prioritized list of projects and goals for the future.

Subcriterion No. C2 – Building on Relevant Federal, State, or Regional Planning Efforts

The activities of the proposed watershed group will complement existing goals of existing federal, state, and local planning efforts. These efforts include the draft GMD3 Management Program (GMD3, 2020), Renewable Supplies Action Items of the Water Vision (GMD3, 2018) (Kansas Water Office, 2015), an “Upper Arkansas River Basin Public Water Supply Alternatives Viability Analysis,” conducted by Reclamation, GMD3, and the KWO on water supply alternatives along the upper Arkansas basin (Reclamation 2014), the goals of the EPA’s Nonpoint Source Management Program (EPA 2013), the EPA’s Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters (EPA 2008), Kansas Senate Resolution No. 1729 (2019), and the Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy, Upper Ark – Lake McKinney Watershed (2008). GMD3 previously worked with Reclamation to develop a System Optimization Review for the irrigation ditch systems within the project area (Spronk Water Engineers 2014). The project area is also located within an area where Reclamation previously funded a Plan of Study in 2013.

GMD3 Draft Management Program

Under GMD3's draft management program (pending approval of the Kansas Chief Engineer), the following activities were set regarding upper Arkansas River corridor water management:

- Work collaboratively with Kansas and Colorado officials to address water usability depletion from poor Arkansas River water quality and the degradation of basin groundwater.
- Maximize benefits of high river flows for aquifer replenishment, well augmentation, and river ecology restoration.
- Explore water storage options for water importation projects.
- Address compact compliance verification needs.
- Maximize public good from available river flows and river resources.
- Maximize efficiency of call water delivery to surface water ditch irrigation use.
- Improve the efficiency and safety of services from the hydrologic system.

The GMD3 draft management program also has the following activities for water quality in the upper Arkansas River basin:

- Follow up on the work performed with Reclamation in 2012 to develop a drinking water plan for the population along the poor water quality Arkansas River corridor.
- Develop standards on water usability and value losses from declining water quality.
- Identify usable water sources or technologies that can enhance the usability of poor-quality water sources.
- Conduct further study to define the paleo-river channel aquifer supply.
- Monitor water quality at Stateline groundwater gages installed with GMD3 help.
- Monitor and assist, as requested, similar activities and basin concerns in Colorado.

The proposed watershed group is ideal for progressing toward meeting these activities set by GMD3. The group will be composed of stakeholders and state and local representatives with interest in watershed activities and will meet regularly. The activities set by GMD3 focus on the same sort of problems the watershed group will be formed to solve.

Renewable Supplies Action Items of the Water Vision (GMD3 Recommendations)

GMD3 recently adopted a set of requests and recommendations for pursuing renewable water supplies consistent with the KWO's Kansas Water Vision Document. These include:

- Place priority on protecting existing renewable supplies while other renewable sources of supply are identified and considered for development and distribution across Kansas and GMD3.
- Host a river resource meeting in the Arkansas and Cimarron River basins where interstate compacts cover portions of the District.

- Ongoing issues of the floodplain above Garden City filling with sand and the pollution of the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer from poor quality Arkansas River water from Colorado should be considered priority action items. As the largest reservoir in the state, the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer receives many tons of Uranium and other harmful dissolved solids carried in with river flow from Colorado into Kansas. This daily occurrence is reducing District groundwater usability and is an issue of common concern with Colorado that requires as much attention as algal blooms in other Kansas Reservoirs. A significantly higher priority of study is needed under Vision implementation and state water planning.
- Study and identify existing incentives and disincentives for water transportation across Kansas as a future source of supply and provide suggested solutions to enhance incentives that overcome the disincentives.
- Identify policies that unnecessarily limit transfers, including water appropriation rules and procedures and the use of unreasonable application process deadlines.
- Study and develop water transport infrastructure financing options, public/private partnerships, and other tools needed to facilitate future project feasibility as is occurring in other states.
- GMD3 board requests support for ongoing interstate meetings with potential water transfer partners seeking interstate water management and transfer benefits.
- Develop a project governance model with input from multiple local government representatives to facilitate a multi-jurisdictional Kansas transfer project authority tool for developing large water transfer and distribution projects.
- GMD3 requests that the Upper Arkansas and Cimarron Regional Planning Areas be considered suitable areas of need for transfer water based on big projected future water deficits and projected economic crisis in meeting existing and future demands from a depleting groundwater supply.
- Research potential enhancements to playas and other land structures to increase water recharge amounts into the Ogallala-High Plains Aquifer.
- Seek Farm Bill provisions to allow research and demonstrations to occur with safeguards for cooperating Kansas landowner protection against losing Federal farm program payments.

The watershed group will serve a critical role as representation for local stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds, including farmers, ranchers, industrial, domestic, municipal, environmental, and state and local government interests. It will help ensure that future renewable water supply and management needs in the basin are considered and addressed.

Upper Arkansas River Basin Public Water Supply Alternatives Viability Analysis

In 2014, Reclamation published a report with GMD3 and the KWO investigating water supply alternatives for communities along the upper Arkansas River corridor in Kansas to be able to address declining water quality in a cost-effective way. The watershed group will seek membership from each of these communities. It will provide them a forum to work together to overcome mutual challenges regarding declining water quality and supply.

EPA Nonpoint Source Management Program

The goals of the EPA Nonpoint Source Management Program are to maintain and improve water quality by:

- strategically focusing on water quality goals to achieve water quality standards in the state's priority waters/watersheds;
- clearly articulating program goals and developing annual work plans that reflect actions to advance those goals;
- reflecting a balance between planning, staffing, statewide action, and watershed project implementation that best utilizes resources to deliver measurable water quality results;
- leveraging and integrating with other programs to align planning, priority-setting and resources to make the best use of available resources to control NPS pollution; and
- tracking and reporting results to demonstrate program progress and success.

The watershed group will be highly focused on addressing water quality issues. The goals set forth by the group are expected to be somewhat like these goals.

EPA's Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters

The EPA has developed a handbook for the development of watershed plans. This handbook presents methods to create plans without creating conflicts. The watershed group will consult the handbook not only when creating plans, but also when deciding who to invite for membership.

Kansas Senate Resolution No. 1729

The Kansas State Legislature passed Senate Resolution No. 1729 in 2019, resolving that the Kansas congressional delegation work with the U.S. Congress to provide funding and direction to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to implement the efforts identified in the 2014 and 2015 studies, including, but not limited to:

1. Further compiling information on existing, usable sources and projected demands;
2. Developing Basin tools, including scientifically defensible hydrologic and economic modeling tools;
3. Completing system reliability and impact analyses to assess the current and future capability of existing natural and manmade infrastructure and operations to meet demands and useable water supply challenges;
4. Identifying adaptation strategies to improve operations and infrastructure and to address current and future water availability and quality challenges in the Basin; and
5. Developing recommendations to address the water quality challenges and to provide reliable, clean sources of drinking water in the affected areas of the Basin.

The Legislature further resolved to request the Kansas Water Office, Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 3, and other state and local partners in Kansas and Colorado to work with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to complete these tasks and to address the concerns regarding the contamination of the Arkansas Basin.

The formation of the watershed group is consistent with all aspects of this resolution.

Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy, Upper Ark – Lake McKinney Watershed

Through funding provided by and EPA 319 grant from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment Watershed Management Section, a Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) plan was drafted to cover the project area. This plan was ultimately not adopted, but it identifies many issues pertaining to water quality that are a concern to all stakeholders within the watershed and it will serve as an excellent starting point for the watershed group to adopt a formal restoration plan. The plan is unavailable online but can be made available upon request to GMD3.

System Optimization Review

Through funding provided by Reclamations WaterSMART grant program, GMD3 completed a “System Optimization Review of the Associated Ditch System in Kearny and Finney Counties, Kansas” in 2014. This review identified projects that would improve efficiency and ranked those projects based upon cost-effectiveness. It also included valuable information on the river system, including estimated losses along different stretches based on flow rate. This optimization review focuses on irrigation and is not all-inclusive to the scope of the watershed group, but it will be valuable in identifying potential projects to be undertaken and for determining the effectiveness of other proposed projects.

Evaluation Criteria D – Department of the Interior and Bureau of Reclamation Priorities

This project addresses Department of the Interior priority 1: Creating a conservation stewardship legacy second only to Teddy Roosevelt. The project will utilize science to identify best practices to manage land and water resources and adapt to changes in the environment. Irrigators, municipalities, industrial water users, environmental groups, and state agencies will work together and use scientific information to design and implement projects benefitting the local water supply, its use, environmental impact, and economics.

This project also addresses Department of the Interior priority 3: Restoring trust with local communities. The watershed group that will be created with this proposal will facilitate working relationships between groups with a diverse set of backgrounds, goals, and concerns. This group will give all interests a seat at the table to ensure that future projects address critical concerns that might otherwise have been ignored.

Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

The proposed funding is only for the creation of a watershed group. It does not include monitoring, measurement, or other field work. No environmental and cultural resources compliance will be required.

Required Permits or Approvals

No permits or approvals are required to form the proposed watershed group.

Project Budget

Budget Proposal

Table 2. Budget

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION		Recipient Funding	Reclamation Funding	Other Federal Funding	Total Cost
	\$/Unit and Unit	Quantity				
SALARIES AND WAGES						
Summer Intern	\$15/hr	560 hrs		\$8,400		\$8,400
TRAVEL						
Trip 1				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 2				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 3				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 4				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 5				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 6				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 7				\$1,500		\$1,500
Trip 8				\$1,500		\$1,500
CONTRACTUAL						
Coordinator/Facilitator	\$27,400/ year	2 years		\$54,800		\$54,800
OTHER						
Radio				\$2,400		\$2,400
Mailings				\$5,000		\$5,000
Website Design				\$2,000		\$2,000
Website Maintenance	\$100/mo	24 mo		\$2,400		\$2,400
Meals				\$5,000		\$5,000
Field Events	\$2,000/ event	4 events		\$8,000		\$8,000
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS				\$100,000		\$100,000

Budget Narrative

Salaries and Wages

GMD3 will hire a summer intern while serving as coordinator/facilitator during the first year. The intern will assist in contacting stakeholders, ordering meals, and arranging meeting times and locations. The intern will be paid \$15 per hour and will work approximately 14 weeks at 40 hours per week. The budget will allow \$8,400 for the intern.

Travel

The budget includes \$12,000 for travel costs. This includes \$6,000 for both the first and second years of the grant period. Group membership is not finalized at this point, so it is not possible to calculate the total number of miles necessary for reimbursement. It is expected that some members might travel as far as from Topeka, while others will not need to travel far. Mileage will be reimbursed at \$0.54 per mile and hotel stays will be fully reimbursed as the budget permits.

Contractual

The budget allows for one contractual position, the coordinator/facilitator. This person will oversee setting meeting agendas, working with stakeholders to develop a mission statement, forming articles of incorporation, identifying problems and needs, developing a watershed restoration plan, setting goals, identifying and evaluating potential watershed management projects, and conducting outreach to establish membership. The coordinator/facilitator will also be responsible for all required reports to Reclamation. The budget allows for the coordinator/facilitator to be paid \$27,400 per year, or \$54,800 over the two-year project period.

GMD3 will serve as coordinator/facilitator until each respective position can be filled. GMD3 will keep timesheets to accurately track costs associated with the watershed group and will seek reimbursement as costs are accumulated, not to exceed the budgeted salary for the time served.

Other

The budget includes \$2,400 for radio advertisement. This will allow for \$300 to be spent on local advertisement leading up to each meeting.

The budget includes \$5,000 for mailings. This will allow for individual stakeholders to be reached that might not see or hear other advertising.

The budget allows \$2,000 for website design and \$2,400 for website maintenance. GMD3 will create a website for the watershed group prior to the first meeting. The estimated cost of maintaining the website is \$100 per month.

The budget includes \$5,000 for meals. Attendees of each quarterly meeting will be fed to improve attendance.

The budget includes \$8,000 for events. This will allow the group to hold 2 events per year, such as tours, with a budget of \$2,000 per event. The budget is expected to be needed for bus rentals and food costs.

Works Cited

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- United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation. Great Plains Region, Oklahoma-Texas Area Office, and Kansas Water Office and Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District Number 3. “Upper Arkansas River Basin Public Water Supply Alternatives Viability Analysis.” (2014). https://www.usbr.gov/gp/otao/upper_ark_water_supply_alt_final.pdf
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http://www.kgs.ku.edu/Hydro/Publications/2000/OFR00_72/plate_c.pdf



FINNEY COUNTY
KANSAS

WILDWOOD PARK

Angie Schmitt, Parks Coordinator
aschmitt@finneycounty.org
T. (620) 272-3844

Roger Calkins, Public Works Director
rcalkins@finneycounty.org
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On Call: (620) 277-6952

Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Attn: Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
PO Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225

RE: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, Phase one.

Ms. Morgan,

We would like to express our support for the formation of a watershed group as proposed in the submittal titled "Creation of a Watershed Management Group to Address Concerns in the Upper Arkansas River Basin, Kansas." Finney County Department of Public Works has great interest in the proper management of the Upper Arkansas River system and we welcome the opportunity to participate with the other stakeholders of this area to improve the management and enjoyment of the water related resources of the basin.

The work proposed in the project application will provide benefits for the cities in our county by ensuring the water transmitted by our community via the Arkansas River is of good quality, with minimum restrictions to stream flow. Remediation and conservation functions upstream from Wildwood Park and our mining area that are accepted to advance the available flows in the Upper Arkansas Basin, thus advancing quality of conditions along the entire river eco-system. We appreciate your diligence in the advancement of this proposed watershed partnership.

Sincerely,

Roger Calkins, Director

Public Works

Angie Schmitt, CFE

Coordinator Wildwood Park



**PUBLIC UTILITIES
DEPARTMENT**

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Public Utilities
Director
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United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Attn: Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
PO Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

January 14, 2021

Ms. Morgan,

I respectfully submit this letter of support for forming a Watershed Management Group to address concerns in the Upper Arkansas River basin. Many stakeholders in the region would benefit from coordination and collaboration to improve the management of the resource.

The proposal submitted to the Bureau provides benefits for urban, rural, and industrial water users in our region. The primary concern regarding the basin for the citizens of Garden City, Kansas, is the declining water quality in the river basin, including radionuclides, a regulated water contaminant, present in the river system. The Arkansas River is a resource, and the resource provides recharge to the water aquifer in our community, regardless of its water quality. Efforts to improve flow in the Arkansas River and remediation efforts upstream would help enhance water quality for human consumption.

I appreciate this opportunity to provide my input and trust you will thoughtfully review the proposal at hand.

Sincerely,



Fred Jones
Water Resource Manager

Resolution 2021 - 1

OF THE

SOUTHWEST KANSAS GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

WHEREAS, the upper Arkansas River watershed serves as a source of water for a diverse array of stakeholders, including municipalities, irrigators, feedlots, dairies, power plants, domestic users, and the environment, either through direct use or as recharge to the Ogallala/High Plains Aquifer in western Kansas; and

WHEREAS, the GMD3 draft revised Management Program contains a program area for the Arkansas River management activities that includes providing leadership in considering development of an Arkansas River Watershed group to help address program elements of this section and building from prior work of program partners, including those identified in the 2008 Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) Report and others.

WHEREAS, the Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District Number 3 (GMD3) is requesting funding in the amount of \$100,000 from the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 Grants program for the formation of a watershed group that would allow a diverse array of stakeholders to form a local, grassroots organization to develop plans to restore and enhance the local watershed, and;

WHEREAS, the contamination of the Arkansas River water and aquifer supply, especially the high levels of salinity and uranium, is diminishing the usability of the water and creating groundwater problems that must be addressed, and;

WHEREAS, the proposed project will begin in the fall of 2021 and will last for 2 years, ending around October 31, 2023.

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Board of Directors of GMD3 to support the proposal "Creation of a Watershed Management Group to Address Concerns in the Upper Arkansas River Basin, Kansas."

Adopted this 13th day of January 2021

ATTEST:


Mike O'Brate, Treasurer


Bret Rooney, President

Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Attn: Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
PO Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80255

RE: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, Phase One

Ms. Morgan:

The purpose of this letter is to express support for the development of a watershed group as described in the "Creation of a Watershed Management Group to Address Concerns in the Upper Arkansas River Basin, Kansas" proposal. Kansas State University's Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment (KCARE) is committed to science-based and stakeholder-driven research and activities that lead to the restoration and protection of Kansas' impaired agricultural watersheds.

The Upper Arkansas River watershed faces many water quality concerns including uranium in public water supply wells and elevated total dissolved solids (TDS), especially sulfate. Addressing these challenges will require a diversity of perspectives and local solutions. The activities and collaboration proposed in the project application will bring together the diverse, local stakeholders necessary to develop a plan to improve the water management in the Upper Arkansas River watershed.

K-State's KCARE looks forward to participating with and supporting the watershed stakeholder group to advance sustainable environmental stewardship for the region and improve the quality of the Upper Arkansas River watershed. Thank you for the opportunity to support this important watershed partnership.

Sincerely,



Susan Metzger
Associate Director, Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment (KCARE) and the Kansas Water Resources Institute (KWRI)



19 January 2021

Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Attn: Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
PO Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80255

RE: WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program, Phase One

Ms. Morgan:

The purpose of this letter is to express support for the development of a watershed group as described in the "Creation of a Watershed Management Group to Address Concerns in the Upper Arkansas River Basin, Kansas" proposal. Kansas State University SW Research-Extension Center's (K-State SWREC) Water Management Program is committed to science-based and stakeholder-driven research and activities that lead to proper utilization, remediation and management of water resources in the region.

The Upper Arkansas River watershed faces many water quality concerns including uranium in public water supply wells and elevated total dissolved solids (TDS), especially sulfate. Our program was involved in the study that found the link of uranium to the agricultural crops grown within the watershed. The activities and collaboration proposed in the project application will bring together the diverse, local stakeholders necessary to develop a plan to improve the water management in the Upper Arkansas River watershed.

Our program looks forward to participating with and supporting the watershed stakeholder group to advance sustainable environmental stewardship for the region and improve the quality of the Upper Arkansas River watershed. Thank you for the opportunity to support this important watershed partnership.

Kind regards,

Jonathan Aguilar, PhD, PE
Associate Professor/Water Resource Engineer

Kansas State University, County Extension
Councils, Extension Districts, and U.S.
Department of Agriculture Cooperating.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal
opportunity provider and employer.

*Knowledge
for Life*





SUNFLOWER ELECTRIC POWER CORPORATION

January 19, 2021

Via Email

Mark E. Rude
Executive Director
Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District 3
2009 E. Spruce Street
Garden City, Kansas 67846

Re: Creation of Watershed Management Group to Address Concerns in the Upper
Arkansas River Basin, Kansas

Dear Mr. Rude:

Sunflower Electric Power Corporation ("Sunflower") is pleased to support the Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District's efforts to create a watershed management group to address concerns in the Upper Arkansas River Basin. As a Kansas utility that operates in the Upper Arkansas River Basin, Sunflower is interested in seeking solutions to the problem of declining water quality and quantity in the Upper Arkansas River Basin. Sunflower believes progress towards solutions to these issues will benefit it and the 400,000 people in Kansas Sunflower serves.

This letter is made in good faith but should not be construed by any party as creating legally binding obligations.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

DLS/mas

Division of Environment
Curtis State Office Building
1000 SW Jackson St., Suite 400
Topeka, KS 66612-1367



Phone: 785-296-1535
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Lee A. Norman, M.D., Secretary

Laura Kelly, Governor

January 19, 2021

Mark Rude, Executive Director
Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District #3
2009 E. Spruce Street
Garden City, KS 67846

RE: Support for Proposed WATER SMART Project for Upper Arkansas River Watershed

Dear Mr. Rude:

This letter serves as notice of support from the Bureau of Water of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to GMD#3 to pursue a grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Water Smart Watershed Management Program to investigate the utility of a watershed group dedicated to focus on the water supply and quality issues of the Upper Arkansas River and its watershed. As Director of the Bureau of Water, I will pledge our participation in the project and provision of any existing data pertinent to the ambient conditions of the river as well as compliance issues faced by the public water supply systems in the watershed.

I do note that state water planning is embedded within the existing Upper Arkansas Regional Advisory Committee supporting the Kansas Water Authority and Kansas Water Office. The Kansas Water Plan remains the primary mechanism driving state action and attention on issues along the Upper Arkansas. I am hopeful that any plans for a regional watershed group will be established and operated in concert with the workings of the Upper Ark RAC.

That said, the Bureau of Water stands ready to support planning efforts such as your proposal within our existing resources and with an eye toward support of Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act implementation in the Upper Arkansas Basin. Please keep the Bureau informed with news regarding your proposal and we look forward to working with you on issues of the Upper Arkansas River.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas C. Stiles". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Thomas C. Stiles
Director, Bureau of Water
Kansas Department of Health and Environment