

The 30 x 30 National Conservation Plan, the Kansas Response...So Far

By Michael Kaye

President Biden's Vision

The Biden Administration, by Presidential Executive Order, has offered the Nation a plan for Americans to work collaboratively to conserve and restore the land, air, waters, and wildlife that support and sustain us. Initially, the Department of the Interior, in collaboration with other federal agencies, submitted a report "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful 2021" to the newly established National Climate Task Force recommending locally led and voluntary conservation and restoration efforts across public, private, and Tribal lands designed to conserve at least 30% of the United States' land and waters by 2030. The goal is to expand the current 12% total of the land and waters in the U.S. in conservation to 30%.

The USDA reports that there are approximately 900 million agricultural acres in the U.S. In 2020, Kansas had nearly 46 million acres of farmland. And ninety-eight percent of Kansas land is privately owned.

Executive Order 14008

A week after his inauguration, President Joseph R. Biden issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14008 titled *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* aimed at prioritizing climate in foreign policy and national security, taking a government-wide approach to the climate crisis, empowering workers through rebuilding infrastructure for a sustainable economy, revitalizing energy communications, advancing conservation, agriculture, and reforestation, and by securing environmental justice and spurring economic opportunity.

The E.O. begins with an urgent message:

"The United States and the world face a profound climate crisis. We have a narrow moment to pursue action at home and abroad in order to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of that crisis and to seize the opportunity that tackling climate change presents. Domestic action must go hand in hand with United States international leadership, aimed at significantly enhancing global action. Together, we must listen to science and meet the moment". Executive Order 14008 of January 27, 2021, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*.

E.O. Section 214 *Policy* states in part: America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners have an important role to play in combatting the climate crisis and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, by sequestering carbon in soils, grasses, trees, and other vegetation and sourcing sustainable bioproducts and fuels. Coastal communities have an essential role to play in mitigating climate change and strengthening resilience by protecting and restoring coastal ecosystems, such as wetlands, seagrasses, coral and oyster reefs, and mangrove and kelp forests, to protect vulnerable coastlines, sequester carbon, and support biodiversity and fisheries.

E.O. Section 216 *Conserving Our Nation's Lands and Waters* lays the governmental framework for the national strategy of inclusion, voluntary participation, and implementation of the 30x30 conservation plan:

(a) The Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, and the heads of other relevant agencies, shall submit a report to the Task Force within 90 days of the date of this order recommending steps that the United States should take, working with State, local, Tribal, and territorial governments, agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, and other key stakeholders, to achieve the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

(i) The Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality shall, as appropriate, solicit input from State, local, Tribal, and territorial officials, agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, and other key stakeholders in identifying strategies that will encourage broad participation in the goal of conserving 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

(ii) The report shall propose guidelines for determining whether lands and waters qualify for conservation, and it also shall establish mechanisms to measure progress toward the 30- percent goal. The Secretary of the Interior shall subsequently submit annual reports to the Task Force to monitor progress.

(b) The Secretary of Agriculture shall:

(i) initiate efforts in the first 60 days from the date of this order to collect input from Tribes, farmers, ranchers, forest owners, conservation groups, firefighters, and other stakeholders on how to best use Department of Agriculture programs, funding and financing capacities, and other authorities, and how to encourage the voluntary adoption of climate-smart agricultural and forestry practices that decrease wildfire risk fueled by climate change and result in additional, measurable, and verifiable carbon reductions and sequestration and that source sustainable bioproducts and fuels; and (ii) submit to the Task Force within 90 days of the date of this order a report making recommendations for an agricultural and forestry climate strategy.

(c) The Secretary of Commerce, through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, shall initiate efforts in the first 60 days from the date of this order to collect input from fishermen, regional ocean councils, fishery management councils, scientists, and other stakeholders on how to make fisheries and protected resources more resilient to climate change, including changes in management and conservation measures, and improvements in science, monitoring, and cooperative research.

The 30x30 Plan

The 30 x 30 Plan is a multi-scaled effort to conserve at least 30 per cent of U.S. lands and waters within 10 years. The plan does not require each state to conserve 30 per cent of its land and waters. The 30 per cent number represents the overall goal to be met by the Federal government and states, Tribes, local governments, individual landowners, farmers, ranchers, and others. The plan resembles the ongoing international effort to protect 30 percent of the Earth's wild areas: the minimum required to prevent the worst consequences of climate change, and the enormous loss of species.

The President's goal is to "repower America with clean energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions at home and abroad, create millions of good-paying jobs, and—importantly—conserve and restore the lands and waters that support and sustain us." Moreover, a major pillar of the 30x30 plan is to work toward a more equitable and inclusive distribution of nature's benefits to all people.

The America the Beautiful Initiative

The America the Beautiful Initiative includes the 30x30 plan. The initiative is a national conservation strategy based on local leadership and voluntary conservation efforts. The E.O's America the Beautiful Initiative includes six areas of focus for federal agencies: helping to create more parks and safe outdoor opportunities; building connectivity and corridors for fish and wildlife; supporting Tribally led conservation and restoration; increasing access for outdoor recreation; incentivizing conservation; creating jobs and growing local economies; and deploying nature to increase climate resilience and remove carbon from the atmosphere.

The Department of the Interior's first report entitled "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful" calls the Initiative an invitation to support locally led conservation and restoration efforts of all kinds across America. Moreover, it is an inclusionary program embracing voluntary conservation efforts of farmers, ranchers, and forest owners and it recognizes the leadership of sovereign Tribal Nations in caring for lands, waters, and wildlife. The administration also welcomes the voluntary participation of communities seeking to protect lands and waters they care deeply about. The report can be read online at [Report: Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful 2021 \(doi.gov\)](#). This is also referred to as the *America The Beautiful Initiative*.

The Initiative is organized around eight core principles laid out in the Report. These principles include a commitment to collaboration, support for voluntary and locally led conservation, honoring Tribal sovereignty and non-tribal private property rights. These are considered essential ingredients for building and maintaining broad support, enthusiasm, and trust for the federal conservation initiative.

Here's a list of the Eight Principles and a brief statement of the gist of the official commentary accompanying each principle:

Principles for a Locally Led Effort to Conserve and Restore America the Beautiful

Principle 1: Pursue a Collaborative and Inclusive Approach to Conservation

The spirit of collaboration and shared purpose should animate all aspects of America's nature conservation and restoration efforts over the next decade.

Principle 2: Conserve America's Lands and Waters for the Benefit of All People

The conservation and restoration of natural places in America should yield meaningful benefits in the lives of all Americans, and these benefits should be equitably distributed.

Principle 3: Support Locally Led and Locally Designed Conservation Efforts

The Federal Government should do all it can to help local communities achieve their own conservation priorities and vision. Locally and regionally designed approaches can play a key role in conserving resources and be tailored to meet the priorities and needs of local communities and the nation .

Principle 4: Honor Tribal Sovereignty and Support the Priorities of Tribal Nations

Efforts to conserve and restore America's lands and waters must involve regular, meaningful, and robust consultation with Tribal Nations. These efforts must respect and honor Tribal sovereignty, treaty and subsistence rights, and freedom of religious practices.

Principle 5: Pursue Conservation and Restoration Approaches that Create Jobs and Support Healthy Communities

A locally driven, nationally scaled conservation campaign over the next decade can help lift America's economy, address environmental justice, and improve quality of life.

Principle 6: Honor Private Property Rights and Support the Voluntary Stewardship Efforts of Private Landowners and Fishers

Efforts to conserve and restore America's lands and waters must respect the rights of private property owners. Such efforts must also build trust among all communities and stakeholders, including by recognizing and rewarding the voluntary conservation efforts of private landowners and the science-based approaches of fishery managers

Principle 7: Use Science as a Guide

Conservation efforts are more successful and effective when rooted in the best available science and informed by the recommendations of top scientists and subject matter experts. Transparent and accessible information will increase shared understanding and help build trust among stakeholders and the public. The use of Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge can complement and integrate these efforts.

Principle 8: Build on Existing Tools and Strategies with an Emphasis on Flexibility and Adaptive Approaches

Agencies should support the flexible application of tools, innovation in designing new approaches, and, where appropriate, the use of adaptive management to help adjust to a changing climate, shifting pressures, and new science.

Year One Report America the Beautiful, December 2021

An update on progress made to support locally led conservation and restoration efforts across the country during the first year of the America Beautiful Initiative

The America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group submitted the first annual report on the America the Beautiful campaign ([Year One Report](#)). It highlights efforts undertaken across the key areas identified in the original America the Beautiful [report](#) and identifies next steps in each of these areas to further the goals of the campaign. These programs, among others, support the conservation efforts of ranchers, farmers, forest owners, and other landowners:

- [Conservation Reserve Program](#)
- [Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership](#)
- [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#)
- [Partners for Fish and Wildlife](#)

[Forest Legacy Program](#)

Letter to America

. The Report begins with a Letter from the America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group Co-Chairs:

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, signed on November 21, 2021, authorizes the largest investment in the resilience of physical and natural systems in U.S. history. There will be help for communities seeking more resilience to drought and wildfire; needed remedies for environmental degradation from abandoned mines and orphan wells; highway infrastructure will be designed and built to connect wildlife habitat and reduce roadway collisions that take a large toll on wildlife; there will be investment in clean drinking water and funding of watershed rehabilitation and flood prevention projects; coastal resilience efforts will be improved.

The infrastructure law and the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 will provide communities with needed funding to improve the care of lands, waters, and wildlife across the country.

Progress to Date and the Path Ahead

This progress report on America the Beautiful “provides an overview of what the Biden-Harris administration has done in the first year to advance locally led conservation efforts, and to protect, connect, and restore our lands and waters in line with the initiative’s goals and principles. It also outlines next steps the administration will take to develop the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas, including assessing how to best measure and reflect the continuum of effective conservation tools. The report includes a brief review of existing scientific literature on land-cover changes and the status of fish and wildlife habitats and populations. Collectively, this report can serve as a motivator to continue our collaborative efforts to restore and support healthy, functioning ecosystems.”

The Progress Report fills 40 pages including Endnotes. The text is divided into three parts: Progress to Date and the Path Ahead; State of Lands, Waters, and Wildlife; Conclusion

Kansas Legislature Special Committee on the Federal 30 x 30 Initiative.

On July 23, 2021, Dan Hawkins, then majority leader of the Kansas House of Representatives requested appointment of a special committee, during the 2021 Interim, to study the federal 30 x 30 conservation initiative and to review its potential effects on agriculture industry and private property rights in Kansas and make recommendations. It has been said that Kansas state legislators were and remain largely perplexed and cautious about the Federal 30 x 30 plan. Details of the plan and the Executive Order authorizing it were thought to be unknown. This spread fear and misinformation about the 30 x 30 plan and drew attention to the unrelated effort begun years earlier to develop a National Heritage Area in north-central Kansas and southern Nebraska. This caused the state legislature to convene the Special Committee on the Federal 30 x 30 Initiative.

A special committee is a temporary committee appointed to carry out a specific task. When appointed to deliberate or to investigate, it should represent as far as possible all points of view of the assembly. Special committees are authorized by legislative leadership to meet outside of the regular session. The Special Committee on the Federal 30x30 Initiative has 11 members selected from the House Agriculture and Water Committees and from the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and it is bipartisan.

The Special Committee held public hearings on December 8 and 9, 2021. The Topeka Capital-Journal covered the meetings and followed up with a frontpage article entitled “Kansas legislators frustrated by lack of detail in Biden 30x30 plan despite the publication in May, 2021 of the first report *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful*. The article described state legislators, officials at the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, research staff, and advocacy groups as largely perplexed.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Before the Special Committee, Brad Loveless, Secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Parks spoke about the central recommendation of the first report to the National Climate Task Force: the Eight Principles for a Locally Led Effort to Conserve and Restore America the Beautiful. He also listed the report’s six Recommendations for Early Focus and Progress in the America the Beautiful Campaign.

Secretary Loveless recommended that KDWP should be among the primary collaborators in the strategic development and implementation of science-driven processes, policies, and strategic guidance for the conservation of resilient fish and wildlife populations of all kinds and their habitats. He said that any conservation efforts under 30x30 should be encouraged through voluntary, incentive-based approaches that will

reinforce good stewardship of natural resources and prompt partnerships between governmental and private landowners.

Loveless commented that the purposes and the intent behind the provisions of 30x30 should be clearly and meaningfully defined. He recommended using the word “conservation” instead of “protection” because “conservation” denotes continued, sustainable uses such as regulated hunting, fishing, trapping, timber harvest, and outdoor recreation on public lands.

He said that, in the 30x30 context, fish and wildlife agencies currently recommend that the Biden Administration clearly state that it does not include the use of eminent domain or any new federal land designations without the expressed support of the community, and that the Administration does not intend unilaterally to create a federal nexus over any state, territorial, or local government lands.

Another recommendation is that the Administration articulate that the 30x30 plan does not focus on the designation and development of additional protections of federal lands at the expense of local conservation-based natural resources management and sustainable uses when many communities depend on their land for economic sustainability and growth.

Lastly, Secretary Loveless said that 30x30 is an opportunity to improve conservation, but Kansas needs to stay engaged to influence how the conservation measures are implemented. He said KDWP is well situated to represent the State’s interests and he is a member of the recently created federal Joint Task Force on Landscape Conservation. He also pointed out that, in the future, in these conservation matters, private landowner perspectives should be considered. He noted that any efforts under 30 x 30 should be encouraged through voluntary, incentive- based approaches that foster and support good stewardship and partnerships with private landowners.

Kansas Livestock Association

Aaron M. Popelka, Vice President of Legal Affairs, Kansas Livestock Association, noted that farmers and ranchers are among the best stewards of our natural resources and KLA supports limiting government intrusion in the marketplace. KLA opposes use of eminent domain and other procedures to take land or impose unnecessary restrictions on private property. If conservation goals are pursued only through voluntary incentive-based actions, KLA would not oppose the goals. He said that the administration’s lack of specificity in explaining the actions to be taken to achieve 30 x 30, has left private landowners uncertain. He also discussed the value of conservation easements as conservation tools and said that the legislature should not limit voluntary tools like conservation grassland easements used to preserve native grasslands.

Kansas Farm Bureau

Ryan Flickner, Senior Director for the Advocacy Division, Kansas Farm Bureau, stated that KFB leadership and staff had conversations with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland and requested information on policy intent and administrative goals. They have received little clarification. Nevertheless, Farm Bureau supports federal agencies’ efforts to promote conservation.

Mr. Flickner raised questions. In his memo to the Special Committee on the Federal 30x30 Initiative, he asked how the federal government would achieve a nationwide plan without infringing on farmers’ and ranchers’ privacy and private property rights. Would farmers be subjected to burdensome reporting requirements concerning their private property? He stated that the 30 x 30 plan lacks a clear definition distinguishing between publicly held land and private land. He said that Farm Bureau constituents need more information.

He also said in his memo to the Special Committee: “There are concerns across Kansas and the nation that this 30 x 30 conservation goal will lead to a federal land grab. Nothing in the Report that shows this to be true. The Report only cites voluntary conservation efforts. KFB and AFBF (American Farm Bureau Federation) will continue to fight for and vigorously oppose any infringement on private property rights and burdensome regulatory schemes.”

Kansas Corn Growers Association

Josh Roe, Vice President for Market Development and Public Policy, Kansas Corn Growers Association (KCGA) said that if agriculture is allowed to be part of the discussions and solutions for 30 x 30 and practices are adopted to increase soil carbon sequestration, much progress can be made without significant changes to our modern food, transportation, and power generation systems. A one per cent increase in organic carbon levels in farmland would yield eight tons carbon reduction per acre per year in a relatively short time frame. If these numbers are applied globally, an annual carbon reduction of approximately 2.04 trillion tons, or 53 percent of the stated carbon reduction goal in 30 x 30 would be possible.

He also said that 30 x 30 unnecessarily assumes that croplands are part of the problem, and this, coupled with a lack of information and answers from the Biden Administration, has left agriculture outside the group of stakeholders who could provide real, tangible results that could assist in achieving the goals of 30 x 30.

Kansas Natural Resource Coalition

The Senior Administrator, Kansas Natural Resource Coalition made several comments about the EO. Among the points made are these: The presidential mandate to issue EO's that direct federal agencies' activities under his control is constrained to the scope of the mandates that have been delegated to the federal agencies by Congress. The President does not have the authority to expand, supersede, or preempt authorities delegated to the federal agencies by Congress.

A state -sponsored impact analysis should be conducted, per the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980 on small business, communities, and the economy of Kansas counties that will be affected by the implementation of the EO; depending on the results, actions should be considered to challenge or rescind the EO through the State Attorney general.

Kansas Sierra Club

Zack Pistora, Legislative Director, Kansas Sierra Club stated that environmental stewardship is important and should be central to our ethics as individuals and through government action. He said that the 30 x 30 spells out overarching goals and strategies based on eight principles, while the plan for implementing and achieving these goals is left to state and local entities. He asked the Committee not to view the 30x 30 as a government strategy for a land grab, but to view it as an opportunity for Kansas to amplify its leadership in conservation and reinvigorate its commitment to preserve its natural heritage.

He also recommended the Committee embrace 30 x 30 to further social and economic progress, by putting programs and goals into place that allow Kansas to pursue conservation in a Kansas-specific and Kansas-friendly way.

Public Testimony

Members of the public and of associations were allowed to present oral and written testimony. Daniel H. Meyerhoff, Executive Director of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts submitted written testimony hoping the 30 x 30 plan would build on the proven conservation system already in place in Kansas. He said that the Eight Principles of the Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful Initiative encourage and reward conservation efforts and that their application would encourage and support ongoing conservation efforts in Kansas and elsewhere. Members of the public spoke and wrote often about the NHA's. Many opposed the presence of NHA's in Kansas. The public expressed concern about violation of private property rights, zoning problems, and undue federal government interference with property rights.

Overview of National Heritage Areas

National Heritage Areas, already mentioned, are places legislatively designated by Congress for their unique historical, cultural, and nationally significant qualities and resources.

A principal legislative analyst assisting the Special Committee presented an overview of National Heritage Areas (NHA's) to the Committee on December 8. The National Heritage Area program uses public-private partnerships to promote heritage conservation, recreation, and economic development. NHA's are authorized by Congressional legislation for each HNA. There are now 55 National Heritage Areas across the U.S. The National Heritage Areas work in partnership with the National Park Service. They are places where a combination of natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources has produced a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape. They are not national parks.

The analyst said that Kansas currently has one NHA, the Freedom's Frontier, encompassing 41 counties along both sides of the Kansas-Missouri state line. It includes 29 counties in east and south-east Kansas. This NHA focuses on historic sites, museums, historical societies, libraries and other cultural-historical sites in these counties to tell stories of the Kansas-Missouri border war, the Civil War, the settlement of the Western frontiers and rural America, and the "enduring struggle for freedom."

The analyst then explained that there has been a potential HNA called the Kansas Nebraska Heritage Area covering parts of southern-central Nebraska and extending into north-central Kansas. In 2016, the Willa Cather Foundation and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, intending to boost tourism and economic development in the region, worked to develop this NHA.

Yet, so far, there has been no authorizing NHA legislation for the Kansas Nebraska Heritage Area. The analyst noted that critics have contended that land in an NHA could be sought to be acquired for 30 x 30 inclusion because there is a connection with the federal government. Some critics saw this as a "land grab". The analyst stated that Freedom Frontier's NHA authorizing legislation does not allow the NHA to acquire private property.

According to Andrew Bahl in the December 10, 2021 article in the Topeka Capital-Journal "30 x 30 initiative frustrates lawmakers." [Kansas legislators frustrated by lack of detail in Biden 30 x 30 plan \(cjonline.com\)](https://www.cjonline.com) When the 30 x 30 plan was announced, residents raised concerns that the NHA would lead to increased federal oversight and even seizure of land. He added: "A host of counties passed resolutions opposing the proposed heritage area. And five counties have even approved language encouraging Congress to shrink the size of Kansas' lone current national heritage area, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area..."

Kent Glasscock, a former Republican speaker of the Kansas House and a previous member of the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage area board, told the committee people were caught up in the confusion surrounding 30 x 30. He said that NHA's do not infringe upon private lands, and he would not have been involved in such efforts had they done so. "Those who established Freedom's Frontier Heritage Area wrote the law to specifically give landowners a choice: They can be involved or not," Glasscock said. "No landowner can be forced to join — and any landowner who chooses to join can get out at any time."

Glasscock also said, "I think folks are getting confused about 30 x 30 and Freedom's Frontier or National Heritage areas. They don't have anything to do with one another, but I think it is easy...to conflate the two."

The Special Committee was not specifically assigned to study the Kansas Nebraska NHA. However, many of the public who submitted letters to the Committee were opposing the NHA as well as the 30 x 30 plan. They often were concerned that the NHA and 30x 30 would violate their private property rights.

The Committee's Conclusions and Recommendations

The Special Committee recommended that the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources study and monitor both the federal 30 x 30 conservation initiative and the National Heritage Areas during the 2022 Legislative Session.

Kansas Public Reaction to the 30 x 30 Plan

At the close of the Special Committee public hearing, there was little disagreement among Democrats and Republicans on the Special Committee about the value of conservation, but legislators and conferees expressed disappointment at lack of detail in the 30 x 30 plan and insufficient articulation of the U.S. Government's intentions to be realized through the 30 x 30 plan.

Discussing funding, Department of Wildlife and Parks Secretary Brad Loveless said that many farmers are "scraping by." Providing them incentive to cooperate under 30 x 30 should include financially funding their efforts. He mentioned state level efforts to help farmers, including the work of his agency, and mentioned money available through federal programs like the Conservation Reserve Program that pays farmers to engage in conservation practices on their land. Loveless also said that the federal agencies should have clarified that the government had no intention of acquiring land by eminent domain. As the Topeka Capital-Journal reported, he said: "They knew what they didn't intend, but they didn't state that."

Many of the people who submitted letters to the Special Committee were ranchers and farmers who feared the violation of their private property rights, often called 30 x 30 a "land grab," and they often opposed both 30 x 30 and the NHA's. In the words from one of these letters: "We are very opposed to any heritage way coming in and we are strongly opposed to the 30 x 30 initiative."

Doug Blex, (R. Independence) commented: "We're being asked to make a decision about something we know very little about...in the state, we're caught in the middle."

Ken Rahjes, serving as the Special Committee chair and chairing the House Agricultural Committee, said that the likely endgame would be a resolution expressing concerns about the 30 x 30 proposal. Addressing members of the public in attendance at the hearing, most of them in opposition to 30 x 30, he said that fact finding on the matter would not be a quick process and patience was warranted.

In her June 22, 2021, news article "Kansas ag board takes level approach to 30 x 30 plan"

https://www.agupdate.com/midwestmessenger/news/state-and-regional/kansas-ag-board-takes-level-approach-to-30x30-plan/article_520d0076-cf9f-11eb-a940-c7e7639767af.html], Amy Hadachek reported on comments of Kansas Agriculture Secretary Mike Beam, Board Chairman Thad Geiger, and Board member Bill Pracht, the owner of Kansas East Agri-Energy in Garnett, KS. at a June 11 discussion at a Department of Agriculture Board meeting. Topics included "'misinformation" about 30 x 30. Also discussed was an April 16, 2021 letter concerning 30 x 30 that Governor Kelly sent to U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Board Member Bill Pracht led a discussion about the Kansas biofuels industry role in confronting climate change.

Hadachek tells us that "Upset with what they call a 'land grab', many Kansas agricultural producers have been attending recent meetings to get a handle on specifics of President Biden's conservation plan".

Kansas Agriculture Secretary Mike Beam and the board called much of the talk about "misinformation at recent public meetings throughout Kansas a social media issue "ripe for misunderstanding and lots of fear". Beam said he had not heard of a proposal that the Administration wanted more control about what happens on private land. He also said his department would not take land and he would not give up his management decisions.

Board Chair Thad Geiger said he had never seen producers so “riled up.” He also told board members that he felt it was concerning when people start “rallying around wrong facts”. He then said, “I thought it was interesting but very misunderstood. But it showed people were upset and fighting mad.”

The board declined to take action relating to 30 x 30 and on the question of the spread of misinformation.

Geiger also praised Governor Kelly’s letter to Secretaries Haaland and Vilsack. Governor Kelly liked the statement in E.O. Sec. 214 recognizing the important role of farmers and ranchers to help attain conservation goals of 30 x 30 including through sequestering carbon in soils and grasses. She also suggested that “private landowners in general, and the agriculture community specifically should be full partners in the development of any new conservation initiatives.” Governor Kelly said that any federal programs should respect landowner property rights, and she encouraged incentivizing voluntary participation in 30 x 30. She noted that incentives and competent technical assistance yield the most landowner participation in conservation projects and result in successful, sustainable conservation measures. She said she was encouraged by plans to improve access to outdoor recreation, but that access to private lands must be obtained after an “unfettered voluntary decision by landowners.”

Member Bill Pracht, the owner of an energy company in Garnett, KS said that Ethanol and renewable bio diesel are produced from corn at his plant and shipped to California. Higher demand for that fuel can create a market for Kansas biofuel industries. Pursuing carbon sequestering could make Kansas ethanol plants among the most competitive in the U.S.

Kansas farmers’ and ranchers’ unfavorable response to the 30 x 30 plan is the occasion for Alice Mannette’s April 26, 2021 article in the Hutchinson News “President Biden wants 30% of U.S. land to be protected by 2030; USDA says no land will be taken from farmers.” [Joe Biden's 30 by 30 plan: USDA says no land will be taken from farmers \(hutchnews.com\)](https://www.hutchnews.com/story/news/2021/04/26/joe-biden-30-by-30-plan-usda-says-no-land-will-be-taken-from-farmers/5511110002)

She quotes Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. She also discusses ongoing conservation measures by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service partnering with Kansas landowners and with landowners nationally. Wetland easements in Kansas are discussed. Agricultural land easements in Kansas and nationally are described. This article reveals the extent of conservation efforts in Kansas and elsewhere that predate 30 x 30 in restoring and conserving wetland, grassland, and farmland.

Secretary Vilsack said that “absolutely” no land will be taken from any farmer or rancher due to the 30 x 30 plan. On another occasion he told agricultural journalists that “there is no intent to take land away from farmers. The goal here is to create new opportunities.” In a comment like views expressed by Secretary Loveless, Vilsack said “the administration and the USDA want to incentivize farmers and ranchers to use the tools that he has at the USDA to compensate and pay farmers for being good stewards of their land.” Vilsack also reiterated his intention to help farmers “embrace opportunities and new ways,” and he repeated what has been said before by Secretary Loveless at the Special Committee hearings: None of it involves taking anyone’s land or using eminent domain.”

More than 5 million acres of wetland, grassland, and farmland across America have been protected through a partnership between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and private landowners. In Kansas, NRCS enrolled more than 162,500 acres. This was a conservation milestone.

For more than 25 years the NRCS has offered voluntary conservation easements through the Farm Bill. The effort includes the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Conservation easements help landowners “protect, restore, and improve wetlands, grasslands, and working farms and ranches.”

Wetland easements have also seen successes nationwide and in Kansas. Wetland easements total more than 2.8 million acres nationwide. Kansas has slightly over 31,000 acres. These easements are useful in the following: “improv(ing) water quality filtering sediments and chemicals, reducing flooding, recharging groundwater, protecting biological diversity, and providing opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.”

Agricultural land easements are useful in preventing the conversion of farms and ranches to non-agricultural uses. Mannette says that these easements are crucial to protecting rangelands and farmsteads from urban encroachment and she also states that easements can protect floodplains, grasslands, and forests. Land and grassland easements together total more than 1.9 million acres nationwide. Kansas has slightly less than 91,000 acres. In May 2021 the Biden Administration was to begin to evaluate how best to measure and assess the Nation's progress toward the 30 x 30 goal.

Finally, Mannette spoke with Daniel Devlin, Ph.D., the director of the Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment at Kansas State University, and William Hohenstein, Director of the USDA's Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, within the Office of the Chief Economist. Devlin said that many Kansas farmers are already using conservation practices like terracing, not tilling, and planting cover crops. He also said that it is important to note how the government defines conservation. This is important because most of Kansas land is in private lands, range, pasture, or urban. Hohenstein mentioned the United States' long history of conservation that is a strong foundation to build on. He also said: "This (30 x 30) is not about taking land. This is not about restricting land. This is about conservation."

Kansas Political Response to 30 x 30

On April 1, 2021, Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kan) expressed his opposition to the 30 x 30 plan and called on Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to consider how the plan would impact Kansas going forward. Sen. Moran urged the Biden Administration to provide Congress with additional details on how it plans to pursue the 30 x 30 plan. In a news release, Sen. Moran voiced his own concerns:

"Kansans are rightfully alarmed about possible implications for private property owners of any federal mandate to set aside vast swaths of land in response to this executive order," wrote Sen. Moran. "In addition to being troubled about diminishing private property rights, I am concerned taking farm and ranch land out of production will damage local and regional economies across Kansas. Agricultural and energy production is the most common use of private lands in Kansas, driving the state's economy and providing jobs and economic opportunities in rural communities. It is critical for the Biden administration to uphold the integrity of private property rights and recognize the important economic contributions of agricultural and energy production on our lands."

On May 18, 2021, Topeka station WIBW reported that U.S. Representative Tracey Mann (R-Kan) and Senators Roger Marshall (R-Kan) and Senator Moran have introduced new legislation to push back against the 30 by 30 proposal.