

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor Sam Brownback holds Water Tour

Sustainable yield of the Ogallala aquifer is attainable

HOXIE and GARDEN CITY – Governor Sam Brownback and Lt. Governor Jeff Colyer today announced new findings from the Kansas Geological Survey (KGS) about the life of the Ogallala Aquifer. Traveling to Hoxie and Garden City, KGS unveiled new data showing that stable use of Ogallala Aquifer is attainable.

“The data reveals that the voluntary efforts happening as a part of the 50-year Water Vision are being rewarded,” said Governor Brownback. “The Ogallala is replenishing itself faster than we previously knew. What was never thought possible is now within our grasp: sustainable use of the Ogallala aquifer is attainable.”

KGS Senior Scientist and Geohydrology Section Chief Jim Butler presented the [new information](#) showing how the rate of decline in water levels can be affected by water conservation efforts by local water users. Although some had previously thought that it was too late to stop the decline, these new findings indicate that even moderate reductions in water use in some areas of the aquifer can help to achieve stability in the region.

“At the KGS, we have developed an approach for assessing how much water use needs to be reduced to have a significant impact on decline rates,” said Butler. “This approach exploits the great water data we have in Kansas. It is no exaggeration to say that Kansas leads the nation, if not the world, in data on water use and water-level changes in our aquifers. The result is that we can have more confidence in our assessments of what the future holds for these critically important systems.”

Lt. Governor Jeff Colyer, standing with members of the Kansas Department of Agriculture and the Kansas Water Office, spoke about what this means for future generation of Kansans. “Innovative technologies and bold stewardship of resources by the people of Kansas has produced real results,” said Lt. Governor Colyer. “This is a great moment for water conservation in Kansas, ensuring that Kansas will remain America’s breadbasket for generations to come.”

Photos are available [here](#).

Hoxie

In Hoxie, the Governor and other representatives met with local water right owners and local leaders who have been instrumental in developing water conservation plans for the region. The Sheridan-6 Local Enhanced Management Area (LEMA), established in 2013, set a goal to limit water use in that specific area to reduce the rate of groundwater decline. New data collected by Groundwater Management #4 and analyzed by the KGS showed that indeed the 99-square-mile area included in the LEMA has seen notable reductions in the rate of water-level decline. In the decade prior to the establishment of the LEMA, the rate of decline in the area was about 23 inches per year. In the first three years of the LEMA, the rate of decline was reduced to a little under 5 inches per year. Every year since the establishment of the LEMA, the annual pumping for the 99 square miles has been less than the smallest amount pumped in any year in the preceding decade.

Mitch Baalman, a farmer within the Sheridan-6 LEMA and GMD4 board member, stressed the importance of the local efforts in that area. “It all starts with the local farmers, the people on the ground,” he said. “They have all provided leadership and commitment and we are excited to celebrate their efforts today.”

In addition to the LEMA, landowners in Wichita County have developed a county-wide Water Conservation Area (WCA) which provides water management flexibilities to water right owners who work to conserve and extend their water supply. “We are very fortunate that the legislature gave us the opportunity to create a WCA,” said Matt Long, who is participating in the Wichita County WCA. “We are only a few months in, but already our WCA, through voluntary participation, has committed to saving enough water to support 22,000 people for one year.”

Students and faculty from Northwest Technical College also attended the event, and Ben Schears, president of the college, said Water Technology Farms are a key element of the hands-on experience received by students studying precision agriculture at NT. “The technology our students use and the skills they learn make them incredibly valuable to the agricultural workforce throughout the state of Kansas,” said Schears.

“It’s all about leadership,” said Scott Foote, who owns Hoxie Feedyard along with his family, and hosted the event. “It’s doing the right thing and working with your neighbors, and now look what we accomplished together.”

Garden City

In Garden City, the Governor and other representatives met with local landowners and water users instrumental in developing water conservation plans for the region. Leaders in Finney and Kearny counties have developed a proposal for a Local Enhanced Management Area (LEMA) for a 200-square-mile area, with a 15 percent reduction in water use which could double the life of the Ogallala Aquifer in that area. New KGS data shows the reduction in pumping with the proposed LEMA would have a large impact on the rate of decline and would not only extend the life of the aquifer but also would slow the rate of increase in groundwater salinity.

“We need to cut down on our water use,” said Dwane Roth, owner of the Big D Water Technology Farm near Holcomb. “This kind of reduction is not only possible, but critical for our region,” said Roth who believes this reduction in water use can be achieved with little impact on production from farms and ranches by utilizing water technology innovations such as soil moisture probes. He gave a virtual tour of the Water Technology Farm at Big D Farms to demonstrate how new water management technology can help farmers cut their

pumping significantly, saving financial resources as well as water. With the information provided from soil moisture probes, Roth noted his farm is on track to save about half of normal water use for this season.

Troy Dumler, manager of Garden City Company, shared that a 15 percent reduction in water use in his area could save about \$1,350 per pivot in energy costs. “Drops in static water levels and declines in pumping capacity have the irrigators within the Company looking for alternatives that balance both short-term and long-term economic needs,” Dumler explained.

Kansas Water Vision

Since the creation of the Governor’s 50 Year Water Vision, leaders have worked diligently to offer a variety of tools and support mechanisms to encourage voluntary water conservation in Kansas, particularly around the Ogallala Aquifer. The Kansas Water Vision is guided by the principle that locally driven solutions have the highest opportunity for long-term success, and action items in the Vision have worked to create policies and programs which reward good stewardship of the state’s water resources.

Local Enhanced Management Areas (LEMAs) empower local leaders to address local groundwater concerns by restricting water rights within its boundaries by a set amount to extend the usable water supply in the region. There is one active LEMA in Kansas, the Sheridan-6 LEMA in GMD No. 4, and a district-wide LEMA has also been proposed by GMD No. 4 and is currently in the public comment phase with plans to be implemented early next year.

Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) allow any water right owner or group of owners the opportunity to develop a management plan to reduce water withdrawals to extend the usable life of the Ogallala Aquifer. Participation in a WCA can give greater flexibility that is not available to other water right owners. Kansas currently has six active WCAs, with several more in the process of becoming approved.

Water Technology Farms were created to allow the installation and research of the latest irrigation technologies on a field scale. The state’s first three Water Technology Farms were initiated in southwest/south central Kansas— two in Finney County and one in Edwards County. Ten additional Water Technology Farms are planned throughout western Kansas for 2017.

More information about the Kansas Water Vision, as well as additional details about LEMAs, WCAs and Water Technology farms, can be found at www.kwo.org/The-Vision.html.

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