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Public Comment for the Hays/Russell Water Transfer Application, OAH No. 23AG0023 AG

June 19, 2023

WATER RESOURCES
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JUN 23 2023

Alaina Cunningham
1415 Washington Circle
Hays, KS 67601

KS DEPT OF AGRICULTURE

Water Transfer Hearing Panel
c/o Chief Engineer – Division of Water Resources
Kansas Department of Agriculture
1320 Research Park Dr.
Manhattan, KS 66502

This is a written public comment to be included in the record of the Public Comment Hearing for the Hays/Russell Water Transfer Application, OAH No. 23AG0023 AG.

This is written in support of the approval of the water transfer application submitted by the cities of Hays and Russell, Kansas.

Hays and Russell have dealt with limited water resources for decades. Having worked through long periods of decreased rainfall and multiple droughts, their conservation efforts are among the top in the state and being recognized nationally. The residents of these communities average water usage per person per day is almost half of other regions. They have exhausted all efforts in conserving and using their current water resources.

Multiple options for the regions water issues have been explored over the past 3 decades, none of which have been a good fit for a long-term sustainable water source. Studies have shown that Hays and Russell do not have a drought resistant supply of water. Their current water sources are inadequate in a drought.

The R9 Ranch is the answer to this issue and their future to grow. It proves to be a sustainable long term source of water for Hays and Russell. The two cities have owned the R9 and its water rights in Edwards County since 1995. The water rights are being converted to municipal use with an agreement to take 30% less water to operate than legally allowed. The conversion of water rights from agricultural irrigation to municipal use actually help to preserve the aquifer, as less water will be used. This proves they are doing due diligence, not harm, to other regions.

In this process Hays and Russell have worked to convert the R9 Ranch back to its native grasses. They continue to strive towards their goal of making the 6,700 acre ranch available for public use. They are working to create a prairie environment with multiple trees and wildlife. Hays and Russell phased out farming the property in 2017. Converting the property from cropland to grassland will help to retain more water in the aquifer, improve water quality and reduce erosion. This once again proves their efforts in conservation and awareness of water usage.

Hays and Russell are part of the two highest oil-producing counties in the state, Ellis and Russell Counties. Together the two communities house a \$3 billion economy. Ellis County is one of only 20 counties in the state predicted to grow in the next 40 years. Without a sustainable long-term water source the area will be unable to grow. This would be detrimental to the region and its residents. If an extreme long term drought were to occur, over multiple decades, it would result in a humanitarian disaster. This would have a devastating economic effect on the state as a whole.

The R9 is the future of our region and the answer to our need for a long term sustainable water source. I urge you to please approve the Water Transfer Application. Approval of the application will result in multiple beneficial outcomes for both Hays and Russell, the region and the state.

With my regards,



Alaina Cunningham
Hays City Commissioner

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