

Local Listening Session Summary Gypsum Hills Core Region

The Kansas Department of Agriculture held four local listening sessions across the state in October 2025. KDA surveyed ranchers and landowners about their ideas to improve and conserve private working grasslands in Kansas. The information and feedback helped shape and create an Issue Brief, a report about the state of Kansas grasslands with action steps to encourage and support the enhanced conservation of these working lands in our state.

KDA worked with the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts on the project, with support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Local ranchers in four of the state's core grassland regions helped inform and invite participants to the meetings. The Gypsum Hills meeting took place at the Wilmore Community Building in Wilmore on October 23. Nine ranchers and landowners took part in the listening session.

The goal was to better understand both regional opportunities and challenges as well as efforts that could be made at the state level. Below is a summary of the meeting that took place in Wilmore. The resulting report, as well as summaries of the notes from the other October in-person meetings and the statewide online survey, can be accessed at www.agriculture.ks.gov/grasslands

Concerns about the future of Kansas grasslands:

- Water is so important to the grasslands — and so is air and carbon sequestration.
- Concern about “losing everything we have already done” when it comes to keeping up with tree removal.
- Poor management of grasslands.
- Decreasing land base caused by woody encroachment.
 - There are questions about taxing land primarily used for recreation and the ways in which deer permits are issued, particularly for out-of-state landowners.
 - Concerns about taking land out of ag production.
 - Recreational land is selling for much more than grasslands or grazing lands, driving up local property taxes.
 - “Do we want to be a recreational state or do we want to be a beef state?”
- There are questions about taxing land primarily used for recreation and the ways in which deer permits are issued, particularly for out-of-state landowners.
 - Related: There is a curiosity about the percentage of land owned by out-of-state owners.
 - Suggestions to look at the deer permitting practices of western states.
- Concerns about the future of grasslands are tied to the general hardships of owning/operating a ranch.
 - # of acres reduced
 - Competition of land use (mostly agricultural vs recreational)
 - Aging owners/managers
 - Workforce to maintain

- Old World Bluestem is a growing threat.
- Ranchers need help with prescribed burns and would like to see more support for Prescribed Burning Associations.

Issues related to working grasslands in the region that ranchers and landowners wish was better understood by those at the state level:

- The impact of losing acres to trees and brush, which reduces herd size = higher beef prices.
- Concerns about KDOT planting and spreading Old World Bluestem seeds by mowing ditches.
 - Ranchers were complimentary of KDOT removing trees in rights of way along US-160 in the region.
- Dealing with invasive species like Johnsongrass.
- An understanding that grasslands are more efficient for feeding animals than on cultivated ground, with additional benefits to soil and water.
- The economics related to grasslands.
- The ways in which healthy grasslands help hydrology and provide carbon sequestration.
- Health issues — ticks, diseases from trees, etc.
- Increase awareness of grasslands to general public:
 - Educate younger people.
 - Scenic drives, add grasslands information to existing scenic drive kiosks and overlook points.
 - Work with Kansas Tourism and Kansas Ag in the Classroom to explore possibilities.
- The Kansas ag economy is diverse.
 - Consider promotion of sheep and goats for entry-level ranchers.

What's the best way the state of Kansas can support your own operation?

- Develop and deliver K-12 educational opportunities.
- Consider more scenic drives.
 - Pros:
 - Educational Benefits
 - Experience Kansas grasslands
 - An organized tour is more controlled
 - Target youth for education
 - Conservation Districts do a good job of this
 - Start with state land around lakes — you already have people who are outdoor/nature enthusiasts
 - Cons:
 - People don't respect property lines
 - Increase in traffic

- Increased risk of fire
 - Wear/tear on local roads
 - Increased number of people
 - Nature Centers in Wichita aren't good examples of prairie anymore (trees out of control)
- Find a good example.
 - Educate realtors on land/land use.
 - Take a new look at taxes, including land use (recreation vs ag) and mineral taxes on land where production has dried up.
 - Take a new look at deer permit processes.
 - Provide more state funding for PBAs.
 - Improve notification and delivery of cost-share and other support programs.
 - Keep ag exemption for buffers.
 - Helps with fire management.
 - Require tree removal in fence lines in order to receive payments.