

## **Statewide Survey Summary**

In the fall of 2025, the Kansas Department of Agriculture 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. Local ranchers in four of the state's core grassland regions helped inform and invite participants to four in-person listening sessions in October. The project team also developed a corresponding online survey, promoted statewide through a press release and ranching, agriculture and conservation networks. A total of 214 Kansans from 65 counties participated in the survey, which was active in late November and early December.

The goal of all of these efforts 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 online survey. The resulting report, as well as summaries of the notes from the October in-person meetings, can be accessed at [www.agriculture.ks.gov/grasslands](http://www.agriculture.ks.gov/grasslands).

### **Top threats to grasslands**

- Increasing concerns about preventing woody species encroachment on grasslands and maintaining the work to remove trees and brush — including the growing risk of wildfires related to the influx of trees and brush.
- There are concerns about invasive plants and grasses, including Old World Bluestem, sericea lespedeza, and others.
- Ranchers and landowners acknowledge potential economic gains realized from converting land from grasslands to crop land, but are concerned about long-term impacts to soil, water, air, wildlife when those grasslands are gone.
- There are concerns about a lack of coordination between state agencies. Among the top: spreading of invasive species (such as Old World Bluestem) from ditches and state-owned rights of way into nearby working grasslands when the ditches are mowed after the plants have produced seeds.
- There are concerns about the management practices of absentee landowners/hunters who may allow invasive trees and brush to flourish on their property.
- A less-mentioned concern: the loss of grasslands to housing/residential uses, and potential impacts from industrial projects like wind, solar, and mining.

### **Government support**

Survey participants named the public agencies (and public-private partnerships) that are supporting private landowners of grasslands in Kansas.

- Natural Resources Conservation Service/U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
- Kansas State University Extension

- Local conservation districts
- Kansas Forest Service
- Working Lands for Wildlife
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife
- Farm Service Agency

### **Non-governmental organizations**

Survey responses also indicated that non-governmental organizations are providing support, technical assistance, advocacy and education. The most commonly-named organizations listed by participants:

- Kansas Livestock Association
- Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition
- Tallgrass Legacy Alliance
- The Nature Conservancy
- Prescribed Burn Associations (all PBAs combined)
- Ranchland Trust of Kansas
- Pheasants Forever / Quail Forever
- Kansas Farm Bureau
- Ducks Unlimited
- Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

### **Other top themes**

Survey participants indicated that they would support the following efforts to improve and conserve working grasslands:

- Additional cost share programs and resources for ranchers to clear brush and trees.
- More coordination between existing agencies, programs.
- Revise the state's agriculture land use tax categories to address land being used primarily for recreation (instead of agricultural production) and wasteland.
- Consider revisions to the state deer hunting permitting process, including an economic study of the impact of out-of-state landowner permits .
- Additional state support for prescribed burning — specifically for local, voluntary. Prescribed Burn Associations. Several participants mentioned labor as a barrier to using prescribed fire.
- Continued research of the state's grasslands.
- Increasing efforts to help the general public become more aware of the benefits of grasslands — especially through K-12 education.
- Support for conservation land easements.