

[KANSAS]

Letter to the Editor of the Jetmore Republican
From the Hodgeman County Commissioners

The HG County Commissioners are in unified agreement about bringing to the public, information and knowledge they need to be distinctly aware of. **Number 1:** The Lesser Prairie Chicken issue, many of you have heard about, is a very serious threat to how agriculture operates in our county. Currently it is listed as a "threatened species" with the EPA and USFWS. Environmental and animal rights groups are pushing very hard for it to be listed as an "endangered species". If this one word is changed from, threatened to endangered, our whole way of operating farms and ranches quite possibly will be changed. Fencing, cropping plans, stocking rates, and many other things may have mandatory changes and implementation procedures monitored by our federal government. Most likely this will reduce the use/value of our farms and ranches creating a financial burden on all who try to make a living in this manner. There are 5 Lesser Prairie Chicken lawsuits being consolidated in the Northern Federal District Court of Oklahoma to halt this listing as endangered. The Department of Justice (DOJ) has tried twice to get this case moved to a federal district court in Washington D.C. and it has been denied . . . and that's a good thing!! Your Commissioners have joined with 31 other western Kansas Counties and their Commissioners to form a group called KNRC — Kansas Natural Resources Coalition. We have done this to protect the private sector citizens from the over reach of environmental groups and our Federal Government. The KNRC has gathered immense amounts of information, statistics, and detailed data that will be used in upcoming litigation to prove that the listing of the LPC as "endangered" is not only an over reach but is unlawful in the way it is being currently presented. All of your Commissioners feel it is a total disgrace for us to feel like we need to spend your tax dollars trying to fight the Federal Government . . . who should be **protecting us!!** But that is what our current situation dictates if we want to fight for our freedoms and way of life.

Item **Number 2:** Conservation Easements. You may not have heard much about these but they are being pushed by our Federal Government through the NRCS, farmland trusts, environmental groups, and even the Department of Defense. Our Federal Government has given the Nature Conservancy (an environmental group) \$100 million to tie up land in these "easements". Many counties back east such as Virginia, have 20%-25% of their land tied up in conservation easements. Many of these easements are written up as having a lifespan of "perpetuity" or in other words: **FOREVER!!** Most of these easements will eliminate oil and gas exploration, wind energy development, or any other land improvement that might come along in the future. There will be restrictions written into your contract that once signed can **NEVER** be changed. Even multiple generations down the line. The enticing point they offer is a onetime huge payment often equal to the value of the land or even more. In many cases these easements devalue the land over time because of all the restrictions associated with the contract. Some of these easements will allow USFWS or other agencies to come onto the property and conduct studies to see if an endangered species might be present. If one is found, then the habitat area will expand to encompass adjacent properties not associated with the conservation easement. A whole new slew of restrictions could quite possibly encompass those lands of your neighbors. After the onetime payment you receive, no further compensation will ever be given, but you and your heirs will be stuck with the taxes forever even if no future income is derived from the property. Currently Hodgeman County has none of these conservation easements in place, although some adjoining counties such as Gray and Ford County do. Your Commissioners just want you to be aware of this and want you to have your eyes wide open if approached by someone offering you a staggering amount of money to participate in one of these. We view this as another way the Federal Government is gaining more and more control of private property and leaving our Country less and less ability to be productive with our lands. If you dare consider one of these contracts, please consult legal advice before signing it and make sure all the fine print has been disclosed.