

Evolving Water Law and Management in the U.S.: Kansas

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Abstract

Situated in the geographical center of the country, Kansas is a state in the tier of states from the Dakotas to Texas that mark the transition from the humid East to the arid West. Elevation rises from under seven hundred feet above sea level in eastern Kansas to over four thousand feet in the west. Rivers generally run from the dry west to the wetter east. Western Kansas is underlain by the High Plains Aquifer, which extends its reach to several other states. Roughly one-third the state's population resides in the two main population centers--the Kansas City-Lawrence-Topeka corridor in northeast Kansas and the Wichita-Salina area in central to south-central Kansas.

This article focuses on the last fifty years of Kansas water allocation management. It excludes water quality and interstate issues. To understand this period and to place it in context, however, one must view the preceding period from statehood in 1861 to 1965. After briefly describing this earlier period, this article examines the fifty years from 1965 to 2015, and then concludes with some observations about the future.

Keywords: high plains, aquifer, water allocation, management, Kansas, Topeka, Kansas City, Lawrence, Wichita, Salina

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