

OTHER NEWS

FROM ZOO TO YOU

Zoo to celebrate Kansas Day with programs

BY ALICE NELSON

The approaching Kansas Day events always bring excitement to the Conservation Awareness Team at Lee Richardson Zoo.

As many Kansans know, Kansas Day is celebrated every year on Jan. 29. This fun Kansas state holiday marks the anniversary of the state officially joining the Union of the United States of America in 1861.

In 1877, a mere 16 years after Kansas became a state, a teacher and schoolchildren in Paola held



Nelson

the first-ever Kansas Day celebration. The tradition quickly spread to schools in Topeka, Lawrence, Emporia, Wichita, and Fort Scott, which taught fun lessons about the Sunflower State. With the tradition gaining traction across Kansas, it soon

became an official state holiday.

This holiday has become more than a simple commemoration of an anniversary.

Indeed, Kansas Day is celebrated in a variety of ways around the state. Field trips, special projects, pioneer programs and meals, visits to the statehouse in Topeka, and of course, resounding performances of the state song "Home on the Range" occupy children from all over Kansas! Even the Governor of Kansas and members of the Kansas Legislature take this opportunity

to announce special proclamations.

But what does this have to do with the Conservation Awareness Team at the Lee Richardson Zoo in Garden City? We want to help you and your students celebrate Kansas Day!

Lee Richardson Zoo is offering a free program covering various Kansas state symbols and native wildlife on Jan. 29 at 10:00 am and again at 2:00 pm. This exciting program is geared toward third and fourth grade audiences, but anyone is welcome to attend.

If the two live

session times don't work for you, or if you are not sure the program would suit your students, feel free to request a link to the pre-recorded program. We also have a coloring sheet that is available as a tie-in activity. These resources are not limited to any specific county in Kansas or any school system. Private or public schools, homeschool, private or public, as well as daycares, libraries, etc. All are welcome to attend!

These programs will be presented through Zoom, and we will

email out links, worksheets (if requested), and recordings closer to Jan. 29. Be sure to register to get the link, the worksheet, or the recording from zoo.education@gardencityks.us or call us at 620-276-1250.

The Conservation Awareness Team and our wonderful ambassador animals look forward to celebrating this amazing state and all who live within it.

Alice Nelson is the Conservation Awareness Manager at Lee Richardson Zoo.

Kansas bills would increase severity for livestock, grain theft

BY MORGAN CHILSON
Kansas Reflector

TOPEKA — Kansas penalties for livestock, grain and ranch equipment theft are significantly less than surrounding states, frustrating farmers and ranchers whose livelihoods are affected long-term, legislators heard Tuesday.

Multiple proponents spoke to the House Judiciary committee Tuesday about two proposals — House Bill 2413, focused on cattle and farm equipment theft, and House Bill 2422 on grain theft — sharing the sometimes long-term effects of agricultural theft. Several pointed out that Kansas penalties are less severe than surrounding states.

No neutral or opponent testimony was submitted.

The two bills would increase the severity of penalties for theft to level 5 or 6 nonperson felonies and set new thresholds for implementing penalties.

CATTLE AND IMPLEMENT THEFT

Jason Thompson, revisor of statutes office, summarized HB 2413 and changes that would

- Define livestock as cattle and horses only
- Change theft of livestock or agriculture equipment used in caring for livestock to a severity level 5, nonperson felony, no matter what the



Randy Stookey, senior vice president with the Kansas Grain and Feed Association, testified Tuesday before the House Judiciary Committee about the importance of increasing penalties for people caught stealing grain. MORGAN CHILSON/KANSAS REFLECTOR

value of the stolen items; and

- Allow for the forfeiture of items used in the theft under criminal forfeiture procedures.

Currently, severity of the crime is based on value, with increasing penalties depending on the value of the items stolen, Thompson said.

Rep. Megan Steele, R-Manhattan, testified in favor of the bill, saying the issue came to light when two calves and a trailer were stolen from a friend.

"This is an important and necessary step to address the growing problem of cattle and agricultural

equipment theft here in Kansas," she said. "This issue extends far beyond just the property issue, but it strikes at the heart of our rural communities, our rural agricultural communities that we have here in the state of Kansas."

The criminal in her friend's case was caught but received only a misdemeanor "slap on the hand," Steele said, while her friend lost an entire year's worth of income because of the cost of the trailer that had to be replaced.

Sam Johnson, a rancher and crop farmer in Wabaunsee, Lyon and Osage counties, told the committee that his small operation could be harmed by even a minor theft, which might be a

misdemeanor under current law.

"I am a small producer, so my cattle herd is roughly 40 pairs. Just the theft of a calf today, that calf goes to market to bring as much as \$3,000, a mama cow over her productive life, well over \$15,000," he said.

Theft of equipment, which in his smaller operation may mean the \$20,000 tractor he uses to feed animals, can have long-term effects.

"When I have to take care of my herd, if there's a health issue or something like that needs to be addressed within my cattle, and those (implements) are gone or animals are stressed due to criminal activity, the impact is even greater to a small

producer such as myself," he said. "This bill is long overdue."

Matthew Steele, CEO and executive director of the Kansas Cattlemen's Association, told legislators that states surrounding Kansas have much harsher penalties for cattle theft.

"It is easier to steal them in Kansas and get rid of them in Oklahoma. Why? Because it's a slap on the wrist in Kansas, and when you go to Oklahoma, it's a slap on the wrist for selling stolen property," he said. "There's a reason that they steal cattle in Kansas, because our penalty does not match our neighboring states and other neighboring cattle states."

In Oklahoma, the penalty is a mandatory three to 10 years in jail per head stolen and up to three times the value, or \$500,000, fine per head, Matthew Steele said. Some trailer loads of cattle stolen in Kansas would lead to a life sentence in Oklahoma, he said.

GRAIN THEFT

House Bill 2422 would set the penalty for stealing crops at a severity level 6 nonperson felony and defines the theft of 400

bushels of grain as the threshold, rather than determining the penalty based on value, Thompson said.

Valuing grain theft so that it meets current standards of value can mean the crime doesn't rise to the level of a felony, testified Randy Stookey, senior vice president with the Kansas Grain and Feed Association.

For instance, a grain truck holds between 400 and 500 bushels of grain, whereas a semi-truck holds about 1,000 bushels. Assuming the grain is corn, which sells for about \$4.50 per bushel, Stookey said someone would have to steal nearly six semi-trucks of corn before the crime would rise out of the level of presumptive probation.

"That's why these aren't charged," he said. "That's why the prosecutor says, 'Look, I've got drug crimes I'm dealing with. I'm not going to prosecute.'"

Mike Schmidt, who recently retired as CEO of Pride Ag Resources in Dodge City, testified about a situation that resulted in losses from theft.

In the industry for nearly four decades, Schmidt said he was overseeing operations at a co-op where theft began gradually with a few hundred pounds of stolen grain and ended with a group of six people at several co-ops working together and stealing about 4,000 bushels.

"They did end up prosecuting two of the six people that were involved in it, and the gentleman that worked for myself, he ended up spending more time in jail for a DUI that he got," Schmidt said, adding that the man also was ordered to pay restitution of \$52,000 and never paid anything.

"To a small company, \$52,000 is a big thing, and he got nothing but a slap on the wrist," he said.

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NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Bids for the 2026 Street Chip Sealing Project will be received by the City of Garden City at the Street Department Office, 105 S. 10th St., Garden City, KS, until 10:00 a.m. on February 3, 2026. At that time, the bids will be opened publicly and read aloud.

All bids shall be submitted on printed forms, which can be obtained from the Street Department Office at (620) 276-1270 or electronically at the Document Center, www.garden-city.org. No bidder may withdraw their bid for at least thirty (30) days after the scheduled closing time for the receipt of bids. The City reserves the right to reject any or all bids, waive informalities, and accept the bid deemed to be in the best interest of the public.

Casey Howard

Casey Howard
Superintendent, Street Department