



News Release

September 26, 2003

For Immediate Release

Award-Winning Author Guest of Honor at Playa Exhibit

Jim Steiert, author of the award-winning book, *Playas: Jewels of the Plains*, will kick off the opening of a traveling playa exhibit in Hereford, Texas October 5. Steiert's book inspired the creation of the exhibit, and the author will sign copies of *Playas* during the opening at the Deaf Smith County Museum from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

"Steiert's book served as the inspiration behind the playa lakes exhibit," said Dr. Paul Katz, co-creator of the exhibit.

The exhibit, which was named after the book, *Playas: Gems of the Plains*, debuted at the Amarillo Botanical Gardens Jan. 12, 2003, and is touring through Panhandle-area museums and exhibit areas for the next three years. This fall, the exhibit will make an extended stop at the Deaf Smith County Museum in Hereford October 5 through November 26. It's next stop will be at the Window on the Plains Museum in Dumas January through February. In June 2003,



[Playa lakes](#) are the most numerous wetlands in the region, totaling more than 50,000 in eastern New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming, western Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma, and the Texas Panhandle. More than 95 percent of the world's playa lakes are located in the western Great Plains - they are a unique natural resource.

Playa lakes are shallow, usually round, wetlands with clay floors that lie in the lowest point of a generally large, closed watershed and collect runoff from surrounding uplands. Their average size is 17 acres, and all playa lakes combined make up about 2 percent of the total shortgrass prairie landscape. They are ephemeral, or seasonal, in nature and hold water only after rainfall or runoff events.

Since rainfall is scarce in the region, most of the time playa

These states have depended on the Ogallala for the majority of agricultural, municipal and industrial water supply since the turn of the century. But continued pumping has depleted the aquifer's water supply faster than natural recharge can replenish it.

Research, design and fabrication of the 360-degree, view-in-the-round exhibit have been under the direction of Drs. Paul and Susana Katz of Panhandle, TX. They are principal investigators for Prehistoric Resources Identification, Assessment and Management (PRIAM), an archeological and museum-consulting company they formed in 1985. Collaborating with them for the playa exhibit was designer/architect James I. Williams II of Amarillo.

Initial funding for the project came from the PLJV. Additional funding for the exhibit came from the Amarillo Area Foundation, Don and Sybil Harrington Foundation and the Meadows Foundation.

The PLJV's mission is to conserve playa lakes, other wetlands and associated landscapes through partnerships for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people.

Playas: Gems of the Plains was awarded a Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History in a national competition of regional exhibits.

Steiert is sure to attract a crowd, not just because of his acclaimed book, but also because he is a Hereford resident. His book received the Texas Outdoor Writers Association's top award for outdoor books in 1995, the year it was published. Steiert is also a former member of the [Playa Lakes Joint Venture \(PLJV\)](#) management board.

The PLJV is a non-profit conservation partnership that works throughout the western Great Plains to protect and maintain playa lakes. The PLJV donated \$20,000 to jump start the playa lakes exhibit and also gave \$5,000 to help publish Steiert's book.

The playa lakes exhibit features 20 separate 80-inch tall and 40-inch wide panels which illustrate a wide range of topics about playa lakes. "Visitors will walk around the panels, each of which presents information on the function of playa lakes, their history geography, ecology and art," said Katz.

lakes are dry. The normal wet-dry cycle generates a diverse plant community which produces large quantities of nutritious seeds essential for waterfowl and other birds which migrate and winter in the region.

"Many people don't realize that they have playas on their land, this exhibit really brings home the idea that everyone has a role in protecting them," said Mike Carter, PLJV Coordinator . "This educational exhibit makes our job of protecting them that much easier."

Playa lakes may be the most [important wetland habitat type for birds](#) in the region. More than 200 bird species are known to use playas during the breeding, wintering or migrating seasons.

Not only are playas important to wildlife, they are vitally important to replenishing and protecting underground water supply. Playas are the [primary source of recharge for the Ogallala Aquifer](#), a 174,000 square mile formation that underlies eight states: Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.

[Joint Venture partners](#) include: Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, ConocoPhillips, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and state wildlife agencies from Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

For further information on upcoming locations for *Playas... Gems of the Plains*, contact Paul or Susana Katz at (806) 537-5040. For more information about the PLJV call (303) 926-0777.