



## News Release

November 3, 2003

For Immediate Release

### Debunking Dogma: PLJV Promotes New Thinking About Playa Lakes

*The PLJV learns more about the natural resources of the region it serves every day, and some of this knowledge is challenging established and traditional views. In this article, the PLJV explores three issues that are commonly misunderstood, yet when examined, broaden the importance of playa lakes.*

#### Myth #1: Only 25,000 playa lakes exist in the PLJV region.

Most research sources cited estimate that between 25,000 and 30,000 playa lakes occur in the PLJV region. Only recently has the Joint Venture learned of and created additional studies which estimate far greater numbers of playa lakes.

HOW MANY PLAYAS ARE THERE?		
	Known Past	Known Today
COLORADO	198	1,413
KANSAS	2,806	10,252
NEBRASKA	0	15,000
NEW MEXICO	2,462	4,139
OKLAHOMA	585	1,312
TEXAS	19,000	26,751
TOTAL	~25,000	>50,000

New research in progress from the University of Kansas estimates that more than 10,000 playa lakes occur in western

#### Myth #2: Playa lakes do not aid aquifer recharge

For many years, a limited body of information fed the widespread view that playa lakes did not aid in aquifer recharge. This thinking went uninvestigated by the PLJV for many years. But recently, with a little digging into broader research sources, the PLJV has found the opposite to be true.

Prompted by a 2001 report from the Texas Water Development Board which summarized a century of research on playas' connection to the Ogallala aquifer, the Joint Venture staff tracked down [dozens of studies linking playas to aquifer recharge](#). Study after study confirmed that [playa lakes are the primary source of recharge for the Ogallala](#) in the Southern High Plains.

Among the scientific community, this information is largely well-known, but not within the general public. Recently, the PLJV has led an effort to educate partners and the general public about playa lakes' importance in protecting and replenishing water supply and maintaining agricultural economies of the region. The PLJV's push to get the word out

However, published waterfowl migration chronology data (from Bellrose's "Ducks, geese, and swans of North America") reveal that the PLJV region hosts even greater numbers of birds during migration than in winter. Further, the PLJV hosts more waterfowl during fall than spring. This makes sense, considering that more playas are wet during fall than spring.

Some PLJV states (KS, OK, and NM) conduct independent waterfowl migration chronology surveys during fall and/or spring. These data will be incorporated into the PLJV planning process to determine appropriate habitat objectives.

The PLJV region also is important for a number of migrating shorebird and waterbird species. A significant portion of the world's population of White-rumped Sandpipers pass through central Kansas during migration. Waterbirds such as Black Terns and Franklin's Gulls also move through in large numbers. One springtime estimate of Franklin's Gull from western Oklahoma in the 1960s showed more than two million birds! Also, the endangered Whooping Crane's migratory pathway follows a relatively straight line from

Kansas - a huge jump from the previously touted number of about 2,800. In Nebraska, where it was once thought that no playas existed at all, the PLJV has recently learned of research dating back to 1997 estimating 15,000 playas in the southwest portion of the state. Today, the PLJV stands behind an estimate of more than 50,000 playa lakes within its administrative boundaries.

The knowledge that playas exist in such great numbers has created new partnerships and infrastructure within areas previously not considered important for playas, such as western Nebraska. In Kansas, top state officials have taken greater interest in the resource, and recently invited the PLJV to lead a tour of playas and speak at the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission meeting in Atwood - a part of northwest Kansas previously thought by some not to contain playas.

is drawing increased attention to playa lakes.

Since the PLJV issued a [press release](#) about playa lakes' connection to the aquifer June 16, 2003, several dozen media outlets have covered the topic throughout the PLJV region.

Myth #3: The PLJV area is important for only wintering waterfowl

The PLJV region has been thought of as an important area primarily for wintering waterfowl. Certainly in the 1970s, when flood irrigation dominated the Southern High Plains, there were plenty of waterfowl around during winter on playas which remained full from runoff. Also, the only coordinated waterfowl survey is conducted during winter. None take place during migration; which may further contribute to the "winter area" ideology.

northwestern Canada, through the PLJV region to its wintering area on the Texas Gulf Coast.

Understanding bird use during migration is important in the planning process. Considering only wintering numbers would lead to insufficient habitat conservation efforts. Like with bird use, playa numbers and aquifer recharge, the PLJV will continue to evaluate all information about the region it serves. Every new aspect learned broadens our understanding of the importance of playa lakes.

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