



News Release

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For Immediate Release

KS Sen. Pat Roberts Introduces Legislation to Protect Playa Lakes, Recharge Ogallala

U.S. Senator Pat Roberts introduced important conservation legislation this week to preserve [playa lakes](#), protect wildlife and recharge the Ogallala Aquifer.

"The playa lakes are wetlands often overlooked, but invaluable to water quality, to [recharging the Ogallala Aquifer](#) and as sanctuary for wintering birds," Senator Roberts said. "This bill works within legislation that is already proven to bring real conservation results in a sustainable way."

Playa lakes stretch from west Texas up through the panhandle and parts of Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Playas are the most common wetland in these areas, totaling approximately 60,000 in the seven states. They are shallow, clay-lined wetlands that average less than 30 acres and are not filled with water on a year round basis. In many areas, the lakes have been used for grazing, irrigation and run-off. Some playas have also been filled in by

"This bill helps to define playas as wetlands, which has not always been the case, and gets some welcome funding going toward playas and landowners that have them," said Mike Carter, Coordinator of the Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV).

Because playa lakes are dry much of the year, traditionally they have not been recognized as wetlands in Farm Bill programs. But the wet-dry cycle of playas is a natural function of the wetlands. The seasonality of playas produces diverse vegetation which supports all types of birds – waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds and grassland species alike. When the playa's clay basin is dry, deep cracks form which are the main [channels for recharge](#) of water through the playa into the Ogallala Aquifer.

"Research indicates that playas can be a significant source of recharge for parts of the Ogallala," Senator Roberts said. "Recharge rates under the playas can be many times greater than surrounding areas. This legislation makes a critical investment in our water supply."

In addition to recharge, the bill will produce significant benefits for [millions of migratory birds](#) which depend on the playa lakes region. The playas support 37

"The Playa Lakes Joint Venture commends Senator Roberts and his staff for introducing this ground-breaking and innovative legislation," said Bob McCready, PLJV Chairman. "Given the importance of playa lakes for wildlife habitat and replenishing water supply, this bill has broad appeal – for landowners, municipalities and conservation groups."

Senator Roberts is a senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. He has been a strong supporter of voluntary conservation programs.

The PLJV is a conservation partnership that works to protect playa lakes, other wetlands and grasslands for the benefit of wildlife and people in the Great Plains. PLJV partners include: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, ConocoPhillips, and state wildlife agencies of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Since its inception in 1989, the PLJV has raised in excess of \$50 million to conserve more than 100,000 acres of wildlife habitat in the six-state region it serves. For more information about the PLJV, visit: www.pljv.org.

sediment runoff from crop land.

Senator Roberts said the bill protects these wetlands by amending the Farmable Wetlands Program under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to allow the enrollment of 40 contiguous acres instead of 10, and allow payment on 10 of the acres instead of five. These changes ensure that the majority of lakes and their buffer areas will be eligible for enrollment, and it also guarantees that playas will be considered eligible wetlands by USDA.

mammal species, 185 bird species, and 340 plant species, Senator Roberts noted. They provide temporary shelter for wintering birds including some 400,000 Sandhill Cranes along with 2.5 million ducks and 500,000 geese.

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