



News Release

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For Immediate Release

Playa Exhibit to Debut in Dumas, TX

An award-winning exhibit on playa lakes is coming to the Window on the Plains Museum in Dumas January 4 through February 25. An opening reception will be held for the public January 4 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the museum.

The exhibit, titled "*Playas: Gems of the Plains*", has been traveling throughout the Texas Panhandle for three years, beginning its tour January 2003 at the Amarillo Botanical Gardens, then continuing on to Borger, Childress, Mobeetie and Hereford before coming to Dumas. In June, the exhibit was awarded a Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History in a national competition of regional exhibits.

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 Paul Katz, co-creator of the exhibit.



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

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.

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](#) is a conservation partnership whose mission is to protect playa lakes, other wetlands and associated landscapes for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people. [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.

[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.

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.

"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, Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) Coordinator. "This educational exhibit makes our job of protecting them that much easier."

After its stopover in Dumas, the exhibit will travel to the Crosby County Pioneer Memorial Museum in Crosbyton. 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.