



News Release

March 5, 2004

For Immediate Release

Don't Forget Playas during National Groundwater Awareness Week

The [Playa Lakes Joint Venture \(PLJV\)](#) is encouraging educators and resource managers in the High Plains region to include information on [playa lakes](#) when hosting events during [National Groundwater Awareness Week](#) March 14 - 20. Playas are the primary source of [recharge](#) for the [Ogallala Aquifer](#), yet are often overlooked when discussing the conservation of this major water resource.

The Ogallala Aquifer is a formation of water-saturated soils which underlies 174,000 square miles under portions of eight states (TX, NM, NE, KS, OK, CO, WY and SD). The Aquifer is the primary source of water for irrigation, municipal and industrial use in the High Plains region. In 2000, the Aquifer contained about 3.2 billion acre-feet of water.

The Ogallala Aquifer's water supply has been declining since modern irrigation took hold in the late 1940s, with the greatest use (95 percent) attributed to irrigation. A recent report from

Although current dry land farming techniques have helped to decrease the rate of depletion, the amount of water being withdrawn from the Aquifer still greatly exceeds the rate of natural recharge.

Playa lakes, which lie above the Ogallala formation, are the primary source of natural recharge for the Ogallala Aquifer. There are more than 60,000 playas that cover the expanse of the Aquifer. Playas are shallow wetlands with clay bottoms that lie in the lowest point of a large, closed watershed, collecting rainwater and runoff from surrounding uplands. Numerous studies indicate that recharge under playas can exceed 3 inches per year in some areas, and playas are responsible for about 80-90 percent of the total amount of recharge into the Aquifer.

[Aquifer recharge](#) occurs through the center of playa basins and also along the perimeter of the playa. When a dry playa receives a surge of water from rainfall or runoff, water flows into the playa basin and penetrates the clay layer through large cracks and plant root openings. These cracks eventually swell shut and become impermeable as the clay absorbs more water. Recharge also occurs along the

Groundwater Awareness Week organizers seeking materials on playas can check out the [PLJV's Educator Resource Guide](#) for a detailed index of activity guides, field programs, videos, books, magazine articles and more focused on playas and related conservation issues.

The PLJV is a regional partnership dedicated to the conservation of playa lakes, other wetlands and associated landscapes for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people. Partners include: Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, ConocoPhillips, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and state wildlife agencies of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. The PLJV was established in 1989 and since then, has raised more than \$50 million to conserve more than 100,000 acres of wetlands and other wildlife habitat in the High Plains. For more information about the PLJV, aquifer recharge or wildlife conservation issues in this region, visit www.pljv.org or call (303) 926-0777.

the [U.S. Geological Survey](#) found the two states with the greatest amounts of depletion are Texas and Kansas. Water in storage has declined 27 percent in Texas, from about 476 million acre-feet to 352 million acre-feet over the past 50 years. In Kansas, water in storage has declined 16 percent from about 322 million acre-feet to 274 million acre-feet during the same time period.

perimeter of playas where clay meets the upland soils.

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