



News Release

August 6, 2004

For Immediate Release

Farm Bill Changes to Benefit Playa Lakes

Playa lakes are getting long-deserved attention thanks to a recent push for more wetlands protection under the Farm Bill.

In an address to Minnesota farmers this week, President Bush directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement the new [Wetlands Restoration Initiative](#). The initiative aims to restore up to 250,000 acres of wetlands and playa lakes through the Farm Bill's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Of those acres, 56,600 will be allocated to Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas where more than 60,000 playa lakes occur.

"We are extremely pleased about this move and what it will mean for playa lakes," said Mike Carter, Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) Coordinator.

The initiative will allow more playas and other large wetland complexes to be enrolled in the CRP. Previously, only wetlands that fell within the 100-year floodplain or sites less than 40 acres were eligible for the program.

PLJV partners set the wheels in motion about a year ago when the organization began putting together a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) proposal focused on the playa lakes region. Then in November of last year, [Sen. Pat Roberts \(KS\) introduced legislation](#) to amend the Farmable Wetlands Program to enhance playas' eligibility. Soon after, [Rep. Randy Neugebauer \(TX\) introduced companion legislation](#) in the House, co-signed by Reps. Mac Thornberry (TX), Dennis Moore (KS) and Jerry Moran (KS).

The legislators' urgings resulted in an administrative action to increase eligibility for playa lakes in the Conservation Reserve Program through this new initiative. The initiative marks the first time playa lakes have been specifically targeted for protection through the Farm Bill.

"In addition to the dollars provide for playas, we now have a Farm Bill program that mentions playas specifically by name," Carter said. "We are very happy about that."

The FSA, which administers the CRP, estimates the program will provide \$200 million in payments to participants through

Playa lakes are shallow, seasonal wetlands that are scattered throughout the High Plains and are crucial to sustaining the region's wildlife and water. Millions of waterfowl, cranes, shorebirds and grassland bird species utilize playas throughout the year, and the wetlands are the [primary source of recharge](#) for the Ogallala Aquifer which supplies the majority of the region's water.

Because playa lakes are dry much of the year, many people do not recognize them as wetlands. 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 of recharge through the playa into the Ogallala.

For more information on playa lakes, visit the PLJV web site: www.pljv.org

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture is a partnership of state and federal wildlife agencies, conservation groups and private industry dedicated to protecting playa lakes for the benefit of

"We are delighted the President announced this as part of his initiative to promote wetlands restoration," said John Johnson, Farm Service Agency (FSA) Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs. "This gives us another tool to target larger wetland complexes and playa lakes."

"The playa portion of this initiative is the direct result of a culmination of efforts by many conservation groups, state and federal wildlife agencies and legislators," said Bob McCready, PLJV chairman and director of The Nature Conservancy's Prairie Wings program.

2007. Payments will include: a wetland restoration incentive payment equal to 25 percent of the cost of restoring hydrology of the site; an annual rental payment; and cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent of eligible practice installation costs. Full details and rules of the program will be announced by the FSA at a later date.

Sign up will begin October 1 and will run on a continuous basis until 250,000 acres have been enrolled or December 31, 2007 - whichever comes first. Of the 56,600 acres available to playa lakes states, 1,600 have been allocated for Colorado, 11,000 for Kansas, 14,000 for Nebraska, 3,500 for New Mexico, 1,500 for Oklahoma and 25,000 for Texas. Interested landowners should contact their local [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\) office](#) to enroll.

birds, other wildlife and people in the High Plains. Joint Venture partners include: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, ConocoPhillips and state wildlife agencies of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Since its inception in 1989, PLJV partners have raised in excess of \$50 million to conserve more than 100,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

Listen to a [radio interview](#) with the PLJV about the program. (2M MP3 file)

Editors: Playa photos available upon request. Contact: Debbie Slobe, Communications Team Leader, Playa Lakes Joint Venture (303) 926-0777