



2018-2019 "Education for Water Conservation" Grant Report to High Plains Underground Water Conservation District

Summary:

With \$5,000 of funding from High Plains Water District awarded in July 2018, Ogallala Commons was able to meet its projected outcomes in the "Educating for Playa Conservation" Project: hosting 4 Playa Field Days to educate landowners and the interested public about playa ecosystems and aquifer recharge, plus 2 Playa Festivals for water cycle and science education for elementary students from schools within the HPWD region.

The following is an overview of our accomplishments.

Projected Outcomes:

1. Playa Field Days (\$3,500 of HPWD grant funding)
Ogallala Commons conducted 4 Playa Management Field Days in Castro, Crosby, Deaf Smith and Hale counties to raise awareness of how playas can recharge the Ogallala Aquifer, as well as to provide information for landowners to participate in Texas Playa Conservation Initiative (<https://pljv.org/partners-launch-texas-playa-conservation-initiative/>).

Measurable Results:

- On July 14, 2018 in conjunction with the annual German Festival in Nazareth, OC held a third Playa Field Day, due to strong requests in earlier evaluations to host a field day in summer when playas are filled with plants and amphibians. Presentations with live amphibians and reptiles was given by Robert Martin from Santa Fe, NM, as well as general playa information by Jim Steiert, and a rancher/farmer perspective on playa recharge of the aquifer by Dr. Chris Gotegut from Umbarger, TX. In addition, Don Kahl gave a brief presentation on Texas Playa Conservation Initiative. A group of 23 adults attended the tour (including 10 landowners, 6 of whom owned playas). The morning session concluded with playa plant identification tours.

- OC hosted a Playa Field Day on November 14, 2018 at Crosby County Historical Museum and Auditorium in Crosbyton, TX. A group of 20 (including 10 landowners, 4 who owned playas) gathered for the event--teachers, landowners, Master Naturalists, and water managers! Jim Steiert, author and outdoorsman from Hereford, TX gave an informative presentation on waterfowl and shorebirds that depend on the playas during fall migration. Don Kahl for Texas Parks & Wildlife gave an informative presentation on the Texas Playa Conservation Initiative, and then led our field trip to a restored playa north of Crosbyton, we were thrilled to see what we had learned about in the morning: dozens sandhill cranes flying around Crosby County, feeding in grain fields and roosting out on wet playas.



- OC conducted a Playa Field Day on March 26, 2019 at the Hereford Community Center in Hereford, TX, with 22 attending--12 of whom were landowners, and 8 owning playas. An opening presentation by Don Kahl, TPWD Region 1 Migratory Game Bird Specialist, covered information on restoration options for playa landowners through the Texas Playa Conservation Initiative. A second presentation, "Playas are a Farmer-Stockman's Best Friend," given by local producer Dr. Chris Grotegut, focusing on land management practices that conserve playas and improve groundwater recharge. A very informative Field Trip was taken out to Dr. Grotegut's farm and large playa north of the Dawn community.



Dr. Grotegut cited compelling reasons for land managers to steward playas

- On May 21st, OC welcomed 25 attendees (10 landowners with 5 owning playas) to a Playa Field Day in Abernathy, TX. Though it turned out to be very windy out on the tour, rainfall from the previous week made it possible to see a number of moist soil plants growing out in the clay-lined playa basins. A major presentation at the event was given by OC Community Intern Amanda Emert, on the role of amphibians in playa ecosystems.



-
- OC Community Intern Amanda Emert grew up in Cotton Center, TX
-

Emert, a Texas Tech University graduate student, shared information about her research project studying playa amphibians in the larval stages. There are 14 amphibian species in the Southern High Plains, including toads, frogs, and salamanders.

"The overall health of amphibians is indicative of the health of the environment, and an important aspect of my study is that ecosystems are important to us. When frogs, toads, and salamanders and other amphibians start disappearing, that's an indicator for us. It's possible that amphibian disappearance could be a water quality issue," said Emert.

A total of 40 landowners (23 who owned playas) attended our 4 Field Days.

2. Playa Festivals (\$1,500)

On Oct. 4 and 5, 2018, funding assistance from High Plains Water District leveraged primary funds from SWCDs in Castro, Swisher, and Parmer counties to conduct 2 Playa Festivals for 5th and 6th Grade students in

HPWD's region. The funding also enabled Sudan Elementary to participate in a Festival for the first time.

The 2 Festivals were attended by 150 students from 6 Elementary Schools.

“Education for Playa Conservation” Grant Final Project Budget

Project Income

Grant Funding from High Plains UWCD	\$ 5,000
Dixon Water Foundation funding	\$ 4,200
Funding from SWCDs in Castro, Swisher, and Parmer Counties	\$ 1,250
Registrations for 3 Playa Field Days	\$ 550
Sub-Total	\$11,000

Project Expenses

Playa Field Days Project Coordination by OC Staff	\$ 7,000
Playa Festival faculty stipends	\$ 3,000
Meals and beverages at Playa Field Days	\$ 500
Administrative Services	\$ 500
Sub-Total	\$11,000

Conclusion:

Ogallala Commons greatly appreciates the support of High Plains Water District for this project, and we look forward to work on the new grant in 2019-2020.

Sincerely,

Darryl Birkenfeld, Ph.D.
Director, Ogallala Commons
P.O. Box 346
Nazareth, Texas 79063
806-945-2255
darryl@ogallalacommons.org