Playa Recharge Summit:
Communicating About Playas and Recharge Tip Sheet

In November 2015, Playa Lakes Joint Venture held a Playa Recharge Summit to determine what was known about the amount of recharge from playas to the Ogallala Aquifer (see the **Recharge through Playas: What Scientists Say** *flyer for a summary of results) and develop communication messages and talking points about playas and their connection to groundwater recharge. Below is a list of communication tips and examples of messaging from the Summit.*

Descriptive Language

When crafting messages, use descriptive language that is meaningful to the audience.

- Use local terminology. Find out what playas are typically called, and include that language in all communications (i.e. lagoon, temporary wetland, etc).

- When possible, use an active voice and anthropomorphize playas (i.e. help them do their job).

- Use "improve water quality" or an adjective like "good" or "clean" to describe the water that is recharged through playas. In some instances, the verbs "clean" and "purify" may give the perception of adding chemicals to the water, so be aware of context.

- Use the word "healthy" to describe a functioning playa and include supporting language that describes or defines a healthy playa.

- Use "sediment accumulation" rather than "sedimentation." Sedimentation is a natural process that happens over time. Before human interference, it was natural for sediments to be deposited in playas but they were also removed by wind. With "culturally-accelerated sedimentation" that balance has been thrown off and sediments accumulate at a rate faster than they are removed by wind.

- Use "time the playa holds water," "flooded period" or "duration of ponding" rather than "hydroperiod" which may not mean anything to the audience.

Playa Benefits

Create messages that focus on water quality and other benefits (reduce erosion, attract wildlife, prevent flooding, water cattle, etc.) provided by playas, as well as the amount of recharge. Examples of messaging about benefits provided by playas:

- "Water reaching the aquifer today started the journey when your parents or grandparents were farming."

- "Water recharging now will help today's children and the next generation [future generations] of ranchers and rainfed [dryland] farmers."

- "A healthy, functioning playa can provide enough recharge and high quality water to meet the water needs of a [ranch, rainfed farm, small town, etc]."

- "Playas are areas of focused recharge, and improve the quality of water flowing into the aquifer."

- "Healthy playas improve water quality, groundwater recharge and wildlife habitat [for the benefit of people and wildlife]."

- "Playas are focused areas for groundwater recharge, water quality and wildlife habitat, so it is important that playas be healthy."

- "Water reaching the aquifer through playas is of higher quality than that going through upland soils, especially through upland soils that have been cultivated. Grass buffers around playas prevent sediments, which may have pesticides and other contaminants attached, from entering the playa. As water moves through the clay floor of the playa, a second 'cleaning' process occurs as the soils beneath the playa remove nitrogen and other dissolved contaminants from the water."

- "Healthy playas filter and clean the water going into the aquifer: first, as grass buffers prevent sediments with pesticides and other contaminants from entering the playa; and secondly, as nitrogen and other dissolved contaminants are removed when water moves through the clay floor and soils beneath the playa."

- "Healthy playas with grass buffers filter out sediments that contain pesticides and other chemicals, while soils in the playa remove nitrates and other dissolved contaminants as water moves through them."

- "A healthy playa is one with a grass watershed, native plants, flat bottom, regular hydrological cycle, and no accumulated sediments or modifications."

Playa Modifications

Convey that modifications, such as pits and trenches, change the natural function of playas and reduce societal benefits (water quality, flood control, wildlife habitat, etc).

- Examples of messaging about pits and trenches in playas:

    - "From an ecological [ecosystem, wildlife] perspective, the greatest existing alteration to playas is pits and trenches, which change a playa's natural design and hinder its ability to do its job."

    - "Filling a pit in a playa enables rainwater and runoff to reach the large cracks in a dry playa floor, which is essential for recharge to occur, rather than collecting in the pit."

    - "We approach playa conservation from a systems perspective and we want to maintain and restore intact systems. Thus we believe that filling pits will benefit recharge in addition to supporting wildlife."

- Examples of messaging about sediment accumulation in playas:

    - "Sediment accumulation is the single largest on-going threat to playas and significantly impairs their ability to provide clean groundwater recharge [and ponded water]."

- "A functioning playa provides groundwater recharge and improves the quality of water flowing into the aquifer. When we allow sediments to accumulate in a playa, we impede the playa's ability to do its job."

- "Sediment build-up reduces the depth of the playa increasing the rate of water loss through evaporation and transpiration, and lessens the time the playa holds water minimizing the use by wildlife and cattle."

- "Healthy playas filter and clean the water going into the aquifer. Establishing native grass buffers around a playa helps to filter out soil and agricultural contaminants present in runoff."

- Example of messaging about the benefits of restoring playas:.

  - "Restoring playa wetlands on your land will …"
    - Improve the quality of recharge and ponded water
    - Potentially increase the quantity of recharge
    - Reduce erosion, gullying (from a watershed perspective)
    - Attract wildlife
    - Prevent flooding of cropland or livestock corrals
    - Provide dependable source of income when in conservation program
    - Provide aesthetic and intrinsic value