Taking the Landowner’s Point of View

Because PLJV works in a predominantly private landscape (97% of the area we serve is privately owned), we are always looking for ways to connect with landowners and support their needs. Such a simple word as “connect” operates at many levels. A connection can mean a robust, working partnership or simply an acknowledgment of what we do. We know that every decision by every landowner is a personal one, driven by unique experiences and circumstances. Understanding those decisions can only be appreciated through personal conversations, and probably many of them. But how do we start those conversations and discover what matters to landowners?

Human dimensions, a field that incorporates most other social sciences (psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics, history, and political science, among others), is helping us understand the motivation behind the decisions that people make. PLJV learned about a decade ago, through our first foray into human dimensions work, that what matters is water—sustainable water. Considering that our territory encompasses a majority of the western Great Plains—a big chunk of North America’s bread basket—that is not too surprising.

PLJV first used this approach in a 2006 survey of 1,800 landowners, and results showed the state of the Ogallalla Aquifer overshadowed everything else. Based on this and other recent efforts, such as the 13 focus groups we hosted across our region in 2014, we have been honing our ability to ask informed questions so we can do something meaningful with that feedback. What we want to know, specifically, is what practices landowners are engaged in to ensure they have sufficient water to continue living on the land, how they are managing the resources they have, and whether they are willing to explore conservation efforts that support their family and future generations, as well as the wildlife and communities that depend on this resource.

Much like the biological sciences that PLJV has always used effectively, we expect human dimension approaches to inform our work more and more. We are excited to see a synergy between social and biological sciences that supports mapping and understanding of bird population declines in alignment with what people are interested in and willing to do.

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Dan Snodgrass
Board Chairman

Mike Carter
Coordinator

Above: Farmland near Amarillo, Texas
Photo by Miruh Hamend
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Above: Board, staff, and guests celebrate PLJV + ConocoPhillips 25th Anniversary
Photo by Emily Elizabeth Photo
Throughout the region, aquifer levels are decreasing. Many communities that depend on the High Plains (Ogallala) Aquifer are experiencing declining availability of groundwater. This decline is impacting nearly 150 towns and cities located above these areas, which means their future water supply may be limited. Many of these towns are searching for solutions to continue providing abundant and clean water for residents including drilling more and deeper wells—just to provide the same amount of water. Restoring playas, a primary source of groundwater recharge, can be an important part of a sustainable approach to securing water for these communities.

Over the past year, PLJV has had the opportunity to work with city leaders and prominent landowners in Clovis, New Mexico, on a visionary plan that features playa conservation as an important aspect of ensuring ongoing groundwater recharge and a sustainable future for their community. With more than 300 playas surrounding their town, the Clovis community is working to restore playas with pits or accumulated sediment that reduce their ability to function, enhance the amount of recharge by diverting stormwater into some of those playas, and retire irrigation wells that are competing for aquifer water. They have discussed establishing enhanced management zones (areas over the aquifer managed for recharge and agricultural production) and are advocating for a land trust to offer associated easements to hold and manage conserved playas.

As a conservation organization, PLJV is excited and inspired to see this community working to secure its water future, thinking about the long-range benefits playas provide, and developing innovative solutions that provide clean water for generations to come. The City of Clovis is working to secure its water future by thinking about the long-range benefits playas provide and developing innovative solutions that provide clean water for generations to come.

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Region-wide Bird Data Informs Habitat Conservation

Many species of grassland birds unique to the western Great Plains—such as Colorado’s state bird, the Lark Bunting—are in steep decline. What appears to be a small decline of 3% per year will amount to a loss of more than half of the Lark Bunting population over a 17-year period, and this is happening to most shortgrass prairie dependent birds.

To better understand the causes of these declines, managers need information about the distribution, abundance, and habitat that these species use across their range. This information helps conservation partners understand how to best manage wildlife populations and where to target conservation actions to arrest or reverse declines. Unfortunately, large-scale, long-term surveys of landbirds are difficult to implement because they require deploying large, highly-trained field crews to survey locations across a wide landscape during early spring.

Playa Lakes Joint Venture is working with many partners, including our management board, to implement the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program across our six states. This program provides much-needed, scientifically defensible estimates of bird distribution and abundance across large areas that will be used by conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, and energy companies to target and evaluate habitat projects throughout the region. The important work of data collection is executed by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, while GIS modeling of field data is done right here at PLJV.

IMBCR for PLJV Program Goals and Outcomes

There is a saying that “many hands make light work,” and our goal with IMBCR for PLJV is no different. As more partners join, the proportional cost to each decreases, helping to ensure the health of this program—and the habitats we care about—for years to come. In its first year, all six state wildlife agencies in our region, USDA Farm Service Agency, US Forest Service, and Great Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative pledged funding through 2017.

The IMBCR data from 2016 is allowing us to create:

- Distribution maps and population estimates useful in all aspects of bird conservation
- Habitat models that provide information needed to guide conservation efforts and habitat management
- GIS data that can be paired with bird data to guide landscape-level planning

During the 2016 field season, 220 bird species were detected in our region. The map above shows locations of surveyed grids in all six PLJV states.
Landscape Design Informs Conservation Planning and Delivery

PLJV continues to use landscape design to help focus conservation efforts not only in locations that benefit birds today but also will be least likely to be impacted by wind development in the future. By incorporating human dimensions, biological planning, and future landscape changes, landscape design is a more holistic way to plan conservation and account for the major competing factors on the landscape.

In addition to helping PLJV meet its biological goals, landscape design can assist the wind industry avoid playas and other sensitive resources while meeting their development goals. In November, PLJV had the opportunity to introduce the wind industry to landscape design when PLJV Conservation Science Director, Anne Bartuszevige, gave a presentation at the biennial American Wind Wildlife Institute conference in Broomfield, Colorado. The talk was well received and supports the Institute’s growing interest in modeling and planning methods that reduce both near- and long-term ecological impacts.

This past year, PLJV staff were invited to write an article about the landscape design process and how to apply it in conservation planning. The article, Landscape Design: Integrating Ecological, Social, and Economic Considerations into Conservation Planning, is available in the September 2016 issue of the Wildlife Society Bulletin. Since the article was published, PLJV has been contacted by land managers, scientists, and private landowners all looking to incorporate landscape design planning into their conservation work.

In eastern New Mexico and the Texas panhandle, landscape design is informing National Wildlife Refuge planning. PLJV and the Great Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative are working with refuge staff to develop planning tools that integrate into the regional landscape design and explicitly state how further refuge conservation contributes to regional scale goals. PLJV staff are working directly with land managers to model woody encroachment, oil and gas infrastructure change, wind energy infrastructure change, groundwater depletion, and biological response using population goals for migratory birds.
Social Value

The value of being a good neighbor to our fellow citizens and partners is a priceless thing when you consider the size of our landscape, the goals for habitat conservation across it, and the challenges landowners and communities face with sustaining water resources. It’s not a responsibility we take lightly. Responding effectively to such diverse challenges requires the trust of our partners on the ground, and we have engendered that trust over the years by being exceptional listeners, advocates, and partners, ourselves.

Conservation happens when people pay attention and get involved, but with so much conflicting information available it becomes harder for concerned citizens to distinguish what is relevant to them in order to take action. As your trusted partner in conservation, PLJV is committed to providing the kind of detail that informs the understanding of conservation science and encourages more and better stewardship of our landscape in real time, and we have taken steps to ensure that we are clear and present wherever you go for news and information. In addition to our website and Facebook page, we have launched social media profiles on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Medium to help expand our communication network and create new pathways for public support of our mission.

Whether you’re looking for a little inspiration, a story worth sharing, some in depth reporting, or to contribute directly to the success of our mission, we hope to be one of your regular neighborhood destinations on the web. Please add us to your list of favorites wherever you circulate and stay tuned!

Join Our Online Community

Facebook – PLJV Classic for shareable, likeable news and information
facebook.com/playalakes

Twitter – Diet PLJV with news across our joint venture at only 140 characters per byte
twitter.com/playalakes

Medium – PLJV Extra with a range of full feature content on water, wildlife, and habitat issues under the banner Recharge Today
medium.com/recharge-today

LinkedIn – PLJV Business Class with what it means to be a responsive organization in the conservation field today
linkedin.com/company/playa-lakes-joint-venture

Above: Guests mingle at PLJV + ConocoPhillips 25th Anniversary Celebration
Photo by Emily Elizabeth Photo
Accomplishments

PLJV was established to build partnerships that deliver habitat conservation for birds. More than half of our funding comes directly from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Region under the Migratory Bird Program, which supports all aspects of the partnership’s efforts and accomplishments. This year, PLJV influenced the conservation of 180,999 acres of habitat. The main funding sources used by partners are PLJV ConocoPhillips and PLJV Capacity grants, as well as other funding sources such as USDA Farm Bill conservation programs.

2016 Accomplishments
180,999 Acres

ConocoPhillips 1,587 Acres
Capacity Grants 43,800 Acres
Other Sources 135,612 Acres

Financial Report

Revenue
$1,085,190
- Management Board: 5%
- IMBCR for PLJV: 17%
- Private Grants: 5%
- Federal & State Grants: 14%
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: 59%

Expenses
$1,061,202
- Communication: 10%
- Operations: 8%
- Project Planning/Implementation: 17%
- Monitoring, Evaluation & Research: 32%
- Program Coordination: 33%
Our mission is to conserve the playas, prairies, and landscapes of the western Great Plains through partnerships for the benefit of birds, other wildlife, and people.

Cover Art:
Northern Pintail by Lisa Brawn
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www.pljv.org

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