

# Playas of Eastern Colorado: Map Viewer

## Summary

This document displays digital maps of playa wetlands created by Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) from their assessment of eastern Colorado playas from 2004-2008. In this viewer you can see the location of all playa wetlands verified by RMBO in relation to counties, cities, roads, as well as potential playa locations that were not visited. The maps also depict areas where playas tend to be larger and where they are more densely concentrated, as well as where they are most likely to be located in native shortgrass prairie and where they are likely to have been hydrologically modified.

We developed these maps to help people learn about the playa wetlands distributed throughout the landscape of eastern Colorado. Playas are primarily found in working landscapes of farm and ranch land. These shallow, rain-fed wetlands provide essential migratory habitat for ducks, geese, and other waterbirds, as well as numerous other wildlife and plants specialized for wet places. Playas benefit society as the primary source of recharge to the Ogallala aquifer, by catching water to minimize flooding, and by providing hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities. The most challenging resource issues for playas today are filling with sediments loosened by farming, being dug-out to concentrate water, and development pressures from urban areas and roads. Because of the importance of these wetlands, a number of programs have been developed to assist landowners who would like to conserve the important wetland features of playas on their land for their enjoyment now as well as in future generations.

## What are playas?

Playas are shallow depressional wetlands of the Great Plains that fill periodically from heavy rainfall and associated runoff. These clay-lined wetlands occur in closed watersheds and are thought to have formed through a collaboration of wind, wave, and dissolution processes. Playas are distributed across northern Texas, western Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and eastern New Mexico and Colorado. Due to the sporadic, localized rainfall patterns common to the eastern Colorado plains, playas are frequently dry for extended periods of time, which can make recognition of a playa difficult. We estimate that 14,000 – 23,000 playas are within this part of Colorado. More information about playas may be found at the Playa Lakes Joint Venture website, <http://www.pljv.org>.

## How To

To operate the viewer, move to the next page and locate the layers icon (looks like two overlapping diamonds) on the left-hand side menu (Adobe 9). Click this icon to display the layers in a list. (In Adobe 7 or 8, go to View, select Navigation Panels/Tabs: Layers). You may then click on and off each layer to see different information. First try viewing just the playas themselves (*Potential Playa Locations*) with roads, counties, and cities, and zoom into an area of interest (use the Marquee tool at the top that looks like a magnifying glass). The dark blue locations represent playas that have been verified through field research. Next you can click on *Playas Bird Surveyed* to find out the extent of playas that were surveyed during the study to learn about bird use. Then go back to the full extent (icon at the top has a sheet of paper with arrows to each edge) and click on the *Playas per sq. mi.* and *Playa Size* layers. These show you where playas tend to be largest and where they occur in the highest density on the landscape.

## For More Information

Please refer to our report posted at <http://www.rmbo.org> to learn more about the playas in this project. The report contains photographs, conservation recommendations, and information regarding the plants, soils, and birds using playa wetlands. Contact Seth Gallagher at RMBO if you would like to talk about conservation opportunities related to playas on your land ([seth.gallagher@rmbo.org](mailto:seth.gallagher@rmbo.org); 970-482-1707 x12).

## Acknowledgements

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# Playas of Eastern Colorado

## Potential Playa Locations

- Confirmed
- Highly Probable
- Probable
- Possible
- Low Potential
- + Playas Bird Surveyed
- + Playas Vegetation Sampled

## Playas in Restoration Programs

- + Control
- + Restoration

## Playas Per Sq. km

- 0.015
- 0.030
- 0.045
- 0.060
- 0.075
- 0.090

## Playa Sizes (ha)

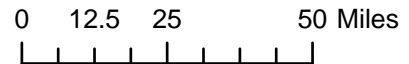
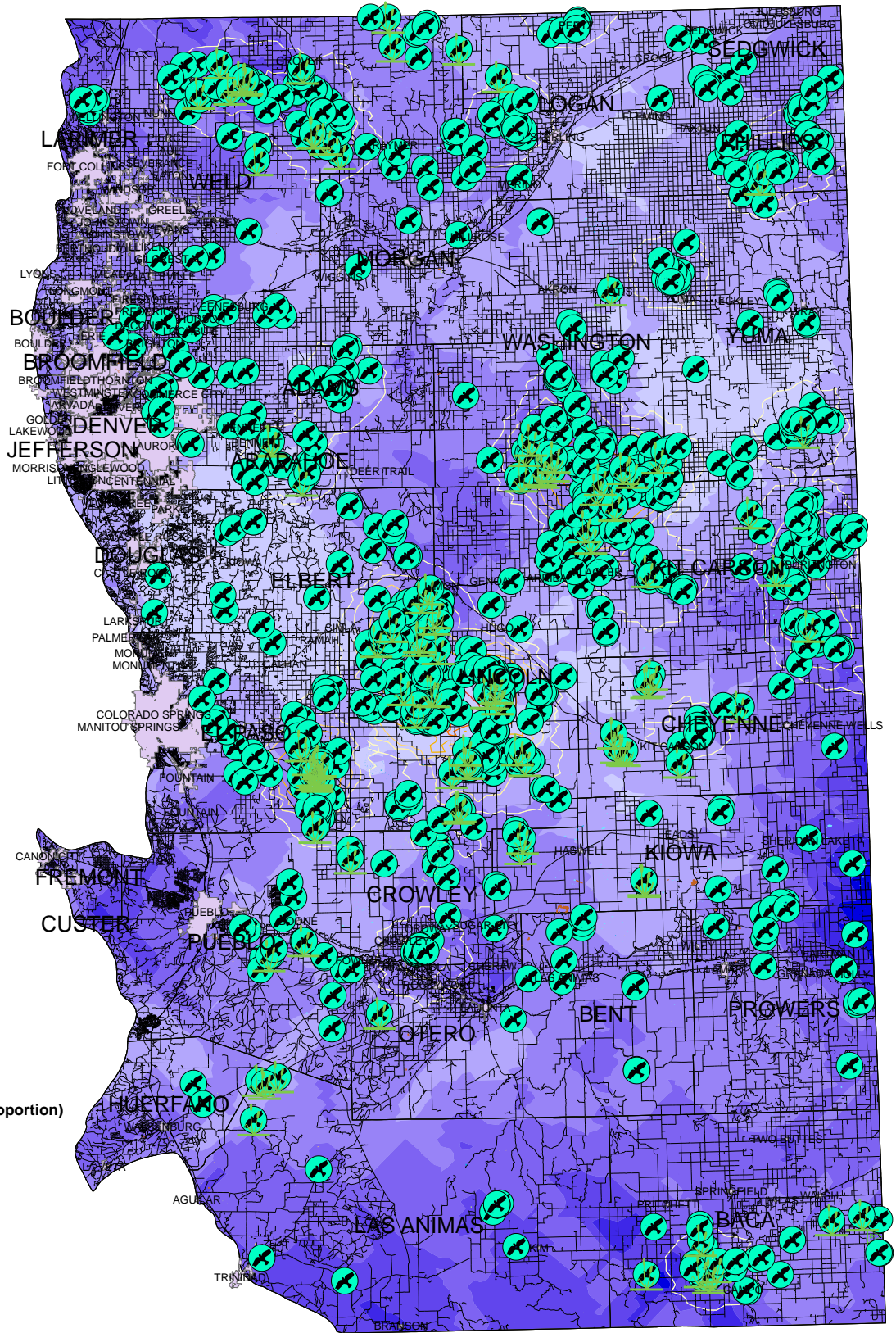
- < 2
- 2 - 3
- 3 - 4
- 4 - 5
- 5 - 6
- 6 - 7
- > 7

## Playas in Grassland (proportion)

- 0.1 - 0.2
- 0.2 - 0.4
- 0.4 - 0.6
- 0.6 - 0.8
- 0.8 - 1.0

## Playas Hydrologically Modified (proportion)

- < 0.1
- 0.1 - 0.2
- 0.2 - 0.3
- 0.3 - 0.4
- 0.4 - 0.5
- 0.5 - 0.6
- 0.6 - 0.7



Created by Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory  
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[www.rmbo.org](http://www.rmbo.org)