Low lying areas in fields that periodically fill with water after rainstorms and create farming challenges are often locally referred to as lagoons or buffalo wallows. These shallow water areas can be difficult to farm, are never dry when the rest of the field is scheduled to be worked and only occasionally produce a crop.

A landowner workshop is scheduled Tuesday, Nov. 27 from 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Phillips County Event Center in Holyoke.

Jerry Miller, Farm Bill biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service/Colorado Parks and Wildlife/Pheasants Forever, will host a landowner workshop to help landowners learn how to protect and restore playas while improving their net profit per acre.

The conservation challenge is ensuring these playas receive water, but not sediment, fertilizer and herbicides that can be carried into them by runoff across exposed cropland-—sediment that over time results in shallower or even vanishing wetlands.

This challenge can be met by enrolling the playa acres and a protective buffer into programs designed to help landowners square up the areas so farming operations are more efficient and high priced inputs are not applied to those acres.

Over the past several decades, researchers have gathered substantial evidence pointing to playa lakes as the primary source of recharge for the Ogallala Aquifer.

This is big news for Phillips and Sedgwick counties which have relied on pumping the Ogallala for agricultural, municipal and industrial use since the early 1900s.

Since about 99 percent of playa lakes are located on private land, this information is crucial for farmers, ranchers and natural resource managers who hope to conserve water and maintain agricultural economies of the region.

In an area where there are no permanent rivers or streams and that only receives 14-18 inches of rain per year, playas are also important because they store water. Consequently, playas support an astounding array of wildlife.

Migrating waterfowl are commonly seen around playas at different times of the year. Shore birds feast on the many invertebrates found in the muddy shoreline. Mayflies, dragonflies, salamanders, hawks, pheasants, deer, turkeys and many other animals can be found at playa lakes.

Because playa lakes support such a wide variety of animals, they contribute significantly to the biodiversity of the High Plains and provide valuable wildlife habitat.

Resource professionals from the Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Pheasants Forever, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Natural Resources Conservation Service will present information on how playas function, programs available to landowners to help restore playas located in agricultural fields and rangeland, how these programs can be blended into a landowner's operation and how taking the playas out of production and seeding them to permanent vegetative cover will create excellent wildlife habitat.

Please RSVP to Jerry Miller at 970-580-5028 or jmiller@pheasantsforever.org to attend the landowner workshop. A landowner help desk where landowners can identify playas on their property and discuss potential restoration options will be available.

Holyoke Enterprise November 15, 2012