

Understanding social factors to foster participation and post-program management behavior in the Conservation Reserve Program

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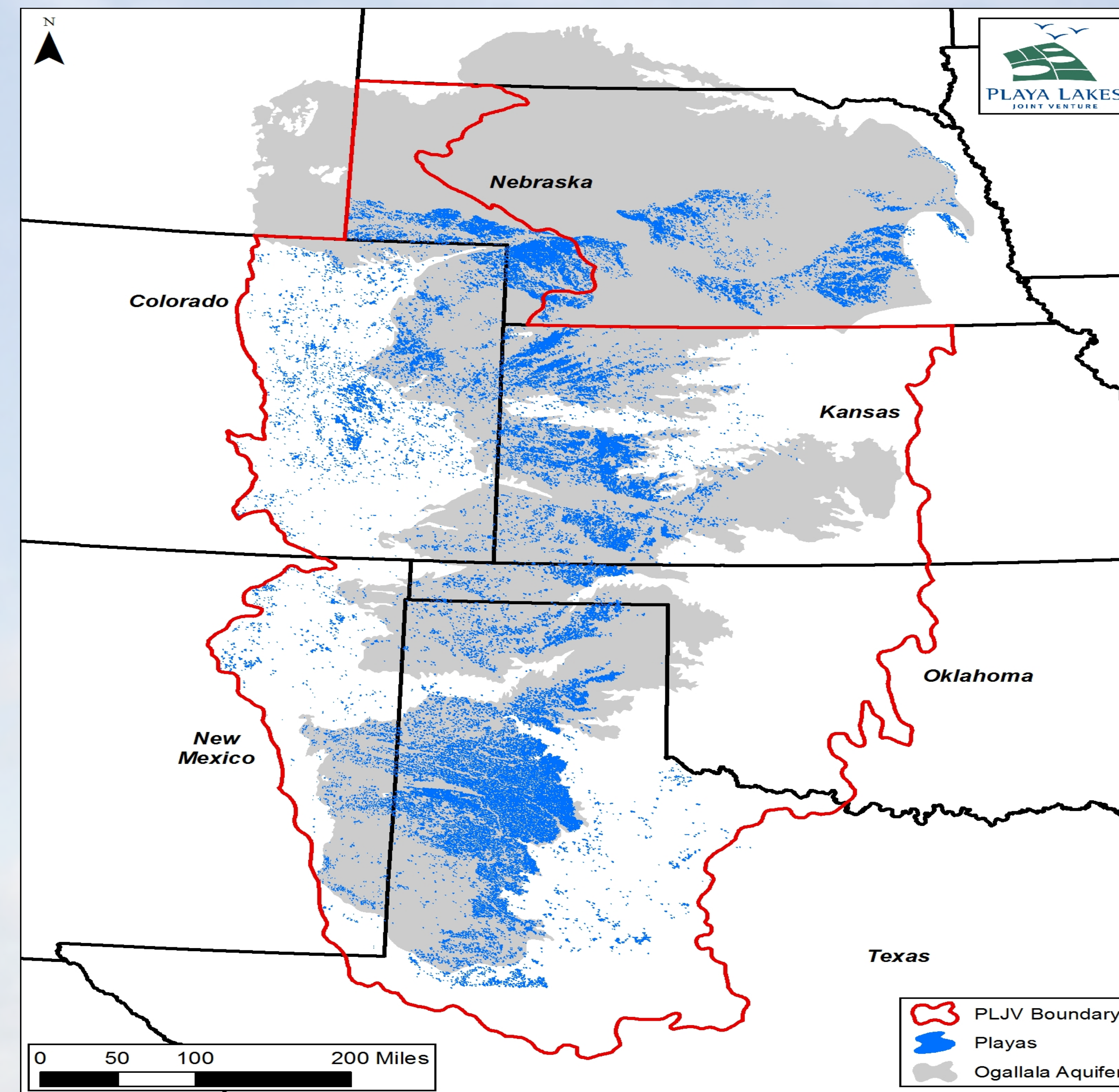


COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
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The Playa Lakes Region

- ❖ The **Playa Lakes region** (outlined in red on map to the right) runs across parts of six states in the western Great Plains (CO, KS, NE, NM, OK, TX)
- ❖ Playas are shallow, temporary wetlands that collect runoff
- ❖ Highest number of playas in western Great Plains
- ❖ Playas and surrounding grasslands are important for plants, wildlife, and people because they provide habitat, recharge the Ogallala Aquifer and improve water quality

- ❖ Cropland conversion and other development can threaten playa function and quality



The High Plains and the Conservation Reserve Program

- ❖ The **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** is the largest private lands conservation program in the United States administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency and works to create vital wildlife habitat by paying producers a yearly rental payment to remove cropland from production and restore grasslands and playas.
- ❖ Two-thirds of CRP acres in Playa Lakes region are due to expire between 2020-2022, potentially leading to loss of habitat

To maintain the conservation benefits of these acres we need to understand producer decision-making and behaviors both during and after CRP participation

Research Objectives

- ❖ Why do landowners participate in CRP?
- ❖ Do those who no longer participate in CRP continue to manage their land consistent with CRP guidelines?
- ❖ What do landowners need that would help catalyze stewardship behavior after CRP contracts end?

Focus groups

We are exploring our 3 research objectives using **focus groups, mail surveys, and interviews/observations.**

3 focus groups (7-12 producers each) were completed with landowners currently enrolled in CRP to inform mail surveys

Factors important to CRP enrollment and intended post-CRP land management include:

- ❖ **Income** from land, as part of entire land management portfolio
- ❖ **Flexibility and autonomy** in CRP management decisions
- ❖ **Natural resource components** of fields such as erodibility and slope
- ❖ **Behavioral inertia**, keeping the land in grass is often easier than converting back to crop production

Survey

Based on results from the focus groups, we designed and will distribute **2 mail surveys** to landowners in Spring 2018

1. Survey of private landowners who are enrolled in CRP

- ❖ Motivations for enrolling
- ❖ Intention to re-enroll or continue managing for grass and/or playas after CRP contracts end
- ❖ Role of stewardship motivations and other variables in predicting intended management behavior

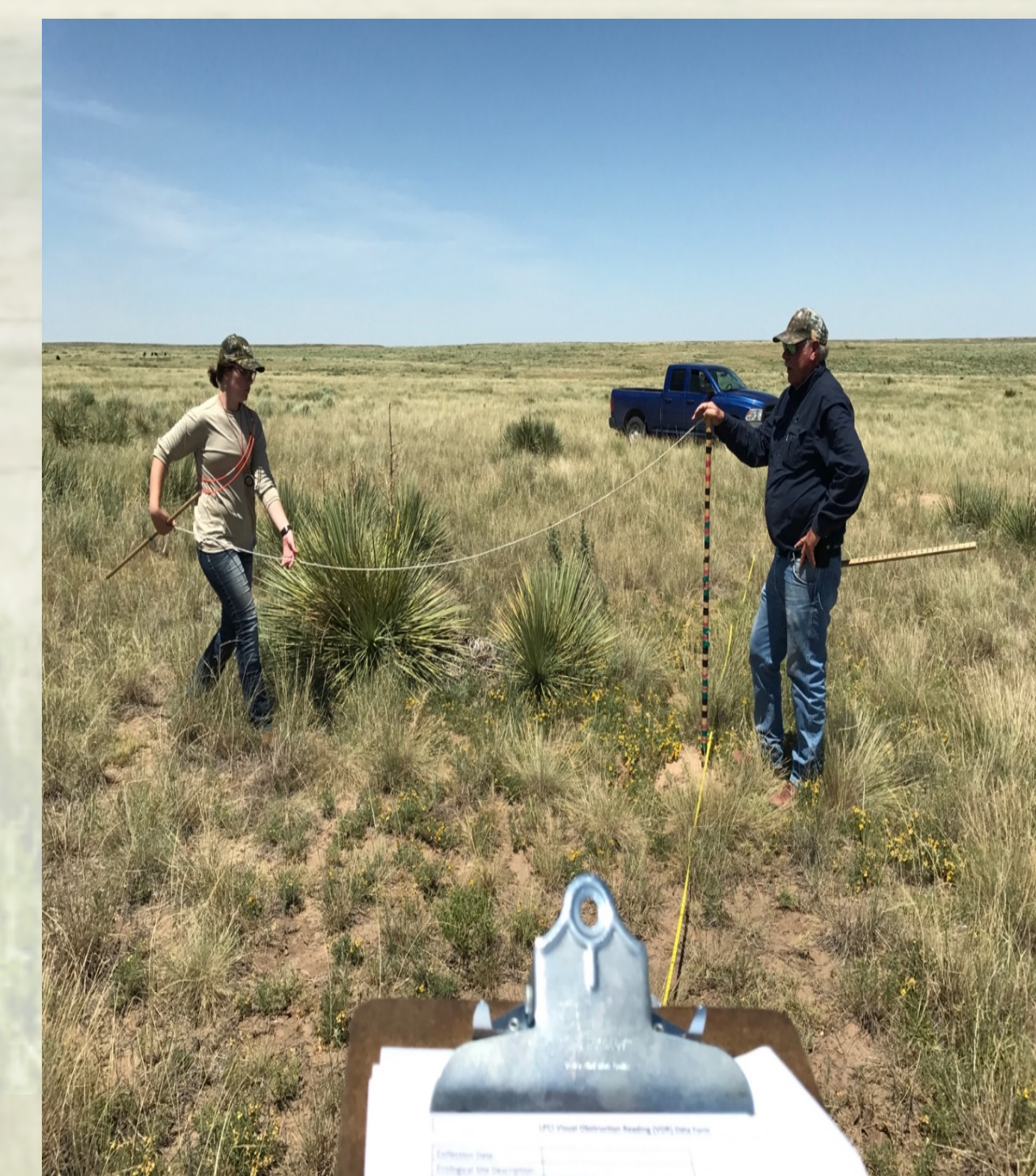
2. Landowners who have left CRP within the last 5 years

- ❖ Reasons for leaving program
- ❖ Extent of continuation of grass and playa management post-CRP
- ❖ Role of stewardship motivations and other variables in determining post-CRP management behavior

Interviews and Observations

Field work was also completed Summer/Fall 2017 in SW Kansas and SE Colorado to understand producer CRP needs through interviews

- ❖ Producers value CRP for guaranteed income, erosion control, and improved habitat.
- ❖ Land tends to be kept in CRP if it is 'poor' farmground and is re-cultivated if 'good' farmground



Management Implications

- ❖ Enhance the conservation benefits of CRP beyond the life of the contract
- ❖ Increase effectiveness of conservation delivery strategies to:
 - ❖ Recruit and retain landowners in CRP and other conservation programs
 - ❖ Promote continued grass and playa management after programs end

