



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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PRIVATE SECTOR TEAMS UP WITH GOVERNMENT TO SAVE VITAL WATERFOWL HABITAT

The Phillips Petroleum Company has joined with other private and public partners, including the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, to launch a 5-year, \$1.3 million program to preserve and enhance vital waterfowl habitat in the southwestern United States.

Phillips will donate \$125,000 annually through 1994 to the Playa Lakes Joint Venture to protect about 25,000 wet basins, called playas, in 84 contiguous counties of New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado. The playas serve as crossroads for 32 species of ducks, geese, and swans during their fall and spring migrations.

The five states collectively will match the Phillips contribution. Ducks Unlimited and the National Wildlife Federation, private conservation groups, also are partners in the Playa Lakes program. Ducks Unlimited will match the Phillips funding and contribute that amount in Phillips' name to waterfowl enhancement in Canada.

The Playa Lakes project is the seventh and newest joint venture in the United States created under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The plan was created in 1986 by the United States and Canada to try to stop the destruction of wetlands and stem the decline in waterfowl numbers in North America.

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Partners in the 15-year operation, which will cost an estimated \$1.5 billion, are the U.S. and Canadian Federal Governments, the states and provinces, and more than 40 private conservation groups and companies.

"The Playa Lakes project is especially gratifying," said Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Turner, "because it exemplifies the private and government partnership so vital to the North American Plan. The Bush Administration is committed to preserving and enhancing vital waterfowl habitat."

Turner added, "The Phillips contribution is one of the largest donations for a wetland conservation project under the plan and will protect the best of the playa lakes area, benefitting the many wildlife species dependent on them."

The money will give environmental agencies in each state and landowners in the Playa Lakes region resources to keep the habitat properly irrigated in order to accommodate the birds' migrating habits.

"In addition to the funds, we will supply manpower and technology for specific needs of the program as they arise," said John Whitmire, vice president of North America exploration and production for Phillips. "This is an extension of our long-standing environmental commitment. We want to keep learning how to be better stewards of the land and implement what we learn."

As many as 2.8 million ducks, 750,000 geese, and 450,000 sandhill cranes winter in the Playa Lakes region. About 99 percent of the lakes are privately owned.

"The cooperation and participation of landowners in the Playa Lakes region is critical to the success of this project," said Bruce Morrison, chairman of the Playa Lakes Joint Venture Steering Commission and assistant division chief of habitat, environment, and lands for the New Mexico Game and Fish Department. "We'll work hand in hand with landowners, without impeding their businesses, to help the waterfowl habitat flourish."