

Wetlands in Western Kansas to be Focus of Fall Conference

Overview

The annual fall conference will be held on the campus of Barton County Community College in Great Bend, KS Saturday, September 20, 2003. The campus is located north of Great Bend at 245 NE 30th road. Wetlands have been described as one of the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs. An incredible diversity of microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish, and mammals can be part of a wetland ecosystem. Physical and chemical features such as climate, landscape, geology, and the movement and abundance of water determine the types of organisms and their life history. Human impact also plays a significant role in wetland dynamics making them good systems for biocomplexity studies.

Playa lakes are unique, freshwater wetlands found in the High Plains region. The Playa Lakes Region includes approximately 89.5 million acres of southwest Kansas, southeastern Colorado, the Panhandle of Oklahoma, eastern New Mexico, and the panhandle of Texas. Estimates of the number of playas range from 25,000 to 37,000. Playas provide more than 395,000 acres of wetland habitat but they occupy only 2% of the total landscape. Playas are the principle native habitat for wildlife in the region because of the intensive agriculture surrounding them (Haukos and Smith 1994). The Playa Lakes Area in western Kansas is part of the Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV) with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Dr. Dave Haukos, wildlife biologist, and Dr. Julie Thomas, College of Education, both at Texas Tech University, have developed a research and educational outreach program based on playa lakes ecology. Their presentation will address the biology of playa lakes, current research, and the opportunities for students and teachers in the classroom. They will share their experiences with Math the Science Way: High Plains Ecology, a year long project with Lubbock Independent School District classroom teachers who studied playa ecology and explored the activities in the Playa Teaching Trunks (developed by the PLJV). Supported by Eisenhower Professional Development Funds, this integrated math, science, and technology project helped teachers and their students identify the mathematics applications in regional ecological concepts.

Another wetland activity at the conference will be an **afternoon field trip to the 7300 acre Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve** about 5 minutes northeast of the Barton County Community College campus. Nearly one-half of all North American shorebirds migrating east of the Rocky Mountains and up to one-quarter million waterfowl stop at Cheyenne Bottoms to rest and feed during seasonal migrations. The shallow marshes averaging less than one foot deep are ideal habitats for wading shorebirds. More bird species are seen here than anywhere else in the state. Of the 415 bird species known to Kansas, 320 species have been observed at Cheyenne Bottoms. Tens of thousands of common shorebirds like sandpipers, plovers, phalaropes, avocets, godwits and dowitchers stop at the Bottoms to feed on the mud flats. Waterfowl can be seen throughout the year. During migration, numbers can climb to 250,000 ducks and geese.

In addition to wetland biology, there will be one session dealing with articulation between high school, community college, and university biology courses. Michelle Schoon, Natural Science Chair at Cowley County Community

College, Brad Williamson, Olathe High School, and Todd Carter, Math and Science Chair at Seward County Community College will be panel members for a discussion exploring how educational institutions at all levels (K-16) might cooperate in ways that increase student success and student learning in biology. Michelle is the coordinator for the Kansas Undergraduate Biology Outcomes Project, a partnership between community colleges and Regent's Universities, which has developed core outcomes for non-majors biology and is currently working on core outcomes for majors courses. Brad Williamson is currently a biology teacher at Olathe East High School and was a member of the Kansas Science Standards committee. Todd Carter also worked on the Undergraduate Biology Outcomes Project and is the President-Elect for KABT. The purpose of this session is primarily informational and to evaluate whether KABT can serve as an organizational model for K-16 articulation in Kansas.

Wetlands Resources

[Playa Lakes Joint Venture](http://www.pljv.org/) - <http://www.pljv.org/>

The sight has background and current project information. Also an aerial photo of wet playas in the Kismet, KS area after 8 inches of rainfall on May 17th, 2003.

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service five wetland joint venture projects](http://www.r6.fws.gov/nawm/nawmp.html) in the Mountain-Prairie region. <http://www.r6.fws.gov/nawm/nawmp.html>

Common Flora of the Playa Lakes by David A. Haukos and Loren M. Smith

Kansas Wetlands, A Wildlife Treasury by Joseph T. Collins, Suzanne L. Collins, and Bob Gress

Cheyenne Bottoms: Wetland in Jeopardy by John L. Zimmerman

Proposed Agenda

- 6:00 7:00 AM Breakfast at Camp Aldrich
- 7:00 8:00 AM Birding and Wilderness Hike at Camp Aldrich
- 9:00 9:30 AM Registration
- 9:30 10:30 AM Session 1 - Articulation
- 10:30 11:00 AM Intermission
- 11:00 11:30 AM Session 2 Cheyenne Bottoms Presentation
- 11:30 12:00 PM KABT General Session
- 12:00 1:00 PM Introductions, Lunch, Presentations
- 1:00 2:30 PM Cheyenne Bottoms Field Trip

Food and Accommodations

Friday night lodging is available at Camp Aldrich Conference Center at no charge to registered participants (RSVP required). Camp Aldrich is located two miles north of Highway 156 between Claflin, Kansas and the Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve. This area is the most comprehensively developed camp-site in Kansas. The 290 acres of rolling sand dunes and 40 acres of heavily wooded preserve have 70 species of wild flowers and grasses, 57 species of birds, plus native reptile, amphibian, and mammal species. Martin and Trails End lodges are reserved for KABT use. The lodges have

central heat and air, restroom and shower, kitchen facilities, and a fireplace with a sleeping capacity of 40 each. Linens and towels are not provided.

All conference activities on Saturday will be held in the Math and Science Building on the Barton County Community College campus. Fresh fruit, danish, and drinks will be provided during registration and breaks. The noon meal is also included in the registration fee.

Registration

Members: \$15.00

Non-members: \$25.00

Conference plus 1 year KABT membership: \$30.00

We need to have a head count for food and beverages so RSVP by September 12, 2003 to Todd Carter at Seward County Community College.

Email: tcarter@sccc.edu Phone: 800-373-9951 ext. 643. Please indicate if you will be spending Friday night at Camp Aldrich.

How do I get there?

A [map](http://www.barton.cc.ks.us/maps/images/hiwaymap_web.pdf) with all highways leading to the campus is available at http://www.barton.cc.ks.us/maps/images/hiwaymap_web.pdf.

Barton County Community College [Campus Map](http://www.barton.cc.ks.us/maps/images/campusmap.pdf) -

<http://www.barton.cc.ks.us/maps/images/campusmap.pdf>

The Math and Science Building is #7 located in the northeast corner of campus.

Camp Aldrich Convention Center

From US 56 turn north on KS 156 10.3 miles to NE 110 Ave. Turn left on NE 110 Ave. 0.7 miles to Camp Aldrich. From KS 4 turn south on KS 156 for 4.6 miles. Bear right on NE 80 RD for 0.3 miles. Turn right on NE 110 Ave 0.4 miles to Camp Aldrich.
