

Take a Playa Lakes Road Trip

The vast majority of playa lakes are located on private property, but there are a few situated on public land. In addition, many private-land playas are viewable from public roads.

Perhaps the best way to take in Oklahoma's playa lakes is a tour of the Great Plains Trail playa lakes loop. The loop is around 75 miles long and begins on SH 136 north out of Guymon. Drive north to SH 7, turn east and drive nine miles to the loop's first stop, McKinley Playa.

After viewing McKinley Playa, drive east into Hooker, turn south on SH 94 to reach Balzar Playa.

Continue south to Optima National Wildlife Refuge and Optima Lake.

While not a naturally-formed playa lake, the failed reservoir is perhaps the most impressive man-made playa in the world and shares many of their characteristics. When it contains water, the shallow basin at the base of the dam draws impressive numbers and varieties of birds.

When finished with Optima, follow the wildlife trail signs and take the paved road north to US 64 and travel east of Hooker to County Road NS58. Go south one mile, turn east and follow the signs to the Lunceford Playa, an 18-acre playa gem owned and operated by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. In operation since 1992, the Lunceford Playa is a previously-farmed 18-acre playa beautifully restored to its native state.

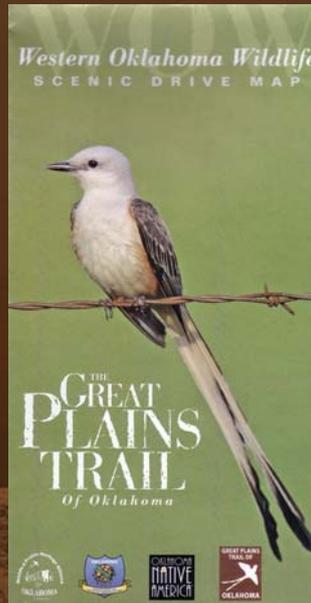
From the Lunceford Playa, go east 1.3 miles to Flynt Playa. Turn left on the next road and view the prairie dog town by US 64. From there travel west to County

Road HS58, go north four miles, turn west and go one mile to what's known locally as the Old Railroad Crossing. You can get out and walk the right-of-way which overlooks a playa.

In addition, countless other playas dot the Oklahoma landscape and are easily viewable from the road. Like a shimmering necklace spanning an arc from Harper County in northwest Oklahoma all the way to the corner of Cimarron County in the panhandle, these nameless playas offer solitude and beauty for those willing to seek them out. Inquiring at local gathering places can often yield tips and locations.

There are, however, some guidelines to follow when seeking out these hidden treasures. Trespassing and littering are both greatly frowned upon, and both are also illegal. If you find a playa close to the road, don't be tempted to cross the fence without permission. If you do get permission, make sure you leave gates as you found them. Nothing irritates a rancher more than an open gate where there shouldn't be. Binoculars and/or spotting scopes are essential gear for right-of-way observation.

This is big country and sparsely populated. Rattlesnakes are common, so watch your step. Rattlers will generally try to avoid you and they only ask you return the favor. Keep an eye on the weather, most roads are passable by car, but can quickly turn into a quagmire after even a brief rain. Having an inflated spare is a good idea, too. Actually knowing how to change it is an even better one. Carry extra water on hot days and enjoy a beauty often unseen. 🌿



Call the Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance at (580) 735-2322 to find out where to pick up one of the new Great Plains Trail maps, which includes a detailed Playa Lakes Loop. For more information about seasonal playa conditions call Danny Watson, biologist at Beaver River & Optima WMAs, at (580) 259-6281.