



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge
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For questions regarding crystal digging or other recreational opportunities, please choose Option 3 on voicemail main menu or email Emily_Neidigh@FWS.GOV

Crystal Digging Area Update

Most Recent Update: July 16, 2007

Current Update: The Crystal Digging Area is still closed at this time. It will remain closed for the remainder of the 2007 season. Tests, surveys, etc will not be completed before October.

Thank you for your understanding.

To learn more about the vials, please feel free to view the following websites:
<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/Library/Explosives/UXOSafety/cais.html>

June 20, 2007: The Crystal Digging Area is still closed at this time. The problem with reopening now is that there were no records of anything ever being buried on the salt flats. Therefore, we do not know what else may be out there, without records. We cannot open the area without reasonable assurance that there will be no harm to the public. The entire area generally open to the public must be surveyed.

The Army Corp of Engineers recently tested several different types of technology (ground penetrating, varying types of detectors, etc) and have not yet found anything that works on the salt flats.

Investigations are still underway.

June 4, 2007: The Crystal Digging Area is still closed at this time. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is collecting bids to expand and cleanup the immediate site under investigation. In addition, ground-penetrating radar is being tested to see if it would detect glass vials under the sand and salt. That knowledge will help us in determining the process for checking the remainder of the dig areas.

May 24, 2007: The Crystal Digging Area is still closed at this time. We are working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to investigate the area. As soon as we have reasonable assurance that the area is safe for the public, we will make the announcement via this website and official news releases.

-----For Release: May 2, 2007

Contact: Victoria Fox, 505-248-6455 or Elizabeth Slown, 505-248-6909

PUBLIC SAFETY ANNOUNCEMENT

Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge Crystal Site Remains Closed

Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge's selenite crystal site remains closed as members of the A-team from the Army's 22d Chemical Battalion (Technical Escort) continue their support of the recovery of vials from chemical agent identification sets (CAIS) used until the 1960s for safely training soldiers in the identification of chemical agents.

As of April 30, approximately 130 intact CAIS vials have been recovered. Each vial contains one of four chemicals. These training sets were not designed to be lethal, but may cause a variety of irritations. To date, a final determination of the content of each vial has not been made. Once identified, the vials will be disposed of per applicable state and federal laws.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is encouraging people who may have collected CAIS vials or military munitions as souvenirs from the salt plain or other sites to notify their local law enforcement agency so they can be safely recovered and destroyed. Having these items places you, your family and your neighbors at risk. To protect yourself, your family and your neighbors, do not keep these as souvenirs, and learn the 3Rs (RECOGNIZE—that you may have a CAIS or munition, RETREAT—do not touch, disturb, or move it, REPORT—call 911).

Refuge Manager Jon Brock stated, "Public safety remains our first and foremost concern and turning in these items with a complete and open amnesty can avert a potential incident."

For photos and further information on CAIS visit the Department of Defense UXO Safety site at: <http://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/Library/Explosives/UXOSafety/cais.html>. Information about Formerly Used Defense Sites can be found at: eko.usace.army.mil/usacecop/pub/ecop/what_we_do/fuds/ or call the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Public Affairs Office at 202-528-4285.

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Contacts Victoria Fox, 580-626-4794 x 113

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touch, disturb, or move it, REPORT - call 911). Refuge Manager Jon Brock stated, "Public safety remains our first and foremost concern and turning in these items with a complete and open amnesty can avert a potential incident."

The site of discovery is a formerly used defense site (FUDS) - the former Great Salt Plains Bombing Range near Cherokee, Oklahoma.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov>.

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-----For Release: April 24, 2007

Contact: Victoria Fox, 505-248-6455 or Elizabeth Slown, 505-248-6909

Salt Plains Refuge Temporarily Closes Crystal Digging Site

Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in central-northern Oklahoma has temporarily closed its popular crystal-digging fields to public access due to a recent discovery of vials containing unknown substances.

Several glass vials were unearthed by a boy digging for hourglass-shaped selenite crystals in a public area on the refuge. One vial broke and caused the child's eyes to temporarily sting. The Refuge remains in contact with the boy's parents and reports the child is doing well with no apparent effects. After the child's parents reported the incident, Jon Brock, refuge manager, closed the public digging site and requested assistance from the Army.

A team from the Army's 22d Chemical Battalion (Technical Escort) will arrive on the site to assess the vials and determine their contents. Based on that assessment, the team will determine the appropriate disposition of the items. The U.S. Army Air Corps used the salt flats on Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge as a practice bombing and gunnery range from 1942 to 1946.

The crystal digging sites will remain closed until officials deem them safe to reopen.

The annual Birding and Crystal Festival to be held April 27 through 29 will continue although the crystal digging portions will be cancelled due to investigation.

Selenite is a crystallized form of gypsum. On the Salt Plains, crystals form just below the salt encrusted surface. They are seldom found deeper than two feet below the surface. The salt flats have always been a tourist attraction because they are so unusual. Each year, more than 30,000 people recreationally dig for crystals on the refuge from April to October. This is the first time anything other than crystals have been found.

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