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### **CSAW to host Southern Plains Conference examining “Sense of Place”**

Canyon, Texas—On February 22-23, 2018, the Center for the Study of the American West (CSAW) at West Texas A&M University will partner with nonprofit education and leadership organization Ogallala Commons to bring the Southern Plains Conference to the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon, Texas. The conference invites 14 speakers who will consider this year’s theme, “Shaping a Sense of Place on the Southern Plains,” from various disciplinary and professional perspectives.

Featured speakers at the conference include Shelley Armitage, author of “Walking the Llano”; Andy Wilkinson, poet/song-writer and artist-in-residence at the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University; and Amy Hale Auker, author of “Rightful Place,” “Winter of Beauty” and “Ordinary Skin.” Conference attendees will also experience the photographic and video art of Jim Livingston through an exhibit titled, “Expanse.”

In addition to these presenters, the conference will welcome speakers from around the Southern Plains region—Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Kansas—including Amarillo residents Jay O’Brien, AJ Fawver and Wayne Hughes. These speakers will approach the theme of “Sense of Place” through discussions of agriculture, ranching, the oil/gas industry, education, regional history and other topics. The conference will also feature a panel of WTAMU faculty from diverse disciplines, including Michael Grauer from art history, Byron Pearson from western and environmental history, Bonney MacDonald from American literature and Ray Matlack from wildlife biology.

Attendees may register for the conference online at <http://www.wtamu.edu/museum/csaw-southernplains.aspx>. Tickets are available for \$30, which includes both days of the conference, a dessert reception on Thursday as well as lunch and refreshments on Friday. WTAMU students may attend free of charge.

In 2003, Ogallala Commons, directed by Darryl Birkenfeld, Ph.D., took over the Southern Plains Conference and produced it annually until its discontinuation in 2013. During that time, the conferences focused on themes of the “Twelve Key Assets of Commonwealth” (<https://ogallalacommons.org/about/commonwealth/>), which include the water cycle, history, spirituality, soil and mineral cycle, education, arts and culture, energy and the natural environment. This year, CSAW director Alex Hunt is collaborating with Birkenfeld and Ogallala Commons to reinstate the Southern Plains Conference as a biannual event held at WTAMU.

CSAW’s role in reviving the Southern Plains Conference seemed a natural fit, explains CSAW director Alex Hunt.

“We wanted to develop a conference focused on regional studies, and when Ogallala Commons proposed this partnership, it seemed like a great opportunity,” Hunt said.

Hunt also found the conference and theme, “Sense of Place,” timely.

“I think a lot about social and environmental challenges facing our region, which are significant. I see a lot of younger people who do not feel strongly connected to the region, many of whom feel that their opportunity in life will be someplace else. This conference speaks to those issues,” Hunt said. “It also ties in well to President Wendler’s WT125 initiative, which is calling for a long range view of the relationship between WT and the region.”

For more information or to register for the conference, please visit <http://www.wtamu.edu/museum/csaw-southernplains.aspx>. All questions may be directed to Alex Hunt at [ahunt@wtamu.edu](mailto:ahunt@wtamu.edu).

### **About the Center for the Study of the American West**

CSAW formed in the fall of 2016 with a mission of fostering the study of the American West at WTAMU and building bridges between the university, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum and the regional populace. CSAW seeks to promote the American West both as a culturally unique region and a product of broad historical forces. Through this endeavor, CSAW remains dedicated to cultivating a critical vision of region and place in a globalized era. For more information about CSAW, please visit [wtamu.edu/csaw](http://wtamu.edu/csaw).

### **About Ogallala Commons**

Ogallala Commons, Inc., is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization providing education and leadership to build vibrant communities in the Great Plains region. Their service area is centered over the High Plains-Ogallala Aquifer, but also extends west into the Rocky Mountains region and east to the river-braided prairies. For more information about the mission of Ogallala Commons, please visit [ogallalacommons.org](http://ogallalacommons.org).

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