

# Klamath Basin Initiative 2023 Report

## A Message from Jeff McCreary

Ducks Unlimited Director of Operations, Western Region

### A wetland-focused future is taking shape in the Klamath Basin

In 2023, California saw heavy rain and snow soak away a years-long drought. Unfortunately, the Klamath Basin was one of the few western landscapes that missed out on any record-breaking precipitation. So, hardship continued this year for the people and for the waterfowl that depend on it being healthy.

Despite the ongoing challenges, Team DU continues building a wetlands-focused future for this region that's so important to the millions of waterfowl and the other birds of the Pacific Flyway. Over the past year, Ducks Unlimited made gains and tangible progress towards a future where wetlands once again are the foundation of the Klamath Basin.

There is perhaps not a more contentious water allocation system in this country than the Klamath Irrigation Project. Tribes, farmers and ranchers, refuges, and regulators have for decades struggled to find common ground over how much water goes to what usage. Limited water supplies due to drought, exacerbated by Endangered Species Act policies, have mostly dried out Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge and its sister refuge, Lower Klamath, our nation's first national refuge for waterfowl.

***But I believe a Klamath Basin future centered around wetlands is beginning to come into focus, thanks in large part to Ducks Unlimited's efforts over the past year.***

Ducks Unlimited leadership is a central component of our strategic approach: rehydrate the refuges by using them to help recover endangered fish. Since water flows towards fish, let's put fish in the refuge wetlands to get that water; the ducks won't even know the difference. Our aim is to bring together Tribes, local farming groups, refuge staff, and federal and state leaders around a future based on wetlands. We've learned in our outreach that we all see pretty much the same thing: the current system isn't working. Endangered fish continue to struggle, and, as a result, water supplies continue to be unpredictable and insufficient.

The good news is the Basin's longtime adversaries, each in their own way, are beginning to coalesce around a bold, collaborative vision for a better future. Thanks to Ducks Unlimited's leadership, the groups are beginning to see healthy refuge wetlands as key to bringing Klamath Basin fish back from the brink of extinction and putting an end to decades of intractable conflict. I'm filled with hope that waterfowl will soon fill Klamath Basin skies once again.

DU is uniquely positioned to be the trusted partner as this future takes shape. No other nonprofit has built the relationships and broad trust that DU has earned in the Klamath Basin. As *the World Leader in Wetlands Conservation*, our track record of restoring and protecting wetlands in and out of the Klamath Basin is equally unmatched. **Several major Klamath Basin projects completed, underway or breaking ground soon highlight DU's unwavering commitment to the people and wildlife of the Klamath Basin.**

Building a wetland-focused future for the Klamath Basin won't be easy after so many years of hardship and conflict, but we can do it. We *are* doing it. And with your help, we will succeed.

Please take a few minutes to learn more. We look forward to keeping you posted on our progress.

*Thank you!*

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## Key accomplishments – 2022/2023

### Leadership and Coalition Building:

DU met regularly with the various groups involved with Klamath Basin water management to discuss wetland restoration. DU spent a week in the summer of 2023 on the lower Klamath River meeting with Yurok and Karuk tribal leadership and their science teams to discuss plans for using upper basin wetlands for fish recovery and ecosystem restoration. Now that four dams on the Klamath River are being removed, migratory fish that are sacred to the tribes will reach their traditional spawning habitat for the first time in more than 100 years. This creates an opportunity to use water differently in the Basin. DU also met several times with the Klamath Tribes of the Upper Klamath Basin to further build our relationship by discussing promising collaboration opportunities. Ducks Unlimited also held monthly meetings with farming groups in the Klamath Basin to discuss wetland restoration and collaboration opportunities for getting water to the refuges. Our approach is building our political capital through our leadership and finding a way to bring the parties together by using the Klamath Basin refuges to aid in the recovery of endangered C'waam and Koptu sucker fish.

### Projects:

#### *Barnes-Agency Restoration Project*

On Upper Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, DU is starting work on the Barnes-Agency Restoration Project, a more than 14,000-acre wetland restoration project that will benefit fish, water quality, and waterfowl. This is the largest single wetland restoration project DU has ever done in the Western Region, and it enjoys broad support from the Klamath Basin's Native American tribes.

#### *Lower Klamath and Tule Lake pumping stations*

This spring, Unit 2 on Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge received water thanks to a pumping station DU recently installed. DU is installing four more pumps, two on Lower Klamath and two on Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the months ahead. The two new pumps on Lower Klamath will make additional agricultural drain water available to the refuge for wetlands. The two new pumps at Tule Lake will improve management capabilities within the wetland units while still allowing agricultural operations.



#### *Shasta Valley improvements*

In 2023, DU replaced the outlet structure on a dam at the Shasta Valley Wildlife Area and improved a levee on a seasonal wetland unit. The 4,700-acre wildlife area in the Klamath Basin is managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, which funded DU's work.

#### *Tule Lake NWR Infrastructure Assessment*

Work continues on this multi-year assessment to determine the physical, environmental, social, and political components of changing the landscape of Tule Lake. DU is developing a grant proposal for Wetland Conservation Board (WCB) funding to assess the infrastructure necessary to more effectively and efficiently manage wetland units and improve agricultural suitability for the long term.

#### *Lower Klamath NWR Unit 2/3 Water Conveyance Assessment*

Progress also continues on the Unit 2/3 Water Conveyance Assessment, a major project that will streamline water delivery and improve water management capabilities for the Lower Klamath National

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Wildlife Refuge. The assessment will be completed in spring 2024, and staff is working to submit a grant proposal to WCB for construction funding.

## *Duck Hospital*

Ducks Unlimited once again teamed with Bird Ally X to fund the duck hospital and was ready to respond in the event of a botulism outbreak. Fortunately, the hospital was not needed as an outbreak did not occur thanks to water conservation efforts by Tulelake Irrigation District. DU will continue to partner with Bird Ally X as needed to combat future outbreaks.

## *Private Agricultural Lands:*

The Klamath Basin Farming and Wetland Collaborative Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) received a \$3.8 million USDA Farm Bill grant in 2022 to implement conservation projects that provide temporary habitat for migrating waterfowl on working agricultural lands. The RCPP grant offers financial incentives for agricultural producers to meet critical habitat requirements, providing short-term relief for migratory birds. Landowners receive payments to either leave standing grain or to fall/winter flood their fields. To date, we have allocated over \$1.2 million in incentives to provide habitat over the next several years, with more expected to be enrolled in the coming months. DU also continues to collaborate with private landowners on other working lands projects vital to migratory waterfowl in the region.



## **Our Flyway, Our Challenge**

### **Thank you!**

Your gifts to Ducks Unlimited continue to make a difference. DU invests at least 80 cents of every dollar in our conservation mission and in fiscal year 2023, our efficiency was 83%. Your contributions help to secure the future of wetlands and waterfowl here in the Pacific Flyway and across the continent. *Thank you* for your support and investment.

### **To support, contact:**

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*Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.*