



May 2, 2023

Mr. Basil Ibewiro  
 Watershed Restoration Grants Branch  
 California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
[Basil.Ibewiro@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Basil.Ibewiro@wildlife.ca.gov)

**RE: Support for Klamath Refuge Water Deliveries Grant Proposals**

Dear Mr. Ibewiro:

Our organizations would like to offer our support of two water grant applications recently submitted to your office that would help fund annual water deliveries to managed wetlands at the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge: “Lower Klamath Refuge Water Deliveries” (ID #1729495) and “Lower Klamath NWR Water Rights Acquisition” (ID #1730140).

The Refuge, which was established by President Theodore Roosevelt back in 1908 as the nation’s first waterfowl refuge, lies in the heart of the Klamath Basin—the most important staging area in the Pacific Flyway. It not only supports birds on their fall and spring migrations, but provides critical habitat for tens of thousands of waterfowl to breed and rear their young. It’s also normally one of the few large wetlands in California where waterfowl can molt in safety, protected from ground predators while they are flightless.

Currently, due to ongoing drought and other factors, the Refuge has only one wetland unit (Unit 2) flooded, and has experienced one of its driest 3-year periods in its 115 year history. The last three years have also seen some of the lowest waterfowl counts at the Refuge since surveys began there in

the 1950s. This has not only harmed waterfowl and many other wetland-dependent wildlife species, but also negatively impacted waterfowl hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Purchasing water annually from willing sellers will help ensure at least some spring and summer wetland habitat there, providing much-needed support for breeding and molting waterfowl. Additional water will also reduce the severity of any waterfowl disease outbreak, such as avian botulism, which has historically plagued the Refuge and neighboring Tule Lake Refuge during low water years. As recently as 2020, 60,000 waterfowl and other waterbirds died from botulism which was exacerbated by low water conditions.

These two water funding proposals are critical to conserving wetland habitat and waterfowl populations in the Klamath Basin over the next three years. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Hennelly, Vice President of Advocacy  
California Waterfowl

Mike Lynes, Director of Public Policy  
Audubon California

Ashley Overhouse, Water Policy Advisor  
Defenders of Wildlife

Steve Chappell, Executive Director  
Suisun Resource Conservation District

Ric Ortega, President  
Grassland Water District

James Stone, President  
Nor-Cal Guides and Sportsmen's Association

Cyrus Baird, Senior Director of Government Affairs  
Delta Waterfowl

Don Kirby, President  
Cal-Ore Wetlands and Waterfowl Council

Fred Harpster, President  
The Black Brant Group

Al Eiden, West Region Director  
Pheasants Forever/ Quail Forever

Steve Miller, President  
Tulare Basin Wetlands Association

Keely Hopkins, California State Director  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Greg Block, President  
Sustainable Northwest

Michael O'Casey, Deputy Director, Pacific Northwest Region  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Catherine Hickey, Director, Pacific Coast and Central Valley Group  
Point Blue Conservation Science

Jeannie Brantigan, Project Director, Water Program  
The Nature Conservancy