

WORDS FROM

THE WETLANDS



SUMMER/FALL



2007

NEWS FROM THE KLAMATH BASIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX

The Status of Sage Grouse on Clear Lake NWR- an Update

*John Beckstrand
Wildlife Biologist*

When I was asked to write an update about the status of sage grouse on Clear Lake Refuge, the first thing I did was to look back on what I had previously written. I was surprised to find that it was back in the 2004 spring/summer newsletter that I had written about our shrinking population of sage grouse. In the time since then, much has been accomplished, but much remains to be done.

In an effort to conserve sage grouse and preclude their listing as an endangered species, The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), agreed along with other member states to develop conservation plans for distinct sage grouse populations (Population Management Units or PMU's) within their borders. As a member of WAFWA, California had developed plans for the major sage grouse populations in the state, but the Clear Lake/Devils Garden population was one of the last for which a plan was to be developed. In December of 2004 a public sage grouse conservation planning meeting was held in Tulelake, California to begin the process of developing a conservation plan for the Clear Lake grouse population. The planning "team" consisted of local landowners or permittees, staff from University of California cooperative Extension, California Dept. of Fish and Game, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Park Service and U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service. The conservation team developed a risk factor matrix by which risks to the grouse population and their habitat were evaluated.

Future population and habitat goals were also developed. Juniper encroachment which has occurred since settlement was identified as one of the greatest risks to the continued existence of sage grouse in the area. Juniper expansion has displaced sagebrush which is vital as cover and food for grouse. With the fragmenting of their sage steppe habitat, the Clear Lake grouse population is probably genetically isolated from other sage grouse populations which, with inbreeding, results in lower productivity and ultimately in the crash of the population. Meanwhile, in order to enhance and maintain the population while juniper removal projects were underway, sage grouse from healthy unhunted populations would be translocated to Clear Lake.

In the spring of 2005 we completed our first translocation of nine females and one male sage grouse from Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in southeastern Oregon. The birds were captured at night near a lek, and fitted with a necklace type radio transmitter. They were then transported overnight to Clear Lake where they were released the next morning near the active lek. The movements and survival of the birds were monitored from the time of release through the summer. In 2006 fifteen additional grouse were translocated from Hart Mountain and this past spring 23 sage grouse were translocated from Sheldon Refuge in northern Nevada. So far, survival of translocated birds has been good at around 50% annually. In the summer of 2006 and again in 2007 the California Dept. of Fish and Game hired a person to track radio-marked sage grouse on the refuge and surrounding lands. The cooperation of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Game, as well as the BLM, USFS and FWS has made the translocations possible.

Continued on page 2

The Status of Sage Grouse on Clear Lake NWR- an Update Cont'd

In 2006 we obtained grant funding for the purpose of removing encroaching juniper trees and in the fall over 1,400 acres of the refuge was treated. The work was done by a contract crew with chainsaws and the trees were bucked up and left in place to provide wildlife cover. Most of the junipers cut were small to medium sized trees that were encroaching into low sage areas. Large junipers located in rocky areas (where they have persisted over time, safe from fire) that contained excavated cavities or had other signs of wildlife use were left standing. Meanwhile, juniper removal projects have been ongoing on the Modoc National Forest as well as on private lands in the vicinity of Clear Lake.

What's next then? Translocations of sage grouse to bolster the Clear Lake population will likely continue depending on how grouse numbers are doing at the source populations, and, the pace of juniper clearing should increase once the final EIS for the Northeast California Juniper Management Strategy, a joint BLM/USFS USFS plan to treat millions of acres of juniper in northeast California, is done in 2008.



Sage Grouse being released at Clear Lake NWR

Issues and Concerns identified for Future Klamath Marsh NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP).

*Carol Damberg
Refuge Manager*

Klamath Marsh NWR is well on its way to developing a draft CCP. The completion of a CCP is required for all Refuges by 2012. The Klamath Marsh NWR is scheduled to be completed by 2009.

Klamath Marsh NWR has completed its public and agency scoping progress for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and has started the initial drafting of future alternatives for managing the Refuge. This phase of the planning process will last for several months along with development of additional background information for inclusion in a future draft CCP document that will be available for public review. The following summarizes the issues and concerns that were identified during the scoping process.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) for the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) was published on January 29, 2007. The first planning update, introducing the Refuge and the CCP process, was mailed to over 200 members of the public, elected officials, organizations, media, and agency representatives in January of 2007. Scoping meetings were held with various resource agencies, county commissioners, and congressional aids. One government-to-government scoping meeting was conducted with the Klamath Tribes during December 2006. Public scoping meetings were held in Klamath Falls (February 6) and Chiloquin, Oregon (February 7). Prior to the scoping meetings, a second planning update was distributed and press releases were sent to local print, radio, and television media. A total of 38 members of the public attended the two public scoping meetings. Verbal comments were recorded during scoping meetings. Additional comments were received as letters and responses to an "issues workbook" provided by the planning team. Over 180 people provided comments by mail, email, or through personal conversations with the Refuge and planning staff.

Continued on page 3

Issues and Concerns identified for Future Klamath Marsh NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) Cont'd

Hundreds of public comments were documented by Service staff during the scoping period. Based on these comments and internal scoping, the following issues were identified. These issues will receive in-depth analysis and will help to define the range of alternatives for the CCP and the Environment Assessment (EA).

- Should the Service restore the natural hydrology of the Williamson River through the Refuge, and if so to what extent?
 - How will invasive plant and animal species on the Refuge be controlled?
 - What management actions will the Service take on the Refuge to protect and restore populations of threatened and other sensitive species?
 - How can the Service improve Refuge habitat for native fish species?
 - Will the Service continue to support or expand ongoing research on key habitats and wildlife species and address other biological data shortfalls?
 - How will the Service manage the Refuge's sedge meadows to improve habitat for spring migratory waterfowl, nesting sandhill cranes, and nesting yellow rails and how will the effects of this management be monitored?
 - What forest management tools will the Service use to reduce hazardous fuels, protect existing old growth stands, increase the habitat value of second and third growth stands, and improve regeneration of aspen stands?
 - How will the Service manage wildfire on the Refuge? How and to what extent will the Service restore fire as a natural process within Refuge plant communities while still meeting local, state, and federal smoke management and air quality requirements?
- Should the Service restore the vast areas of densely vegetated emergent marsh to a more historical mix of emergent vegetation, floating leaf (wocus), and open water? If so, how and to what extent?
- How will the Service pursue resolution of water rights for Refuge lands and waters?

- What portions of the Refuge should be open to hunting, fishing and other types of wildlife dependent uses? How will the Service address future demands for hunting and fishing while being sensitive to Tribal uses of Refuge lands?
 - How will the Service provide compatible wildlife viewing opportunities which maintain the current uncrowded and remote nature of visitor experiences?
 - How will the Service provide for an appropriate level and variety of interpretive and educational services while being sensitive to Tribal uses of refuge lands?
 - How will the Service provide effective law enforcement on Refuge lands?
 - Will the Service consider allowing additional, or restricting current, non-wildlife dependent recreational activities on the Refuge and if so, what activities?
 - How will the Service protect and manage cultural resources on the Refuge?
 - How will the Service address lack of fish passage and screening of irrigation/water diversions on the Refuge?
 - How will the Service protect and maintain the water quality in Klamath Marsh?
 - How will the Service address the encroachment of emergent vegetation into open water and the loss of structural diversity in Klamath Marsh?
 - Will the Service consider opening additional areas of the Refuge to fishing (Big Spring Creek and Williamson River) and hunting (waterfowl and big game)?
- How will the Service manage forested wetlands and wet meadows to preserve these unique habitats and limit their progression into coniferous forests?

The Service is pleased to have the number of comments provided during the scoping process. The interest expressed by the Tribes, public, and agencies will help us to create an excellent CCP.

2007-2008 Hunting Season Just Around the Corner

*David Champine
Park Ranger*

Hunting season is only four months away and preparations for the season are picking up speed. Hunters and Refuge employees alike are feeling the excitement and enthusiasm for the upcoming season. You have already read about the minor changes to the Annual Pass Program (see page 5). Now read about the other changes in the hunt program.

First, one of the most major changes deals with the opening weekend application process. Starting this year, the applications for opening weekend will not be mailed out to people. In an effort to redirect the hunt monies to other portions of the program, there will not be the mass mailing of the applications. Beginning the third week of July, the applications, instructions and maps will be available on the Refuge Website (<https://www.fws.gov/klamathbasinrefuges>). Applications can be printed off and mailed with the \$3 per hunter application fee. As always, the applications should be post marked on or before August 15th. If there is no means of computer access, then notify the refuge and one can be mailed.

The disabled blinds in the spaced-blind program will be put back into the regular blind areas. They will also be set aside to be used by parties with at least one permanently disabled hunter only. They will not be filled by other hunters if not chosen during the disabled Space-Blind drawing. A disabled hunter who has registered with the Refuge may have up to three other hunters and two junior hunters or non-hunters. If a person is interested in becoming a registered disabled hunter, please contact the Refuge.

Although this could be subject to change, for hunt season 2007-2008, the drive-in blinds will be the "C, F and G Blinds". If there is a change, it will be posted on the web and the hunter check station.

On the Lower Klamath Refuge, one of the biggest changes will pertain to the following Units: Unit 4b will remain motorless until December 1st. Unit 4c will allow motors all season. Unit 6b1 which is the northeast section of the 6b unit will be motorless all season. There will be NO designated boat ramp that could accommodate anything bigger than a canoe or flat bottom "John" type boat size in unit 6b1. This unit will be Waterfowl hunting only instead of Pheasant hunting only.

Finally, just a reminder about ATV usage. They may not be driven on hunter access roads or dike tops. They may go into a field that is open for regular vehicle traffic to drop off and pick up decoys. Check brochure for further details.

LET'S MAKE 2007-2008 A GREAT HUNTING SEASON!!!

Bird Festival Held at Refuge Headquarters

Airboat rides through Tule Lake Marsh, wild bird banding and guided trips to local wildlife refuges were just a few of the family events featured at the Tule Lake Migratory Bird Festival on May 19th. The 6th annual Tule Lake Bird Festival was held at the Tule Lake Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center for the first time this year. A dedication ceremony for the new exhibits at the Tule Lake Refuge Visitor Center opened the festival this year. An estimated 500 to 600 people attended the event and the weather cooperated splendidly.

As in previous years, free airboat tours of Tule Lake Marsh proved to be the most popular event at the festival. Other featured events included bird banding demonstrations with hands-on opportunities for festival participants, educational programs with live hawks and owls, a volunteer fire department Tri-Tip Bar-be-cue, hourly guided tours of Discovery Marsh across from the Refuge visitor center, and youth activities for all ages including: Children's wildlife art instruction, bird mask making, a wildlife puzzle competition and migration mail out activity

The Debbie and the Quick Picks blues band provided entertainment during the lunch period.

The annual festival is usually held the third Saturday in May..... **Join us next year!**

Fee Program changes for 2007

Dave Menke

Outdoor Recreation Planner

Last year major changes were implemented to the refuge fee program which cut the cost of an annual pass by half (now \$ 25.00 per year) for refuge hunters and photo blind users. At the same time, the options to purchase daily and multi-day passes were eliminated and the fees for using refuge auto tour routes were ended. The new changes were effective July 1, 2006 and after one year the new program appears to be working well. With few exceptions most refuge users seem to favor the new fee program. Despite cutting fees in half, a record of nearly \$ 65,000.00 was raised in the first year of implementation.

Only minor changes are being made to the refuge fee program this year. One difference is that vendors will have the option to charge a one or two dollar transaction fee for selling the pass. Thus hunters buying a pass from a vendor may pay a total of \$ 26.00 or \$ 27.00 for the pass. Passes purchased from the refuge office by credit card (telephone) or in person will remain at \$ 25.00 (and half price for seniors 62 or older with a golden age or Interagency Senior Pass). As has been the case in the past, passes may be purchased through the mail (personal check or money order), by telephone with a credit card or in person using any of these payment methods.

A new nationwide fee program was introduced this year covering many federal area fees on land management units administered by the federal government. Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and Golden Access Passports will no longer be issued. This program is being replaced by the America the Beautiful Pass Program with the following features:

- An annual **Interagency Pass** will replace the Golden Eagle Passport allowing entrance to federal fee areas during a calendar year. The annual cost for this pass is \$ 80.00.
- The new **Interagency Senior Pass** will now be issued in place of the Golden Age Passport. This is a lifetime pass with a onetime cost of \$ 10.00. Previously issued Golden Age Passports will continue to be honored. To qualify the purchaser must be 62 or older. Permanently disabled U. S. citizens may obtain an **Interagency Access Pass** at no cost. This pass will offer the same benefits as the previously issued Golden Access passports.

With all the new passes and options available, some confusion is bound to result. Feel free to contact Dave Menke at (530) 667-2231 or dave_menke@fws with questions.

Still, Looking for a Few good Ideas! Centennial 2008

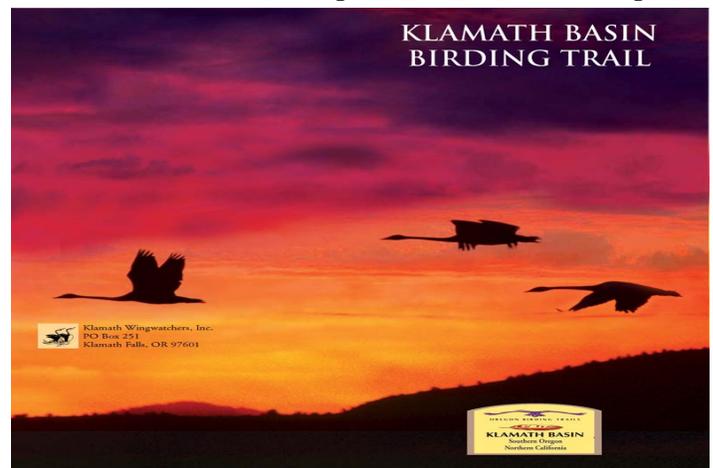
Next year (more specifically on August 8, 2008) we will celebrate the Centennial of Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge. We invite you to let us know what you think might work as a fitting tribute to this hundred year anniversary!

So far we are planning to host an Ice Cream Social for current and past refuge employees and other refuge supporters on the refuge's birthday date. Other events may be planned at this time since Malheur Refuge will also be celebrating its Centennial in 2008.

Please let us know what you would like to see happen to commemorate this momentous occasion! Ideas may be outlined and sent to Dave Menke by email at "dave_menke@fws.gov."

Klamath Bird Trail Brochure Available

A new 48-page brochure featuring 47 sites along the Klamath Basin Birding Trail route is now available. This colorful and informative booklet contains maps and descriptions of each recommended birding location found along the 300 mile-long Klamath Basin Birding Trail. Sites featured along the trail are all located along roads in Klamath, Siskiyou and Modoc Counties as featured on the centerfold map in the brochure. The publi-



cation also features color photos of many of the Basin's interesting birds. It contains a complete list of birds found in the Upper Klamath Basin and a myriad of other information helpful to both visitors and local residents interested in the incredible diversity of birds found in the region. If you would like to receive a free copy just contact us.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Lazuli Bunting
Passerina amoena
Michele Nuss-Park Ranger

One of the more colorful birds you are apt to see in the Klamath Basin, the unmistakable markings of the male Lazuli Bunting, include an azure blue head, throat and back, with a cinnamon band across the chest and sides, and white wing bars.

During spring and summer months, the Lazuli Bunting is widely distributed throughout southern Oregon. Their preferred habitat is open, brushy canyons and along streamside thickets, but they are also found in chaparral and subalpine meadows. They frequent the riparian areas of the Klamath River Canyon and along the Link River trail. The Lazuli Bunting was once found breeding at 6500 feet in Crater Lake National Park.

The nest is constructed in dense vegetation, usually in a shrub, typically one to six feet above the ground. The female lays three to four pale greenish blue eggs in an open cup nest made of coarsely woven dried grasses, rootlets, strips of bark, and leaves, lined with fine grass, rootlets, and sometimes even animal hairs. John James Audubon reported finding a Lazuli Bunting nest lined with buffalo hair. Incubation time is usually around twelve days. Both males and females care for the young. They leave the nest ten to fifteen days after hatching. The diet of the Lazuli Bunting consists of insects and seeds. They will often perch on stems of grasses and other plants, removing seeds with their bill. They sometimes catch insects in the air, but usually forage on or near the ground or in shrubbery. They glean the leaves for insects, or hop along the ground catching grasshoppers, caterpillars, beetles, and ants.

The song of the Lazuli Bunting is distinctive. Each male two years of age and older sings only one song which are composed of a series of different syllables, and is unique to that one individual. Yearling males generally arrive on breeding grounds without a song of their own. Shortly after arriving, the young male develops its own song, which can be a combination of song fragments of other males or an original arrangement of its own.

The Lazuli Bunting has a unique pattern of molt and migration. Individuals begin their initial molt during late summer on their breeding grounds. They interrupt this molt and migrate to one of two known molting "hotspots"— southern Arizona and New Mexico and northern Sonora, or the southern tip of Baja California— where they finish molting before continuing their migration to wintering grounds in western Mexico.

According to the new Klamath Basin Birding Trail brochure this species is found during the spring, summer and fall at sites throughout the Klamath Basin including West Side Road (Rocky Point), Fourmile Lake, Klamath River Canyon, Link River Trail, Butte Valley, Juanita Lake, and Lava Beds National Monument.



Male Lazuli Bunting



**Ash-throated
Flycatcher**



Spotted Towhee

Spotted Towhees use the area around Photo Blind 4 year-round while **Ash-throated Flycatchers** are an infrequent late spring and summer visitor there.

Tule Lake Refuge Photo Blind #4

Ten photo blinds on Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuges, provide opportunities to observe and photograph water birds or raptors **with one exception**. Photo blind # 4 which is located in a brushy area along Hill Road on Tule Lake Refuge provides opportunities for close photos of small perching birds. A small water feature at the blind attracts some species seasonally and others year-round. During the spring and early summer a hummingbird feeder is also located near the blind. Throughout the year, this location has proven to provide almost daily opportunities to photograph three bird species: Spotted Towhee, California Towhee and Bewick's Wren.

Other wildlife species found more infrequently or seasonally at the site are listed below in descending order of frequency:

- California Ground Squirrel - spring through fall
- Song Sparrow – year-round
- Bushtit – year-round
- American Robin – year-round
- Bullock's Oriole – spring and summer
- California Quail – year-round
- Western Fence Lizard – Spring and summer
- House Finch – year-round
- Mourning Dove – spring through summer
- Rufous Hummingbird – spring and summer
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet – spring and fall
- Yellow-rumped Warbler – spring and fall
- Juniper/Oak Titmouse – spring and fall
- Golden-crowned Sparrow – late fall and winter
- White-crowned Sparrow – late fall and winter
- Dark-eyed Junco – late fall and winter
- Brown-headed Cowbird -- summer
- Lincoln's Sparrow – spring and fall (rare)
- Townsend's Solitaire - spring and fall (rare)
- Sage Thrasher - spring and fall (rare)
- Northern Flicker – spring through fall (rare)

Photo blind users are required to purchase an annual pass and may make reservations by calling (530) 667-2231.

KLAMATH BASIN WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION
Membership Application / Renewal

Name _____

Single \$15

Address _____

Family \$20

City / State / Zip _____

Sustaining \$35

Telephone _____

Benefactor \$50

E-Mail _____

*Mail to: Klamath Basin Wildlife Refuge Association
4009 Hill Road, Tulelake, California 96134*

**US Fish and Wildlife Service
Klamath Basin NWR Complex
4009 Hill Road
Tulelake, CA 96134-9758
(530) 667-2231**

**Would you or a friend like to be on our free newsletter mailing list?
Write or call Refuge Headquarters.**