

# WORDS FROM

# THE WETLANDS



SPRING

2006

NEWS FROM THE KLAMATH BASIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX

## WINTER WINGS FESTIVAL Takes Flight February 16-19

The Klamath Basin of Northern California and South Central Oregon is home to over 350 species of birds throughout the year. It is world famous for spectacular flocks of waterfowl on the lakes, rivers and nearby Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges, home to the largest concentration of wintering Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states.

The Winter Wings Festival coincides with the presence of wintering waterfowl and eagles, so that Festival participants can enjoy these magnificent birds on tours and learn more about them at workshops. Local birding experts bring alive the magnificence of a hawk in flight, the majesty of eagle wings, and the multitudes of black and white swirling snow geese.

After 25 years as the Klamath Basin Bald Eagle Conference, this event has spread its wings to become the **Klamath Basin Winter Wings Festival**, a four-day event that will occur every President's Weekend at Oregon Institute of Technology. The purpose of the Festival is to share information, increase awareness of community resources and gain an understanding of our wildlife resources, especially birds of the Klamath Basin.

It begins Thursday evening in Klamath Falls. From 4-8 pm, arts, food, music, vendors, and store specials will give families and tourists the opportunity to enjoy Downtown as part of the Winter Wings Festival. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday at OIT, the Festival will offer workshops, tours, vendors, displays, and activities attractive to families at low or no cost. (See page 2.)

Photographer Bill Silliker, Jr. says, "The Bald Eagle Conference provides the opportunity to not only learn more about these wondrous birds and the challenges that they face, but also to watch them in the wild. And both are a sure thing. That's a rare combination, in my experience. We all need to learn more about how to protect these special birds, a bird unique to North America and our national symbol. I learned a lot from other speakers at the 2001 Conference that has helped me to spread the word about how we can help to make a difference for these birds, so that we may have bald eagles forever."

For more information, call the Great Basin Visitor Association at 1-800-445-6728, or see the Winter wings website at ([www.winterwingsfest.org/](http://www.winterwingsfest.org/)).

## REFUGE WEB PAGE ADDRESS HAS CHANGED

If you have used the Klamath Basin Refuges web site lately you may have noticed that the web site address has changed to <http://www.fws.gov/klamathbasinrefuges/>. The old address should still get you to the site but users should "bookmark" the new address to make sure they have quick and easy access in the future.

The web site has a wealth of helpful information and photos for all six refuges and many opportunities including wildlife viewing, hunting, wildlife photography, educational programs and auto/canoe trails. A wildlife species list, helpful links, aerial counts of birds and copies of this and past newsletters are also posted on the site.

## **FESTIVAL EVENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS**

Early morning **Eagle Flyout** at Bear Valley Refuge (Fee/reservations required)

**Special Workshops and Field Trips** (Fees and reservations required – space limited)

- Avian Art
- Bald Eagles
- Birding by Ear
- Birding the Basin
- Bats and Bat House Building
- Bird Friendly Timber Harvest
- Birding IBA's
- Children's Beginning Birding
- Citizen Science – Community Stewardship
- Falconry
- High Desert Museum Children's Program
- Lava Beds Cave tour
- Naturescaping
- Partnering Wetlands and Agriculture
- Digital Photography
- Wildlife Refuge Photography
- Pine Needle Basket Making
- Raptors
- Raptor Rehabilitation
- Snowshoeing at Crater Lake
- Teacher's Workshop
- Tracking and Calling
- Volcanic Legacy Byway Tour
- Waterfowl Identification
- Wetland Reconstruction

**Art/Photo Contests, Displays and Sales**

**Vendors**

**Live Bird Demonstrations**

**Silent Auction and Raffle**

**Live Music** (including “**The Coats**” Friday evening and the “**Dixie Hummingbirds**” on Sunday evening at the Ross Ragland Theater)

**Food and Restaurant Discounts**

**Breakfast with the Eagles**

**Hot Air Balloon Rides**

**Workshops for Families and Interactive Booths for Kids -- FREE**

**Wings City Music Hall (Saturday at 7:30 pm OIT Auditorium)**

**Refuge Open House (Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge)**

## **DATES TO REMEMBER:**

**March 25, 2006**

**POST SEASON PUBLIC HUNT MEETING**

*Will be held at the Tulelake Fairgrounds from 6 to 9 pm*

**May 13, 2006**

**MIGRATORY BIRD DAY**

*Held in Klamath Falls, Oregon*

**May 20, 2006**

**MIGRATORY BIRD DAY**

*At the Community Center “The Honker” in Tulelake, California*

**NEW REFUGE VIDEO FINISHED**



The new visitor center video titled “**Stepping Stones**” is now available for visitors to view and enjoy at the Tule Lake Wildlife Refuge, 5 miles west of Tulelake, California. This six and one-half minute program features the sights and sounds of approximately 100 species of wildlife in their habitats in the Upper Klamath Basin.

Videographer Anders Tomlinson completed the film in mid-December 2005. Tomlinson has spent the past ten years documenting the natural and cultural history as well as the current day dynamics of the Klamath Basin.

The film begins with a look back to the pre-history and early history in the Basin. The film briefly outlines the wildlife significance of each of the six refuge units in the Basin and explores how each refuge is managed to enhance wildlife habitats and values.

Finally, Stepping Stones suggests ways in which visitors can enjoy the lush natural wonders depicted throughout the video.



## **“WALKING WETLANDS” UPDATE: Moving to Private Lands!**

*By Ron Cole, Refuge Manager and Dave Mauser, Wildlife Biologist*



Much of the management of Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) is guided by the Kuchel Act. This act of Congress is unique in the National Wildlife Refuge System in that it mandates a coexistence of wildlife and commercial agriculture. The Act was passed in 1964 and was intended to eliminate the possibility that these two refuges would pass into private ownership via homesteading. Over the decades, provisions of this act have become increasingly controversial. Some feel that fewer restrictions should be placed on refuge agriculture and at the other extreme, some believe commercial agricultural has no place on a National Wildlife Refuge. Over the years, interpretation of the Kuchel Act has been the focus of several lawsuits. Caught in the middle are wildlife and rural families and communities.



Refuge managers don't make laws and are not allowed to lobby any particular political position; that's a responsibility best left to the public. It is the manager's responsibility to make reasonable interpretation of law and policy. Under the Kuchel Act, how does the manager resolve the apparent conflict between wetlands and agriculture? What is the proper balance of land uses?

Taking the optimistic viewpoint, the Service believes that perhaps the Kuchel Act is not the proverbial

albatross around our necks, but instead represents a unique opportunity to find ways in which wildlife habitat and agriculture can be integrated in ways that are beneficial to both. Could management of these refuges be used to seek innovative solutions to the apparent conflict between these land uses? Could techniques be developed on-Refuge that would have more far-reaching implications?

In the 1990's the Service began seeking answers to these questions. The Service in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey, the Universities of California and Washington, Ducks Unlimited, and the Tule Lake Irrigation District began a program of experimental rotation of wetlands (termed "walking wetlands") within commercial farm fields on the Tule Lake NWR. A similar program was also in effect on adjacent Lower Klamath NWR. Results from that experimentation indicated that periodic flooding of lands as seasonally flooded wetland or year-round flooded wetland enhanced soil fertility and reduced soil pest populations. Yield increases of up to 25% with reduced inputs of fertilizers and the elimination of soil fumigation (a savings of up to \$200/acre) were achieved within the program. Flooding cycles also allowed Refuge farmers to pursue organic production. In addition to agricultural benefits, created wetlands have been utilized by a variety of wetland birds representing a diversity of species. These formerly cropped wetlands have become some of the most productive wetland habitats on Tule Lake and Lower Klamath NWRs.

Due to successes on the Refuge, adjacent private landowners have expressed an interest in implementing this program on their lands. However, there are unique challenges in moving to private lands. On the Refuge, farm fields are converted to wetlands when leases or farm agreements expire. However, on private lands where a grower depends on farming these fields each year as a livelihood, how does he/she earn a living if the fields are out of production for several years? To solve this dilemma, the Refuge

## **“WALKING WETLANDS UPDATE,” Cont.**



has adopted a unique approach. Given that the Refuge farms a certain acreage each year to feed waterfowl and sandhill

cranes, why not compensate growers who create wetlands on their private lands with a similar acreage of farmland on the Refuge? The net result is more wetlands and wildlife habitat created in the Klamath Basin, and less reliance on fertilizers and pesticides in crop production. Both the wildlife and rural farm economies benefit from this approach.

Initially, the going was slow. In 2005, our first private wetland of 53 acres was developed near the city of Klamath Falls. However, the program has accelerated. In 2006, 1,157 acres of additional wetlands on private lands will be created with the addition of fields in the Klamath Drainage District and in the Tule Lake Basin. In 2007, 1,476 acres are planned and there is demand for more in the future. Unfortunately, the Refuge is rapidly reaching a point where we have no additional agricultural lands to offer as we must stay within the acreage of on-Refuge croplands that optimally serves wildlife needs.

To address this additional demand, the Refuge, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and local growers are working to develop conservation programs in the next Farm Bill which would directly compensate farmers on a per acre basis for fallowing their fields as wetlands. In addition to these efforts, the Refuge and local growers are combining forces to “get the word out” via articles in newspapers and other media. This outreach effort is beginning to pay dividends as we are now receiving inquiries about the program from other areas such as the California Bay/Delta region and the Skagit River Delta in Washington. From small beginnings and controversy, the “Walking Wetlands” program is beginning to gently stroll across the Basin, leaving footprints of optimism and a brighter future with every step.

## **PARDON OUR DUST: Visitor Center Renovation in Progress**

In recent months the refuge has undertaken some major efforts toward renovation of the refuge visitor center, anticipating installation of new exhibits and an updated video. To date, landscaping and a new water feature have been created behind the center. A viewing area near the information desk is visible through newly installed windows which provide opportunities to view a microcosm of upland birds commonly seen on the refuge including quail, towhees, sparrows, orioles, hummingbirds and woodpeckers.

Inside the visitor center, an office space has been modified to centralize the small sales area in a single location which will be equipped with cabinets and shelving over the next several months. A small enclosed space has been created which will eventually be used as a mini theater for showing the new refuge video (see article on page 2.)

In the next four months the refuge expects to receive and install exhibits which will include wall panels featuring refuge management and public use topics and two visitor access computers. One of the computers will allow visitors to access web based information on wildlife viewing and tourism information in the Klamath Basin. A second computer program will provide visitors a chance to gain historical insight into wetland changes through the twentieth century in the Klamath Basin.

A large scale map will also provide information to help with their travel plans in the Klamath Basin. This map will outline the Volcanic Legacy All American Road and Klamath Basin Birding Trail routes within the Basin.

The Wildlife Refuge visitor center will remain open to serve the public during all but a few days during the renovation process.



# UPCOMING MAINTENANCE PROJECTS

Mark Carlson,  
Engineering Equipment Operator Supervisor  
&  
David Champine  
Park Ranger/Interpretive Specialist



As usual the Maintenance Division is hard at work to improve the natural and public resources of the Refuges. Every season brings more and new challenges. As we move into late winter early spring and the weather

improves, this becomes a very busy time of year for the Maintenance Division as they prepare the Refuges for a new season of growth. The following projects are just four of the major projects they will undertake in the next few months.

## PROJECT:

**Project:** Lift & Widen A-Dike with base rock material.

**Scheduled Date:** Work will begin and be completed between March 1st and April 31st. Exact dates not yet set.

**Location:** The Project will begin at the top of Lot 1 (Double White pump houses) and extend south along A-Dike to the south end of Lot 7 (Pump 11), a distance of 2.5 miles on Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

**Size and/or Scope:** The project will require hauling 15,000 to 20,000 cubic yards of base material from Orem's Pit to A-Dike.

**Purpose:** Adding the base rock to A-Dike will prepare this section of road to be surfaced with 3/4" minus material in the future. This material is the final material to be added and is the next best material to pavement.

**Comments:** There will be heavy truck traffic on the haul route which includes A-Dike, County Line road, and a section of the N-12 Canal.

## PROJECT:

**Project:** Flood Fallow (Lots 42-47), the "B" Spaced-Blinds.

**Scheduled Date:** Starting in March and ending in April 2006.

**Location:** Lots 42 – 47 (the "B" Spaced-Blinds) on Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuges.

**Size and/or Scope:** Project consists of building 3 new levees totaling 1.5 miles and installing 6 water control structures.

**Purpose:** Allow farm ground to be seasonally or permanently flooded.

**Comments:** Project was started in November 2005 and was put on hold due to weather. It is currently about 1/3 complete.

## PROJECT:

**Project:** Lakeside Farms Restoration

**Scheduled Date:** May 2006

**Location:** Private property immediately south of Hank's Marsh on Upper Klamath National Wildlife Refuge.

**Size and/or Scope:** Project consists of cleaning 3/4 mile of drain ditch and puddle trenching a 3/4 mile levee, replacing undersized culverts, and lowering a pump.

**Purpose:** Reduce and/or prevent subbing from the wetland to the neighboring agricultural ground.

**Comments:** The work is being conducted in conjunction with the Ecosystem Restoration Office (ERO).

## PROJECT:

**Project:** Rehabilitate Stearns' Field #6, 7, and 8 wetland units.

**Scheduled Date:** June 2006

**Location:** Stearns' Field #6, 7, 8, immediately south of Stearns' Shop on Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge.

**Size and/or Scope:** Clean and rebuild approximately 2 miles of drains and dikes. Install 6 water control structures.

**Purpose:** Update a failing water management facility.

**Comments:** This project will better allow us to manage the water level in these units and require less labor to operate.

These projects and several other small scale ones will keep the Maintenance Division very busy. As with all of their duties they will perform them with skill and professionalism.



# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

## THE GREATER SANDHILL CRANE:

### *A Flagship Species*

*By Deena Noonan—Volunteer*

There is no sound quite like the call of a greater sandhill crane, heard most often in the early morning hours when the sun comes up. Yet this is a sound being heard less and less often in our Pacific coast states.

These majestic birds, which can stand 5' tall with a wingspan of 6 to 7', are now the focus of intense recovery efforts in the West.

Biologists call sandhill cranes a “flagship species,” because the health of the crane population is often a good indicator of the health of their ecosystem. The survival of the sandhill crane depends on the conservation of the wetland habitat in which it lives, feeds, and nests, but wetlands in California are decreasing at an alarming rate as the state becomes more heavily developed and populated. Studies have shown that less than 6% of California’s wetlands present in 1850 still existed in 1980.

Greater sandhill cranes in the West are known as the “Central Valley population,” since that is where they spend their winters. But as development in the Valley continues to encroach on their habitat, their numbers decline. Recent breeding surveys found only 465 breeding pairs of greater sandhill cranes in California.

A popular species with bird lovers, the sandhill crane is best known for its famous courtship dance, which consists of a series of jumping, bowing, and stick-tossing movements. While they dance, the male makes a series of loud calls. Each note the male makes is answered quickly by the female’s two-note answer. On a quiet spring morning, they can be heard several miles away.

Crane pairs mate for life, and return to the same nesting territory year after year. However, they are easily disturbed when nesting, and may abandon their nests if they feel too threatened. Since mortality rates of young sandhill chicks are already quite high, nesting pairs should not be disturbed when observed in the wild.





A successful recovery program could halt the decline of California's Central Valley sandhill crane population, however. Proof that this is possible exists in Colorado, where the sandhill crane population was once endangered. However, because of the success of that state's recovery program, Colorado's greater sandhill cranes were "delisted" in 1998.

As the world's oldest still-living species of bird, sandhill cranes have survived for at least 6 million years. Yet in only 150 years, we have brought them to the edge of extinction. If we are to continue hearing the calls of these magnificent birds, and enjoy the sight of their winged migration each fall and spring, it is imperative that we help California's recovery program become a successful one. Much of our success will depend on our ability to conserve California's remaining wetlands, which sandhill cranes and so many other species need in order to survive.

## **CRANE PROGRAM AVAILABLE SOON**

Deena Noonan, a new volunteer at the Tule Lake Wildlife Refuge, is designing an educational program about sandhill cranes that will be made available to local teachers, students, and visitors to the Refuge.

This program is divided into five parts:

1. The life cycle of sandhill cranes
2. Physical traits and adaptations
3. Flight and migration

4. The "language" used by sandhill cranes
5. The ecosystem in which they live

This new program has been correlated to both California and Oregon science curriculum guidelines. Deena has already taken it to staff meetings at the Newell Elementary School (K-2) and Merrill Grade School (K-6). The responses, she said, were wonderful, and many of the teachers said they would be happy to have her come and do trial presentations in their classrooms.

A former teacher, writer, and graphics artist, Deena says one of the most unique qualities of this new program is that it can be used at any grade level. Each part of the program has three sections:

1. A high-interest photo essay/powerpoint utilizing exceptional wildlife photography and very little text, which makes it appropriate for all ages and abilities
2. Fact sheets which correlate to each of the slides in the photo essay
3. Resource materials on all different grade levels to supplement and reinforce concepts introduced in the photo essay and fact sheets.



One of the most challenging things about designing and presenting environmental education programs, Deena feels, is being able to do it in a way that can interest young and old alike, especially in mixed groups. If the format of the new sandhill crane program is successful, she plans to do a series of programs about birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and plants which can be shared with other Wildlife Refuges too.



## Lower Klamath and Tule Lake 2005-06 Waterfowl Hunt Season Summary



For the first time in five years water and crop conditions on both Tule Lake and Lower Klamath Refuges were “normal” this year. In general, both marsh and field hunting habitats looked favorable at the start of the season. Waterfowl hunting success rebounded compared to recent years and many hunters and the refuge staff were pleased as a result.

Despite much better hunting success this season, the numbers of hunters using the refuges declined in most areas. The lone exception to this apparent trend was Lower Klamath field units which had a 19 percent increase in hunter numbers compared to the previous season. Drawings for the first weekend included 200 and 300 hunters drawn for Tule Lake field and marsh units respectively. On Lower Klamath 150 hunters were drawn for field permits and 250 were drawn for marsh permits for the opening weekend.

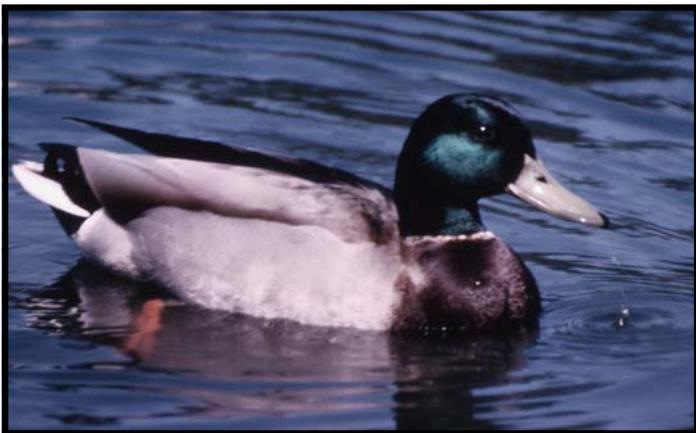
**Lower Klamath** Marsh hunting success on opening day averaged 5.17 ducks per hunter this year compared to an average of 4.38 ducks per hunter on opening day the previous season. Opening day goose hunting success in field hunting units this year was 1.06 geese per hunter in 2005 compared to 1.00 goose per hunter on opening day last season. On Lower Klamath, season-long duck hunting success in marsh units was up significantly this season compared to the previous season (3.68 ducks per hunter this season compared to 2.16 ducks per hunter last season). Mallards taken this year by Lower Klamath



marsh hunters equaled 18 percent of all the ducks taken compared to 28 percent last year. Season-long field goose hunting success on Lower Klamath averaged 0.59 geese per hunter in 2005-06 down slightly from the previous season. Duck hunting on Lower Klamath field units was very productive with hunters bagging nearly 3 ducks per hunter in November and December.

Overall waterfowl hunting use on **Tule Lake Refuge** was down significantly this season (3,125 hunters in 2005-06 compared to 3,817 hunters using all waterfowl hunting areas the previous season). Duck hunting use was down but success was up in marsh units in 2005 (hunter use down 24 percent while duck harvest increased from 2.45 last season to 3.34 ducks per hunter this season). Field goose hunter use decreased by 12 percent but the goose harvest almost doubled in the spaced-blinds and free roam field areas in 2005 compared to the previous season. Tule Lake Marsh hunting success on opening day (October 8, 2005) averaged 3.81 ducks per hunter this year compared to an average 3.39 ducks per hunter last season. Spaced-blind goose hunters harvested an average of 0.41 geese per hunter on opening day this year, compared to 0.24, 0.16, 0.53, and 0.82 the previous four years. It appears that many white-fronts now pass through the Basin without stopping or migrate south prior to the hunting season, as has been the case for the past several years.

Additional hunting statistics for the past hunting season are available on the “hunting” section of the refuge web site ([www://fws.gov/klamathbasinrefuges/](http://www://fws.gov/klamathbasinrefuges/)).



# **NEW FACES... CHANGING PLACES**

*David Champine  
Park Ranger/Interpretive Specialist*

## **Ruth Johnson:**

She is the new Prescribed Fire Specialist here at Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Complex. She is transferring from the U.S. Forest Service where she was an Assistant Fire Management Officer stationed in Bly, Oregon. Ruth brings 20 fire seasons of experience to the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges. In her new position she will be in charge of the prescribed fire burns on the Lease Land Farming acres, and also in charge of prescribed burns for habitat improvement and maintenance. She will be the supervisor for the Refuges' Prescribed Forestry Technicians. Ruth resides in Merrill, Oregon and is a native of the state.

## **Officer Rich Lloyd:**

Officer Lloyd's last duty station was Imperial National Wildlife Refuge by the Colorado River at the border of Arizona and California. He arrived at the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Complex in October of 2005. Before working at Imperial NWR, Officer Lloyd was a Park Ranger with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Washington State. Prior to that, he was a Range Technician with the Department of Defense at Fort Riley. Kansas is his native state. He is looking forward to working more with natural resource issues and wildlife laws. While working at Imperial NWR, he dealt with some natural resource issues but mainly performed river patrol and enforced boating safety laws. He has been here for most of the waterfowl hunting season and is looking forward to future seasons. Officer Lloyd enjoys hunting, fishing, and spending time with his family during off duty hours.

## **Camden Bumpus:**

"Cam" came to the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Complex in 2002. While here, he was assigned to the Crew 5 Prescribed Fire / Fuels Crew. He was also assigned to Engine 81 as an Engine Operator. He is now going to work for the U.S. Forest Service at the Huron / Manistee National Forest in Mio, Michigan. There he will also be an Engine

Operator. We wish "Cam" all the best in his future position.

## **John Donahue:**

John came to the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Complex in 2001. While here at the Refuges he was assigned to the Crew 5 Prescribed Fire/ Fuels Crew. He was the Assistant Crew 5 Lead of the Crew 5 Prescribed Fire/ Fuels Crew. John has moved on to work for the U.S. Forest Service at the Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois. We wish John all the best in his new position.

## **Gregg Zoppetti:**

Gregg is not a new face nor is he "changing places." He has been given a promotion, though. Gregg will be moving up the ladder from Fire Management Officer Trainee to Assistant Fire Management Officer. Gregg is now second in command of the fire crew at the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Complex. Congratulations, Gregg!

# **KLAMATH BASIN WILDLIFE REFUGE ASSOCIATION**

The Klamath Basin Wildlife Refuge Association, which has just celebrated its first year of operation, was started by a number of local residents who believed it would be an asset to the Refuge to have local input, with members who have a close proximity to the Refuges.

We always need new members and new ideas. Our meetings are generally every other month; we will try to keep everyone informed so you may be able to come. Membership dues include a 20% discount on items purchased at the bookstore, notification of our annual meeting, copies of the Refuge Newsletter, and the gratification of knowing that you can make a difference for the Refuge.

We are trying to earn enough money through bookstore sales to assist the Refuge in getting an Interpretive Program started, by hiring staff to assist Refuge employees to bring information to the public and interested visitors.

**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*

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

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Write or call Refuge Headquarters.**