

WATER PROBLEMS AREN'T OVER

UNBELIEVABLY, A BANNER YEAR FOR WATER SUPPLY STILL LEAVES THE KLAMATH BASIN AT RISK

by **JEFFREY A. VOLBERG**, DIRECTOR OF WATER LAW AND POLICY

The National Weather Service announced in April that the 2016-17 water year in Northern California broke the record for the most rain and snow since record-keeping began in 1895. The previous record was set in 1982-83 with an index of 88.5 inches of precipitation measured at eight weather stations in the Sierra as of Sept. 30, 1983. The new record is 89.7 inches as of April 13. The water year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

This amazing amount of water follows five years of serious drought. During the 2014-15 water year, the April 1 snow survey found no snow at all at the traditional measuring spot in a meadow near Echo Summit. Climate scientists estimated that it would take 10 years of average rainfall to make up for the drought. The odds of making up the entire deficit in one year were estimated to be less than 1 percent. However, all of California's reservoirs are now full, and there is an abundant snowpack in the mountains to keep them full.

After a disappointing hunting season for many (see story on page 12), waterfowl hunters are wondering what the abundance of water will do for their hunting opportunities in 2017-18. The first indication is that mallards are mating in every little stream and puddle. Nesting cover is lush and abundant, and brood water is everywhere this spring.

The next good sign is that there should be water available for spring and summer irrigations, allowing duck clubs and refuges to grow plants that will provide food for ducks in the

fall and winter. As a result, ducks will not have to travel as far and spread out as widely as they did when feed was scarce during the drought.

Duck clubs and refuges should receive plenty of water in the fall, due to reservoirs being full. In most places, flood-up should be on time and should cover the entire property.

And for only the second time since 1992, waterfowl refuges south of the Delta have been allocated 100 percent of their water rights under the Central Valley Project Improvement Act.



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Flood waters in January rush over a road and inundate stream banks in the Yolo Bypass.
PHOTO BY ANDREW CREASEY

What Mother Nature giveth, the Government taketh away.

Amid all that good news and abundant water supply, though, the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge still has no water allocation

The Klamath Project, which delivers water to farms and ranches as well as the refuge, has been constrained for the past 20 years by the water needs of species listed under the Endangered Species Act: coho salmon and the shortnose and Lost River suckers.

The Lower Klamath NWR is the first waterfowl refuge, established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. Sixty percent of all the birds migrating on the Pacific Flyway pass through the refuge each year in the fall and again in the spring of the following year. The refuge is critical for supplying the birds with adequate food energy for their journey into California.

The refuge relies on the Klamath Project for water, but it is not a designated purpose of the project, and has the lowest priority, behind the endangered species and the irrigators. When there is not enough water to go

around, the refuges are the first to lose their supply.

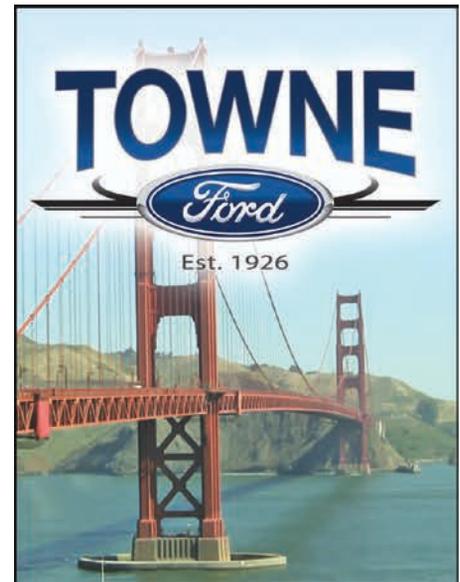
In 2017, with the largest amount of water available since the beginning of the Project, the refuge is still unsure of having any water next fall. The Bureau of Reclamation has not announced an allocation for the refuge as of mid-April.

The reason is that certain tribes on the mainstream Klamath River have sued to seek more water from the Project to protect salmon farther down the river. Although it is uncertain how much water will be taken from the Project, it is certain that the water will come first from the refuge's allocation.

California Waterfowl is working with other conservation groups to reach out to the irrigators in the Klamath Project for help in resolving the refuge's chronic water supply problems. We hope to get the help of the Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke, to reach a comprehensive solution like the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement. That agreement would have provided the refuge with an adequate and secure water supply, but the agreement lapsed in 2015 when Congress failed to pass a bill that would authorize the federal government to implement it. 🐾

WANT TO HELP?

If you would like to help California Waterfowl fight these ongoing water battles, be sure to sign up for eNews at www.calwaterfowl.org/call-to-action - we'll let you know when it's time to contact your representatives, we'll give you the facts, and we'll make it easy for you to email them.



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