

News Release

Klamath Water Users Association

Klamath Farmers Pave the Way for Lower Klamath Refuge to Begin Receiving Klamath Project Water Allocation

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On September 4th, Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge began receiving 50 cubic feet per second (cfs) of Klamath Project Supply through Ady Canal, operated by Klamath Drainage District. This delivery, on top of water already being provided, comes at a critical time for fall waterfowl migration, and has become available through extensive coordination and efforts by Klamath Project irrigators.

“We have been very conservative with our supply this year and feel fortunate that we are able to send some additional water to the Refuge at this critical time,” said Tulelake Irrigation District Manager Brad Kirby. “We will still have irrigation demand through November, so we will proceed cautiously and closely monitor diversion of the remaining supply and meet the needs of Project irrigators while attempting to maximize benefit of potential available water for the Refuge.

The combination of responsible water management by irrigators and various favorable weather conditions have led to the Klamath Project potentially having anywhere between 6,000-21,000 acre-feet (estimated) of a calculated “Project Supply” available for diversion to the Lower Klamath Refuge. Since April, there has been ongoing inter-district coordination and conservation measures, as well as coordination with refuge managers and conservation groups.

“The Klamath Project irrigators understand the importance of the refuge to waterfowl and are pleased to be able to make a water supply available for the critical early fall period when waterfowl start migrating through the Basin,” said Klamath Drainage District Manager Scott White.

The timing of the water delivery is paramount in determining the benefit of Lower Klamath Refuge to the waterfowl of the Pacific Flyway. Kirby noted that the current diversion is not necessarily all that will occur. “Our district may also have additional water that we can pump from Tule Lake sumps to the refuge when the waterfowl managers say it would do the most good, he said.”

Under current Endangered Species Act (ESA) restrictions, there is a total “Project Supply” from Upper Klamath Lake calculated for the March-October irrigation season at the Klamath Project. The refuge can only use Project Supply that is in excess of irrigation needs, along with some other sources that exist outside the Project Supply. In years past, there would have been more than adequate water available for refuge needs, but that has changed

due to ESA requirements to maintain water levels in Upper Klamath and to send water down the Klamath River.

“Even in a year with 130 percent of average precipitation, we still did not have a full allocation to the Project,” said Klamath Irrigation District Manager Gene Souza. The ESA requirements for fish are overwhelmingly the biggest risk to the water needs of the Refuge as well as the Project.”

