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Dam removal agreement presents tremendous opportunity for conservation of Klamath Refuges

Sacramento, CA – Representatives of Audubon California today expressed hope that a new multi-agency agreement to remove four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River could create new opportunities for much-needed conservation of the nearby Klamath National Wildlife Refuges that straddle the California/Oregon border. The non-binding agreement struck between the U.S. Department of the Interior, the states of Oregon and California, and the energy company that operates the dams, is mainly intended to resolve the basin's long-standing trouble balancing the water needs of agriculture and the river's important fisheries.

“Although the purpose of this agreement has more to do with farming and fishing, the removal of these dams creates more flexibility to allocate water to the historic wetlands of the Klamath Refuges,” said Dan Taylor, director of public policy for Audubon California. “Water has been diverted away from these important bird and wildlife habitats for too long, and this is an opportunity to go in a different direction.”

The Klamath Basin is one of the most important stops on the Pacific Flyway, and the Refuges provide critical migratory habitat for millions of waterbirds and wintering grounds for the largest concentration of bald eagles in North America. The Klamath Refuges are home to 25 endangered, threatened, or sensitive species including two of the last White Pelican breeding colonies in California.

In all more than 430 different wildlife species have been observed in the Klamath Basin including 263 species of birds. The Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges have appropriately been called one of the “crown jewels” of the North American Wildlife Refuge System and have been designated an “Important Bird Area” of global significance.

Agricultural development and settlement have claimed more than 75 percent of the Basin's 350,000 acres of historic wetlands. Today, peak waterfowl concentrations utilizing the refuges are less than a half of historic levels, which surpassed six million birds, reflecting loss of habitat at Klamath and throughout their migratory ranges.

“Audubon California's long-term vision for the Klamath National Wildlife Refuges is to see all refuge lands managed with a sufficient and secure supply of water for birds and wildlife,” added Taylor. “While this agreement offers us new opportunities, the first step is putting a higher value on the Refuges themselves.”

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About Audubon California

Audubon California is building a better future for California by bringing people together to appreciate, enjoy and protect our spectacular outdoor treasures. With more than 50,000 members in California and an affiliated 49 local Audubon chapters, Audubon California is a field program of the National Audubon Society.

More information is available at www.ca.audubon.org.

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