

KLF-Findlay Klamath Forest Wilderness Study Area Public Hearing Statement
KLAMATH FOREST WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
PUBLIC HEARING STATEMENT

BY

JOHN D. FINDLAY
BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE REPRESENTATIVE
(DATE)

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. I am John D. Findlay, Regional Director, Region 1, of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. Our Regional Office is in Portland, Oregon. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I welcome you to this hearing on a wilderness area study of the Klamath Forest National Wildlife Refuge.

As background, I should like to point out that the Wilderness Act of 1964, directed the Secretary of the Interior to review all roadless areas of 5,000 acres or more and every roadless island within the National Wildlife Refuge System to determine their suitability or non-suitability as wilderness.

Further, regulations of the Secretary of the Interior published on February 22, 1966, require this Bureau to review those areas qualifying for study under the Wilderness Act that are: (a) reasonably compact; (b) undeveloped; (c) possessing general characteristics of wilderness; and (d) without improved roads suitable for public travel by conventional automobile.

The National Wildlife Refuge System consists of over 300 units containing nearly 30 million acres. Units of the system are found on lands reaching from the shores of the Arctic Ocean to islands of the Central Pacific and from Maine to the Florida Keys.

There is one or more national wildlife refuges in every one of the 17 major life zones of North America. Therefore, the ecology of each national wildlife refuge differs - at least to some degree - from that of any other refuge. Because of these differences, management objectives of individual refuges are often quite different. About 90 national wildlife refuges, containing nearly 25 million acres, qualify for study as wilderness. These refuges are located in 32 different states.

As you can see, the wilderness review program in the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, of which this proposal is a part, encompasses a wide spectrum of lands within national wildlife refuges in the country. Only through careful study and analysis can a proper determination be made regarding whether a national wildlife refuge, or a portion of a national wildlife refuge, qualifies for consideration by the Secretary of the Interior as wilderness. We are presenting the results of our study of the Klamath Forest National Wildlife Refuge for your consideration today.

You have a copy of the summary of the study we have made of this proposal. Copies of the complete study report are available for your scrutiny after the hearing. We ask you to please leave them in the hearing room after you have finished with them, because the number of copies is very limited. A copy of my statement also is available, if you do not already have one, for your information and use.

The Klamath Basin of northern California and southern Oregon is one of the world's outstanding waterfowl areas. The Basin acts as a giant funnel through which pass three-fourths of the entire population of the

Pacific Flyway. During fall migration several million birds depend on this region for their life needs.

Five national wildlife refuges have been established here to provide food and protection and to help perpetuate the Basin's dwindling wetlands. For, while most of the wetlands of this region have been drained and converted to agricultural use, the birds continue to fly their ancient migration routes and crowd into the remaining habitat.

The Klamath Forest National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1958, is the newest addition to this complex of waterfowl areas. It was purchased with Duck Stamp Funds following passage of the Klamath Termination Act of 1954.

The Klamath Forest Refuge is perhaps misnamed, since its 15,200 acres include only a couple of hundred acres of pine forest. The refuge's main feature is a marsh covering almost 15,000 acres. Historically, this marsh has provided some of the finest waterfowl nesting habitat in the Basin. It is also an important migration area. Now, as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System it continues to serve this function.

The Klamath Forest Marsh is set in an elongated, shallow basin in the Williamson River Drainage. Its long axis is north-south and the main river channel lies along the eastern and southern edge. From the center of the marsh outward the ascending topography is outlined by definite changes in the vegetation. Open water gives way to true fresh water marsh in the shallower reaches. In turn, marsh is replaced by wet meadow,

upland meadow, and finally pine forest that almost completely surrounds the marsh.

During fall migration the marsh may host up to 60,000 ducks and geese as well as a large variety of other waterbirds. With full development of the marsh, two or three times as many birds could be accommodated. Canada geese and a number of ducks find nesting conditions to their liking. The sandhill crane and other waterbirds also nest on the refuge. In all, over 230 different birds occur in this region.

The marsh serves other wildlife as well. Muskrats and other small mammals of the marsh and meadows are common. Mule deer are frequently seen as are coyotes and bobcats hunting the marsh. Even an occasional black bear or cougar ventures into the refuge.

Public use of the refuge is low with a good deal of this use attributable to residents of nearby communities. The marsh is popular for waterfowl hunting and fishing and the surrounding lands attract deer hunters. Certainly, one of the reasons for the refuge's low use is the diluting effect of other refuges in the Basin as well as the Basin's remoteness from population centers. In the years to come we expect public use on all of these refuges to increase, and with the increase, a shift in the visitor's emphasis to the non-consumptive recreational activities.

In its present state the marsh is still largely natural. Its maximum level is limited by a lava sill in the southwest corner of the refuge.

The water supply is governed by natural runoff and the agricultural demands placed on waters of the Williamson River and ground water sources.

Water is easily the most critical factor in the marshes' future. Without it the refuge as a waterfowl area would cease to exist. Water is being diverted upstream on the Williamson River and downstream below the refuge at an alarming rate. The situation is further aggravated by a lowering of the water table through pumping from adjacent wells. As a result, water levels are decreasing and the marsh receding. These pessimistic trends will continue until water rights of the various users are adjudicated and until refuge development is effective in retaining water in the marsh.

The basic objective of the Klamath Forest Refuge is the preservation and enhancement of the marsh as an integral part of total waterfowl environment of the Klamath Basin. To achieve these aims maximum development of the marsh is necessary. Developments would include construction of a low dam at the outlet of the marsh, a north-south dike dividing the marsh south of Silver Lake Highway, and two wells to augment the water supply. The Silver Lake Highway, bisecting the marsh, presently acts as a dike diverting water east toward the main channel of the Williamson River. These developments are essential to perpetuate the marsh.

In addition, we intend to enhance the waterfowl habitat by fences to better distribute grazing, pothole blasting, and other appropriate management techniques.

Refuge plans also call for future acquisition of about 5,700 acres of

private and Indian lands adjacent to the present refuge boundary. These lands are within the original acquisition boundary approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. The lands would be largely inundated with the planned development and are, therefore, necessary to complete this development.

A number of developments presently on the refuge are at variance with wilderness. They include fences, developed wells in various stages of disrepair, artificial wood duck nests, a cabin for administrative use, the blacktopped Silver Lake Highway, and a chain link fenced enclosure around an historic Indian cremation-burial site. With the exception of the highway, all of these developments are temporary.

The refuge is grazed by cattle and certain portions are hayed. Both activities are conducted under permit and are an aid to the local economy. More important, however, is their role in waterfowl management. Properly managed haying and grazing open the thick stands of vegetation and improve the nesting cover for waterfowl and waterbirds. Fences are required to manage grazing and mechanical equipment to harvest the native hay.

My preceding remarks have summarized the findings of a wilderness area study conducted on the Klamath Forest National Wildlife Refuge. It was an in-depth examination of all factors mitigating for or against wilderness on the area. The study was conducted by a regional wilderness team aided by refuge personnel and the staff of the Portland Regional Office of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. We are indebted to a

number of individuals and governmental agencies for information essential to the study.

Our recommendations to the Director, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Washington, D.C., will be as follows:

No lands of the 15,226-acre Klamath Forest National Wildlife Refuge are suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

While substantial portions of the refuge are undisturbed and most of the remaining disturbances are of a temporary nature, inclusion of the Klamath Forest marsh would preclude its development for waterfowl and other waterbirds.

To forego these developments in deference to wilderness would prevent achievement of the basic objectives of the refuge and probably lead to the ultimate loss of the area as a marsh.