

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) owns lands to serve the needs of wildlife, as well as public recreation. Establishment and maintenance of wildlife areas and other resource properties is an integral part of the Department's mission to "protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations." Wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, hiking and viewing provide positive economic benefits to local communities.

Klamath Basin

History and Importance: The natural ecosystem of the Klamath Basin has been altered since the arrival of European settlers in the late 1800's with a high percentage of wetlands converted into agriculture. Meanwhile water rights and usage continue to be a complex and challenging issue in the area. Klamath Basin continues to be an important resident and migratory stopover for birds in the Pacific Flyway. Counts of one-half million waterfowl in the spring and one million in the fall are common. Extensive food and resting areas are needed to support these populations and prevent depredation to private agriculture. Socially and economically, wildlife viewing and hunting is an extremely important aspect of the Klamath Basin community.

Klamath Wildlife Area

Klamath Wildlife Area was established in 1958, with primary objectives of protecting and improving waterfowl habitat and providing a public hunting area. The wildlife area consists of four parcels in Klamath County, in south-central Oregon. The largest parcel (Miller Island Unit) is located along State Highway 97, six miles south and west of Klamath Falls and an additional parcel is located six miles downstream along the Klamath River. The other two parcels are on the west side of Upper Klamath Lake. The wildlife area is 3,412 acres in size.

Anderson Property

Frank Anderson, the property owner, approached the Department to see if we were interested in purchasing his 214 acres located on Miller Island along the Klamath River. The property has been in Frank's family for generations and was originally used for pasture. Due to wetland characteristics of the property, attempts at raising alfalfa were unsuccessful. Frank then enrolled the property in an NRCS permanent Wetland Reserve Program easement to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on the property. This effort fits well with the Klamath Wildlife Area Management Plan provisions that acquisitions "... must be for conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats and to provide fish and wildlife oriented public use for educational and recreational purposes." The Anderson property is adjacent to the Klamath Wildlife Area and NRCS has already committed resources to restore wetland function and fence the property in 2018.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

One public meeting was held in Klamath Falls to provide information on the proposed land acquisition and garner public input. Seven members of the public were present, all in support of the acquisition.

Information on the acquisition and invitations for the public meeting were provided to the Klamath County Commission.

ISSUE 1

1. PURCHASE OF ANDERSON PROPERTY TO BE INCLUDED INTO THE KLAMATH WILDLIFE AREA.

ANALYSIS

The Klamath Wildlife Area vision/mission statement is to protect and enhance habitat for all endemic wildlife, provide wildlife resources for use and enjoyment by present and future generations while reducing waterfowl depredation on adjacent private lands.

The Anderson property is 214 acres which consists of 40 acres of uplands and 174 acres of wetlands (managed as a palustrine seasonal to semi-permanent wetland.) The property has water rights (dated from 1879) of 4.89 cfs on 195 acres of pasture.

Flood irrigation will be utilized where possible with the existing irrigation water right from the Klamath River.

Spring through early summer uplands will be managed as a nesting and forage area for a variety of bird species including but not limited to passerines and waterfowl. Grazing will be utilized post-nesting season (late summer) to late winter depending on forage conditions to pre-condition pasture vegetation in preparation for spring migrating goose usage.

The property will provide additional hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, and educational opportunities. At present, a total of 21,000 users visit Klamath Wildlife Area, Miller Island Unit yearly with 14,000 of those for viewing, 2,400 hunters, and 4,600 other uses. Visitor use on/to the property (hunting, viewing, other recreation) will be administered as part of the Miller Island Unit. An additional parking area will be built on existing ODFW property to accommodate users.

Funding for this project will come from the Waterfowl Stamp Fund. No Department license funds will be used towards the purchase of this property. As with other properties, the Department will make payment to the County in-lieu of taxes.

OPTIONS

1. Approve the purchase of the Anderson Property
2. Take no action

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

Approve the acquisition of approximately 214 acres in Klamath County to benefit habitat restoration and public access, and direct staff to proceed to escrow closing upon completion of all processes required under Oregon law for land acquisition.

DRAFT MOTION

I move to approve the acquisition of the Anderson Property and direct staff to proceed to escrow closing upon completion of all processes required under Oregon law for land acquisition.

EFFECTIVE DATE

October 12, 2018