

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT STAND AIMED AT ENDING KLAMATH-TULE LAKE WILDLIFE STALEMATE

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today sent to Congress suggestions on proposed legislation to safeguard for waterfowl use the vital Klamath-Tule Lake wildlife area near the California-Oregon line. He said that if the suggestions are approved, the legislation will be a significant conservation achievement and solve a problem that has been under discussion for over 20 years.

Secretary Udall's views became known in reporting on legislation (Senate Bill 1988) introduced by United States Senator Thomas H. Kuchel of California. Secretary Udall's suggested amendments to the Kuchel legislation would, according to the Department, serve to recognize more clearly the Federal Government's present contractual obligations to the Tulelake Irrigation District in California and the Klamath Drainage District in Oregon. The legislation is designed to permit present agricultural use while simultaneously protecting waterfowl use in three refuges. The legislation, as advocated by Secretary Udall, prevents future sale or homesteading of lands which would be dedicated to providing essential nesting, feeding, and resting grounds for ducks and geese on the Pacific Flyway.

Waterfowl experts of the Department estimate the marsh land is used by 80 percent of ducks and geese on the Pacific Flyway during the fall migration. The area is generally regarded as one of the most important waterfowl grounds on the North American Continent.

The refuges were created by Executive order upon lands under the primary jurisdiction of the Bureau of Reclamation. By terms of an agreement, the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service manages the lands designated as refuges. Much of the remaining publicly owned project land is leased to private individuals for farming. The harvested fields provide waste grain and stubble heavily utilized by ducks and geese.

Under the terms of the proposed legislation, this practice of leasing would be continued. All public lands within the boundaries of the Refuges would be administered for the major purpose of waterfowl management, but with full consideration for the optimum agricultural use that is consistent with waterfowl conservation. Some of the areas would be developed as waterfowl habitat or to augment public shooting grounds. Additional tracts would be developed intensively for waterfowl use. These include the Klamath Straits Unit, Sheepy West, Sheepy East, and Miller Lake tract, all within the lower Klamath Refuge.

Provision is made for turning over to county governments a percentage of the funds received from leasing agricultural lands. Provisions which would assure the carrying out of the Government's contractual obligations with the Tulelake Irrigation District and Klamath Drainage District are included in the proposed legislation. The right of the Secretary of the Interior to continue the policy and practice of leasing land for agricultural uses is clarified.

The Department underscored its desire to give due emphasis to reclamation and agricultural benefits as well as wildlife conservation.

The Lower Klamath Refuge was set aside by Executive Order in 1908. Tule Lake Refuge and Upper Klamath Refuge were established in 1928. The total in the three refuges now is 91,619 acres. An additional 6,891 acres, included in the proposed bill, would bring the total acreage with permanent waterfowl-agricultural use to 98,510 acres.

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