



# News Release

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May 27, 2020

## Partnership adds three miles of the Williamson River to the Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

**CHILOQUIN, Ore.**— Western Rivers Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have successfully conserved a 2,200-acre ranch along the Williamson River, in the headwaters of the Klamath River and adjacent to the Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge.

Western Rivers Conservancy conveyed the property to the Service for inclusion and protection within the 40,000-acre wildlife refuge, permanently protecting three miles of the Williamson River. The project will improve both the quality and quantity of water entering the marsh from the river, which will in turn bolster water quality within the Klamath system as a whole.

The effort also preserves extensive marshlands and wet meadows that shelter a diverse assemblage of migratory bird species that travel up and down the Pacific Flyway during their migration between Alaska and South America.

Originally part of the Klamath Tribes' ancestral homelands, the ranch was later owned by the legendary William "Kitt" Kittredge, who began ranching the area in the early 1900s. The Kittredge Ranch spanned over 68,000 acres of marsh and meadowlands, and was one of the West's largest ranches at the time.

"The impact this project will have on the Klamath system is extraordinary," said Zach Spector, project operations director for Western Rivers Conservancy. "It will improve the upper Williamson River and Klamath Marsh, deliver better and more water to the Klamath River, and protect outstanding habitat at the heart of one of the West's most important bird areas."

Located on the eastern edge of the wildlife refuge, the property hosts tens of thousands of nesting and feeding birds throughout the year. The Service expects those numbers to grow as it restores the property's river channels and marshlands.

"This acquisition would not have been possible without Western Rivers Conservancy. This is a great addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System and to Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge," said Greg Austin, Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex manager. "The Service looks forward to working with the Klamath Tribes to develop a habitat management plan that improves the marsh."

Notable bird species that utilize the property include cinnamon teal, gadwall, mallard, sandhill crane, trumpeter swans, Forster's tern, dowitchers, sandpipers, and hundreds of others. The area

also shelters the rarely-seen yellow rail, which has 200 nesting pairs in the Klamath Marsh, or about half of the West's breeding population.

Surrounding the marshlands, the property's ponderosa pine forests support deer, elk and pronghorn. The project has great opportunities to benefit the Williamson's scale-tipping redband trout (famous among anglers), the Miller Lake lamprey, listed as an Oregon sensitive species, and the federally endangered Lost River and shortnose suckers.

The Williamson River supplies Klamath Marsh with high-quality water that eventually reaches Upper Klamath Lake, providing half of the lake's inflows. To improve the quantity and quality of these flows, the Service plans to restore and reconnect the property's reach of the Williamson River and recreate natural channel meanders that deliver water to the marsh. The water flowing out of the marsh is naturally rich in tannic acids, which help suppress toxic algal blooms in Upper Klamath Lake.

"By delivering increased flows and better water quality at the very source of the Klamath River, this project will benefit not just fish and wildlife but everyone who depends on a healthy Klamath River: the Klamath Tribes, the agricultural community and recreationists alike," said Spector.

Western Rivers Conservancy has been working in the Klamath basin for more than a decade to protect vital habitat and cold-water sources for fish, wildlife and local communities. On California's North Coast, Western Rivers and the Yurok Tribe created an unprecedented salmon sanctuary in 2018, protecting the entire lower half of Blue Creek, the most important source of cold water for salmon and steelhead on the lower Klamath River.

This effort on the Williamson River was made possible with funding from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which utilizes Federal Duck Stamps and other funding sources for the Department of the Interior to acquire and protect important migratory bird habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System. Generous support was also received from Meyer Memorial Trust, Giles W. & Elise G. Mead Foundation, Evermine, Weeden Foundation, Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust, The Flyfisher Foundation, Pacific Power Foundation and donor advised funds of Oregon Community Foundation, including GreenSprings Fund, Marshik Family Fund, and Schamp Family Fund.

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS

**Western Rivers Conservancy** acquires lands along rivers throughout the West to conserve habitat for fish and wildlife and to create or improve public access for compatible use and enjoyment. By cooperating with local agencies and organizations and by applying decades of land acquisition experience, WRC secures the health of whole ecosystems. WRC has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great western rivers, including the Klamath, North

Umpqua, John Day, Eel, Madison, Rio Grande, Yampa, Salmon and Snake rivers. To learn more, visit [www.westernrivers.org](http://www.westernrivers.org)

**The Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge** is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is one of six refuges within the larger Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex, a freshwater mosaic of lakes and meadows that hosts two-thirds of the millions of migratory birds that navigate the Pacific Flyway each year between Patagonia and Alaska. Part of the Klamath Tribes' indigenous homeland, the 40,000-acre Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge includes expansive wet meadows, open water wetlands, and the upper reaches of the Williamson River, altogether supporting important nesting, feeding, and staging habitat for waterfowl and sandhill crane.

During the current public health emergency, outdoor recreation sites at national wildlife refuges, including the Klamath Marsh, remain open to the public as social distancing allows. For more information, visit [fws.gov/refuge/klamath\\_marsh](http://fws.gov/refuge/klamath_marsh)

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