



News

NEWS RELEASE – *for immediate release*

Media Contact: Ali Ryan Hansen, 503-510-6860, ali.r.hansen@dsl.oregon.gov

October 11, 2022

Klamath Lake Wetland Project Honored with State Land Board Award

SALEM, Ore. – Transformation of a degraded, contaminated 45-acre landscape on the shores of Klamath Lake into wetland habitat was honored today by the State Land Board during the 18th Annual State Land Board Awards.

Governor Kate Brown, Treasurer Tobias Read, and Secretary of State Shemia Fagan recognized the Klamath Lake Wetland Mitigation Project, a project in south-central Oregon that restored wetlands, developed new channels, and created a pond for reintroduction of endangered fish species.

“Exceptional collaboration brought exceptional results,” said Secretary Fagan, who presented the award. “The Klamath Lake Wetland Mitigation Project addressed past and future impacts to meaningfully improve water quality and wetland habitat for the endangered fish species that are so important to the Klamath Tribes.”

Since the early 1900s, agricultural uses have replaced more than 70 percent of the wetlands connected to Klamath Lake—the largest freshwater lake west of the Rocky Mountains. In the past 50 years, the lakeshore was also used as a dumping ground for discarded debris, much of it laden with asbestos and rebar.

The loss of wetlands and the addition of agricultural runoff into the lake negatively impacted the health of the entire Klamath Basin and the Lost River, and the shortnose suckers that depend on it. Known by the Klamath Tribes as C’waam and Koptu, young fish are particularly vulnerable to poor water quality and habitat loss. This loss is felt deeply by the tribes.

The Tribes’ creation story says “if C’waam go away, the people go away.”

“All surviving suckers currently in Klamath Lake were born between 1991 and 1993,” shared project partner Allison Cowie of the Oregon Department of Transportation. “They’re facing extinction, and the survival of the juvenile fish became an intense focus of our restoration efforts.”

A 0.5-acre meticulously designed sucker rearing pond, connected to the lake by a head-gate, is serving as an experimental nursery for the endangered juvenile suckers and is advancing the science for their potential recovery.

When the Federal Highway Administration, Western Federal Lands Highway Division initially reached out to ODOT for wetland, geology, and right-of-way assistance and to the Forest Service Restoration Services Team (RST) for revegetation assistance ODOT, in turn, reached out to the Tribes for sucker expertise. What followed was an integrative cooperation among all state and federal agencies, Tribal representatives, contractors and volunteers throughout this ambitious undertaking.

“This project used innovative, collaborative approaches to achieve multiple goals,” said Department of State Lands Director Vicki Walker. “Project partners cleaned up a contaminated former mill site, improved the water quality, and engineered solutions to benefit two regionally and culturally-valued endangered species.”

A collaborative approach continues post construction.

In the spring of 2022, more than 800 juvenile suckers were introduced to the pond. The Tribes are managing this introduction by assessing ongoing water quality and the health of the fish as they mature. RST is installing native plants and managing weeds on an ongoing basis and, in the spring of 2022, installed mats with a diverse palate of native wetland plant species.

ODOT will continue to coordinate with the Klamath Lake Land Trust to build and install floating islands to provide improved water quality and localized fish habitat. Klamath Lake Land Trust volunteers have also installed bird houses and photo stations, with future plans to install wildlife structures. These ongoing partnerships are expected to expand over time and will help to ensure lasting stewardship of this noteworthy project over the long term.

The State Land Board Awards honor exceptional projects and partners for their contributions to protecting and enhancing Oregon’s treasured natural resources. The State Land Board Awards honor exceptional projects and partners for their contributions to protecting and enhancing Oregon’s treasured natural resources. View the awards ceremony on the Department of State Lands [YouTube Channel](#).

###

About the State Land Board

The State Land Board consists of Governor Kate Brown, Secretary of State Shemia Fagan and State Treasurer Tobias Read. Established by the Oregon Constitution in 1859, the Land Board oversees the state’s Common School Fund.

About the Department of State Lands

The Department of State Lands is the Land Board’s administrative agency, managing the lands and resources that help fund Oregon’s public schools and protecting the state’s waterways and wetlands for the many benefits they provide. For more information on DSL, visit www.oregon.gov/DSL.