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WHOLESALE WATERFOWL DESTRUCTION IN THE KLAMATH COUNTRY

During the late 90's, market hunters carried on a prosperous business along the Oregon-California boundary at Lower Klamath and Tule Lakes. The records of the Game Transfer Company in San Francisco showed that one hundred and twenty tons of ducks were shipped to market from this region in one season. The passage of state laws in Oregon and California stopped this traffic.

Today the records show that the Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior have killed far more water fowl than all of the market hunters combined because they have destroyed the vast breeding, feeding and nesting areas.

A part of this destruction comes from drying up swamps and lakes, the ancestral resting, breeding and feeding areas of ducks, geese and other migratory water fowl. This may be justified on the basis of developing more important uses of land and water for the public benefit.

On the other hand, acts not essential to irrigation and reclamation, that show unnecessary destruction of one public resource in developing another, cannot be justified.

Lower Klamath Lake, lying partly in California and partly in Oregon, was ceded to the government in 1904 and 1905 respectively by the legislatures of these two states. At the time, it was thought to be valuable for reclamation.

On August 8, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt issued a Special Executive Proclamation creating Lower Klamath Lake into a wild bird reservation. This, of course, was subject to its use by the Reclamation Service.

The Lake was a natural sump area, being the lowest part of the Klamath Basin. Eighty thousand acres of shallow water and vast tule marshes made it one of the greatest wildfowl refuges in the United States. The supply of water came from a channel leading south from the Klamath River. The water flowing in and out kept the lake and the river on the same level.

Years ago, careful examinations were made of the soil in and around the bed of this lake by the Department of Agriculture. Dr. C. F. Marbut, soil expert, reported that all evidence pointed to the conclusion that successful agriculture could not be carried on within the area of deep tule peat or within the area formerly covered by water. Experiments proved this to be the case.

In the face of these facts, on November 30, 1917, the Reclamation Service entered into a contract with a land promotion corporation called the Klamath Drainage District. A dike was built across the channel; Reclamation officials closed the gates cutting off the water from the Klamath River, and the Lake dried up by evaporation.

Lower Klamath Lake, an outdoor resource in its primitive condition, was traded for lands now partly deserted and partly held by a destitute class of farmers.

The Reclamation projects established in different western states created reservoirs or large bodies of water, some combined with swamp areas, which were recognized as advantageous sanctuaries for water fowl. In certain cases, all or parts of these areas have been created by Special Executive Proclamations as wild bird reservations. The Presidential orders establishing these sanctuaries provide against the destroying of nests and eggs, or hunting or disturbing birds.

The Reclamation Service has priority rights in the development of certain lands and waters in the above mentioned districts. The Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture has secondary rights in protecting and developing the wildlife resources on the lands and waters of this district.

There has been and at present exists a lack in coordination of the work of these two federal departments both spending public funds. The acts of the Bureau of Reclamation have nullified the services of the Biological Survey. The result has been a very great destruction of water fowl that could have been prevented. Therefore, we feel that the rights of the Biological Survey in preserving wildfowl, although secondary, should be recognized.

A number of cases may be presented where the Reclamation Service is destroying bird life on federal wildfowl reservations as the result of adopting a policy which is not essential to successful irrigation and reclamation. This policy has been the leasing of these federal reservations where birds nest and feed to livestock owners for grazing purposes.

Clear Lake may be given as an example. It lies in Modoc County, northern California, and was created a bird sanctuary by Executive Order, April 11, 1911. Originally it was a body of water about eight by ten miles. All around the border of the lake was natural plant life where different species of ducks and many Canada geese were nesting. The sage brush areas around the border were the breeding places of many sage hens. The value of this sanctuary lay in the number and variety of bird life, and its distance from any settled area.

The waters of the lake have now been lowered to the limit, leaving a large part of the old lake bed uncovered. Of these uncovered lands, the Reclamation Service has signed four leases turning over 14,120 acres of the reservation to stockmen. The average price received was about twenty-five cents per acre per year. These leases started in 1931. At first, the flocks of sheep not only grazed off the natural vegetation but tramped through colonies of birds, destroying the nestlings.

Upon complaint of the Biological Survey, any leases now authorized by the Bureau of Reclamation forbid grazing between April 1st and July 1st. While this may prevent tramping out of the birds' nests, it destroys all of the natural cover necessary for bird life.

B. E. Hayden, Chief Engineer in charge of the Project, claims that formerly range stock had free access to the grass and weeds that grew along the water's edge. Therefore, it was leased to stockmen in return for cash revenues, as follows. From 1931 to 1934, \$9552.57 was received by the Reclamation Service and was applied to the construction charges or costs of the districts affected.

Mr. Hayden's report states that "the Reclamation Bureau might well entertain some reasonable proposition from the Biological Survey where the Survey would compensate the settlers for the agreed loss of revenue, and the Survey then be permitted to fence the entire lake or any portion thereof for the complete exclusion of stock, due provision being made for stock lanes to accommodate range cattle and sheep."

The Reclamation Service in conjunction with the Biolo-

gical Survey has full power and authority to keep range stock off this reservation as a protection to bird life.

The suggestion that one department of the government pay another department for the rights to conserve a natural resource is an absurdity. It shows a lack of coordination in the work of two bureaus, both dealing with important public resources. Why should the Biological Survey pay the settlers on the Clear Lake Project for the privilege of preserving bird life on federal funds set aside for this purpose by the President of the United States?

The Bureau of Reclamation could greatly assist in wild fowl protection and restoration by cancelling its leases and stopping the grazing of livestock on federal bird reservations. The sum of money received for grazing rights on sanctuaries does not compensate for the amount of destruction. Leases to stockmen are not a service essential to irrigation or reclamation. Reclamation officials in the Klamath District have promoted the uses of land and water but have been unmindful of the protection and development of wildlife resources.