KWUA Klamath Water Users Association
2312 South Sixth Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601
(541) 883-6100 Phone • (541) 883-8893 Fax
www.kwua.org

# Tule Lake Flow-Through: A Multi-Benefit Water Management and Ecological Improvement Approach for the Klamath Basin

**February 2026**

**Introduction and Purpose:** Tule Lake Flow-Through is a basin-wide water management approach that builds on the historical operation of the Klamath Project while mimicking natural hydrologic conditions. Water moves continuously from Upper Klamath Lake through canals, drains, pumping stations[1], agricultural lands, Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuges. Water is also returned to the Klamath River with better water quality. Flow-through integrates multiple objectives by supporting food production, sustaining wildlife and fisheries habitat, improving water quality, recharging the shallow aquifer, reducing infrastructure damage, and strengthening the resilience of the communities and counties of Modoc and Siskiyou (CA), and Klamath (OR).

**Agricultural and Community Benefits:** Maintaining live flows through irrigation infrastructure reduces damage to irrigation infrastructure, improves operational uncertainty for water users, limits reliance on groundwater pumping, and helps stabilize the well-being of local economies that depend on agriculture. Continuous soil moisture improves efficiency by lowering the total volume of surface water required to charge the system annually while sustaining crop and livestock production. This approach supports healthy soils and productive farmland, aids in dust abatement, pest control, strengthens rural communities, and enhances the overall resilience of Basin economies.

**Environmental Benefits:**

**Tule Lake and Lower Klamath Refuges:** Managed as dynamic, functioning wetlands rather than static storage areas, these refuges slow water movement, filter nutrients, and provide essential habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, helping address long-standing challenges such as poor water quality, dust storms created by dewatering wetlands, disease outbreaks (such as botulism), grasshopper infestations, while maintaining the refuges' historic role in the Basin. Well-hydrated wildlife refuges also support recreation and waterfowl hunting, providing economic benefits to local communities and counties.

**Native Fish and Water Quality:** Flow-through benefits native fish, including salmon and sucker species, by improving water quality and expanding habitat availability across canals, wetlands, and managed waterways. As water moves through agricultural fields and wetlands, nutrient loads are reduced and temperatures are moderated, creating conditions more favorable for fish health and recruitment than direct, untreated releases.

**Groundwater / Aquifer Recharge:** Allowing water to infiltrate through fields, canals, and wetlands restores the shallow aquifer, which has been depleted in the last two decades due to surface water delivery curtailments. This recharge supports healthier soils and crops, stabilizes rural wells, maintains ground stability critical for infrastructure, increases springtime return flows to the Klamath River canyon, and contributes to overall Basin resilience.

**Conclusion:** Flow-through fosters a shared framework where agriculture, wildlife refuges, tribes, agencies, and communities work toward common outcomes rather than competing demands. By recognizing the interconnected nature of the Basin's water system, this approach provides opportunities to develop durable agreements and long-term solutions that benefit both people and the environment. Tule Lake Flow-through offers a balanced, integrated water management approach that reflects both the Basin's historical function and its path forward, demonstrating that multiple objectives can be met through thoughtful, landscape-scale water management.

[1] Essential infrastructure utilized includes A, C, D and G canals, Earl Danosky Pumping Plant, Pumping Plants E and F, Klamath Straits Drain, P Canal, Lost River Diversion Channel, Sumps 1A and 1B, Anderson Rose Dam, and the Lost River Diversion Channel.