**White Paper on Sale of Klamath Sprig and Honker Club Property**

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**INTRODUCTION**:

The Klamath Sprig and Honker Club, Inc. (“KSHC”) currently is the owner of property located adjacent to the southeastern portion of the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge boundary. This property is located approximately 2 miles south of Stateline Highway 16; and is approximately 6.5 miles directly west of the City of Tulelake, California and approximately 15.3 miles east-southeast of the City of Doris, California (the “property”). This property is almost completely surrounded by United States Fish and Wildlife land. This paper is intended to give information about a proposed sale of the property to Federal Fish and Wildlife.

**BACKGROUND:**

In the early 1900’s, the property was part of the expansive Lower Klamath Lake. As the Klamath Irrigation Project was developed in the early 1900’s, Lower Klamath Lake was slowly drained**.** Most of the historic Lower Klamath Lake was established as the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge with extensive levees and water control structures being constructed by the Federal Government. The KSHC property was not part of the original footprint of Lower Klamath NWR. Prior to becoming a private duck club (the “duck club”), the property had consisted of grazing and small grain production. The property is considered a seasonal wetland, with water usually being applied in fall and either drained or naturally evaporated in late spring.

The property has been used as a duck club since approximately 1988. Approximately 15 years ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Private Lands biologist collaborated with the owner of the property to recontour the majority of the property, with swales and installation of water control structures to efficiently and effectively manage water levels. This work was done under an NRCS contract with the USDA. This project created a NRCS easement on the property that ensures the re-contouring would be left intact in perpetuity. If the land were to be sold to another owner, the recontouring would remain in place unless the new owner paid the Federal Government back for the cost of the project (approximately $485,000). This would have to be paid for before the establishment of a different use, i.e., for a commercial crop, which would likely render the land economically unusable for commercial farming operations.

There is no well on the property. Investigation as to the feasibility of drilling a well, the depth of the well would probably be at least 1,000 ft. The refuge adjacent to this property has developed wells, one of which had high boron content and the other has only steam. Consequently, this property can only be flooded by agricultural return flow water via the “P” Canal when the “D” Plant is turned on.

The water supply is also dependent on an agreement with the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge which agreed to “share” the water for the duck club (subject to substantial conditions). The KSHC also entered into an annual contract with the Board of Water Resources for the purpose of purchasing water from the “P” Canal by the acre foot. Their relationship continued for many years; however, the Refuge manager has indicated these agreements for sharing water would likely not transfer to a new owner.

Due to the reorganization of the water system in the Klamath Basin, water for the refuges, agriculture, and this club have not been available for about 4 years. The club members have been very “loyal” to the club’s management by maintaining the land as a seasonal wetland and providing water sources and nesting grounds for all wildlife, not just waterfowl.

There currently is no power source to this property and the cost of installing a power line to the property is prohibitive, again limiting potential alternative uses for this property. These conditions have rendered the property useable as a duck club, its intended purpose.

Currently, the land is held idle. There is no plan nor anticipation that the club will resume active hunting, primarily due to the change in water management by other entities. With the majority of members of the duck club aging, the KSHC voted at the general meeting in October of 2022 to sell the property. The Klamath Sprig and Honker Club eventually will not be capable of paying the current costs of ownership and so elected to sell, with a vote of 84 to 3.

After showing the property to three established ranchers and residents of the basin, including California Water Fowl Association, the Modoc Indian Tribe, and others, it became apparent that any use of the property other than that of a “refuge” type operation would not be a possibility. The land would require re-contouring again to be used for agriculture or grazing. As stated earlier, these costs would require the additional repayment of the $485,000. The cost of finding and pumping water is prohibitive. The duck club has been in the process of trying to sell this land for over 2 years, and all prospective buyers have stated that buying the property (especially with the $485,000 burden) is not a project they would be willing to undertake.

**CONCLUSION:**

Due to the costs associated with the maintenance of the land and the increasing challenges for the members of the KSHC, the members have expressed their extreme reluctance to continue paying the costs of maintaining the property, including the Siskiyou County Property Taxes.

The most recent tax bill from Siskiyou County for July 2022 to June, 2023 was for the amount of $5,565.00, which seems to be a relatively small sum of money when compared to the highest and best use of the property, which appears to be allowing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife to purchase the property and to manage the property as part of the larger refuge. While we appreciate the county’s need for additional revenue, it seems that this relatively small amount will not impact Siskiyou County’s income to the extent that this sale should be prevented.

We also note that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife is the only entity to express an interest in purchasing the property. The property is already contoured to serve as a refuge and, if owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the water would likely not be a problem, since it could operate cooperatively with the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge. The sale of the property through this transaction appears to be the only viable solution that is in the best interest of the duck club, while providing an increase in the refuge by approximately 830 acres and a substantial opportunity and benefit to the public at large who will appreciate the time they spend at the refuge.

The members of the Klamath Sprig and Honker Club believe they should be allowed to make use of their real property in a reasonable manner. We respectfully request that Siskiyou County allow the KSHC to finalize the sale of this property to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in consideration of the protection of wildlife, the expressed wishes of the owners (Klamath Sprig and Honker Club), and the promotion and enhancement of wetlands for the wildlife.

As a footnote, the KSHC also owns title to a 0.79-acre parcel (APN 001-050-050) located approximately 1,275 feet east of the other five parcels. The owners have not put it to any use over the past decades. This parcel was not included in the offer as it is outside the Refuge boundary.