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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Awards up to \$6 Million Grant for Collaborative Conservation to Improve Aquatic Health and Wetlands in Harney County

Funding is a result of a multi-year cooperative effort among partners

January 26, 2016 - The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) voted Tuesday (January 26, 2016) to allocate more than \$1.6 million to support a diverse partnership working to improve habitat values and water quality in Malheur Lake and other Harney Basin wetlands. The funding set-aside, one of a half dozen made for OWEB's new Focused Investments Program, represents the down payment on a proposed six-year, \$6 million commitment to the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative. OWEB funding will be used to control carp that have destroyed the historic marshes in Malheur Lake and work with ranchers to maintain and improve flood irrigation on private lands that provides habitat for millions of migrating waterbirds every spring. Malheur Lake once produced up to 180,000 waterfowl per year but today produces less than 10% of that number due to the destruction wrought by carp.

The High Desert Partnership, a community-based organization committed to collaboration in Burns, submitted the successful proposal on behalf of a diverse group of partners who have been working together since 2011 following a successful collaborative planning effort focused on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. "This grant award reflects years of hard work by very diverse stakeholders to achieve real consensus about this landscape which is so important to so many different people," said Brenda Smith, Director of the High Desert Partnership which coordinates the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative. "The funds OWEB will be providing will support a very positive path forward at Malheur and on the surrounding landscape which will improve both the ecological health of the landscape and the rural economy of Harney County."

In recent years, Harney County has become home to a number of important collaborative conservation initiatives including the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Harney County Restoration Collaborative for forest restoration in the southern Malheur National Forest, and Harney County Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances Initiative to recover imperiled sage grouse. Stakeholders do not always agree on every issue, but they have worked hard to listen, learn from one another and to find very significant opportunities to move forward together. That is the spirit we hope will continue to guide efforts in Harney County moving forward. The emergence of these collaboratives is part of a broader shift in how the local community has worked with state and federal agencies and conservation interests to resolve contentious issues that have in the past been characterized by conflict and controversy.



Partners in the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative include local ranchers and farmers, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Harney County Court, Burns Paiute Tribe, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ducks Unlimited, The Wetlands Conservancy, Portland Audubon, Intermountain West Joint Venture, Oregon Wildlife, Harney Soil and Water Conservation District, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon State University Cooperative Extension, Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center, Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Harney County Watershed Council, and The Nature Conservancy.

For more information on the Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative please visit <http://highdesertpartnership.org/what-we-do/harney-basin-wetlands-initiative/resources.html>