



## INTRODUCTION

The Klamath Basin in south central Oregon and northern California is home to our national bird, the bald eagle. Eagles are present in the basin the year around. They use selected timberlands surrounding the basin to fulfill spring nesting and winter roosting requirements. The basin's abundant lakes, rivers, and marshes provide the necessary food supplies to sustain these majestic birds. They primarily feed on fish from spring through fall and waterfowl throughout the winter months.

This brochure, a joint effort of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, will help you gain an understanding of the importance of the Klamath Basin to the bald eagle. Our national bird has been classified as rare or endangered in 48 of the 50 states.

## EAGLE NESTING

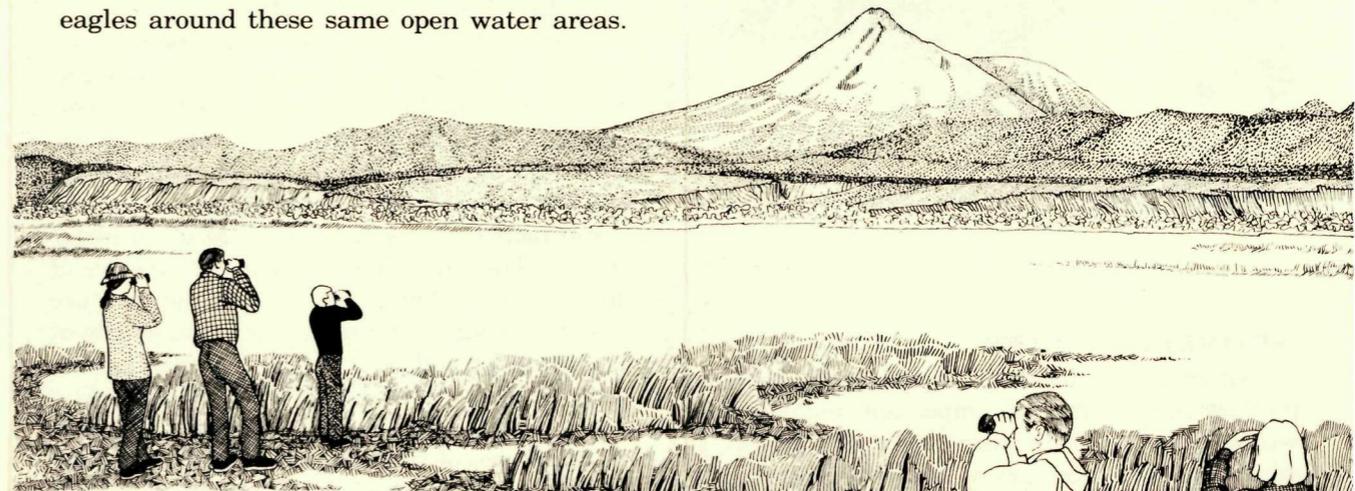
The northern part of the basin supports a sizable breeding population — an estimated four dozen nesting pairs. The majority of this nesting occurs on US Forest Service and pri-

vate timber lands surrounding Upper Klamath Lake. Other nesting occurs near the Williamson and Klamath rivers. Nesting areas are close to a reliable food source, primarily fish. Eagles, which mate for life, reach breeding age at four to five years.

Nesting territories are established in February. Generally two or three eggs are laid per nest. During the incubation period, which lasts about 35 days, both the male and female eagle will share the egg-sitting duties. Eaglets are generally born in April. They grow very rapidly and require a great amount of food. Both adults are kept busy feeding and caring for the young birds. The young eagles can fly at about three months of age and usually leave the nest for good after the fourth month. Young eagles have been known to travel great distances after leaving the nest. Eaglets banded in the basin have been recorded as far away as northern British Columbia and Mexico the same summer after leaving the nest. The majority of the young, however, are believed to remain in or near the basin.

## PUBLIC VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the winter, eagles are best viewed from the self-guided auto tour routes on the Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife refuges, especially when ice covers most of the water areas in the basin. Waterfowl concentrate at a few remaining open water areas and this in turn concentrates the eagles around these same open water areas.



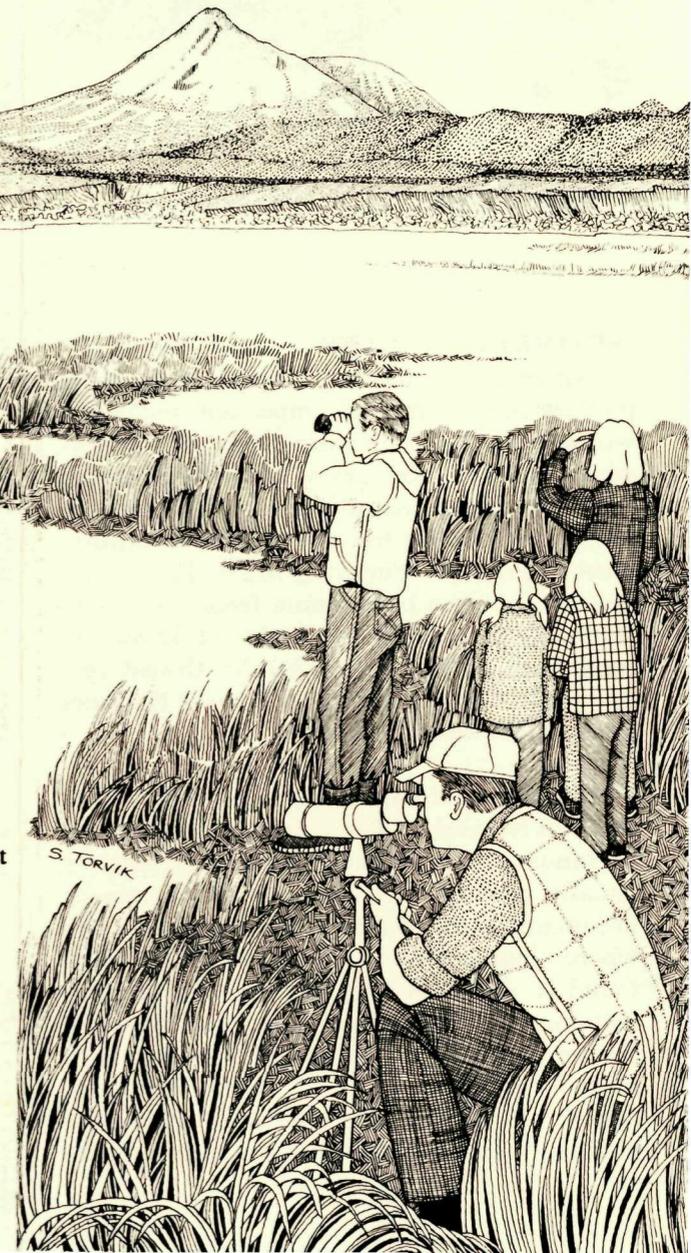
Visitors are encouraged to contact refuge headquarters or the Klamath Falls office of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to obtain up-to-date information on the best viewing opportunities.

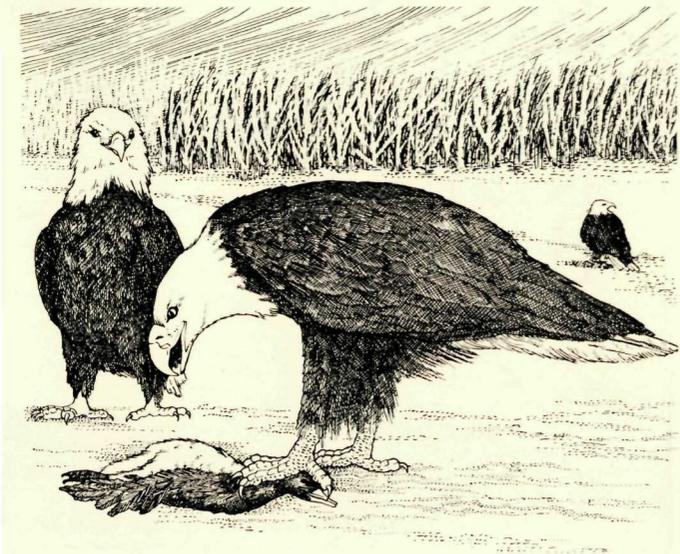
Klamath Basin  
National Wildlife Refuge  
Route 1, Box 74  
Tule Lake, CA 96134  
Phone: (916) 667-2231

Oregon Department of  
Fish and Wildlife  
1400 Miller Island Road, West  
Klamath Falls, OR 97603  
Phone: (503) 883-5732



# Bald Eagles of the Klamath Basin





### WINTERING EAGLES

Although the basin is an important eagle production area, its most important role is as a wintering area. The basin hosts the largest wintering concentration of bald eagles in the lower 48 states. Although eagles sometimes spend their entire lives in the same locality, most migrate to wintering areas. Eagles migrating into the basin come from the north, primarily Canada. Some birds are known to come from as far away as the Northwest Territories in Canada by way of Glacier National Park in Montana.

Migrant bald eagles begin arriving in the basin in November. The largest numbers occur in January and February when over 500 are usually present. The majority of this winter use occurs in the southern portion of the basin where abundant numbers of waterfowl can be found on the Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife refuges and adjacent areas. Winter migrant eagles usually depart the basin by late March or early April. Wintering eagles feed primarily on waterfowl which have died as a result of natural causes, injuries from

hunting or accidents, or disease, such as fowl cholera. Bald eagles can, and do, take live birds, but the abundance of dead or weak waterfowl provide a ready and easy food source. Eagles will also feed on rodents which become readily available when harvested grain fields and pastures are flooded for winter irrigation and rodent control.

### EAGLE WINTER ROOSTS

Although an abundant food supply is important to the wintering eagles, it is also necessary for them to have night roosting areas. Since the mid 1970's there have been five major night roost locations documented around the edge of the basin. All of these roosts have some factors in common: 1) close to an abundant and dependable food supply, 2) are free of human disturbance, 3) contain old, mature stands of timber that can support the weight of many eagles and have an open branching pattern of large limbs which allow easy landing and takeoff, and 4) are located on northeast-facing slopes of ridges which protect the eagles from the winter weather and prevailing southwest and westerly chilling winds. When protected at night from these winds, eagles lose less body heat, thus requiring less food to maintain body temperature.



As the pattern of waterfowl use and other food supplies in the basin changes throughout the winter, so does the use of the roosts by eagles. Eagles will typically utilize roosts closest to their food source. Numbers of eagles in any particular roost will change dramatically during the winter. Some roosts will be utilized by more than 300 eagles at certain times, while

at other times numbers may dwindle to only a few birds. It is important to recognize this dynamic movement of eagles throughout the winter and to offer protection to all the night roost sites. Each roost plays an important role sometime during the eagles' winter stay in the basin.

