

Washington, D.C. — Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) will offer an amendment this week to the fiscal year 2004 Interior Appropriations bill to protect the Lower Klamath and Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuges, located on the border of Oregon and California. The amendment would limit commercial farming on the refuge to less water intensive crops.

“My amendment is a simple and reasonable step toward putting the Klamath basin back in balance,” said Blumenauer.

The Klamath Basin refuges are currently the only refuges in the country where commercial farming is allowed. More than 20,000 acres within the borders of the refuges are leased for commercial agriculture. Refuge farming consumes more than 37,000 acre-feet of scarce water in the Klamath Basin during the summer months when the region is at its driest, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. More than 75 percent of the historic wetlands in the Basin have been drained and converted to agriculture and other developments.

Scarcity of water has taxed this basin for years. In 2001, many farmers had their irrigation water reduced due to a lack of water in the river, and last year over 33,000 salmon died in the Klamath River – one of the largest recorded fish kills in the history of the United States – because of a lack of water downstream.

The amendment aims to help reduce the strain on the scarce water resources in the Klamath Basin by requiring the new agricultural leases on the Klamath refuges to grow less water intensive crops. The amendment will affect only 2,250 of the 20,000 acres of leaseland farming on the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges this year, but is a policy that will gradually reduce water demand and provide more environmental protections for years to come. This amendment would save water at a critical time of year that would benefit farms, fish and wildlife throughout the Basin while still allowing for appropriate agricultural production on the Refuge.

The Klamath River Basin, in Southern Oregon and Northern California, has been compared to Florida’s Everglades for its importance to fish and wildlife. The Basin hosts 80 percent of the waterfowl in the Pacific flyway and is home to the greatest concentration of wintering bald eagles in the continental United States. The Lower Klamath Wildlife Refuge was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 as the nation’s first waterfowl refuge.

“This year marks the centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This amendment will

ensure that wildlife — not commercial enterprise — comes first on our National Wildlife Refuges,” stated Blumenauer.