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WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Stamp Price Increase Proposed in Senate Bill



The Current Stamp

Since 1934, when Stamps originally cost \$1 apiece, the price for the Stamp has increased seven times to the \$15 price in effect today. That price became effective in 1991. This is the longest single period without a price increase in the program's history.

With the price unchanged during this long period, the Stamps have lost an estimated 40 percent of their value based on the consumer price index. This is all while the United States Fish and Wildlife Service reports the price of land in targeted wetland and grassland areas has tripled, from an average of \$306 to \$1,091 per acre. (In Minnesota, for example, desired land has increased from an average price of \$400 to \$1,400 an acre since 1998. This is an increase of 250 percent.)

While the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp price remains stagnant, the cost to conserve land and habitats that host waterfowl and other species has increased dramatically.

At its current price, the land-buying power of the federal duck stamp has never been lower in its 79-year history.

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Did You Know?

1) Only once has an image of a dog appeared as part of the Federal Duck Stamp (1959-1960). But there have been many occasions when dogs have appeared on state stamps, perhaps dozens of them, and from 22 states.

2) Stamp funds not only go to refuges. Since 1958, the funds also go to acquire smaller wetland and grassland habitats (the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program - SWAP) within the Prairie Pothole Region of the upper Midwest and northern Great Plains. In this way, over 3.6 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat have been added to the Refuge System. These units are commonly referred to as Waterfowl Production Areas or WPAs. These WPAs go beyond waterfowl, protecting many other wetland and grassland birds and other wildlife.

Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office found that because the Stamp is a user fee, such a price increase would have no net impact on federal spending.

On December 20, U.S. Senators Mark Begich (D-AK), Max Baucus (D-MT), Chris Coons (D-DE), and Jon Tester (D-MT) introduced a bill (The Migratory Bird Habitat Investment and Enhancement Act, [S. 1865](#)) to raise the Stamp price from \$15 to \$25.

The proposal would allow the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC), to raise the price. For the five-calendar-year period beginning with 2014, and for each five-calendar-year period thereafter, the Secretary could establish the price, so long as the amount would not exceed \$25 for the first five-calendar-year period and not exceed \$30 for the subsequent five-calendar-year period.

And, as the findings for the proposed legislation indicate, "those benefits extend to all wildlife, not just ducks."

3) The state with the most NWRs that have been purchased at least in part through MBCF/Stamp dollars is North Dakota (21 refuges), followed by California (20 refuges).

4) The state with the most NWR acres purchased through MBCF/Stamp dollars is Georgia (over 357,000 acres), followed by Texas (over 326,000 acres).

5) Ding Darling provided six model sketches for the first Stamp (1934-5) to staff from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. These were all produced on laundry cardboard stiffeners that were in his office. Darling approached these works as concepts, but the engravers actually chose one of them and began stamp production.

80th Anniversary Coming Up

In the mid-1930s, and after years of discussion and disappointment, forces for wetland and waterfowl conservation were finally able to make major headway. The backdrop was a triple crisis: the Depression with its impact on virtually all sectors of the economy, drought that was to contribute to creating the Dust Bowl, and the corresponding loss of crucial wetlands across the land.

The effective triple response in the mid-1930s was a Congressional bill to pass a "Duck Stamp," a sweeping Presidential Commission proposal for wildlife conservation, and changes in the Bureau of Biological Survey, predecessor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The key bill to establish the Stamp was promoted by Senators Peter Norbeck (R-SD) and Frederic C. Walcott (R-CT). In the House of Representatives, Congressman Richard Kleberg (D-TX) took the lead. Particularly after well-attended hearings, it began to gain momentum.

At the same time, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed a Presidential "Committee on Wild-Life Restoration" consisting of three visionary conservationists: Thomas Beck, Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, and Aldo Leopold. In about [two dozen pages](#), the "Beck Commission" identified a series of creative projects to secure an initial five million acres of "submarginal" lands for broad-scale wildlife conservation, including lands purchased through federal "duck stamp proceeds."



The First Stamp: 1934-35

And in early 1934, the President appointed Darling, the Pulitzer-Prize winning American cartoonist and dedicated conservationist, as the Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey.

The stars were in alignment, the bill for the Stamp soon passed, and it was signed into law by FDR on March 16, 1934. With Roosevelt's signing, the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, popularly known as the Duck Stamp Act, required all waterfowl hunters 16 years of age

or older to buy an annual stamp. The price was \$1.

The artwork for the very first stamp (1934-1935), showing a pair of landing Mallards, was also created by Ding Darling, and the rest is history.

For more on that history, see [here](#).

The funds generated from the Stamp were immediately directed to buy or lease wetland habitat.

Now, almost 80 years later, we can visit the wetland, riparian, and grassland habitats in the National Wildlife Refuge System that have been secured through the official decisions of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. Waterfowl, other birds and wildlife, and the American public have all benefited greatly from the Stamp, and we can certainly celebrate that fact after these 80 years.

You can check our [website](#) and the next issues of *Wingtips* to find out more on celebrating this 80th Anniversary.

Gearing up for the Jr. Duck Stamp Contest

It's almost that time of year again, time to consider the Junior Duck Stamp Contest. State deadlines for most states and U.S. Territories will be March 15, 2014. There are some exceptions: South Carolina has already had its deadline pass earlier this month, and March 1 is the deadline for Arizona, Maine, and Ohio.

Contest entries by state or territory should be through state coordinators. More information can be found on the [JDS website page](#) and from individual [state coordinators](#).

About the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Our Friends Group is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to two basic goals:

1. To increase promotional and educational efforts among various target audiences concerning the stamp and the National Wildlife Refuge system.
2. To increase the regular, voluntary purchase of the stamp among hunters and non-hunters alike.



The purchase of a stamp is, perhaps, *the easiest thing you can* do to protect crucial wetland and grassland habitat in the U.S. Indeed, a 15-dollar purchase of a stamp goes a very long way!

Our "Regular Friend" fee is modest, equal to the cost of one current Stamp (\$15), but all Friends are *also* asked to pledge to buy two stamps per year, joining with other individuals and organizations across the country with that promotional effort. Our "Friend's Year" also corresponds with the "year" of a valid Stamp - from July to July.

[Become a Friend Today!](#)