

June 3, 2014



# WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

## A Stamp Success Story : Ruby Lake NWR



Ruby Lake NWR in early fall; Photo: USFWS

When it comes to wetlands, we're accustomed to thinking of those found near our coasts, along rivers, or in the center of the country, in the Great Plains. But the extensive marshlands of [Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge](#) are at an elevation of 6,000 feet. Its marshes comprise 17,000 acres of the refuge's 39,928 acres; the balance consists of meadows, grasslands, alkali playa, and shrub-steppe uplands. MBCF funds paid for 75.0% of this life-giving habitat,

Part of Region 8 and established in 1938, the refuge is located in northeast Nevada, serving both the Central and Pacific Flyways. Lying in a valley between the Maverick Springs Range and the Ruby Mountains, it is probably the most remote refuge in the lower 48. Visitors must travel at least 13 miles by gravel road to reach the refuge from any direction, and one access

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## Did you Know?

1) The first time that stamp sales topped two million was the 1946-47 stamp, when 2,016,841 stamps were sold.

2) In the 1950s, Ding Darling, who hadn't served in government in 20 years, was vigorously complaining over moves in Congress to repeal the Stamp Act and over Congressional actions impounding the existing funds. The issue wouldn't be resolved until the Act was revised and strengthened in 1958.

3) Before the 1958 revisions (effective 1 July 1960), land acquisition was only one of several programs financed at least in part with Stamp dollars. Previously, about 20 percent of

road is impassible in winter. The town of Ely lies to the south; to the north, via Secret Pass, lies Elko. In geologic times past, the land was covered by a 200-foot deep lake; now, two hundred mountain springs provide the region's surface water. In the 19th century, the southern portion of the valley was crossed by the routes of the Pony Express and the Overland Stage and Mail Company; however, with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, both services were abandoned almost as soon as they had begun.

The wetlands and surrounding meadows are vital for waterfowl, shorebirds, and waders. Ruby Lake's pristine South Marsh hosts the highest concentration of nesting Canvasbacks in North America; other breeders include White-faced Ibis, Trumpeter Swan, Redhead, Sandhill Crane, and Wilson's Phalarope. In the water itself, the two-inch-long Relict Dace (*Relictus solitarius*) is the area's only native fish; it is under threat from bass and trout (stocked for sport) as well as hybridization with introduced Speckled Dace.

The uplands are just as special, for birds and mammals alike. Greater Sage-Grouse strut their stuff at leks; Pygmy Rabbits burrow under the sagebrush; Pronghorn Antelope, at one time extirpated, again run free on the refuge. The refuge as a whole supports 225 bird species, per the published [checklist](#), and it is recognized as one of 500 Globally Important Bird Areas in the U.S. by the American Bird Conservancy.

Careful control of the upland vegetation cover is one of the most critical management problems at the NWR, especially as it concerns the grouse. Frequent fires promote invasion by non-native grasses like Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*). Cheatgrass quickly builds the fuel load, driving a spiral of even more frequent, damaging fires. On the other horn of the dilemma, fire suppression tends to allow succession by woody plants like juniper and pinyon. The trees shade out sagebrush and herbaceous plants, and discourage the grouse. Research indicates that grouse avoid habitat with a canopy cover as little as 4% of the total area. Therefore, while controlled burns are still in the refuge staff's toolbox, cattle grazing is relied on more. In wetter years, haymaking is also employed.

To accomplish its conservation goals, the refuge depends on a variety of [partnerships](#) with other organizations, including Ducks Unlimited and National Audubon Society and its local chapter. Ruby Lake hosts a [Youth Conservation Corps](#) crew for eight weeks each summer. Finally, Mark Brown's [photographic landscapes](#) of the refuge and adjacent Humboldt National Forest are stunning, and they give you a good feel for this wonderful place.

these funds were used to acquire refuge lands and approximately 50 percent had been used to develop and maintain migratory bird refuges after acquisition.

4) The 1950-1951 stamp was the first one to be chosen by an open art competition.

5) The first year for the self-adhesive stamp - along with the traditional gummed stamp - was the 1998-1999 stamp.

6) Each of the last two times that the price of the stamp went up, 1989-1990 and 1991-1992, there actually were increases in the total numbers of stamps sold.

7) Only one animal other than a waterfowl has ever appeared on the Federal Stamp. The animal was a dog: Labrador retriever and field trial champion, King Buck, on the 1959-60 stamp.

8) There have been 13 artists, all men, whose art has appeared more than once on a Federal Duck Stamp.

9) Five artists have had their art appear more than twice on a Stamp: five times for Maynard Reece, four times each for Jim and Joe Hautman, and three times for Edward Bierly and Stanley Stearns.

10) The 1982 art contest for the Stamp was the first one to require an entry fee. It cost \$20.

11) There were 2,099 artwork submissions for the 1982-1983 stamp. This is the highest number of entries recorded.

12) The 1935-36 stamp, one showing flying Canvasbacks, was the first to show a duck blind.

Interestingly, these features were not in the original art for the stamp; they were added by the engraver at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

## The New Stamp Will Be Released at the End of the Month



Adam Grimm, of South Dakota, won the art competition for the 2014-15 Stamp last September, and his rendition of a pair of Canvasbacks will appear on the new Stamp. His work was judged the best of 201 entries, and Canvasback appeared on 48 of the 201 art submissions, or about a quarter of the pieces. The species has actually appeared four times on the Stamp, most recently in 1993.

Canvasback is certainly an elegant waterfowl, as Grimm's artwork shows. Its sloping head profile is distinctive.

Canvasback numbers in North America have fluctuated widely over the decades, often due to changing water levels on the breeding grounds. The Canvasback population is currently rebounding, from a difficult period of low numbers (early 1980s to the mid-1990s).

The use of Canvasback on this year's Stamp is very appropriate, since it also can represent the ongoing efforts to keep wetland and associated habitats healthy for this and other species. The fact that almost all the proceeds from the sales of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp go directly to secure these vital breeding, stopover, and wintering habitats healthy in the National Wildlife Refuge System should be of some comfort to everyone who buys a Stamp.

The [First Day of Sale Ceremony](#) for the 2014-2015 Federal and Junior Duck Stamps will be held on June 27 at the [Department of the Interior building](#) in Washington, D.C., starting at 10am. (The ceremony is free and open to the public. Both the Federal and Junior Duck Stamp artists will be available to sign stamps, and the U.S. Postal Service will have a special cancellation for collectors.)

Immediately after the ceremony, the new Stamp will begin to be available at Post Offices and other vendors across the country and through the Internet.

## Stamp Friends Present Award to Congressman Dingell



A year ago, in June 2013, Rep. John D. Dingell, Jr. (D-MI) became the longest-serving member of Congress in history. He started serving in the House in 1955. As a young Congressman with little seniority, he championed the 1958 amendments to the Duck Stamp Act, revisions which became the most significant protections for the use of the Stamp in building the Refuge System since the Act's passage in 1934. Congressman Dingell has also been the longest-serving member of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, having started on the MBCC in 1969. His role on the MBCC has been one of vigilance and leadership,

consistently raising important issues to defend wetlands, waterfowl, other birds and wildlife, and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Dingell will end his service this year, since he is leaving the House of Representatives.

To recognize and applaud the Congressman's service, the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp presented the Congressman with an award on 18 May on his home turf, in Michigan. It was at the 9th Annual [International Wildlife Refuge Alliance \(IWRA\)](#) Benefit Dinner in support of the [Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge](#). There, the Congressman was presented our award (at left), created by Joe Hautman, artist and Board member of our Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp. The work shows Hautman's rendition of a male Wood Duck which graced the 2012-13 Stamp, along with a copy of the Stamp itself and a special inscription from our Friends:

*To Congressman John Dingell on behalf of the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp honoring your tireless work for birds and their habitats and for your leadership on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.*

*~ Joe Hautman, May 2014*

The photo on the right shows (l to r) John Hartig (refuge manager), Richard Micka (IWRA chair), Paul Baicich (from our Friends Group), and Congressman Dingell.



Photo: Mark Messer, All-Tech Visual

## 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.

[Buy a Stamp. Join the Friends Group!](#)