

August 20, 2014



WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

First Day of Sale - 1934

The very first "first day of sale" for the first "Federal Duck Stamp" was August 22, 1934. The actual stamp, affixed to a document known as a "Form 3333" is housed in the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum. That form is accompanied by an affidavit signed by Clinton Eilenberger, Third Assistant Postmaster, as well as by Jay Norwood Darling. The original artwork for the design, of course, was created by that same artist and dedicated conservationist, "Ding" Darling. He drew the stamp's potential artwork options for the U.S. Postal Service in about an hour! At the time, Darling was also the Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, a predecessor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

While the struggle to pass legislation and establish a wetland-and-waterfowl funding mechanism had gone on for over an agonizing decade, the creation of the stamp itself moved fairly rapidly once the legislation passed.

The new bill passed and was signed into law by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in early March, 1934. With Roosevelt's signing of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, funds from stamp sales would be deposited in a special treasury account, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF). The stamp would be made available for waterfowl hunters and non-hunting conservationists at post offices across the land.

In just over five months, the process rushed from passage of the legislation to sales of the stamp across the country. And this was all accomplished in 1934!

In its first year of existence, 635,000 stamps were sold at \$1 apiece, with the revenue generated from the stamp directed to wetland conservation. In the last 80 years, approximately

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Did you Know?

1) In the 1950s, Ding Darling, who had not served in government in two decades, was vigorously complaining over moves in Congress to repeal the Stamp Act and over actions impounding the existing funds. The issue would not be resolved until the legislation was revised and strengthened in 1958.

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

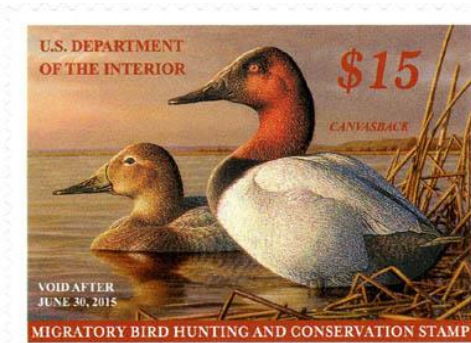
3) Since June of last year, Rep. John D. Dingell (D - MI) became the longest-serving member of Congress. He is also the longest-

\$900 million has been collected through the sale of this stamp, and over 5.5 million acres of wetland, grassland, riparian, and bottomland habitats in the National Wildlife Refuge System secured.

For more on this year's 80th anniversary, see [here](#).

serving member of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. He started MBCC service in 1969. He will end his honored MBCC run at the September MBCC meeting, next month. Congressman Dingell has decided to retire from his seat in the U.S. House.

Bipartisan Stamp Legislation Pending in Congress



The current 2014-2015 stamp sold at \$15

Late last month, there was a hearing at the House of Representatives on amending the legislation covering the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp, H.R. 5069. Very briefly, [H.R. 5069](#) calls for an increase in the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25, with that \$10-increase dedicated to easements only for lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The hearing was held by the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs, chaired by Congressman John Fleming (R-LA), the lead sponsor of the bill, the Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014. A week later, the House Natural Resources Committee reported the bill by voice vote to the floor for consideration. The bill currently has the bipartisan sponsorship of eight members of the House (three Republicans and five Democrats), including the two House members on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, Congressman John Dingell (D-MI) and Congressman Rob Wittman (R-VA).

During the hearing, Congressman Fleming, the chair of the Subcommittee, brought up the 80th anniversary for the stamp and stressed the easement dedication in H.R. 5069 in his support for the bill. He also asked the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about efforts to promote the stamp beyond waterfowl hunters, beyond those who are required to buy the stamp.

There is expected opposition to the content of H.R. 5069, mainly focusing on three arguments: 1. Any increase in the price of the stamp is tantamount to an increase in "taxes," 2. The collected funds are going to increase Federal control - even restricted to easements - over lands, Federal lands which are already too large, and 3. The goals of the Stamp/MBCF have already been accomplished.

Many of these objections were addressed in testimony given by Paul Schmidt, Chief Conservation Officer for Duck Unlimited, speaking in support of H.R. 5069. He emphasized the 23-year gap in an increase in the price of the Stamp, added that the Stamp is still vital to offset wetland losses, and that at its current price, the buying power of the Federal Duck Stamp has never been lower. He spoke to the fact that easements are already a welcome component in the effort to secure habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System through the MBCF. Schmidt added that this proposal is not simply a user-pay/user-benefit situation, but the stamp exemplifies a user-pay/*public-benefit* advantage for the country.

In the Senate, there is an identical companion bill, [S. 2621](#). This bipartisan bill currently has eight Senate supporters (five Republicans and three Democrats). Senator David Vitter (R-LA) hopes to move the Senate version of the bill in September.

While it is important to engage in the discussion and support this sort of legislation, enjoying bipartisan and geographically diverse support, there are, of course, some major issues that merit consideration and emphasis in the process:

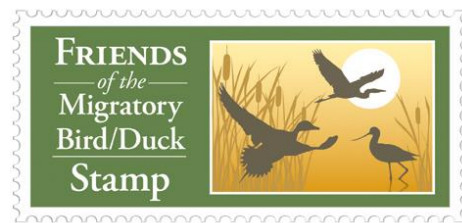
- First, is the fact that the general buying power of \$15 in 1991 (when the stamp cost was last increased) is today estimated at \$26.25. Frankly, raising the stamp price now is barely keeping up.
- Second, that the real cost of land - including easements - has never been so high.
- Third, that easements - with eager partners - have been an important component of past MBCF conservation. Dedicating such an increase to easements is currently justified, yet it should not suggest this approach as a permanent feature for future price increases.
- Fourth, that efforts for "exemptions" for some stamp-holders, a discussion initially involving certain Native Americans, could be an unfortunate precedent, attracting more seemingly benign, if not deserving, exemptions (e.g., military veterans, single moms, or all waterfowl hunters under 21 years of age). There could be no end to this sort of largess.
- Fifth, that simply increasing the price of the stamp without a real strategy to increase the sales - especially to non-waterfowlers - is unwise. If the entire public, especially millions of outdoor-oriented Americans, benefit from the investment of stamp dollars through the MBCF, then more of that public should be buying stamps, initially through their voluntary sales.

Do H.R. 5069 and S. 2621 have a good chance at passage? With increased and serious discussion, thoughtful bipartisanship, and geographic and broad conservation interest, there is that possibility.

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 and most efficient 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 kept 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!](#)

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