

September 4, 2014



WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Stamp Success Story: Hart Mt. National Refuge



Photo: USFWS

As part of our *Wingtips* series on places where stamp dollars have been invested, we move to Region 1 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a region that covers Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and the Pacific Islands.

The Greater Sage-Grouse, currently a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), is much in the

spotlight these days. The issue impacts Region 1, of course, and the USFWS faces a court-mandated deadline - due in one year - to make a final decision regarding the status of this species. The complexity of efforts to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse and the tangle of competing interests are [deftly summarized](#) in a recent issue of the *Birding Community E-Bulletin*.

Perhaps it's not surprising that one of the bird's strongholds is the high desert of [Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge](#) in Oregon, our next stop on the circuit of Refuges acquired with the help of MBCF dollars. It's a happy accident that this Region 1 refuge - originally designated for the protection of Pronghorn, commonly called antelope - also provides a haven for the grouse, as well as other species of interest. [Bird species](#) vary according to seasons, with heavy migrations of waterfowl and waterbirds occurring during spring and fall, in the Warner Valley, partially included in the refuge.

The property lies in south central Oregon across a massive

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

3) The price of the stamp has been raised only seven times

fault block ridge (similar to the topography of the Grand Tetons) where, from a valley wetland, a series of cliffs ascend steeply up the western slope of the mountain. Warner Peak tops out at 8,100 feet. On the eastern side of the mountain, more gentle rolling hills descend to [sagebrush steppe](#). The diversity of habitat, even though water is a scarce resource (12 inches of annual rainfall), supports 330 species of wildlife. Key species safeguarded by the refuge include Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Pygmy Rabbit, and the local Rainbow Trout subspecies, *Oncorhynchus mykiss newberrii*.

Funding from the MBCF purchased 54,837 acres of Hart Mountain's (established 1936) total of just under 271 thousand acres. That's 20 percent of the refuge.

Curiously, it's not only birds that migrate to and from the Refuge, but also the Pronghorn, which winters in Nevada's nearby Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge.

Invasive plants are an important management concern for the refuge. Staff have used fire and cutting to control species such as Western Juniper, Canada Thistle, and Cheatgrass. These more aggressive plants (natives and non-natives alike) crowd out the sagebrush, and that's bad news for the sage-grouse.

Unique recreational activities suggested for the Refuge include rockhounding and off-road horseback riding. The roads and jeep trails are the only maintained paths available to hikers; cross-country walkers are advised to follow game trails. The Friends of Hart Mountain NAR have created a [fund to acquire in-holdings](#); currently there are 55 parcels totaling 6,000 acres that the Friends would like to secure. Volunteers from the [Oregon Natural Desert Association](#) and [Friends of Nevada Wilderness](#) provide boots-on-the-ground management. Mark Brown hosts a [photo gallery](#), and photos are also at the Friends site. The [petroglyph series](#) is particularly interesting.

Hart Mountain was a favorite of Justice William O. Douglas, who wrote these often-quoted words about the place in *My Wilderness: The Pacific West* (1960):

I always feel sad leaving Hart Mountain. Yet after I travel a few hours and turn to see its great bulk against a southern sky my heart rejoices.... [In this refuge is] life teeming throughout all the life zones that lead from the desert to alpine meadows.

Those who visit Hart Mountain next century will know that we were faithful life tenants, that we did not entirely despoil the earth which we left them. We will make the tradition of conservation as much a part of their inheritance as the land itself.

since its enactment in 1934.

4) 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.

5) States that have historically had high numbers of stamps sold (e.g. Minnesota and California) have been highlighted here in Wingtips in the past. But how about the lowest-selling states? Among the lower-48 states, try West Virginia and Rhode Island, which in the past couple of years have apparently had sold only about 1,200 to 1,800 each per year.

6) The fiscal Year 2013 disbursements through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) involved \$64.8 million to secure habitat (fee-title and easements) for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRs and WPAs). Of this, \$22.3 million came from the sales of stamps.

7) In April 1921, Frederic C. Walcott of Connecticut had an article in the Bulletin of the American Game Protective Association (AGPA) advocating a \$1 hunter stamp with proceeds to be used to secure waterfowl habitat. This article was accompanied by a model stamp-like sketch (by Belmore Browne) showing a flying Canada Goose. This is the first recorded effort to establish such a federal stamp.

8) The bill to create the stamp was championed by Senators Peter Norbeck (R-SD) and the same Frederic C. Walcott (R-CT). In the House, Congressman Richard Kleberg (D-TX) took the lead. It was signed into law on March 16, 1934.

9) The 1982 contest for the stamp was the first one to require an entry fee. It was \$20.

Bipartisan Stamp Legislation Pending in Congress

Congress returns to conduct business on Monday, September 8. But it won't be for long - perhaps a dozen "working" days before a pre-election break.

Unfortunately, there is not much time to address two proposed companion bills in Congress, both called the "Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014." Fortunately, they both have bipartisan support.

Very briefly, they both call 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.

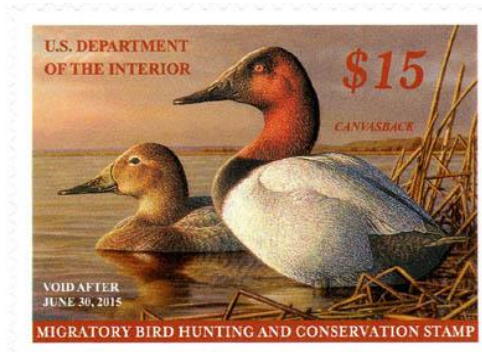
In the House, [H.R. 5069](#) is sponsored by Rep. John Fleming (R-LA-4), with the following co-sponsors:

Rep. John Dingell (D-MI-12)
Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA-2)
Rep. David Joyce (R-OH-14)

Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI-3)
Rep. Jason Smith (R-MO-8)
Rep. Tim Walz (MN-1)
Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA-1)

In the Senate, [S. 2621](#) is sponsored by Sen. David Vitter (R-LA), with the following co-sponsors:

Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH)
Sen. Mark Begich (D-AK)
Sen. John Boozman (R-AR)
Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE)
Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID)
Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH)
Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)



The current 2014-2015 stamp sold at \$15

Both bills are expected to gain additional co-sponsors once Congress returns to conduct business.

The issue of easements is an important one, especially since easements are already a significant and creative component in the effort to secure habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System. This easement element should not be a problem in this particular legislation, although attaching this feature to future stamp-price increases could grow to be potentially too restrictive.

An additional issue has come up in both the House and the Senate. In the House, during a Natural Resources Committee markup, Rep. Don Young (R-AK) successfully amended H.R. 5069 to exempt subsistence hunters in Alaska from being required to purchase a Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp. The exemption existed in the past, but it had been removed. In going back to the exemption, this could open the door for other exemptions, benign as they may seem. In the Senate, Senator Begich from Alaska is also calling for an identical exemption.

Finally, there is one important concept that is absent in much of the discussion around the stamp price increase. To increase the price of the stamp without having a creative strategy to increase the stamp sales - especially to non-waterfowlers - is short-sighted. If millions of outdoor-oriented Americans benefit from the investment of stamp dollars through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, then more of the American public should be buying stamps.

As H.R. 5069 and S. 2621 proceed with bipartisanship and with geographic and broad conservation interest, one would hope that a creative discussion accompanies the process.

Stamp Contest Coming Up - September 19-20



The 2014 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest will be held Friday and Saturday, September 19 and 20, at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The five eligible species for the 2015-2016 stamp are: Brant, Canada Goose, Northern Shoveler, Red-breasted Merganser, and Ruddy Duck.

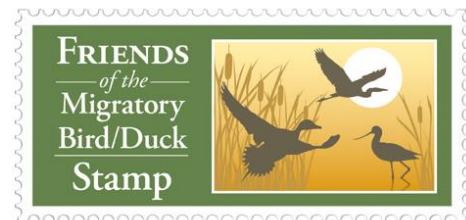
See here for [more details on the contest](#) as news is released. This includes specifics on a live online broadcast of the contest.

You can also view an [online gallery](#) of all the entries.

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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