

October 3, 2014



# WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

## Ding Darling and the Blue Goose

By David Govatski

There are three important 80th anniversaries to celebrate this year, events all related to the National Wildlife Refuge System and the "Duck Stamp."

The first was in March, with the passage of the Act creating the stamp in 1934.

The second was in August, with the very first "First Day of Sale" for the stamp.

The third may surprise you, so let's begin with the key individual behind all three of these events in that historic year.

Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling was the conservationist and cartoonist/artist who, among many other things, helped advocate for the creation of the stamp through his role in the Presidential "Committee on Wild-Life Restoration," a role he shared with two other perceptive conservationists, Thomas H. Beck and Aldo Leopold. Working over a few short weeks, the committee submitted its report in early February, 1934. It included support for the stamp idea, a concept that had been circulating, unsuccessfully, for over a decade.

Ding Darling was soon appointed head of the Biological Survey, an agency then in the US Department of Agriculture, by FDR on March 10, 1934. Just six days later, Congress passed and the President signed the Duck Stamp Act on March 16, 1934.

One of Darling's associated tasks on the job in 1934 was to prepare a design for the new stamp, a short project which he did on cardboard shirt-stiffeners lying in his office. He thought these were to be samples or prototypes, and he was chagrined when the Bureau of Engraving and Printing selected one of the

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## Did You Know?

1) The last time that stamp sales topped two million was the 1980-81 stamp, when 2,045,114 stamps were sold.

2) Before the 1958 revisions of the law (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 since its enactment in 1934.

4) The last two times that the price of the stamp went up,

drawings to grace the stamp, a pair of Mallards landing in a pond.

What you may not know is that Darling is also credited for designing the famous "Blue Goose" logo used on the signs on refuges starting that same year, although we do not know the exact date. The logo was an outline of a stylized Canada Goose, not the "Blue Goose" morph of the Snow Goose, as some people assert. The sign had the wording: "US Department of Agriculture Biological Survey." That's because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had yet to be created inside the Department of the Interior. Below the image of the goose were either the words "Migratory Bird Refuge" or "National Wildlife Refuge."



USFWS National Conservation Training Center Archive and Museum

The first sign templates were black on a white background. (See the image here.) An existing label from the back of the first "Blue Goose" sign sample from the Erie Enameling Company of Erie, Pennsylvania, indicates that the signs could also be made in blue, instead of black. And, indeed, they have been ever since! (The original heavy signs, by the way, each weighed over four pounds.)

The flying-goose model sign replaced a standardized circular sign that dated back to 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt created the Pelican Island Bird Reservation.

The three interrelated events 80 years ago are highly significant for wildlife protection in America. In fact, the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp has now raised over \$900 million since 1934, helping to secure over 5.5 million acres of habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife on the National Wildlife Refuge System across the lower-48 states.

It's remarkable to recall how much was started in that one year, how much was accomplished in 1934.

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1989-1990 and 1991-1992, there actually were increases in the immediate following years in the total numbers of stamps sold. The first time, the sales went up from 1,403,005 to 1,415,882 stamps; the second time, the sales went from 1,408,373 to 1,423,374 stamps.

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) 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.

7) The historic 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.

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

9) Only once has an image of a hunting dog appeared on the Federal Duck Stamp. But dogs have appeared on state stamps dozens of times, from 22 states.

## Bipartisan Stamp Legislation Awaiting Action

When Congress returns from recess after next month's elections, there will be many issues to consider in the "lame duck" session. There may be time to address two proposed companion bills in Congress concerning the stamp, both called the "Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014." While there is not much time, they both do have significant bipartisan support.

Both bills 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. It is estimated that such an increase would bring in an additional \$16 million a year for easements in the Refuge System.

In the House, [H.R. 5069](#) is sponsored by Rep. John Fleming (R-LA-4), with 18 co-sponsors. In the Senate, [S. 2621](#) is sponsored by Sen. David Vitter (R-LA), with 13 co-sponsors. Currently, Hill insiders are looking for more majority supporters for the two bills, emphasizing Republicans in the House and Democrats in the Senate.



The current stamp costs \$15.

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

Another 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 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 Mark Begich (D-AK) is also calling for an identical exemption.

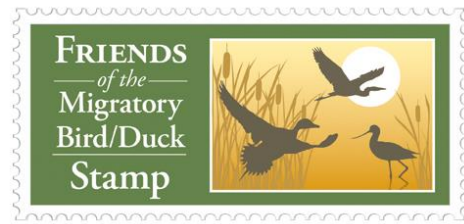
Finally, there is one important concept that is absent from much of the discussion around the stamp price increase. To increase the price of the stamp without having a creative strategy to increase the stamp sales - especially to non-waterfowlers - is short-sighted. If millions of outdoor-oriented Americans 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 move with bipartisanship and with geographic and broad conservation interest, one would hope that a creative discussion accompanies the process.

## 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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