

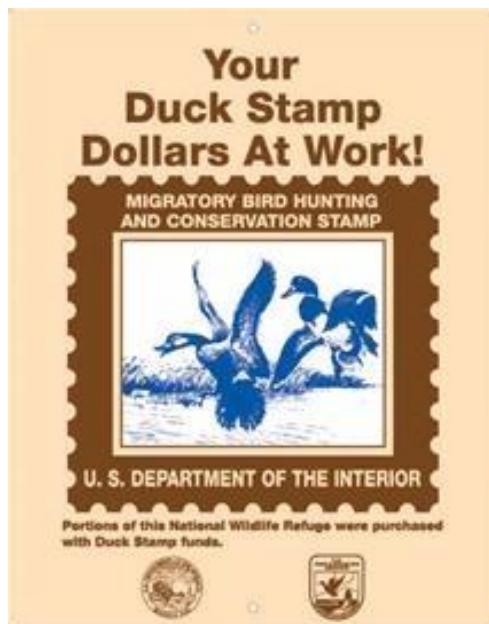
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# WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

## THE NEXT STAMP, THE NEXT CHALLENGE



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## Where do we go now?

The very next Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp will be officially available across the country at the beginning of July. It will cost \$25, and it will show that fine contest-winning artwork by Jennifer Miller, [her pair of Ruddy Ducks](#).

The new stamp should actually be the *start* of something big. The recent passage and signing of two related Congressional bills - the one on raising the price of the stamp and the other on the e-stamp - should not be the end.

In fact, we at the Friends did not enter the fray, explain the role of the stamp to anyone who would listen, and regularly spread the word, just to have it end simply with a price increase. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that "the Federal Duck Stamp has no more passionate supporters than Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp."

Accordingly, the passage of the two bills are best seen as the *potential beginning* of a longer and more involved process.

We hope that the next stamp opens a creative discussion and leads to actions to promote and sell more stamps. Simply put, this will save more wetland, bottomland, and grassland habitats. *And it will deliver the funding quickly.*

Every price increase presents a core problem: keeping up sales. Historically, almost every time the stamp price went up (i.e., 1950, 1959, 1972, 1979, and 1987), sales dropped from the previous year. There have been two minor exceptions - 1989 and 1991 - and these should be remembered. But keeping sales steady becomes a real challenge.

At the same time, there is no reason to write off the potential of increased sales just because the price goes up. There have to be concentrated and creative efforts to counteract any threatening or "expected" drop in sales. The resource deserves as much.

This is where conservation-conscious users and proponents of the stamp come into play.

With the new \$25-stamp, we have a new opportunity - let alone a need - to promote the stamp more. Not enough people who should buy it, even know about it. There are opportunities now to partner with supporters of the stamp and find new allies to get the word out about the stamp, especially to those for whom this may be brand new conservation information.

Let's face it: the stamp is a real bargain, even at \$25. If you purchased an item for \$15 in 1991 (the price and year of the last stamp increase), today that same item would cost you approximately \$26.20. So, a \$25-stamp is barely keeping up! Land costs have also skyrocketed in the last 20+ years, with some valuable locations and habitats more than tripling in price. Stamp buyers should also appreciate that stamp dollars going into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) secure urgent acquisitions for the National Wildlife Refuge System. And the purchase of a stamp is, perhaps, *the easiest and most efficient* thing anyone can do to protect crucial habitats in the U.S. Indeed, a \$25 purchase of a stamp will go a very long way.

Since the \$10 increase in the stamp price must be *dedicated to easements*, there is a compelling need to explain the appropriate role of easements, especially in the Prairie Pothole Region (i.e., the Dakotas and much of the Northern Great Plains), where so much of the Stamp/MBCF funds are already directed. It's not just the immediate wetlands, it's also the expanses of buffering grasslands in these circumstances which are protected. By default, this goes far beyond waterfowl conservation, extending to highly imperiled grassland birds.

With those concepts in mind, we present here just a eight ideas - *and there are many more* - to continue to spread the word and raise the profile of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp with the upcoming price increase. Most of the ideas go beyond the role of the active waterfowl hunters who have been required to buy the stamp for over 80 years.

While waterfowl hunters have done virtually all of the heavy lifting in this cause for over the last eight decades, it's high time to spread the responsibility. Going back to the approximately 1.7 million U.S. waterfowl hunters to pay-up once again is insufficient. And *only* going to them is also

unfair. This is essentially a *conservation stamp* that should be *embraced on a voluntary basis* by other hunters (e.g. upland bird hunters), anglers, wildlife-watchers (e.g., birders), environmental educators, wildlife photographers, and at least a slice of the 46 million annual visitors to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

It's important to realize that none of these eight ideas requires any change in Federal law, that some ideas are better than others, and that they are presented here in no particular order.

1 Beyond the requirement to hold a federal duck stamp to hunt waterfowl, the stamp is also a "free pass" to any National Wildlife Refuge that charges for entry. This is excellent, but there could be new "benefits" to holding a stamp. Those pursued might include requirement/discount for locally-run refuge tours and walks, photo-blind use, nature-festival entry, shopping at the NWR store, and so forth.

2 More National Wildlife Refuges should charge! Simply put, refuges should charge what they are worth. When a refuge charges only \$3 or \$5 for the entry of a car full of passengers, that's exactly what the public will think it's worth! Remember the last time you went to a National Park or National Monument where the entry fee was \$25 (e.g., Grand Teton, Yellowstone, and Grand Canyon)? Or \$20 (e.g., Death Valley, Big Bend, and Yosemite)? Or \$15 (e.g., Mesa Verde and Joshua Tree)? Or the relative bargain you got at \$10 (e.g. Everglades)? (Note: These National Parks are considering charging up to \$30 for each vehicle, and they also regularly charge now for internal tours and guided walks. See the previous suggestion - #1.)

Too few refuges charge (out of 464 NWRs open to the public [only 35 charge at all](#)), and there is no fee for any Waterfowl Production Area ([WPA](#)) entry anywhere in the country.

Again, those wonderful Refuge System properties that do collect a fee charge too little for entry/parking/auto-tour-route (e.g., \$5 at Ding Darling, Santa Ana, Merritt Island, Bosque del Apache, and Parker River; \$4 at Bombay Hook, and \$3 at Laguna Atascosa and Nisqually.) Besides, now the "value" of a free-pass stamp will dip when the price of that stamp goes up to \$25. (Simply put, for some people, more visits will have to be made to these charging NWRs to approach "breaking even.")

3 Stamp supporters should draw more attention through the waterfowl art on the stamp and the related art contest run by the hard work of the Federal Duck Stamp Office. This means further engagement with the art community, collectors, and portions of the general public interested in wildlife and art. The process, the contest, the exposition, all should be made "more interesting." There are ways to do that, and the Federal Duck Stamp Office cannot be expected to do it alone. Active partners and new ideas are required.

4 Stamp promotion should combine with a recognition of historical and conservation events. This was done through the centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge System back in 2003. We also witnessed a bump in interest last year in the 80th anniversary of the Congressional passage of the original stamp act, the creation of first stamp, and even the development of the "blue goose" sign, all accomplished in 1934.

Soon, there will be the sequential centennials of the Migratory Bird Treaty - signed in 1916, ratified by Congress in 1918, and upheld by the Supreme Court in 1920. These all present wonderful opportunities. The USFWS is already considering the [options for the first year, 2016](#). More stamp connections with these celebrations should be considered throughout the multi-year centennial period.

5 The highly respected and successful North American Waterfowl Management Plan ([NAWMP](#)) was revised in 2012. Until then, NAWMP only included objectives for waterfowl populations and habitat. The revision now includes objectives that consider human dimensions, specifically to "increase the number of North American citizens who enjoy and actively support waterfowl and

wetlands conservation." What a great opportunity to combine stamp promotion with the necessity to "increase the number" of Americans who appreciate waterfowl and wetlands! That not only involves the traditional commitment to recruitment and retention for waterfowl hunters, but it also includes a place for refuge Friends groups, wildlife photographers, bird watchers, anglers, environmental educators, and many others.

Indeed, we've [said this before](#): What better way is there to measure public support for the resource than to get non-waterfowl-hunters to commit to buying an annual Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp?

6 In the category of "measuring" as indicated above, we need to know *who* is buying the stamp. Sure, it's waterfowlers. But how many? And how many of them double-up to buy two stamps (as promoted by Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, and other waterfowl-oriented groups)? Do waterfowl hunters buy 95% of all stamps? Or is it 98%? Or might it be 85%? Or 75%? How about stamp collectors? Or birdwatchers? Or refuge Friends groups?

We may know *where* they are sold, but not *who* buys the stamps. This is essential for serious future marketing. There must be effective ways to track sales, or at least at a start, truly representative samples of sales. This is made more difficult, believe it or not, when this information collecting is handicapped by governmental restrictions. But there ought to be ways to collect and evaluate that information through other means, partners, and even important online venues (e.g., looking at the new e-stamp law as an entry to better counting, as well as providing the potential to meet the challenges of the 21st century through technology and addressing a younger generation).

7 Promote materials which include the federal duck stamp or the stamp message: t-shirts, mugs, posters, and pins. It's about the *visibility and display* of the actual stamp and its image. This is not the responsibility of the busy Federal Duck Stamp Office. It can, and should, be taken up by organizations and businesses whose goals are in parallel with the mission of the stamp program.

8 Finally, and lest we forget: Give the Junior Duck Stamp ([JDS](#)) the attention it justly deserves. We all owe it to the next generation of wildlife artists and conservationists. There are relatively recent (i.e., 2011) aids available for the JDS Program, including remarkable field-tested and evaluated [education guides and curricula](#) (K-12) prepared by the Federal Duck Stamp Office. Admittedly, stuffing yet another educational effort into the American classroom is difficult these days, what with school teachers given less latitude in the menu of optional items presented to students and with art itself being squeezed out of too many school districts. But there is still the potential to recruit a new "farm team" of young bird-and-wildlife artists, replete with supportive mentoring, skill-building, existing materials, exciting opportunities, and a team of supporting [state coordinators](#).

Central to these eight ideas are the goals of getting more outdoor-involved Americans to appreciate how the federal duck stamp conserves habitat, saves wildlife (well beyond just waterfowl), builds a valuable National Wildlife Refuge System, and serves the American public. Friends groups, non-waterfowl hunters, birders, wildlife photographers, collectors, and environmental educators have to be approached with the argument that they *should* buy a stamp.

These eight possibilities are the kind of tasks to take to heart, a collective challenge to all of us with the new stamp later this year.

## And Three Tougher Concepts

Here are three possible ideas on increasing sales that would probably require a change in federal law, as opposed to the eight above. This would not be easy, not at all. Additional law-required concepts could be pursued, but for starters here are three that are difficult, yet specific and *potentially* doable:

The first might be a requirement that all hunters of "waterbirds," and not simply "waterfowl" be required to hold a valid federal stamp. This would include hunters of cranes, snipe, and rails. While these birds and their hunters are regulated under state laws, the hunters are not currently required to hold a federal stamp to pursue these migratory birds. This is despite the fact that these birds cross state lines in migration - indicating federal jurisdiction under the MBTA - and these birds use essentially the same habitat as waterfowl, often the specific and identical habitat made possible through duck stamp investments.

The second one might be a requirement that all adult users of the network of refuge-system-run Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) hold a valid federal stamp. That would include upland bird hunters and big-game hunters, not simply waterfowl hunters, as well as any birders, photographers, environmental educators, and others. This would ensure that all users of these 3-million-plus WPA acres would contribute to securing more wetland and grassland habitats and, thereby, to sustaining the associated recreational activities.

The third might actually require the Junior Duck Stamp (JDS) for *something!* What that "something" is should be discussed. Right now, nobody *has* to buy the \$5 Junior Duck Stamp, even though whatever is collected goes back to sustain the JDS educational program and competition. Should the JDS be required for waterfowl hunters under the age of 16? (They are currently exempted from the requirement of holding an actual federal duck stamp.) How about subsistence hunters? (They have *just* been exempted from the requirement of holding a federal duck stamp.) And, if any WPA requirement for holding a federal duck stamp in the second option above is deemed "too onerous," how about a simple JDS requirement? Multiple requirement options probably need to be explored, just to keep the JDS Program healthy and thriving.

If the first eight "easier" suggestions require serious consideration, then these three "more difficult" ideas for stamp-and-conservation advancement deserve at least a sober discussion. Of course, there are other issues to take up concerning awareness and sales of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp and the Junior Duck Stamp, but these could be a real start.

## About the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to two fundamental 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.

When you join our Friends you will receive a stamp-holder, sticker, and/or other supporting material (as supplies last). Please use these to

"spread the word" about the stamp to your colleagues and co-workers and to advance the message of the Friends.

You can also order our current t-shirt, with the image of the 2014-2015 stamp, [here](#).

To join or send us a contribution today, you can go to [our online form](#).

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