

May 8, 2015



WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

WATCHING THE MBCC



Cache River NWR in Arkansas, where 909 acres are being added through the investment of MBCF/Stamp dollars. (Photo: USFWS)

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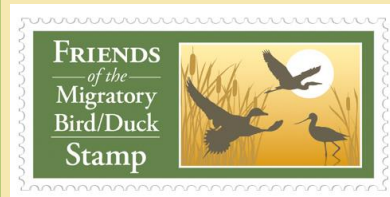
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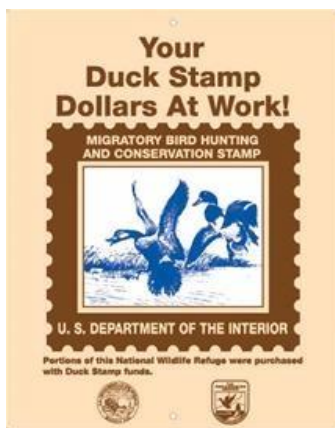
Or... How your Stamp dollars are spent

On the morning of April 29, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) met to make decisions on acquisition of National Wildlife Refuge properties through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF), where "Duck Stamp" dollars are held. The commission also decided on the funding of a number of North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) projects.

The meeting was held at the Department of the Interior - South building, a pleasant-looking, three-story, but relatively undistinguished building on Constitution Avenue on the Washington Mall. The meeting was opened by the MBCC chair, Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior, and this was the first meeting attended by two new members of the Commission, Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM).

Eric Alvarez, Chief of Refuge Realty and the Secretary for the MBCC, provided for MBCC members - new and old - a thorough summary of the accomplishments of the last year. For FY 2014, he covered MBCF/Stamp collections, disbursements, and acres secured. There were, attendees were told, 54,801 acres conserved: 11,410 fee-title acres, of which 10,301 were at refuges, and 43,391 easement acres.

Then, there were eight MBCC-approved refuge projects (for nine NWRs and accounting for over \$8,825,000 of expenditure) that came before the Commission for consideration. They were all approved and were as follows:



The first was a combined project at Felsenthal and Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuges, in Arkansas and Louisiana respectively. These are contiguous acquisitions, and the properties span the state boundary, and they include 1,383 acres in Arkansas (Felsenthal NWR) and 861 acres in Louisiana (Upper Ouachita NWR). The total price approval was to acquire 2,244 acres for \$3,000,037. The intent is to protect and restore bottomland hardwood forest habitat, mainly for wintering waterfowl, including Mallards, Northern Pintails, and Wood Ducks, but also for wading birds, Neotropical migrants, and other wildlife that depend on the involved habitats. Parts of these NWRs are also considered important in the Red-cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Plan. The tracts have been under the same ownership, and they straddle the state line. The acquisitions, moreover, would be the first step toward connecting the two NWRs. Commission members were informed

that if the Service didn't acquire the properties, collectively called the "Beanfield Tract," they would likely be sold to a private party or be sub-divided and sold to multiple private parties. The Commission made the right decision.

The second option involved the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas, with a price approval to acquire a 909-acre tract for \$2,000,000. This property has one landowner and is currently in agricultural use. The USFWS will restore it to its "full wildlife and recreational potential," the MBCC was told. The refuge itself encompasses some of the largest remaining blocks of bottomland hardwood forest in the Lower Mississippi Valley and some of the largest expanses of forested wetlands on any tributary within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Cache River NWR is designated as a Wetland of International Importance according to the RAMSAR Convention. With the new acquisition, the use of MBCF/Stamp dollars will account for 50,090 acres of Cache River NWR, or over 74 percent of the refuge.

The third NWR-acquisition project was for Mackay Island National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina, with price approval to acquire a 288-acre tract for \$944,900. This NWR is located in the northern portion of Currituck Sound and the southern portion of Back Bay. The area attracts

concentrations of Snow and Canada Geese, Tundra Swans, other waterfowl, Osprey, wading birds, and shorebirds. The Commission was reminded that the NWR offers "bird watching, nature photography, wildlife observation, and other wildlife-oriented recreation." The tract, part of a historic hunting lodge, is currently held by The Conservation Fund, a cooperating organization.

The fourth project involved Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, with a price approval to acquire approximately 1,778 acres for \$1,000,000. This is a real bargain, since the property is being acquired by The Conservation Fund for \$4,500,000 and offered to the USFWS for \$1,000,000. The acquisition will help create a corridor linking the NWR's main unit with its well-known Bahia Grande unit, providing connectivity for various shorebird species and waterfowl. (The wintering Redhead population on the NWR is the largest single concentration of Redheads in the U.S.) The acquisition may also help in securing Aplomado Falcon habitat at Laguna Atascosa NWR.

The fifth NWR acquisition was for San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, also in Texas, with a price approval to acquire approximately 360 acres for \$1,080,480. This acquisition was pricy, a fact that came up in MBCC deliberations, but the parcel was valuable, in a bidding competition, and about an hour's drive from Houston. The tract would be managed for "waterfowl, wading birds, neo-tropical migrants, and other wildlife that depend on freshwater marsh, bottomland hardwood forests, and grasslands." Again, a wise decision was made by the Commission.

The sixth NWR considered was Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana, with a price approval to acquire a 383-acre tract for \$726,800. This NWR is unique because it is one of the few natural areas along the Mississippi River which has never been leveed and still experiences seasonal overflows. A vestige of the past, the NWR contains one of the highest densities of old-growth bald cypress in the country.

The last two NWR projects involved renewing approval for leases at two refuges.

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana, required a 10-year lease renewal on 9,580 acres of State school section lands, for the annual lease fee of \$53,562 - or \$5.59 per acre. (Five percent per annum increases might also be involved in the future, and these were approved in advance.) This NWR, of course, is famous in its historic role in the protection and restoration of Trumpeter Swans.

Another lease renewal involved St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Mississippi, with are-approval to renew a five-year lease on 502 acres of State school section lands, for the annual lease fee of \$19,600. Especially important for migrating and wintering waterfowl, the habitat in question consists of bottomland hardwood and cypress sloughs.

These decisions by the MBCC represent a well-invested \$8.8 million. (It is also important to remember that the Commission reviewed and approved \$49.3 million in grants under NAWCA for the U.S. [24 grants for \$25 million], Canada [12 grants for \$21.6million], and Mexico [12 grants at \$2.7 million].)

Congratulations! With these particular NWR decisions by the Commission, everyone who bought a Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp last year can take an appropriate bow.

Honoring John D. Dingell

A year ago, in May 2014, at the 9th Annual International Wildlife Refuge Alliance (IWRA) Benefit Dinner, the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp presented Congressman John D. Dingell (D-MI) with a formal award honoring his tireless work for birds and their habitats and for his leadership on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, going back to his inclusion on the MBCC in 1969.

Mr. Dingell's role in Congress and on the MBCC has been one of continued vigilance and leadership, consistently raising important issues to defend wetlands, waterfowl, other birds and wildlife, and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

With those contributions in mind, last month we extended to the now-retired Congressman the status of Honorary Life Member of the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp.

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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