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WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Monte Vista and Alamosa NWRs



Sandhill Cranes at Monte Vista NWR

Photo: USFWS

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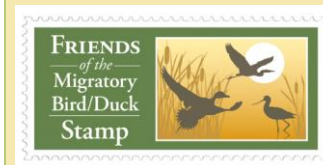
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Stamp Success Story: Two Colorado NWRs

At the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp we emphasize the concept that the various units of the Refuge System, especially those acquired through Stamp dollars, form a vital network - that no refuge functions in isolation. A good example can be found out West in Region 6, where [Alamosa](#) and [Monte Vista](#) National Wildlife Refuges are situated in the San Luis Valley of south central Colorado. This valley constitutes the headwaters of the Rio Grande. About half of the two million acres of the valley is held by the public, in a mosaic of National Forests, National Parks, BLM lands, and other state and federal holdings, including one other NWR, Baca. The valley is cradled between two mountain ranges, the San Juans to the west and the sunset-kissed Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east; its relatively flat floor lies at about 7,800 feet above sea level.

Alamosa NWR lies along the river and offers 12,026 acres of wet meadows, river oxbows, and riparian habitats: an oasis for wildlife in this dry region. Somewhat to the west, Monte Vista

consists of 14,804 acres of artificial wetlands intensively managed for the benefit of waterfowl and other water birds. Monte Vista was organized as an NWR in 1952; 94% of its acreage has been acquired with MBCF/Stamp funds. The first deed for Alamosa was signed in 1963; 91% of its land can be credited to money from the MBCF.

The valley has a rich [prehistory](#). We have evidence of human presence 12,000 years ago. About 7,500 years ago, the still-mobile populations began to build hunting blinds and storage structures. In the final millennium before European contact, the dwellers here became more sedentary, taking advantage of the valley's wetland resources; pottery and archery flourished.

The unique hydrology of the region accounts in part for its value over the centuries to people. The groundwater of the San Luis Valley consists of an unconfined aquifer (one with a connection to surface waters in rivers and lakes) and below that, separated by an impermeable layer, a confined aquifer. Wells drilled into this confined aquifer are frequently artesian. It is recharged by precipitation and snowmelt from the enclosing mountains, and is buffered from short-term ebbs and flows.

The region's system of water rights is even more complex than the flows of water that it regulates. Most of the senior water rights here go to irrigators. Monte Vista holds adjudicated water rights specifically for wildlife, which gives managers more flexibility. A key attribute of groundwater for legal purposes is whether it is considered tributary, that is, whether it has a direct hydraulic connection to surface waters. Surprisingly, both the unconfined and confined aquifers are tributary, although the confined aquifer's connection to surface water is not fully understood by hydrologists.

As a reminder that the refuges are links in a chain of protected lands, perhaps the most stunning example in the San Luis Valley is the movement of Sandhill Cranes. During spring migration, the entire Rocky Mountain population of these birds - 20,000 strong - flies through the valley moving north from winter havens like [Bosque del Apache NWR](#) (featured in *Wingtips* in October 2013). It's a journey of a day and half from the Bosque in New Mexico, as the crane flies. The cranes' peregrinations are usually honored with an annual festival at Monte Vista in March.

Depending on the season and the location, waterfowl can abound at both refuges.

An important songbird that also benefits from this complex is the Southwestern race of Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). Listed as Federally Endangered, this subspecies frequents willow thickets in the riparian habitats of Alamosa, as documented by the draft [Comprehensive Conservation Plan](#).

Networks of partnerships are also important to the region. For example, the Colorado Wetlands Initiative has linked the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado Parks and Outdoor Recreation, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife, the Nature Conservancy, Great Outdoors Colorado, and Ducks Unlimited. In terms of public support and volunteers, the [Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges](#) adds its help to all three refuges: Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Baca.

Art Contest Scheduled for Next Month

The 2015 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest will be held on September 18th and 19th at the [National Conservation Training Center](#) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The species that are eligible for this year's contest are Blue-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Mallard, and Trumpeter Swan. Artists entering the contest may choose to use any medium or combination of media except photography or computer-generated artwork. All entries, of course, must be hand-created.

The event is free and open to the public and begins at 10 a.m. Eastern each day. The Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest is open to the public; anyone can witness a bit of history in the making as judges select the winning art from among hundreds of entries.

The contest will also be streamed live online. The [Federal Duck Stamp Office](#) will post a link to the broadcast just prior to the start of the contest.

Also, there will be a viewing of "The Million Dollar Duck," a Duck Stamp documentary, on Friday, September 18th at 7 p.m. in the training center auditorium. This is also free and open to the public.

Join - or Rejoin - 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.



Membership is annual, corresponding to the year of validity for the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (Duck Stamp), namely from the beginning of July to the end of the following June. Our "Regular Friend" fee is modest, only \$15, but all Friends are also asked to *pledge to buy two stamps per year*, joining with other organizations across the country with that effort.

You can access a secure online form to join the Friends - or to make a contribution - [via Razoo](#). Or you can access a simple mail-in membership form [here](#).

Since the new Stamp has recently appeared, and since it marks the start of a new "stamp-year," it's also time to commit yourself to the promotion of the Stamp program, the Friends, and smart conservation through the sales and promotion of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp.

Also, 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.

A Great Way to Support the Jr. Duck Stamp Program

"AmazonSmile" is a simple concept that works like this: When you shop through the Amazon website, the folks at Amazon will donate to your favorite designated tax-exempt organization or charity.

The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp is now a registered charitable organization with AmazonSmile. You can designate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to be donated to the Friends, at no cost to you. In turn, these



funds will be re-donated by the Friends to sustain the creative activities of the the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program. This is an great way to benefit young wildlife artists and students of conservation while you shop. You can find a lot more details [here](#).

Please consider sharing this information to supporters of the Jr. Duck Stamp Program, whether they are environmental educators, art teachers, hunters, birders, or Refuge Friends.

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