

November 23, 2016



# WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

## Stand Up for Loxahatchee Support Refuge Management



Loxahatchee at sunset by Daniel Schwen CC BY-SA 4.0

by [Ed Penny](#)

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Many of you have likely heard the news that the [Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge](#) is in danger of losing most of its lands. The Refuge is located in western Palm Beach County, Florida and is composed of 221 square miles (approximately 144,000 acres) of land owned by the both the federal government (through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS]) and the State of Florida (through the Southwest Florida Water Management District [District]). For a long time, the USFWS and the District have partnered to manage wildlife habitat and to provide public access at this large refuge. It is the largest intact portion of all that remains of the once vast

### IN THIS ISSUE

[STAND FOR LOXAHATCHEE](#)

[SPREADING THE WORD](#)

[ABOUT THE FRIENDS](#)

[SHARING CONTENT](#)

### Quick Links

[Our Website](#)

[About Us](#)

[On Facebook](#)

[Resources](#)

[Wingtips Archives](#)

[Tweaking Future Art Rules](#)

### What Percentage?

Here is a listing illustrating the percentages of property acquired by MBCF/Stamp funds at some popular and well-known refuges:

Eastern Neck (MD)

100%

McFaddin (TX)

100%

Reelfoot (KY)

100%

William L. Finley (OR)

100%

Tamarac (MN)

99.9%

northern Everglades. The refuge is important to the nation, the state, and local communities - over 300,000 visitors come every year to hike, bike, canoe, kayak, fish, photograph, birdwatch, and learn about and explore the Everglades; thousands of Palm Beach County students have been able to experience the Everglades first-hand on field trips to the refuge.

But now, the refuge could be reduced to only the relatively small portion (ca. 3,000 acres) that was purchased with federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (or "Duck Stamp") funds. How could this happen to such an important land complex? The District is considering terminating its long-term cooperative agreement with USFWS to manage and operate the refuge. The District wants exclusive management control of this land because the spread of invasive exotic plants (primarily melaleuca trees and Old World climbing fern) on the Refuge has gotten out of hand. These invasive plants are a very serious problem because they overtake and replace native plants that provide homes for migratory birds and other wildlife. Their spread beyond the boundary of the refuge is a problem for neighboring landowners as well. (Both *Melaleuca quinquenervia* and the fern, *Lygodium microphyllum*, are on [Florida's list of noxious weeds](#), and hence constitute species of particular concern.)

Control of noxious weeds requires a great deal of focused cooperation and financial investment, and termination of the agreement would force the District to foot the entire bill. The Refuge spent almost \$3 million to treat invasive species last year, more than half of its entire annual budget, and the state spent a similar amount, but the problem continues. It is estimated that \$5 million for 5 years would be required to bring these noxious plants under maintenance control. These costs are in addition to essential management costs like performing prescribed fires, clearing canoe trails, fighting wildfires, and assuming law enforcement responsibility for the entire area. It is also not clear how the state would continue any kind of educational or recreational opportunities for its visitors.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association, the Florida Wildlife Federation, the National Wildlife Federation, the Everglades Foundation, the Everglades Coalition, and the Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge are speaking up to bring attention to this issue and to help resolve this problem. For more information and to make your voice heard, visit <http://refugeassociation.org/action>.

The issue at this refuge and in other communities around the country with refuges or other public lands is not simply a bureaucratic tug of war between government agencies or an

|                          |       |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Sacramento (CA)          | 99.6% |
| St. Catherine Creek (MS) | 99.4% |
| Bosque del Apache (NM)   | 99.2% |
| Pea Island (NC)          | 99.2% |
| Quivira (KS)             | 99.2% |
| Muscatatuck (IN)         | 98.8% |
| Horicon (WI)             | 98.7% |
| Monomoy (MA)             | 97.8% |
| Parker River (MA)        | 97.7% |
| Bombay Hook (DE)         | 95.2% |
| Santa Ana (TX)           | 94.9% |
| DeSoto (IA and NE)       | 90.8% |
| Anahuac (TX)             | 87.3% |
| Montezuma (NY)           | 86.7% |
| Okefenokee (GA)          | 86.2% |
| Laguna Atascosa (TX)     | 86.1% |
| Ottawa (OH)              | 86.0% |
| Edwin B. Forsythe (NJ)   | 84.4% |
| Prime Hook (DE)          | 82.4% |
| Panther Swamp (MS)       |       |

argument between big government or small government. The more broadly relevant issue here is the extremely dire need for committed care and stewardship of our public lands, whether they are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System or owned by a state agency. Our Friends group is very enthusiastic in supporting any land acquisitions made with Duck Stamp dollars, because we understand their importance. We are also quick to react to "action alerts" and to contact our elected officials when important funding vehicles like the Land and Water Conservation Fund are endangered by spending cuts. However, land "conservation" is more than just buying land for the public domain and then simply leaving it alone. You see, once lands are purchased with public dollars like those from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (Duck Stamp Fund), they must be managed and cared for to truly benefit migratory birds and Americans. Public land management requires sustained financial commitment, but public funding for science-based, habitat management has declined over the last several years.

What exactly is meant by habitat management? Habitat is the often referred to as "the place where an animal lives." It may be obvious, but birds live in the wetlands, grasslands, and forests of our public lands throughout the U.S. It may be counterintuitive, but these places cannot simply be "left alone" to be in a "natural state." These lands must be managed. Similar to a farm, these natural places often require intensive care and maintenance to continue providing food, cover, and places to nest for birds and other wildlife. For example, wetlands require periodic manipulation of water levels (draining and re-flooding) and soils (disking) to produce mudflats for shorebirds and natural foods for waterfowl. Grasslands require regular prescribed fire, and sometimes selective herbicides, to reinvigorate nesting cover for birds and to control the pressure from invasive weeds. Forests require selective timber harvests to help sunlight reach the forest floor; sometimes replanting to generate appropriate species is called for.

These management practices, which support bird and other wildlife populations, require significant investment to acquire water supplies, heavy equipment (tractors), materials (tree seedlings), and knowledgeable people (managers) who know how to use them. Professionals in conservation understand that land stewardship is difficult and sometimes expensive, and for this reason, working together through partnerships is often the best way to get things done. Collaboration and cooperation is rarely easy, though, so the District, USFWS, and their respective leaders should be commended and supported for cooperating for so many years to manage habitat and provide public access at Loxahatchee.

- 80.9%
- Turnbull (WA)
- 74.4%
- Cache River (AR)
- 73.5%
- Chassahowitzka (FL)
- 73.1%
- Blackwater (MD)
- 73.0%
- Chincoteague (VA)
- 69.9%
- Lower Hatchie (TN)
- 65.1%
- Nisqually (WA)
- 58.4%
- Seney (MI)
- 46.4%
- Aransas (TX)
- 43.0%
- Lake Umbagog (NH and ME)
- 42.2%
- Cape May (NJ)
- 40.3%
- J. Clark Salyer (ND)
- 36.5%
- Great Swamp (NJ)
- 36.1%
- Bear River (UT)
- 35.0%
- Sonny Bono Salton Sea (CA)
- 26.5%
- Malheur (OR)
- 25.6%
- Gray's Lake (ID)
- 20.2%
- Pocosin Lakes (NC)
- 11.2%
- Lower Klamath (CA)
- 10.2%

Compared to a large and controversial (or even a very popular) land purchase, science-based land management doesn't usually make for attention-grabbing headlines. That is, it doesn't until our failure to properly manage the land leads to a difficult situation like the one at Loxahatchee. But committed stewardship is just as important to migratory birds and our opportunities to enjoy them as land acquisition! A similar situation could occur at any of our treasured national wildlife refuges or state Wildlife Management Areas unless we acknowledge the problem of reduced funding for management.

The decline in funding for public land management is real and must be addressed. For those of us who truly love our migratory birds and public lands, whether we enjoy them in a duck blind or through the lens of a spotting scope, it is time to speak up for a stronger commitment to managing our public lands, regardless of their ownership.



J.N.Ding Darling (FL)

8.5%

Bayou Sauvage (LA)

8.2%

Assabet River (MA)

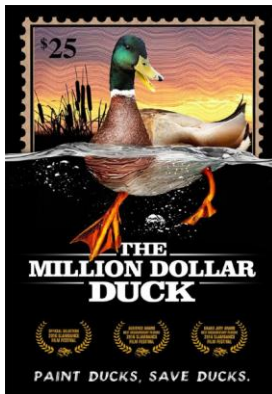
4.4%

Note:

1) The dollars reflected in these percentages are from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) where Stamp dollars are the major, *but not the only*, contributor. A large portion also comes from excise/import fees and other some sources.

2) You can access a recent report of all NWRs which owe all or part of their existence to MBCF investments from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### Some ways to spread the word and support the stamp...



Consider five simple things to support the activities of our Friends and raise awareness of the entire Stamp program:

- 1) Join our Friends or renew your membership. Find details toward the bottom of this newsletter.
- 2) Spread the word and have your like-minded friends [sign up](#) for *Wingtips*, our near-monthly newsletter.
- 3) View *The Million Dollar Duck*, the fun documentary about the stamp and the art contest. Show the video at a meeting. (Available on iTunes, Amazon, and on DVD.) For details, click on the image to the left.

4) Build support for the Jr. Duck Stamp through AmazonSmile. Click on the feature to the right to find out more on this program.

5) Buy and wear a classic 1934-1935 Duck Stamp T-shirt, featuring an image of the very first Stamp. See the particulars [here](#).

There are [many other things to do](#), but these five are great starters. Please consider sharing these ideas with others, whether they are hunters, anglers, hikers, birders, wildlife photographers, environmental educators, art teachers, or Refuge Friends.

**Shop at AmazonSmile**

and Amazon will make a donation to:

The Junior Duck Stamp Program through our Friends

Get started

amazon smile

## FROM THE MALHEUR NWR FRIENDS GROUP

Readers of *Wingtips* will surely remember the armed seizure of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon earlier this year and the disappointing verdict in that case.

Earlier this month, the Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge released a statement by its president, Gary Ivey, on some of the consequences of that seizure and on rededicating the Friends to access to public lands.

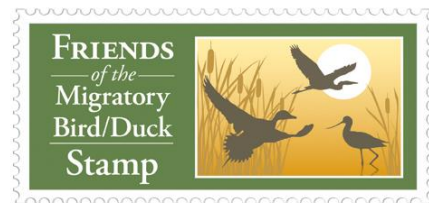
The listing of refuges on the first page, where 25.6% of Malheur is shown to have been acquired through by MBCF/Stamp funds, accentuates the need to stress that these lands, legitimately acquired and appropriately managed, belong to all of us.

You can read the full Malheur Friends statement [here](#).

### 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.



Our "Regular Friend" annual fee is kept modest, only \$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. [Join our Friends group!](#)

### Sharing and Adapting Our Content



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## THANKSGIVING WISHES

This is a season where we are dearly reminded that there is always something for which to be thankful. May you enjoy all the simple pleasures that this beautiful season and Thanksgiving Day have to offer. In fact, life's most valued treasures are often the ones that are free, special gifts that have no price, including family, friends, and the enjoyment of nature. Wishing you and your loved ones a wonderful Thanksgiving!