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WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Celebrating Waterfowl Hunting Heritage



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The Friends on the Current Stamp Art Proposal

In late November, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [announced a proposal](#) to require art entries in the 2018 Federal Duck Stamp contest to include one or more visual elements that would focus on the theme of "celebrating our waterfowl hunting heritage." Simultaneously, the Service also proposed that all selected contest judges must have "an understanding and appreciation of America's waterfowl hunting heritage and be able to recognize scenery or objects related to waterfowl hunting." The public was [invited to send in comments](#), something that our readers, regardless of their view on this particular subject, may wish to consider.

Our group, the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp, has welcomed the opportunity to make comments on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to recognize the contribution of waterfowl hunters on the 2018 stamp.

The proposal clearly indicates that the Service has an interest in making some changes in the program, at least on the part of the artwork for one year, that may draw attention to the wetland - and grassland - conservation achievements of the stamp, achievements made through sales to waterfowl hunters. We can easily imagine that such a requirement involving one or more

additional visual elements to "celebrate our waterfowl hunting heritage" might include an image of a hunter or hunters, a hunting blind, hunting dog, and/or camo-covered boat into the background.

While we feel that there is nothing wrong in requiring art changes to draw attention to the importance of the stamp, we doubt that this particular proposal, *viewed alone*, will serve to "grow" the stamp, producing greater appreciation and increasing sales.

We feel that this proposal, if made within the context of a larger, meaningful plan to expand appreciation and sales, would be very good. But this change, simply proposed alone and dropped into the rules, represents a missed opportunity. Therefore, we suggest not rejection, but rethinking.

Our group could think of at least five potential suggestions worthy of discussion that would emphasize the conservation issues confronting the Migratory Bird Hunting *and Conservation* Stamp, the revised name of the stamp since 1977. Such ideas might include:

1. A requirement for one year with background showing vital habitat (no close portraits). Reasoning: this could emphasize the importance of wetland and/or grassland to the particular species portrayed.
2. A requirement showing only female ducks at nests or with young. Reasoning: this could emphasize the essential role of the more cryptic females in incubating/raising the young ducks (not necessarily geese and swans) and the fact that the artists historically have tended to focus on painting the males of the species.
3. Restricting the choices for one or more years to the more sea-bound species of the seaducks. This would focus on the three scoters, four eiders, long-tailed duck, and harlequin duck. Reasoning: These species have been seen to be among the most at-risk species at one or another level, and more conservation attention should be directed to them. In addition, the three scoters - black, white-winged-and surf - have only appeared once each in history of the stamp.
4. A requirement showing "food" as an added feature in the image. While this may be difficult, perhaps showing the waterfowl - multiple birds? - dabbling, dipping, and up-ending or perhaps consuming some vegetable or animal matter as food, it would be highly instructive. This requirement might be not unlike suggestion #1, the habitat requirement, but more artistically demanding. Reasoning: habitat without food is meaningless.
5. The requirement of the inclusion of a migratory non-waterfowl in the background, [a suggestion we previously made](#). There is some time for this idea; it might be best in 2020, celebrating the centennial of the Supreme Court decision upholding the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Reasoning: Showing a *secondary* bird species would emphasize that other migratory birds, beyond waterfowl, are important beneficiaries of the conservation effort driven by the waterfowl-dominated stamp.

These five suggestions are among those that *might* be considered in a longer-range plan for artwork and the stamp, all stressing *the conservation* functions of the stamp.

There are two other creative suggestions that could enter the mix, although neither has an intrinsic conservation/biological message:

1. The current suggestion on the "waterfowl hunting heritage" that might give the hunters and the hunting culture a well-earned position on the stamp itself.

2. The inclusion of an "old-style black-and-white" version of the stamp for one year, a version which would highlight the history of the stamp and the role of collectors.

These ideas - seven in total - are provided to suggest an approach to the stamp in a new way for multiple years. But none of these should be presented in the absence of an overall plan.

It is vital that multiple stakeholders be tapped for their ideas (e.g., artists, waterfowl hunters, wetland conservationists, collectors, Friends, state wildlife agencies, and the birders and wildlife photographers who increasingly visit the NWRs that are the beneficiaries of stamp dollars). The changes - if any - would need serious buy-in. The potential risk - such as a decline in art entries - would have to be identified and addressed. In addition, the wisdom of showcasing other constituencies who buy and benefit from the stamp program may also need addressing (e.g., non-waterfowl hunters, wildlife photographers, bird watchers, and environmental educators).

The ultimate goal would be educational and institutional - to grow the appreciation and the sales of the stamp.

Finally, two further comments are necessary.

First, there have been alternate suggestions that any art changes on the stamp be "recommended" and not "required." If an art change is well-defined, well-thought-out, and well-justified, it should be required. If a change is only "recommended," the waterfowl artists are in a quandary, not knowing whether non-inclusion of the feature will be a disadvantage when the artwork is judged.

Which brings us to our last rule comment, concerning the judges. The new proposed rule that the 2018 judges "must have an understanding and appreciation of America's waterfowl hunting heritage and be able to recognize scenery or objects related to waterfowl hunting" is too restrictive. Historically speaking, the previous judges have been chosen for their knowledge of waterfowl, biology, stamp design, wildlife art, collecting, hunting, and other vital characteristics. The mix has always been difficult, but the chosen judges have consistently represented broad interests. One would think that a "special-requirement contest" as outlined in the seven potential options above would have to include multiple individuals with a serious knowledge of the particular annual requirement. But other interests - especially design and art sensitivity - must be included. The Federal Duck Stamp Office needs only to be given general advice on the selection of a mix of judges, not be limited by restrictive requirements.

In summary, approaching the historic Federal Duck Stamp program with new art, appreciation, and sales priorities is admirable and is supported by the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp. But such a renewal and re-commitment needs to be an effort that goes beyond one year's rules, one that takes a step back for a broader look at the program, one that includes multiple stakeholders, and one that must be driven by the intent to increase appreciation and the sales of the stamp.

THE WALL AND SANTA ANA NWR: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Department of Homeland Security has announced that the first new section of the proposed border wall at the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) in South Texas will be at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.



The proposed 2.9-mile section of wall at Santa Ana NWR would be constructed in a 10-mile gap in the existing barrier. The wall would be 30 feet tall with additional 18 feet of steel bollard fence atop it. Additionally, there would be a cleared 150-foot enforcement zone stripped of vegetation immediately to the south of the wall. This zone would include a road and surveillance towers with floodlighting. On either end of this imposing construction, there would be no wall. That's right, no wall.

The Santa Ana segment is projected to cost \$45 million - approximately \$15 million per mile - and is slated to be completed by July 2019, according to Army Corps of Engineers records acquired by the *Texas Observer* and described in a [highly revealing article](#) (along with excellent maps and illustrations). It is still uncertain what the fate of the refuge and access to it would be after this construction. Construction would likely begin in 2018.

Santa Ana NWR has been long been referred to as "the jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System." The refuge was originally created in 1943 to protect migratory birds, and almost 95% of the property has been acquired through Stamp/MBCF dollars. The refuge is an important stopover site for many species on the Central Flyway. Some 400 bird species have been seen there, including "South Texas specialties," as well as 450 species of plants, and it hosts both the rare Texas sabal palm and the endangered ocelot. Other wildlife species - from rare mammals to herps and butterflies - call the area home.

Elsewhere in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the National Butterfly Center, a non-profit sanctuary and wildlife center, recently filed a lawsuit in Washington D.C. against the Department of Homeland Security demanding that the Trump administration conduct federally required environmental assessments, and follow the constitution and legal due process before attempting to build a border wall through their 100-acre nature and wildlife sanctuary.

According to those Army Corps of Engineers documents recently acquired, the wall also would cut through other valuable nearby habitats and properties, such as the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park.

For more information and general background, see our issue of [Wingtips](#) for July 27, 2017. As we indicated there, security along the border, of course, is important, and some wildlife-compatible fencing is justified. Still, the currently suggested intrusive wall and accompanying south-side cleared buffer is shaping up to be more of an expensive boondoggle than actually contributing to real security. There are better ways to address the issue of security under these circumstances. For example, more technologically advanced sensing devices could be used along sections of the Rio Grande, and USFWS Law Enforcement could be enhanced for all parcels of the Refuge System in the LRGV.

Let your members of Congress know where you stand on this issue. You can find phone and e-mail information for your Representative and Senators through their websites for the [House](#) and [Senate](#). *Don't put this off. The process is currently playing out, and action now is of the essence.*

Support 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.



Our membership is annual, corresponding to the year of validity for the Federal 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 in that effort.

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

We encourage you 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.

And don't forget support for the Jr. Duck Stamp Program which reaches tens of thousands of youngsters. One way to help is described here, on the right, through AmazonSmile.

Shop at AmazonSmile
and Amazon will make
a donation to:

The Junior Duck Stamp Program
through our Friends

Get started

amazonsmile

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WISHING YOU THE VERY BEST THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!



"Nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own."

- Charles Dickens

The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp wishes our friends and colleagues all the warmth and happiness that this time of year can bring, no matter how one might choose to celebrate it. May the wonders of nature bring us all peace and comfort throughout the New Year.