

# Wingtips

## Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp



30 June 2025



What's at stake

### Refuge System at Breaking Point

### New Junior Duck Stamp Winner: Catheryn Liang

### Quick takes

## Refuge System at Breaking Point

By Tim Eisele, Friends of the Duck Stamp

The Federal Duck Stamp has been one of the most successful federal programs ever created. Thanks to the foresight of the late J.N. “Ding” Darling and other early conservationists, the stamp has raised more than \$1 billion to preserve more than six million acres of wildlife habitat, especially wetlands and upland nesting cover.

Many of these areas are preserved in National Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas.

The proposed new federal budget contains reductions in refuge resources that are of concern. The following information comes from the National Wildlife Refuge Association outlining how the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget can further reduce an already gutted National Wildlife Refuge System:

The National Wildlife Refuge System is at a breaking point, but the President's FY2026 budget proposes funding the Refuge System at just \$412 million—a 22% cut from current levels.

The last time the Refuge System's budget was this low was nearly 20 years ago. The FY2010 appropriation adjusted for inflation is over \$730 million in today's dollars—highlighting just how far support has fallen.

“This budget proposal sends a devastating message to the millions of Americans who value their national wildlife refuges,” said Desirée Sorenson-Groves, President & CEO of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “We are facing a moment when entire refuges are without staff, basic operations are falling apart, and habitat management and visitor services are slipping through the cracks. Our Refuge System cannot survive on this level of funding let alone deliver the unique

benefits its mission serves to the American people.”

The proposed cut compounds more than a decade of declining investment. The Refuge system had already endured a 30% reduction in staffing over the past 15 years, and since January, it has lost an estimated 25% more, leaving approximately 1,750 full-time equivalent staff to manage what is the largest conservation system in the world.

These most recent losses—driven by retirements, resignations, and positions vacated during prior terminations—come on top of dangerously low staffing levels. Today, over 10% of national wildlife refuges are completely unstaffed, and no single refuge has the resources needed to fully meet its mission.

Adding insult to injury, the administration could seek to terminate another 20% of the workforce of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including the Refuge System.

“We hope to work with the administration to ensure additional staffing cuts do not occur as the impact of another staff reduction of this magnitude would be catastrophic to the management of the Refuge System,” said Sorenson-Groves.

Conservationists who would like to stand up for the Refuge System, should let their voice be heard. Wildlife—and the Refuge System staff—cannot speak out!

Congress holds the strings to the budget and needs to hear about your concerns to these slashes to the Refuge System’s budget!

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Wildlife Refuge System spans more than 850 million acres, offering habitats for thousands of wildlife species and outdoor recreation opportunities to over 67 million annual visitors while supporting more than \$3.2 billion in economic activity each year.

*As the only nonprofit solely dedicated to advocating on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the National Wildlife Refuge Association protects, promotes, and enhances America’s wildlife heritage through strategic programs that serve the System and wildlife beyond its boundaries. The organization addresses Refuge System funding, management, and strategic growth, while also promoting programs that maximize the system’s conservation impact.*

## New Junior Duck Stamp Winner: Catheryn Liang

By Valerie Fellows, Program Coordinator of Federal Duck Stamp Office

A talented young artist from Texas has taken top honors at the [National Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest](#). A Northern Shoveler by 18-year-old Catheryn Liang, will grace the 2025-2026 Junior Duck Stamp, which raises funds to educate and engage our nation’s youth in wildlife and wetlands conservation and outdoor recreation.

A panel of five judges chose the oil painting, titled “Gliding Through Gold,” among 58 best-of-show entries from 50 states, Washington, D.C. and one U.S. Territory. Liang placed second in the 2022 National Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest with a pair of Canada Geese. This is the first time a Northern Shoveler has been selected for the Junior Duck Stamp.



The winners of the 2025 National Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest on display;  
photo: [Jennifer Wright/USFWS, Public Domain](#)

Students in kindergarten through grade twelve participated in their annual state Junior Duck Stamp Program through their school, home, art studio or after-school group, or from a refuge, park or nature center. After learning about wetlands, waterfowl, and wildlife conservation, they express their learning through a drawing or painting of a duck, goose, or swan.

Students submit their entries to their State contest for local recognition. Each State Best of Show is then forwarded to the National Competition.

The top piece of art in the nation - chosen at this annual competition - is featured on the Junior Duck Stamp, sales of which support educational programs and activities that nurture our next generation of conservationists.

The Federal Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program began in 1989 as an extension of the [Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp](#), commonly known as the Duck Stamp. It's a dynamic art- and science-based curriculum that teaches wetland and waterfowl conservation to students in kindergarten through high school. The program encourages students to explore their natural world, invites them to investigate biology and wildlife management principles and challenges them to express and share what they have learned with others.

Each year, tens of thousands of students have the opportunity to learn principles of wildlife conservation, connect with the outdoors, sparking a lifetime love of hunting, fishing, birdwatching and other wildlife-related recreation activities. Using science, art and language, the Junior Duck Stamp Program has been shown to kindle an initial spark, creating conservation stewards of tomorrow.

The first national Junior Duck Stamp art contest was held in 1993. Approximately 3,000 Junior Duck Stamps are sold annually for \$5 each.

The second place winner in the 2025 National Contest is Sophie Xu, 16, of Maryland, with "Inner Peace," an oil painting of Harlequin Ducks.

Third place went to 17-year-old Dan-Nhi Nguyen from Oregon, who entered "Nesting Tree," an acrylic painting of a Common Merganser female tending to her nest.

In addition to the art contest, a Junior Duck Stamp Conservation Message Contest encourages students to express in words the spirit of what they have learned through classroom discussions, research, and planning for their Junior Duck Stamp Contest entries.

This year's winner is Kaylen Kasel, 16, of North Dakota with the message: "Nature needs heroes; be one."

This year, over 13,500 young artists submitted entries to the Junior Duck Stamp contests around the nation. [View the gallery](#) of the 2025 Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest entries.

The Junior Duck Stamp Contest winner receives \$1,000. The second place winner receives \$500; the third-place winner receives \$200; the Conservation Message winner receives \$200.

[You can buy Junior Duck Stamps](#) online through the U.S. Postal Service and Amplex and at some national wildlife refuges. Proceeds from the sale of Junior Duck Stamps are used for recognition of individuals who submit winning designs in state or national competitions and to further activities related to the conservation education goals of the program.

## Quick takes

- The administration is rolling back a landmark conservation rule that prevents roadbuilding and logging on roughly 58 million acres of federal forest and wildlands. The U.S. Forest Service is under orders to increase logging and thinning in forests. While rescinding this rule is said to help reduce the wildfire threat, it will also increase access and remove red tape hindering logging on federal land.
- The [USGS Eastern Ecological Science Center](#), which includes the Bird Banding Lab (BBL) and Breeding Bird Survey, is slated to have its funding zeroed out. These two longstanding biological monitoring projects provide decades of data used for monitoring and managing bird populations.
- Keep your eyes on the news for updates impacting our bird populations and our public lands!
- If you know of friends, hunting partners, art enthusiasts, or others who would like to receive this newsletter, please send them to the [Wingtips archive page](#) for a sign-up link.

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