

*The  
“Duck Stamp”  
Story*



*Celebrating  
50 Years of  
Saving Wetlands  
for Wildlife*

Since 1934, "Duck Stamps" have helped save 3.5 million acres of wetlands—vital habitat for waterfowl and other fish and wildlife, including endangered species. Wetlands benefit people, too. Still, nearly half a million acres of irreplaceable wetlands vanish every year.

You can help save them . . . .



Bald eagle, Lee Enery, USFWS



Peace at sunset, Elise Smith, USFWS



Blue-winged teal preening, Dave Menke, USFWS



Canada geese and goslings, Ron Singer, USFWS

America's once-enormous populations of ducks and geese had fallen on hard times back in 1934. The long decline began many decades earlier. As millions of acres of prime waterfowl habitat were drained for agriculture, the huge flocks steadily dwindled. Their numbers were further reduced by indiscriminate shooting and market hunting. Even nature joined the onslaught when the mid-continent was ravaged by a drought of historic proportions.

But 1934 also marked the dawn of a new era for the nation's waterfowl. In July of that year, Congress created a revenue-raising device that was popularly known as the Federal "Duck Stamp." Every waterfowl hunter 16 years of age or older was required to purchase a stamp annually. Recognizing the stamp's value for wildlife and as a collector's item, a growing number of non-hunting conservationists and stamp collectors also began to buy them. By 1984, a half century later, over 285 million "Duck Stamp" dollars had gone to preserve some 3.5 million acres of precious wetland habitat—habitat that formed the backbone of the world's greatest system of waterfowl refuges.

Before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (aided by Duck Stamp revenues) stemmed the alarming trend, the continent's most important waterfowl habitat was rapidly vanishing. The Dust Bowl years, coupled with wetland drainage, had left north-central U.S. marshes largely bereft of water . . . and waterfowl. These vital regions, together with the wetlands

of the Canadian prairies and Alaska, were key production areas where the bulk of North America's waterfowl nested and reared their young. Crucial staging and migration rest areas in mid-America were also vanishing, along with bottomland timbered swamps of southern river systems and lush Gulf Coast marshes that served as wintering havens.

The U.S. Congress first responded to these threats by enacting the Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 1929. The law authorized a program of land acquisition for waterfowl refuges (expanding the existing National Wildlife Refuge System established in 1903). The landmark legislation, however, failed to provide a steady flow of funds for the purchase of wetlands.

Conservationists, led by nationally known political cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling, set about correcting that oversight. Darling, cartoonist for the *Des Moines Register*, was an avid duck hunter who had witnessed the destruction of prime waterfowl habitat in his native state. His biting cartoons, depicting the demise of America's ducks and geese, set the tone for a campaign to secure permanent funding for habitat acquisition. Perhaps Darling's most far-reaching contribution was the idea of a Federal revenue stamp to generate the needed money.

The efforts of conservationists like Ding Darling paid off on March 16, 1934 when Congress passed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. Proceeds from sales of the Duck Stamps were used to buy and lease waterfowl habitat. Over the years, Darling's far-sighted inspiration evolved into one of the most successful ongoing conservation programs ever devised. And today, the Duck Stamp dollars provided by American conservationists continue



Snow geese at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, William Ackerknecht, USFWS

ON THE COVER—Mallard drake, Peter Carboni, USFWS;  
Redbeak and young, Matthew Perry, USFWS

to help preserve critical wetlands for the continent's waterfowl.

From the beginning, the stamps pictured waterfowl in their natural surroundings. The first design, a pair of alighting mallards, was drawn by Darling himself, who had been recruited by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to head up the Bureau of Biological Survey (forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

Until 1949, a leading artist was commissioned annually to prepare a Duck Stamp design. That year, however, the Duck Stamp contest began and became the Federal Government's only continuing art competition. Any artist can enter the contest by submitting a 5 × 7 inch waterfowl design and paying a small entry fee. The winning drawing, reproduced on the special delivery-sized stamp, is chosen by a panel of art and waterfowl experts.

## BUY DUCK STAMPS

"Duck Stamps" may be purchased for \$7.50 at most Post Offices and selected National Wildlife Refuges, or by mail for \$8 (includes 50¢ for postage and handling).

Send your "Duck Stamp" order to:  
U.S. Postal Service, Philatelic Sales Division, Washington, D.C. 20265-9997

Yes, send me the current Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (the "Duck Stamp").

Enclosed is a check or money order for \$8.00 (\$7.50 plus \$.50 postage and handling).

Name:

Address:



Close-up! Robert Shallenberger, USFWS



Redheads, Glen Smart, USFWS

# The "Duck Stamp" Story

The winner receives a sheet of stamps bearing his or her design. Duck Stamp artists also sell prints of their prize entries to collectors. In recent years, with the growing popularity of wildlife art, such sales have greatly escalated for members of the elite group who are contest winners. The competition itself reflects this rising interest in Duck Stamp art. Entries have increased from a handful in 1949 to 2,099 in 1982. Prints of winning Duck Stamp designs—and the Duck Stamps themselves—have increased in value and become collector's items.

From the start, the Duck Stamp program proved successful. Some 635,000 of the first stamp were sold at \$1 each. By 1938, sales topped one million. Those were the days when wetland habitat could be bought for as little as \$1 an acre in some areas. During the late 1930's and early 1940's, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, which oversees the purchase or lease of such areas, added vast tracts of wetlands to the National Wildlife Refuge System. A major focus was the upper Midwest—the nation's prime waterfowl territory—where important breeding areas were preserved.

As the years went by, the cost of habitat steadily climbed. Land that once could be bought for as little as \$1 to \$10 an acre may now cost as much as \$1,000 an acre. As a result, new wetlands acquisitions tend to be smaller than in the past. The price and sales of Duck Stamps have gone up along with the

value and scarcity of wetlands. Sales reached 2 million in 1946-47 and hit a peak of over 2.4 million in 1970-71. The cost of the stamp, meanwhile, rose to \$7.50 in 1979.

The focus of the program has also changed over the decades. The goal in recent years has been to preserve key wintering and breeding habitats in each of the four major north-south waterfowl migratory flyways, particularly those most threatened by development. Efforts are also underway to save areas needed by species whose numbers are low or declining, such as black ducks, canvasbacks and redheads.

Not only waterfowl benefit from the "Duck Stamp" program. Many other wildlife species, including one-third of our endangered or threatened species, find food and shelter in the wetland habitats purchased by Duck Stamp revenues. Many of our commercially important species of marine fish and shellfish rely on these coastal wetlands for spawning or nursery grounds.

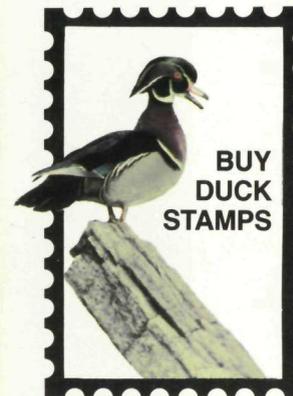
The habitat preserved by Duck Stamp funds also directly serves people. By temporarily storing floodwaters, wetlands reduce losses of life and property. By blunting the force of storm waves, they stabilize and protect coastal shorelines. And by absorbing and filtering out pollutants, they help to purify our waters.

Not least, wetlands provide unspoiled space where people can view and photograph wildlife, hike, hunt, fish and simply enjoy nature. Many of the 400 National Wildlife Refuges scattered throughout the United States were paid for entirely or in part by Duck Stamp receipts.

The task of saving wetlands, however, is far from completed. An estimated 458,000 acres of valuable wetlands continue to vanish annually in the face of growing pressures from development. Thus, the waterfowl habitat acquired with the

millions of Duck Stamp dollars provided each year by growing numbers of conservationists and stamp collectors is more important than ever.

Indeed, America's conservationists have played a central role in preserving the continent's ducks and geese. Over the past 50 years, each Duck Stamp purchase has been a small investment that pays a large dividend—helping to ensure that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate one of our most precious wildlife resources.



Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



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