



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DUCK STAMP, ONCE "JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES", NOW SPECIALIZES IN ACQUISITION

For a quarter of a century the duck stamp has been a multipurpose asset for the Nation's waterfowl program--a sort of jack-of-all-trades which could be used for acquisition, development, operation and maintenance of waterfowl refuges, for research and for enforcement of the waterfowl hunting regulations.

The duck stamp started its 26th year dressed up in a brand new price tag (\$3) and geared to a single purpose--the selection and acquisition of waterfowl habitat--in the United States only.

When the duck stamp (price \$1) program was inaugurated in 1934, development was a big problem. Marginal lands and other types of areas were being added to the refuge system by inter-agency agreement, administrative orders, emergency appropriations and otherwise. Substantial acreage was brought into the refuge system though the total was far short of need.

Acquired areas had to be improved; key habitat within or adjacent to the refuges was needed to bring out the full value of the areas; there were problems of maintenance and of law enforcement.

Against that background the Congress provided--and the Fish and Wildlife Service used--the returns from the duck stamp for "acquisition ...developing and administering ... enforcement ... and for other purposes".

Although the existing refuges still are not fully developed, natural wetland habitat continues to disappear at such an alarming rate that the emphasis on duck stamp expenditures has shifted to the preservation of the remaining duck habitat through lease or purchase.

So an old order has ended and a new order has begun.

But the old order can point with pride at what it has accomplished. A guiding principle in the use of the money which came from the sale of the \$1 stamp and later from the sale of the \$2 stamp was based upon the adage of making two blades of grass grow where only one had grown before--only this time it was ducks and geese

and not grass and it was not only two, but three and four and sometimes ten or even twenty. The old order, like the new, was limited to expenditures within the boundaries of the United States despite the fact that a high percentage of the ducks nest outside the country. However, there is a big job to be done in preserving habitat required by ducks and geese within our boundaries and duck stamp funds will have to bear the bulk of this responsibility.

One example of past development to which the old order points with pride is Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Delaware, where duck stamp money was used to increase the geese population from 150 before improvement to 10,000 geese after development. At Bombay Hook nature was given a big assist by constructing dikes, creating several freshwater pools, by providing grazing areas for geese and feeding areas for ducks. The increase in ducks use has been at least three-fold.

Then there was the big Carson Sink-Stillwater Slough area in Nevada--a 200,000 acre unit which had a terrific potential but needed dikes and dams to better manage available water. The State of Nevada, using Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid funds, and the Fish and Wildlife Service, using duck stamp money, joined in a cooperative effort to make a waterfowl paradise out of the waste water sump.

The Souris refuges in North Dakota are other examples of areas of high possibilities that needed only water retaining reservoirs, dikes, canals, and assured food and cover supplies to bring out their really good potential. Duck stamp money was used in this development.

The duck stamp money has helped support a consistent law enforcement program over the years--a solid program which is highlighted by such events as smashing market hunting activities in three States--Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois with the arrest and conviction of nearly 100 market hunters; the spectacular raid which netted nearly half a hundred law breakers in Texas; and "crackdowns" in California and Tennessee which were body blows at market hunters in those areas.

The cold figures on acreage acquired by duck stamp funds do not tell the story. The approximately 300,000 acres so purchased is only a small fraction of the  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million acres total waterfowl habitat within the National Wildlife Refuges. Most of it was acquired by transfer of Federal lands or purchased with other funds. The story lies in just what special good the duck stamp purchases accomplished. For example, the 1,029 acres acquired with duck stamp funds for the Salt Plains, Oklahoma, Refuge is only about three percent of the total but it was acreage within or on the edge of the refuge which had to be acquired if water was to be restored on the whole refuge. The 140,000-acre Loxahatchee Waterfowl Management Area in Florida was acquired without duck stamp money but it was these funds which paid for a few hundred acres of land sorely needed to buy out scattered private holdings in order to make the area a desirable waterfowl habitat.

An accountant's summary of the first 25 years of duck stamp financing will not be available until the results of the last fiscal year's expenditures have been tallied. However, the money has purchased approximately 300,000 acres of land,

much of which made possible the development of important areas; some has been used in the construction of dikes which, if placed end to end would reach half way across the Nation, canals which would start at the Atlantic and end in or beyond the Rocky Mountains, fences which would stretch across the distance of both our north and south borders, roads which would reach diagonally across the country. Not all this was done with duck stamp funds but those funds were an essential part of the money used. Operation and maintenance also absorbed some of the stamp money, for without every day management attention, the refuges would soon lose their attractiveness to waterfowl.

Prolonged drought which has seriously curtailed the production of birds this year has forced certain restrictions in the hunting season. Whether this will seriously curtail the sale of stamps and reduce the amount of money which is now earmarked by the Congress for selection and acquisition only will not be known for some time. Conservation leaders hope not and they are urging hunters to buy stamps whether or not they go afield.

In the meantime those who want to buy stamps for hunting purposes or just to help a good cause can find them at any post office and at many sporting goods stores and other places. Since July 30, 1956, when Public Law 56-838 was enacted merchants who wish to have stamps available for convenience of customers can do so without taking the risk of having an unsold supply on hand when the demand is over. The Post Office, whose duty it is to print and distribute the stamps, will redeem unsold duck stamps in blocks of two or more.

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