

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

FEATURE MATERIAL

For Release On Receipt (prepared 10/17/75)

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## DUCKS NEED STAMP OF APPROVAL FROM NON-HUNTING PUBLIC

"The individual American citizen can make a substantial contribution to the conservation of wild waterfowl in the United States by purchasing a Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp at the local Post Office for \$5," Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said today.

The proceeds from the sale of these stamps--known popularly as "Duck Stamps"--go directly into the purchase of wetland habitat for ducks and geese. The stamp is issued annually and is required of all waterfowl hunters 16 years of age and older, but the Interior Department is now encouraging non-hunters who also enjoy the wildlife resource through photography and birdwatching to contribute to the U.S. conservation effort this way.

Since 1934 when Duck Stamps first went on sale, over \$160 million in revenue has been collected and used for the setting aside of close to 2 million acres of waterfowl habitat. Each year over 2 million hunters, by purchasing the stamps, provide close to \$11 million in revenue. It is hoped that upwards of a half million to a million non-hunting Americans will voluntarily purchase one of the stamps.

Waterfowl abundance and distribution are closely related to the availability of living space. When requirements for production, migration, and wintering are not fully met, waterfowl numbers decline.

(more)

Central to the needs of most waterfowl is an aquatic environment. An estimated 127 million acres of wetlands existed in the United States at the turn of the century. By 1953, only 82 million acres remained intact, of which less than one-fourth was judged to be of significant value to waterfowl.

A 1964 inventory by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that 2.7 million acres of the most productive wetland types remained in the prairie pothole region of the Dakotas and Minnesota. Surveys between 1964 and 1968 in the same area indicated losses of nearly 2 percent annually.

Estuaries and coastal wetlands, particularly along the mid and south Atlantic Coasts and the Gulf of Mexico, are wintering grounds for a major segment of North American waterfowl. During the period from 1922 to 1954, at least 25 percent of shallow coastal water and marsh areas were destroyed. Seventy-three percent of the Nation's estuaries have been moderately or severely degraded, according to a 1970 study. Recent estimates conservatively place the nationwide rate of loss of coastal wetlands at 0.5 to 1.0 percent annually.

The loss of wintering habitat affects the distribution of wintering waterfowl. Some 20 million acres of wooded swamps and overflow bottomlands remained along the Mississippi River and its tributaries during the 1950's. By the mid-1960's, conversion of hardwood forests in the lower half of the Mississippi River basin to cropland for cotton, rice, and soybeans resulted in a reduction of waterfowl habitat values on about two-thirds of the overflow bottomlands. During the 1960's an average of 200,000 acres of bottomland hardwoods were cleared annually in the lower Mississippi River region. These areas provide major wintering grounds for mallards and critical breeding habitat for wood ducks.

On the plus side, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System 276 waterfowl refuges and 68 migratory bird refuges which encompass 8,337,700 acres of land and water. In addition, the refuge system contains 1,371,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas, located in the glaciated prairie region of North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Other units of the refuge system include an estimated 240,000 acres of waterfowl habitat.

State conservation agencies control 4.5 million additional acres of land and water having major value to waterfowl. About half of the acreage is owned by the States, and the remainder is managed under lease, easement, or other temporary arrangements.

Over 11,000 private waterfowl hunting clubs control, through ownership and leases, a minimum of 5.2 million acres of land. Approximately 68 percent of the known duck club acreage is in the primary waterfowl wintering areas of California, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc., a private non-profit international conservation organization, working in cooperation with Ducks Unlimited (Canada), has developed 1,200 wetland projects in Canada. The projects involve over 9,500 miles of nesting shoreline and 1.8 million acres of controlled water on managed marshes. Ducks Unlimited affiliates were formed in Mexico in 1969 to help preserve wintering areas in that country.

An additional 400,000 acres of wetlands are owned or leased in the United States by private conservation organizations. The Nature Conservancy and the National Audubon Society hold most of these wetlands--about 350,000 acres.

Private citizens contribute to wetland preservation through organizations such as "Wetlands for Wildlife" and the Minnesota Duck Hunters Association. These organizations purchase wetland areas, thereby insuring that they are not lost. There are no nationwide figures available as to the amount of habitat preserved or developed as the result of activities of such groups.

Total waterfowl habitat presently preserved by all the above mentioned organizations and groups exceeds 22,900,000 acres in the United States and 1,800,000 acres in Canada.

While waterfowl breed throughout North America, the prairie region of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Montana, the Dakotas, and western Minnesota produces from 50 to 75 percent of the total of the 10 duck species most abundant. This semi-arid region is subject to recurring drought, and its capacity to support breeding ducks varies markedly from year to year. Federal Duck Stamp revenues in the coming years are being focused on this vital area of the country to set aside and preserve what's left of North America's "duck factory."

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