

## **It's More than A Duck Stamp. It's a Champion for Conservation**

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It's sometimes easy to lose hope these days, given the challenges our nation faces and the seemingly intractable political polarization of our society. But President Obama's approval in December of bipartisan legislation raising the price of the federal Duck Stamp is a reminder that we're still capable of great things as a nation.

The federal Duck Stamp program is one of the most successful conservation initiatives in history. Since the program's creation in 1934, funding from Duck Stamp sales has been used to acquire and permanently protect more than 6 million acres of vital National Wildlife Refuge System habitat. Much of this wetland and grassland acreage – which supports hundreds of native species of migratory birds, animals and plants – would otherwise have been plowed under or paved over.

Rising land prices have steadily eroded our ability to protect other vulnerable habitat through acquisitions and the purchase of conservation easements on private land. Raising the price of the Duck Stamp from \$15 to \$25 will restore most of the purchasing power that has been lost since the price was last increased in 1991. With the additional funds generated by the increase, we anticipate being able to protect an estimated 17,000 additional acres of habitat every year.

This will also benefit Americans of all ages and backgrounds. All hunters 16 and older are required to possess a valid stamp, but anyone who cares about conservation can buy one. And what's more, lands acquired and protected with Duck Stamp dollars are accessible to everyone – not just for hunting, but for wildlife watching, photography and other outdoor recreation. A valid Duck Stamp can also be used for free admission to scores of national wildlife refuges that charge admission fees.

Wetlands and associated uplands are as important for people as they are for wildlife. They provide natural protection against flooding and storm surges; filter pollutants from water used for drinking, cooking and sanitation; and support thousands of jobs and local businesses linked to outdoor recreation and tourism.

Perhaps most importantly, the Duck Stamp price increase represents an emphatic expression of optimism for the future. After all, the stamp itself was born out of far more desperate circumstances.

More than 80 years ago, at the height of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, our nation's waterfowl and migratory birds faced devastation. Yet in the midst of ecological collapse, widespread poverty and unemployment, many Americans refused to give up. Led by hunters, they played an instrumental part in the passage of the Duck Stamp Act of 1934.

That success inspired passage of the Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, which created an excise tax on firearms and ammunition (later expanded to fishing rods, reels and equipment) that has raised more than \$14 billion to support conservation at the state level.

These historic conservation achievements laid the foundation for the return of healthy wildlife populations and habitat across the nation.

Hunting groups led efforts to raise the price of the stamp. Organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and the National Wildlife Refuge Association mobilized their members in support, and hunters across the nation contacted members of Congress to urge passage. That's why this successful program continues to enjoy strong bipartisan support in Congress and the Executive Branch.

We face enormous conservation challenges in the coming decades and we must confront them as one nation, indivisible. The federal Duck Stamp shows us the way forward. Together, we can ensure that future generations of Americans have access to clean air, clean water and the wonder of our native wildlife and wild places.