

An Overdue Increase in the Duck Stamp

In 2015, the cost of the Federal Duck Stamp will be \$25. The \$10 increase from the current \$15 was championed by Ducks Unlimited, the Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Coalition, and other sportsmen's and conservation organizations. The Duck Stamp fee increase is one of the few pieces of legislation that enjoyed strong bipartisan support in the current (113th) Congressional session. As the country knows, this Congress has been almost completely gridlocked and it is being called a "do-nothing" Congress. That the Duck Stamp increase was passed is a tribute to the grassroots support of sportsmen and sportswomen in both parties.

The \$10 increase will be dedicated to purchasing conservation easements to permanently protect wetlands that are important to waterfowl and other water birds. The pressures on wetland ecosystems are an inevitable consequence of our economic growth, which virtually mandates that we manage and enhance our remaining wetland habitat if we expect to maintain diverse and abundant populations of waterfowl, water birds, and associated wetland wildlife.

Sportsmen have historically been and clearly continue to be the driving force



Editorial

in providing money and political support for wildlife conservation. Their efforts and money have enabled the United States to develop the most successful wildlife restoration and management programs in the world. This is especially true with respect to waterfowl. In the early years of the Great Depression, "Ding" Darling, a duck hunter and nationally syndicated political cartoonist, drew a constant stream of biting satirical cartoons depicting



The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge is one of 11 in the state that largely owe their conservation to the funds provided by the sale of federal Duck Stamps.



Gadwalls are one of many waterfowl species that Duck Stamps have helped to conserve.

Photo © Bill Byrne

the plight of waterfowl that resulted from the destruction of the nation's wetlands. These cartoons proved to be a catalyst for inciting public pressure to address the issue through the establishment of wildlife refuges; refuges that would specifically ensure that enough wetlands to sustain our waterfowl resources would not be drained or plowed under. Waterfowl hunters strongly supported the imposition of a national duck-hunting fee to raise the funds for refuge acquisition.

Even in the midst of the worst depression in our country's history, the grassroots support was so widespread that, in 1934, Congress passed – and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed – the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. The act required the annual purchase of a "Duck Stamp" by all waterfowl hunters 16 years of age or older. The money raised from the Duck Stamp was dedicated to the purchase of federal refuges placed under the management of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The money raised from the sale of Duck Stamps has enabled the federal government to protect over 6 million acres of land. That's an area larger than the state of Massachusetts! The first federal refuge in Massachusetts was the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, featured elsewhere in this issue as a wildlife viewing destination. It was established in 1941. Other refuges have subsequently been established throughout the Commonwealth. In order of establishment, they are Monomoy (1944), Great Meadows

(1944), Noman's Land Island (1970), Thacher Island (1972), Oxbow (1974), Massasoit (1983), Nantucket (1995), Mashpee (1995), Silvio O. Conte (1997), and Assabet River (2001). All told, these refuges encompass about 15,300 acres, of which 79% of the cost was paid with Duck Stamp dollars.

Today, there are 561 federal refuges with at least one in every state. Duck hunters have paid for 40% of this federal refuge system, a system that has conserved not only waterfowl habitat, but also the habitats of hundreds of other species. These properties are enjoyed by the general public for many reasons from hiking and wildlife viewing to fishing, boating, and swimming. All because duck hunters not only "talked the talk," but also "walked the walk."

There have been eight increases in the cost of the Duck Stamp since its creation in 1934, with the last increase occurring in 1991. The 22+ year period from 1991 until now is the longest interval that the cost of the Duck Stamp has not increased. The buying power of the Stamp dollars has decreased about 40%. Given the constant loss of wetland habitat that we are experiencing, the increase in the cost of the Duck Stamp is good news for the future of waterfowl and waterfowl hunting in this country, and, as always, the benefits will accrue to all.

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