



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SEATON PROPOSES NEW PLAN FOR REFUGE ACQUISITION

In a new approach to the problem of preserving key wetlands for waterfowl management, Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton today announced the Department of the Interior has proposed that all net proceeds from duck stamp revenues be used for acquisition of lands for National Wildlife Refuges.

The Department's proposal was set forth in its report to the Congress on S. 2617. This report was signed by Ross Leffler, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife.

The proposal also calls for an increase in the price of the duck stamp from \$2 to \$3 to make possible an acquisition program at the pace necessary to offset the disappearance of these waterfowl areas in the face of expanding demand for new sites for home, farm and industry. This part of the proposal already has the endorsement of the International Association of Game Fish and Conservation Commissioners and the Secretary's Advisory Committee for Fish and Wildlife.

"I am convinced this could be one of the most important steps in the furtherance of the wildlife refuge system since its establishment by Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. The proposal makes sense as good fiscal policy and it also makes sense as good conservation," commented Secretary Seaton.

At the present rate of duck stamp sales, the proposal would make available \$66 million in the next ten years for the preservation of important wildlife lands before they are lost through development for other purposes.

The present law contains no requirement for any specific portion of the revenues to be spent for acquisition. The only earmarking now is that not more than 15 percent may be used for law enforcement and printing and distributing the stamps. Much of the remainder has been spent for refuge operation and development, surveys and investigations. Under the new proposal, these items would be handled by direct appropriation by the Congress. The relatively small cost of printing and distributing would be the only charge covered by Duck Stamp funds, except acquisition.

To make possible the flexible refuge management required to handle harvests in the face of shrinking areas for public hunting, the Department proposes that up to 40 percent of a refuge can be opened for hunting when the Secretary determines it to be sound wildlife practice. The plan also would make it possible to leave open to hunting such small ponds and potholes as may be acquired under this program.

The Secretary also pointed out the acquisitions not only would meet the needs of waterfowl but would have "bonus" benefits for fish, shellfish and other wildlife resources of the Nation.

Where coastal areas are involved, particularly along the south Atlantic and Gulf coasts, not only would wintering grounds and food for ducks and other waterfowl be provided by the Federal Refuges, but forage and cover for wild furbearers and essential spawning and feeding grounds for many kinds of fish and shellfish also would be preserved, he said.

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