

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR'S DUCK STAMP CONTEST INVESTIGATED

The Department of the Interior made public today an investigative report of complaints of irregularities in the conduct of the 1975-76 annual Duck Stamp contest by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The investigation, conducted by the Department's Office of Audit and Investigation, revealed no evidence of irregularities.

As a result of the complaints and to avoid future charges of partiality, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently published new contest procedures which will take effect in time for the 1976-77 contest next fall. These regulations remove U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees from the judging process and establish detailed contest procedures.

It was alleged in a complaint filed by several private individuals that last year's contest winner was selected in advance, and that a Fish and Wildlife Service employee and contest judges had part in this action. The contest judges were five private citizens, all of whom are associated with outside organizations. The investigation disclosed no irregularity in their selection or information which would place in question the integrity of the judging procedure or of the judges personally.

Investigation of the complaints disclosed that the allegations were based upon rumors circulating among commercial wildlife art dealers and that these rumors had no basis in fact.

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The investigation did reveal that the existing Duck Stamp contest rules were not comprehensive, thus the new regulations have been proposed.

The prestige of winning the Duck Stamp contest brings significant financial reward and immediate acclaim to a wildlife artist each year. The Federal Government offers no prizes in the contest. Commercial wildlife art dealers, however, are usually eager to market limited edition reprints for the winning artist.

The proposed new regulations set forth the technical specifications for designs created for the contest. They also describe the procedures to be followed in actually submitting an entry. In addition, the regulations detail the qualifications and selection of the judging panel, the criteria to be used in scoring the various entries submitted, and the voting procedures to be employed by the judging panel.

The stamps were authorized and required by the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of 1934. Popularly known as "Duck Stamps," they are sold through post offices and must be carried by every migratory waterfowl hunter over 16 years of age. All of the stamp revenues, beyond printing and handling costs, are used solely for the acquisition of additional migratory bird refuges.

Prior to 1949, wildlife artists were commissioned to provide the design for the annual stamp. Since that time, the design has been chosen by a contest open to all artists who are residents or citizens of the United States.

The annual contest held by the Service is the only art contest regularly sponsored by the Federal Government. The colorful stamps that are selected through the contest constitute the longest running, annually issued series of stamps in revenue or postage stamp history.

The report of the contest investigation was released in full except for minor deletions on one page. That material was deleted, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, on the grounds that release of the material would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. The investigation report as released is available for public inspection in the Department of the Interior, Office of Communications, Room 7222, 18th and C Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C.

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