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"DUCK STAMP" 50TH ANNIVERSARY TO BE CELEBRATED IN 1984

1984 marks 50 years for the Federal "Duck Stamp" and next year's commemoration promises to spark the greatest amount of public interest in the history of America's national conservation stamp program, Interior Secretary James Watt said today.

The Interior Department expects this fall's "Duck Stamp" art competition to select the design for the 1984-85 anniversary year stamp to draw the highest number of entries and the largest attendance in the contest's history. The judging will take place over 2 days in Washington, D.C., to accommodate the increased public interest in the 50-year celebration.

"This year's winner will have the distinction of being the 50th anniversary stamp and will grace the 'Duck Stamp' for the 1984-85 hunting season," Watt said.

"Little did Congress know how truly significant and far-reaching the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act would become when the program first started in July 1934. The 'Duck Stamp' built the National Wildlife Refuge System with the millions of dollars contributed by the American sportsman. What was once a loose collection of refuges scattered throughout the Nation is now a 417-unit network encompassing nearly 90 million acres of land with a well-defined purpose and a continuing financial base. The 'Duck Stamp' has spawned the largest system of lands intensively managed for wildlife anywhere in the world," Watt says.

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"The 50th anniversary issue will undoubtedly become a collector's item because of the significance of the upcoming occasion and the national attention that will be focused on the 'Duck Stamp' at its mid-century mark," adds G. Ray Arnett, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "Consequently, there's been tremendous interest in this year's contest and in the commemorative activities through 1984 that are being planned by the Interior Department and many private conservation organizations and individuals."

The "Duck Stamp" is a principal means by which the Federal Government generates revenue from waterfowl hunters to buy and preserve vital wetland habitat for ducks, geese, and non-game shorebirds and waterbirds. Over 85 million of the colorful stamps, known formally as Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, have been sold since 1934, pumping more than \$240 million into the land acquisition program for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Now sold for \$7.50 each fall, the "Duck Stamp" is required of all migratory waterfowl hunters 16 years of age and older. Over two million are bought each year by sportsmen and non-hunting conservationists and stamp collectors. Thus, sportsmen and others who purchase "Duck Stamps" contribute directly to the acquisition and protection of national wildlife refuges.

The 50-year success of the "Duck Stamp" is tribute, in large part, to the efforts and foresight of J.N. "Ding" Darling, an Iowa political cartoonist for the Des Moines Register, who first conceived the idea of a self-generating revenue stamp by which waterfowl hunters would pay to sustain their sport. Considered the "Father of the 'Duck Stamp,'" Darling later became director of the Bureau of Biological Survey, predecessor of today's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The 1983 judging ceremonies to select the 50th anniversary stamp design will be held November 8 and 9 at the Interior Department auditorium in Washington, D.C. This year's judging will be highlighted by several new features designed to enhance the ceremony for the benefit of audience members, according to Peter Anastasi, the Fish and Wildlife Service's "Duck Stamp" contest coordinator. They include an overhead projection system by which every design can be viewed by visitors and an electronic numerical scoring system by which the rankings of all entries will be displayed instantly and totaled.

The design will go on sale as the 50th anniversary year "Duck Stamp" on July 1, 1984, at post offices throughout the country.

"The 'Duck Stamp' is unique," Watt said, "but we have come a long way since the first one was issued a half century ago. Now we have the task force to Protect Our Wetlands and Duck Resources; to which we give the shorthand name of 'POWDR.' And, we are seeking a variety of ways to save wetlands through Federal, State, local and private cooperation."

Other events sponsored by the Interior Department to commemorate the "Duck Stamp" Act's passage and the contributions of J. N. "Ding" Darling are currently being planned and will be announced later.