



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SECRETARY CLARK URGES AMERICANS TO
"BUY A DUCK STAMP--SAVE WETLANDS FOR WILDLIFE"

Secretary of the Interior William Clark today launched a major campaign to encourage more nonhunters to support wildlife conservation by purchasing Federal Duck Stamps.

The campaign, which is supported by a broad cross section of corporations and conservation groups, coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Duck Stamp program, one of the Nation's oldest and most successful wildlife conservation efforts. Duck Stamps (formally named Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp) are required to be purchased each year by anyone age 16 or older who hunts waterfowl. Revenues from the sale of the \$7.50 stamps are used to buy wetlands for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Nearly 89 million Duck Stamps have been sold, providing \$285 million for the conservation of 3.5 million acres -- all or part of 186 national wildlife refuges and many smaller waterfowl production areas.

"Waterfowl hunters are not the only ones who benefit from healthy wetlands," Secretary Clark said. "Everyone who enjoys wildlife--birdwatchers, anglers, nature photographers, campers, and others--also benefit. The purchase of a Duck Stamp is one of the most direct ways Americans can help ensure the preservation of these important wildlife habitats."

"I am pleased with the support this campaign has so far received," Clark said. "More than 50 corporations and conservation organizations are actively assisting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by encouraging sales of Duck Stamps to their customers and members."

Secretary Clark said that concern over the rapid disappearance of wetlands and the escalation of land prices had led to the Interior Department's decision to try to broaden public participation in the Duck Stamp program.

"The United States is losing nearly half a million acres of marshes and other wetlands every year," Clark said. "These areas are vital not just to ducks, but to many other kinds of fish and wildlife including endangered species and commercially valuable fish and shellfish."

"At the same time, increasing land prices have slowed efforts to acquire and protect important wetlands. Duck Stamp dollars don't stretch as far as they used to."

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"Over 90 percent of all Duck Stamps are purchased by waterfowl hunters. Effectively, these hunters are paying to preserve wetlands that all of us benefit from. I recognize that many people who do not hunt have probably never heard of Duck Stamps, and I believe more nonhunters would buy Duck Stamps if they realized it would help save wildlife habitat. Anyone can buy a Duck Stamp--all you have to do is go down to the Post Office and ask for one."

The idea of a Duck Stamp was conceived in 1934 by a nationally known cartoonist and conservationist, J. N. "Ding" Darling. At that time, America's ducks, geese, and other migratory waterfowl were severely threatened by drought and by loss of their wetland nesting areas to agriculture. Darling's idea was to provide a dependable source of funds to preserve habitat for ducks and geese. Congress agreed with his notion of raising the money by requiring waterfowl hunters to buy an annual stamp, and passed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. (The official name of the stamp was later changed to "Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp" but it has always been popularly called the Duck Stamp.) Darling himself sketched two mallards for the design of the first stamp, which went on sale in 1934 for \$1. In 1961, Congress passed the Wetlands Loan Act, authorizing advances on Duck Stamp funds to speed wetlands protection. The loan is to be repaid using three-quarters of annual Duck Stamp revenues when the law expires October 1, 1984. Congress is considering this issue in conjunction with comprehensive wetlands conservation legislation.

Although originally intended to help waterfowl, the Duck Stamp program has turned out to be beneficial for many kinds of fish and wildlife throughout the country. The program has preserved prairie potholes in the upper Midwest; marshes along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts and the Mississippi River; bottomland hardwood swamps in the South; and other important wetlands areas. These wildlife refuges provide homes for many kinds of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and wild plants. Wetlands play an important role in the production of commercially valuable fish and shellfish, and provide other economic benefits to people by helping to control flood waters and improve water quality.

Duck Stamps portray a species of North American ducks, geese, or swans. The design for each year's stamp is chosen through an annual art contest that is entered by many of the nation's best wildlife artists. The colorful stamps have become collector's items and a complete set of unused stamps now sells for as much as \$6,000. Long popular among waterfowlers and stamp enthusiasts, Duck Stamps have in recent years been purchased by growing numbers of non-hunting conservationists who want to help conserve wetland habitat for wildlife.

Duck Stamps may be purchased at most post offices and some national wildlife refuges for \$7.50, or ordered by mail for \$8 (includes 50 cents for postage and handling) from the U. S. Postal Service, Philatelic Sales Division, Washington, D.C. 20265-9997.

The 50th anniversary (1984-85) Duck Stamp goes on sale on July 2.

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Note to editors: The National Hunting and Fishing Day Committee is sponsoring a poster contest for schoolchildren on the theme "How Sportsmen's Duck Stamp Dollars Benefit Wildlife." The contest features 52 prizes totaling \$5,200 in U.S. Savings Bonds. For information contact NHF Day Headquarters, P.O. Box 1075, Riverside, Connecticut 06878 (203/637-3618).