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The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act

Sportsmen and conservationists witnessed an unprecedented decrease in waterfowl populations in the early 1900's. In response, Congress passed The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act in 1934 to provide a funding mechanism for conserving waterfowl and their habitats. This Act is more commonly known as the Duck Stamp Act.

Methods

The Act requires any person who hunts waterfowl to buy a Duck Stamp each year. The money raised by the sale of these stamps is placed in the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) where it awaits use by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) specifically for migratory bird habitat acquisition.¹ Any new habitat bought or leased by FWS using MBCF money must be approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC). The Commission is comprised of two U.S. Senators, two U.S. Representatives, the EPA Administrator, the Chief of the Division of Realty within FWS, and the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

Periodically, Congress passes amendments to the Act that increase the price of the Duck Stamp to offset inflation. The first Duck Stamp sold for \$1 in 1934; the price was last increased in 2015 to \$15.³

Results

Over \$800 million has been raised as of fiscal year 2013, which has contributed to the protection of over 6 million acres of wetland habitat.³ Wetlands protected through Duck Stamp revenue have benefited duck populations, which now exceed 48 million individuals in North America.⁴

Discussion

Wetland habitats conserved through Duck Stamp revenues benefit waterfowl, all wetland-dependent wildlife, hunters, and other wildlife enthusiasts. Local communities benefit through ecotourism and ecological services provided by wetlands. The MBCF provides a portion of the National Wildlife Refuge System funding which generates nearly five dollars of economic activity from tourism and recreation for each dollar invested.⁵ The conserved wetlands mitigate floods, improve water quality, and provide critical habitat for game, fish, and endangered species.⁵

While the price of the Duck Stamp has remained steady since 1991, rising land values and inflation have reduced the purchasing power of the Duck Stamp. Legislation has recently been proposed to increase the price to \$25 to allow FWS to continue purchasing important wetland habitat.⁶

Implications for Wildlife Professionals

Wildlife professionals are aided in their work of conserving wildlife through the Duck Stamp Act. Habitat purchased with the Act is restored and managed by wildlife professionals, increasing wildlife populations and fulfilling public trust obligations that benefit sportsmen and other wildlife enthusiasts.

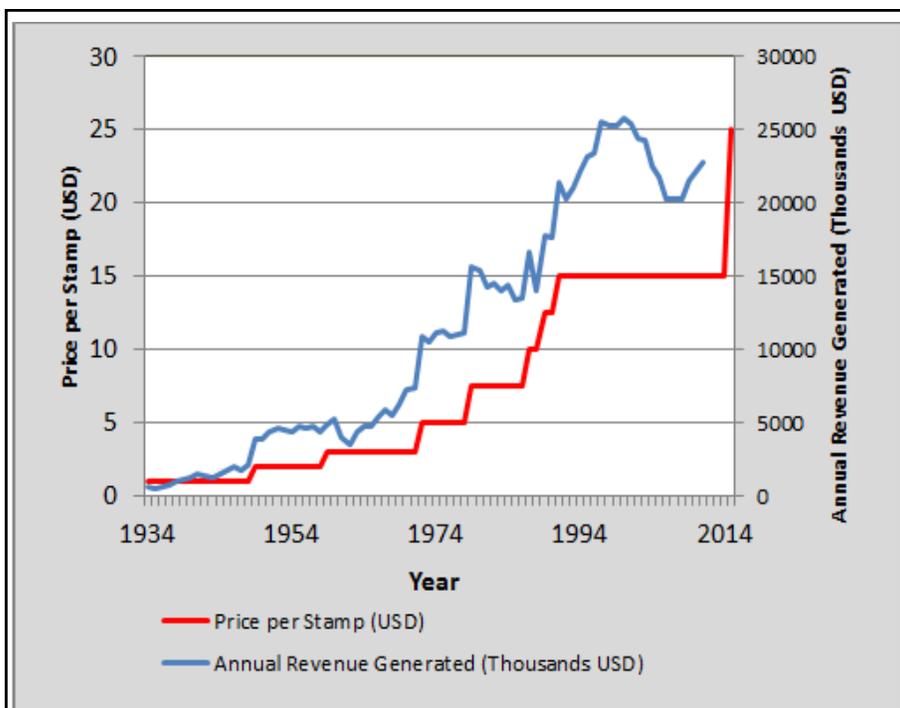


Figure 1. The price and revenue generated by the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp has increased over time. The price is changed periodically by an Act of Congress to account for inflation or land value changes. The price was last increased to \$25 in 2015 (Adapted from Maryland Department of Natural Resources² and FWS⁸).

The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act: Features

Duck Stamp Revenue and Overflow National Wildlife Refuge

Duck Stamp revenue provided 100% of the funds to purchase the 13,000 acre Overflow National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas.⁷ This refuge protects some of the last remaining bottomland hardwood forests – and the wildlife that rely on it – conserving black bears, bald eagles, wintering mallards and wood ducks, and migrating shorebirds.



Mallards taking flight in the flooded grasslands of Overflow National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas (Credit: USFWS).



The 2013-2014 season official Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp depicting a common goldeneye designed by Robert Steiner (Credit: USFWS).

Art and Conservation: The Federal Duck Stamp Competition

The artwork for each year's stamp has been an important artistic symbol of wildlife conservation. In 1949, the stamp artwork became a contest judged by a panel of art and waterfowl authorities. Hundreds of artists compete each year to have their art on the official stamp.

Sources

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