



# Birds Forever

*America is rich in birdlife—but our birds are in trouble. Each year, more than 800 species of migratory birds fly thousands of miles across North America to warm climates where they stay for the winter. As lands are developed, migratory birds have a harder time finding places to stop and rest during their migration—places essential to their survival.*

*P. Lynn Scarlett  
Deputy Secretary of the Interior*

Through our Birds Forever initiative, Interior proposes an increase of \$9.0 million in our 2009 budget to help reverse declines of wild birds, including migratory birds. The Fish and Wildlife Service will fund joint venture partnerships, inventory and monitoring, and habitat restoration programs. The U.S. Geological Survey will monitor bird populations through the breeding bird survey. The budget sustains 2008 increases to the FWS refuge system of \$35.9 million that also contribute to the conservation and protection of migratory bird habitat in 2008 and 2009.

On October 20, 2007, the President announced a new effort to conserve migratory birds that consists of the U.S. working cooperatively with Mexico to conserve birds that know no border, improving efforts with migratory bird joint ventures, and producing a State of the Birds report among other things. The Department's Birds Forever initiative is complementary to the President's effort.

To assure healthy and sustainable bird populations, the Birds Forever initiative has three goals:

- Habitat conservation to benefit 36 targeted species through partnerships.
- Improved information to guide management actions.
- Engaging citizens in wild bird conservation efforts.

## THE STATUS OF BIRDS

In June 2007, the National Audubon Society issued a report, *Common Birds in Decline*, based on an analysis of the Society's Christmas bird counts and breeding bird surveys performed by USGS. The report indicates a significant decline occurring in 20 common species. The list of 20 common species includes the Eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, and common grackle—backyard birds that visit our feeders and congregate on nearby lakes and seashores. The report illustrates the status of these and other species, some of which have declined by 80 percent.

According to the Audubon report, on average, populations of common birds in the steepest decline have plummeted 70 percent since 1967. Nearly half of the



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shorebirds that breed in the U.S. have undergone significant declines. All of the 20 birds in the report have lost at least one-half of their population in just four decades. In an earlier report, issued in 2004, the Audubon Society found that 30 percent of more than 400 species had already declined significantly.

These declines of well-known backyard birds lessen our links to nature and mark a palpable loss to our quality of life. Yet these losses go beyond the birds themselves. Their decline is accompanied by:

- The loss of diversity in wildlife and in ecosystems.
- Impacts on plant species pollinated by these birds.
- Impacts on predator and prey species that rely on these birds as a food source or are controlled by these species.

More than 47.7 million people per year observe, feed, or photograph birds. These activities contribute \$31 billion in direct spending to our economy annually, or over two-thirds of the total amount spent in wildlife-related recreation. Of all of the wildlife watching activities surveyed, bird watching is the single most popular activity. A large majority of the bird enthusiasts, 88 percent, bird watch around their homes, according to the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation.

## THE CHALLENGES

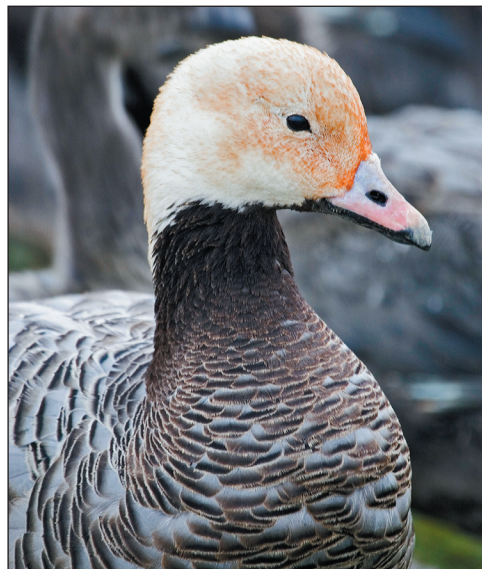
Though many factors lie behind declines in wild bird populations, habitat loss is number one. Competition for freshwater and freshwater habitat threatens birds. Human demand for freshwater in the United States almost doubled during the period 1950–2000. Significant increases in energy development, industrialized agriculture, and landscape development are fragmenting bird habitat. Loss of wetlands harms wild birds that depend on these areas for feeding during their migration. Approximately 120 million acres of wetlands in the U.S. were lost during the last 200 years. Tropical deforestation is a significant threat, as many birds spend a significant period of their lives in the tropics. Climate change also increasingly impacts birds. For example, the melting of permafrost is reducing habitat for the greater scaup—a species of duck. Climate change also affects the vegetation, water, and food sources that birds rely on.

Migratory birds face these challenges in the United States and in other countries. Each fall, more than 900 species of migratory birds brave obstacles and, in some cases, travel thousands of miles to reach warmer climates in South America, the Caribbean and Mexico. These migrants return each spring to the United States to feed and breed. The survival of these species depends on the availability of stopover habitat where they can rest during their journey north and south. The National Wildlife Refuge System and other areas that provide suitable habitat are key to the successful migration of these birds. Protection and restoration of refuge habitat will enhance the potential for improving the status of birds.

The decline of once-common species warns us of more significant habitat changes and wildlife impacts to come. With bird populations one-third their historic size, the time to act is now.

## BIRDS FOREVER INITIATIVE THE DETAILS

As manager of one-fifth of this Nation's lands, Interior, working with this Nation's citizens, can help reverse declines in bird populations. Since 2004, through the Focal Species Strategy, Interior has been working with national and international partners to improve the status of migratory bird species. The American woodcock, common eider (Pacific population), Henslow's sparrow, American oystercatcher, and tricolored blackbird have benefited during this period of focused attention by the migratory bird management community, in terms of their numbers and trend. Current activities are



also helping to ensure that more than 62 percent of the Nation's migratory bird species are healthy and at sustainable levels.

The budget proposes an additional \$9.0 million for the 2009 Birds Forever initiative. Initiative funding, together with the \$35.9 million refuge budget increase continued from 2008, will enhance efforts to address the decline in bird populations by focusing on species of greatest concern and leveraging Federal investments with extensive partnerships.

To assure healthy and sustainable bird populations the Birds Forever initiative has three goals:

- Conserving habitat to benefit 36 focal species through partnerships.
- Generating data to guide management actions.
- Educating citizens to understand the needs and stressors of birds and engage them in conservation.

The initiative targets 36 species that are part of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Focal Species Strategy. By emphasizing these priority species, benefits will accrue to other species because they often have similar conservation needs and utilize the same habitats. The strategy emphasizes priority species of management concern, including the painted bunting, the cerulean warbler, and the American woodcock.

### STATE AND TRIBAL WILDLIFE ACTION PLANS

State wildlife grants provide Federal money to States, Tribes, and Territories for conservation aimed at preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. The projects funded through the program conserve, manage, and restore wildlife and natural areas and allow engagement with conservation partners. For the first time in history, each of the 56 States and Territories has completed a Wildlife Action Plan. This "road map" provides a platform for coordinated conservation in every State across the Nation. Plans guide the formulation of specific solutions that State fish and wildlife agencies will implement to protect wildlife. States are also working together to effect changes. Interstate collaboration is underway. State plans will be used to identify Birds Forever projects in priority areas and provide the basis for multi-State projects. For example, the border of Texas and Mexico is one of the most ecologically diverse areas in the country and home to significant numbers of migratory songbirds. Texas uses State Wildlife Grants to work with Mexico to develop joint conservation projects to conserve wildlife in areas along the border.

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FOCAL SPECIES

American Black Duck	Dusky Canada Goose	Lesser Scaup
American Oystercatcher	Emperor Goose	Long-billed Curlew
American Woodcock	Golden-winged Warbler	Marbled Godwit
Audubon's Shearwater	Greater Scaup	Mottled Duck
Bendire's Thrasher	Greater Shearwater	Painted Bunting
Bicknell's Thrush	Gull-billed Tern	Red Knot
Black Brant	Henslow's Sparrow	Reddish Egret
Black Oystercatcher	Hudsonian Godwit	Rusty Blackbird
Black-footed Albatross	Hawaiian Honeycreeper	Snowy Plover
Cerulean Warbler	King Rail	Sprague's Pipit
Common Eider	Kittlitz's Murrelet	Tricolored Blackbird
Dunlin	Laysan Albatross	White-winged Scoter



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Employing this strategy, FWS and USGS will improve understanding of these species, restore habitat, and monitor species status and trends. Through collaborative projects with States and others, these efforts will improve protection of habitats important to these bird species. Interior will complete action plans for 30 of the 36 species and coordinate them with State Wildlife Action Plans. The initiative will utilize State Wildlife Action Plans to guide multi-State efforts to identify and protect important bird areas and enhance habitat. For the first time, States plan to pool resources from State Wildlife Grants to undertake multi-State conservation projects.

In addition, Interior is working with nonprofit organizations, State, and Federal programs through joint ventures to set conservation priorities and invest in coordinated actions. Interior proposes to focus on joint ventures across the coastal and central flyways. Additionally, as part of the President's migratory bird efforts, we will continue helping newer joint ventures, such as those in the Rio Grande corridor, the Appalachian Mountains, and on the northern Great Plains. Ongoing efforts funded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and the National Wildlife Refuge System will multiply the benefits of these efforts.

Improved survey and banding information generated by USGS will support these efforts. The USGS will expand both the number of migration routes surveyed annually and the geographic scope of the bird banding survey into Mexico, which will result in over 57 percent of focal migratory bird populations for which scientific information is available to support resource management decisionmaking. The USGS activities will complement FWS activities with expanded capabilities for population and habitat modeling, landscape characterization and assessment, integrated monitoring, and biological information management at an eco-regional scale. These efforts improve our understanding of the large-scale drivers of migratory bird population and habitat changes.

Success, however, will depend on engaging American citizens in conservation. In 2000, 80 percent of Americans live in urban areas. Urban green space is declining, yet these areas often provide essential bird habitat in fragmented landscapes. Since 1999, seven cities have embraced a conservation partnership that brings attention to the benefits that migratory

birds bring to everyday life and engages citizens in hands-on activities to protect migratory birds. In 2009, FWS will use the Urban Conservation Treaty program as a blueprint that additional cities around the country can follow.

Working in collaboration with the Birds Forever initiative, the National Park Service will create and restore wildlife habitat, including areas that directly benefit birds. The NPS Centennial initiative will provide an infusion of funding to promote these activities. In addition, the President has announced an innovative recovery credit trading policy that will provide a new tool to promote habitat conservation. The FWS will use this new approach to conserve bird habitat by giving credit to landowners who improve habitat for birds and other species.



### CONSERVATION OF PRIORITY HABITAT

One important component of the Birds Forever initiative is focused on expanding habitat for birds. We will expand protection, conservation, and restoration of habitat on which birds rely for breeding, feeding, and other life stages. The 36 focal species require diverse habitat types such as grasslands, wetlands, and forests. The initiative will coordinate efforts under existing programs that can deliver on-the-ground results to improve habitat conditions for diverse species. These programs include the Joint Venture program, North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, National Wildlife Refuge program, and Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. Other programs that will support bird conservation include the FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, Coastal program, and Endangered Species Candidate Conservation and Recovery programs.

## FLYWAYS WITHIN THE UNITED STATES



Through the Birds Forever initiative, States will be able to leverage funds from Federal grant programs to target multi-state bird conservation priorities. States and Tribes will use their recently completed Wildlife Action Plans to guide their wild bird conservation actions.

**Joint Ventures** — Joint ventures are regional partnerships involving Federal, State, and local governments, as well as corporations, and a wide range of non-governmental groups that conserve wild bird habitat. Joint ventures have an extensive portfolio demonstrating their success in bringing together the collaborative efforts of multiple partners to improve habitat. The joint ventures commonly leverage several dollars for every Federal dollar invested and provide the coordinating body to address regional bird habitat conservation issues.

The joint ventures will target the 36 focal species and expand landscape and species modeling, monitoring birds and their habitats, and use remote sensing and geographic information systems to detect and assess landscape changes that are affecting the species of concern. The initiative includes a \$4.0 million increase for new and ongoing joint ventures. We will focus investments on priority habitats along the coastal and central flyways. For example, the budget will establish a new Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture in the western portion of the current Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. The new joint venture will work collaboratively with partners to develop consistent and complementary habitat mapping and modeling efforts for birds and other priority

species and will collaborate with partners in aquatic habitat conservation efforts under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

**Neotropical Migratory Birds**— The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund provides matching grants to partners for bird conservation throughout their ranges in the Western Hemisphere. Many of the birds in decline are considered neotropical birds—long-distance migrants from the tropics and subtropics. Eleven of the 20 birds on the Audubon Society’s List of the Top 20 Common Birds in Decline are long-distance migrants that will benefit from grants provided through this program. The projects conserve these birds by securing habitat, providing education and outreach to the public, and conducting research and monitoring. These conservation activities are closely tied to objectives outlined and contained in international bird conservation initiatives such as Partners in Flight, a program that addresses the migratory habitat conservation specific to songbirds.





The President's budget funds this program at the 2008 request level of \$4.0 million, which will fund approximately 40 new projects. The program is averaging more than four-to-one in non-Federal matching funds to grant dollars. This joint investment will result in the enhancement and protection of approximately 120,000 acres of habitat in the United States, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. These projected habitat accomplishments complement other project activities, including research and monitoring of bird populations, law enforcement, and outreach and education.

**North American Wetlands** — The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund directly contributes to the conservation of waterfowl and other wetland-associated migratory birds across the North American landscape. The program focuses on habitat protection and restoration because direct habitat loss continues to be the leading cause for migratory bird population decline. North American grants and matching contributions provided by over 3,000 partners have improved more than 23 million acres of wetlands and wetland-associated habitat across North America. The Birds Forever initiative provides an increase of \$666,000 to improve an additional 454,000 acres of habitat.

**INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRD HABITAT**

In October 2007, President Bush announced conservation initiatives in five priority habitats in Mexico to preserve important migratory bird habitat. The FWS committed \$4.0 million from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to begin projects to support conservation initiatives in Laguna Madre, Marismas Nacionales, Chiapas, Yucatan Peninsula, and the Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands. The projects will support conservation of habitat for birds that migrate between Mexico and the United States.

**National Wildlife Refuges** — The National Wildlife Refuge System provides a 96 million acre network of land and water, including breeding habitat critically important for the conservation of birds. The 548-unit refuge system, 37 wetland management districts, and 49 wildlife coordination areas span the continental United States and includes refuges in Hawaii and Alaska. The habitats managed by

the refuge system are diverse, meeting the needs of many species of wildlife, including focal bird species. In some cases, refuges were established to support the unique habitat needs of particular bird species. For example, the Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Management Area in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, was established and is managed to provide nesting habitat for the Kirtland's warbler. This warbler, a neotropical migrant that spends the winter in the Bahamas, nests in jack pine found only in a narrow strip of habitat in northern biomes.



The 2008 enacted budget includes \$434.1 million for refuges, a \$35.9 million increase over the 2007 level. The 2009 budget sustains this record-high refuge funding level, which will significantly increase habitat conservation and other activities to help restore the health of wildlife found on refuges, including birds. The refuge system will coordinate habitat restoration efforts with joint ventures. In 2009, the refuge system will improve more than 200,000 acres for the benefit of migratory birds.

The refuge system will undertake projects targeted to protecting focal species, including:

- Restoration of native prairies in the midwest grasslands to benefit native species such as the meadowlark.
- Conservation of bottomland forests in the Southeast important to benefit neotropical songbirds such as the cerulean warbler.
- Partnerships to protect coastal wetlands and estuaries on the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts that will benefit many wetland-dependent birds such as the scaup.
- Control of invasive animals on islands critical to the conservation of seabirds.

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## NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM BIRD FOREVER INITIATIVE PROJECTS

**Piping Plover Habitat Enhancement** — In spring 2006, the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to improve beach-nesting bird habitat, specifically for the federally listed threatened piping plover. To improve habitat for the birds, the secondary dunes were pushed into the primary dune area to an elevation that allows flooding only during extreme high tides, thus creating an overwash area. Within a few weeks of the project that created nesting habitat, piping plovers and American oystercatchers nested in the restored area. The initiative will provide funding for similar enhancement work on beach-nesting bird habitat along the East Coast.



**Enhancement of Early Successional Habitat in the Midwest** — A variety of techniques, including mechanical and prescribed fire treatments, were used to manage early successional forest habitats on Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge for the benefit of golden-winged warblers and American woodcock, both of which are listed as Birds of Conservation Concern by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Conducting the treatments at this 43,000-acre refuge, as well as monitoring the habitat and the species response, was critical to reversing the declines of these priority species, and provided a model of how to improve management for these species across the Midwestern States. Initiative funding can be used to implement these techniques at other refuges across this area.

**Invasive Plant Removal and Native Habitat Restoration** — Saltcedar is one of several invasive plant species prevalent on western refuges that destroys native habitats on which ducks, geese, sandhill cranes, and other migratory birds depend. Saltcedar removal and restoration of native habitat is expensive, involving mechanical and chemical techniques and requiring several seasons to accomplish the work. Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge has researched and developed a combination of techniques that are extremely successful in removing saltcedar and restoring habitats. Initiative funding can be used to apply these techniques to other refuges in the Southwest.

**Grassland Nesting Bird Restoration** — Huron Wetland Management District, LaCreek National Wildlife Refuge, and Souris River Basin refuges have all developed successful restoration and enhancement techniques that involve removing invasive woody species and reseeding native grasses and forbs. Initiative funding can provide other refuges with the capacity to conduct such restorations.



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## CONSERVATION AND COLLECTION OF SCIENTIFIC DATA

The FWS Migratory Bird program has targeted the completion of 30 conservation plans for focal species by the end of 2009. The Birds Forever initiative will provide the resources to successfully reach this goal. Development of these action plans will: direct priority conservation strategies; identify conservation needs for the focal species; and facilitate more refined biological planning, conservation design, and management recommendations in the future. This information is critical to better support conservation activities associated with the 36 focal species in the initiative. The USGS will provide the science that supports development of the action plans by expanding its capabilities for population and habitat modeling, landscape characterization and assessment, integrated monitoring, and biological information management at landscape scales.

### **Migratory Bird Conservation and Monitoring**

— Conservation, monitoring and assessment programs will be enhanced to ensure program goals are achieved. The initiative includes a net increase of \$3.8 million, which includes \$4.2 million in increases offset by reductions in lower priority efforts. Of the \$4.2 million increase, \$2.0 million will be used to implement conservation actions in focal species plans and \$2.2 million will be used to determine potential impacts of climate change, urban expansion, changing agricultural and other land-use practices, and energy development. Information on bird population numbers and distribution in North America is needed to effectively manage habitat, target priority restoration actions, and identify management strategies for birds at risk.



### **BIRD BANDING PROGRAM**

Marking birds with leg bands has proven to be one of the most cost-effective information gathering techniques employed by wildlife biologists over the past 70 years. Biologists capture birds using a variety of methods. They then place small, uniquely numbered lightweight aluminum bands on their legs for future identification. Over the years the recapture or reporting of bird bands has provided wildlife managers with extensive information on bird migration, life history, site fidelity, and sport harvest. To date, biologists in North America have banded more than 63 million birds and accumulated more than 3.5 million recoveries. In any one year, biologists generally band more than 220,000 ducks and nearly 135,000 geese and swans.





Expanded aerial surveys will be conducted by FWS or its partners in the northern nesting areas of Canada and Alaska, as well as key migration and wintering areas in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Information gathered from these surveys will document changes in the numbers and distribution of migratory birds and correlate these results to natural or man-made disturbances in the environment. Equally important is increased monitoring to collect essential information regarding feeding, breeding, and other habitat. This information will allow managers to anticipate how birds are coping with changes in northern nesting areas. Similarly, the information will also provide new insights on how species, such as the rufous-sided hummingbird, loggerhead shrike, and heron are responding to disturbances on southern migration and wintering areas.

Expanded banding and marking programs for migratory birds in all of these areas will augment survey information, while contributing data useful in deriving key population parameters such as survival and reproduction, for these species and others using these same habitats. In addition, as requested by the President, FWS will produce a State of the Birds Report by 2009. This report will chart progress, identify species that need additional protection, and help bring more of the Nation's bird species into a healthy and sustainable status.

**Avian Monitoring and Strategic Habitat Conservation** — The Birds Forever initiative includes an increase of \$1.0 million for USGS to enhance the quality and geographic magnitude of monitoring wild bird populations in North America.



Working with FWS, and other partners such as Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy, USGS will monitor and document changes in bird populations across North American landscapes. These efforts will build upon current USGS migratory bird research, and the results will be used to assist natural resource managers in developing priority conservation strategies with targeted species programs.

The USGS bird banding survey provides the most geographically extensive and scientifically based estimation of bird population status and trends in North America. To enhance the survey and better understand large-scale drivers of migratory bird population and habitat change, increased funding will be used to:

- Expand the number of bird banding survey routes surveyed annually.
- Expand the geographic scope of the bird banding survey into Mexico.
- Evaluate and refine methodologies for conducting the survey, including estimation of detection probabilities.
- Enhance database management and online data reporting.

### **BIRD CALL TO ACTION OUTREACH AND PUBLIC EDUCATION**

An important component of a holistic program to restore wild bird populations includes outreach and education, activities that will increase public awareness of the need to conserve and protect these species and their habitats. The popularity of backyard bird watching and other bird-related activities can be used to build and expand programs to inform the public.

*Through its Schoolyard Habitats program, FWS will expand partnerships with schools. This very successful program fosters children's interest in nature and resource conservation and fills an important need for on-the-ground habitat conservation. In Oklahoma, the Partners program has already developed the Outdoor Environmental Classroom program that will ultimately provide a hands-on conservation experience for two million students.*

**P. Lynn Scarlett**  
*Deputy Secretary of the Interior*

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**Partners for Fish and Wildlife: Backyard Birds**

The Partners program will continue its technical assistance role in urban areas and offer additional cost-sharing for habitat restoration projects in backyard, suburban settings. Within the 2009 budget for the Partners program of \$48.0 million, FWS will work with citizens and other partners such as schools to identify and implement urban habitat restoration projects that will restore and enhance important migratory bird habitat now and into the future. The program will target metropolitan areas that include Baltimore, Houston, Chicago, San Juan, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Cleveland.

**Urban Treaties** — Urban areas constitute approximately 20 percent of the land area in this country. Yet more than 80 percent of Americans call these areas home. An additional 17 million people are expected to move to urban areas in the next 15 years. This trend places great pressure on natural resources in these areas. The Urban Conservation Treaties program, a collaborative effort between FWS and participating U.S. cities, brings together private citizens; Federal, State, and municipal agencies; and non-governmental organizations. The program focuses on the benefits that migratory birds bring to everyday life and involves citizens in hands-on activities to protect migratory birds.



*Through these efforts, cities can become effective sanctuaries for birds and other wildlife, with an environmentally aware citizenry dedicated to conserving and enhancing birds and bird habitat. By restoring and conserving green space, urban treaties enhance livability for human residents as well as the migratory birds that nest or pass through municipal and urban/suburban neighborhoods. Since 1999, seven cities—New Orleans, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Portland, St. Louis, and Nashville—have embraced this successful partnership opportunity with the Service.*

**Lee P. Brown**  
**Former Mayor of Houston, Texas**



## DUCK STAMPS

What do waterfowl hunters, stamp collectors, wildlife-watchers, and wild birds have in common? They all benefit from sales of Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, commonly known as Duck Stamps.

The Duck Stamp program has its origins in the early decades of the 1900s. Some ducks, including the colorful wood duck, were at risk of extinction due to habitat loss and hunting pressures. The drought that resulted in the "Dust Bowl" of the 1930s had a devastating impact on migratory birds that were dependant upon wetland habitats. In response to concerns from hunters and conservationists, Congress passed the Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 1929. This Act authorized the government to purchase wetlands and preserve them as waterfowl habitat. Five years later, the creation of the Duck Stamp provided a steady source of funding to conserve these wetlands.

Since 1934, the Duck Stamp program has raised more than \$700 million, conserved more than 5.2 million acres of habitat, and returned several species of birds to healthy and sustainable levels. Today, of every dollar spent on Duck Stamps, 98 cents is used to acquire wetlands and other wildlife habitats that are then preserved as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Waterfowl are not the only wildlife to benefit from the sale of Duck Stamps. Numerous other bird, mammal, fish, reptile, and amphibian species that rely on wetland habitats have prospered. Further, an estimated one-third of the Nation's endangered and threatened species find food or shelter in refuges established using Duck Stamp funds.



People, too, have benefited from the Duck Stamp program. Hunters have places to enjoy their hunting heritage and other outdoor enthusiasts have places to hike, watch birds, and visit. Moreover, the protected wetlands help purify water supplies, store flood water, reduce soil erosion and sedimentation, and provide spawning areas for fish important to sport and commercial fishermen.

Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota is a prime example of how this program has helped to protect important habitats and provided recreational benefits. This refuge has been designated as both a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Birding Conservancy and a key site of regional significance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. The refuge also provides hunting, fishing, and environmental education opportunities for the public.

Funds from the sale of Duck Stamps have been instrumental in preserving refuges like Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Waterfowl hunters can congratulate themselves for much of this conservation success story. Waterfowl hunters aged 16 and older are required to purchase and carry the stamp as part of their hunting license. These hunters benefit from the program because conservation of waterfowl breeding habitat increases waterfowl populations, which influences hunting bag limits. Conservationists buy Duck Stamps because they know that the stamps are, dollar for dollar, one of the best investments one can make in the future of America's wetlands. Collectors buy both the Federal and Junior Duck Stamps, because the beautiful stamps can gain value over the years and are an important part of America's outdoor culture. Finally, educators, conservationists, hunters, parents, and students alike buy \$5 Junior Duck Stamps in order to support conservation education programs.

At a cost of \$15 per stamp, this has been a vital tool for wetland conservation. However, in the 17 years since the last price increase, the cost of land and water has increased significantly. The Administration proposes to increase the cost of the Duck Stamp to \$25 per stamp beginning in 2009. This increase will lead to the conservation of an additional 16,800 acres through acquisition and conservation easements.