

# Wisconsin Waterfowl Stamp Update:

As I write this today, I've just returned from a drive across the state, watching the many species of migratory birds that have returned to the state, from their winter homes to the south. Seeing the geese, mallards and diving ducks enjoy some of our lakes & rivers and the many temporary wet spots in agriculture fields, as well as seeing the thousands of birds in the air, around the Horicon Marsh area – all helped to remind me again of why I had occasion to make this drive.

Recently, as the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, I partnered with George Meyer of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, and Nels Swenson, the WI State Chairman for Ducks Unlimited, in an effort to reach out to the leaders of our state Legislature, to find support for an increase in the price of the Wisconsin duck stamp, as an addition to the state budget that's currently being developed.

For the majority of waterfowlers in Wisconsin, who are members of WWA or DU, (our groups' combined memberships represent well more than half of the 80,000 stamp purchasers in Wisconsin) this is a familiar topic, as our organizations have been working to inform our teams of the need for additional funds for wetlands-related projects, for nearly a year now. For some waterfowl enthusiasts, this may yet be a new discussion. A quick review:

- Wisconsin duck stamp funds are segregated from the "general fund", and may be used in only a few select purposes, namely: new restorations of wetland habitats, maintenance of wetland infrastructure (i.e.: dike or water control device upkeep), and intensive wetland management (like phragmites or cattail control spraying).
- Oftentimes, state duck stamp funds are matched, either with private monies from groups like WWA and DU, or as a part of a federal grant, like the North American Wetland Conservation Act. Wisconsin is a leader in the nation, in acquiring these types of federal monies for conservation, and our ability to leverage sportsman's stamp monies in this regard, is key.
- The state duck stamp price has been set at \$7, since 1997. Since that time, public lands have been added to our state's collection of properties, some of which have opportunities for wetland projects, and our wetland infrastructure; the dikes, water control structures, and other constructions of previous generations – has continued to age, requiring more maintenance to prevent our investment from going to waste. The state waterfowl stamp fund, which only a few years ago carried a balance, now is less than the amount of opportunity, presented annually. We are quickly building a backlog of projects and maintenance needs to be addressed.
- WWA, DU, and WWF have worked together to propose an increase in the price of the stamp, from \$7 to \$12, effective as of the 2012 seasons. Most seasoned hunters will recognize this \$5 increase as being about half of the price of a box of non-toxic ammunition. This action has been undertaken, following numerous surveys by our groups, as well as others, like the independent Wisconsin Waterfowl Hunter's Conference, that have all shown willingness by waterfowl hunters, to again take up the charge – and show leadership in terms of our tradition of habitat

protection and conservation. Wisconsin is routinely among the highest in the nation, in numbers of waterfowl hunters, behind only California and Minnesota. The strength of our numbers, multiplied by this modest increase in the stamp price, will help make hundreds of thousands of new dollars available to the stewards of our wetland habitats, starting next year.

At this point in our presentation, it is unknown what the future of this proposal will be. We are hopeful that we have found a sympathetic ear, among one or more of the leaders that we spoke with, over the course of many sessions. The meetings our happy band of emissaries enjoyed, were generally positive. In this time of difficult economic situations, and political unrest, the easy route would be to make no change, to choose to wait to address the issue later. However, that is not what leaders do. Waterfowl hunters are leaders, a fact no better evidenced than by the Federal Migratory Bird Stamp, the predecessor to all conservation stamps – a program begun during the Great Depression. As a waterfowl hunter, or even a wetland enthusiast, I encourage you to contact your state Senator, and your Representative. Let them know that you support an increase in the state waterfowl stamp, as a part of the next budget. Be a part of the solution today!