

**TESTIMONY OF PAUL R. SCHMIDT
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THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE,
ON H.R. 3805 THE ELECTRONIC DUCK STAMP EXTENSION ACT OF 2009 AND
H.R. 4973, THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE VOLUNTEER IMPROVEMENT ACT
OF 2010**

May 6, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Paul Schmidt Assistant Director for Migratory Birds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), with the Department of the Interior (Department). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to testify on two important pieces of legislation -- H.R.3805, the Electronic Duck Stamp and Stamp Extension Act of 2009 and H.R. 4973, the National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Improvement Act. The Service greatly appreciates the Subcommittee's continued leadership and support for the conservation of the nation's migratory birds and our National Wildlife Refuge System.

Migratory birds are among nature's most magnificent natural resources, and they are enjoyed by millions of Americans who hunt, watch birds, or just enjoy the outdoors. Their pursuit of these recreational pleasures in turn significantly supports local economies where concentrations of migratory birds can be found. The Service's 2006 Survey on Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation reported that 2.3 million migratory bird hunters spent 20 million days hunting birds, such as waterfowl and dove, and they spent \$1.3 billion on their trips and equipment. Each migratory bird hunter must possess a Federal Duck Stamp, and during its 75th anniversary, this program has provided funds to protect more than 5.2 million acres of wetlands supporting habitat for waterfowl and other wild birds, as well as a wide diversity of fish and wildlife species.

The National Wildlife Refuge System currently boasts close to 42,000 volunteers contributing in excess of 1.5 million hours to a wide variety of tasks. Our volunteers help implement conservation measures, provide environmental education and recreation opportunities, plan and carry out special events, and perform many other valuable services for fish and wildlife conservation and our Refuge visitors. The Service is proud of our partnership with our Friends groups and other volunteers who make it possible for us to deliver on our mission to "work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."

H.R. 3805, ELECTRONIC DUCK STAMP AND STAMP EXTENSION ACT OF 2009

In 2006, the Electronic Duck Stamp Act (P.L. 109-266) was signed into law and the Electronic Duck Stamp Pilot Program was born. The Service initiated this program in September 2007, partnering

with 8 states to test the feasibility and efficiency of providing hunters the opportunity to purchase an electronic permit via the internet to take to the field until a paper stamp is mailed to them. Each participating state signed a Memorandum of Understanding detailing both the state's and the Service's responsibilities. Since its inception, over 196,000 electronic stamps have been sold through partner states, including Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Through this program hunters in each participating state can purchase the Federal Duck Stamp through the internet and receive a proof of purchase with a unique serial number, which they can take with them into the field. The proof of purchase serves as a valid permit to hunt migratory birds for up to 45 days from date of purchase. Like the Federal Duck Stamp, the electronic stamp proof of purchase allows free entry into all National Wildlife Refuges.

The Electronic Duck Stamp Act authorized the program for 3 years, and Section 9 of the Act requires the Secretary, working with the states, to evaluate the program and issue a report on whether or not the "pilot program has provided a cost-effective and convenient means for issuing migratory-bird hunting and conservation stamps." The Act directs the Secretary to include in the evaluation whether or not the program has: 1) increased the availability of those stamps; (2) assisted states in meeting the customer service objectives of the states with respect to those stamps; (3) maintained actual stamps as an effective and viable conservation tool; and (4) maintained adequate retail availability of the actual stamp.

The Service is currently working through the third year of the program and is in the process of conducting this evaluation. Each participating state will assist in this effort. The Service believes an evaluation of the entire authorized period for the program will be of greatest value and therefore the evaluation is being conducted so that data from all three years is analyzed as a whole. The report is scheduled to be completed this summer. Based on the information we have at this point, we can say with confidence that the pilot program has been of benefit to the Federal Duck Stamp Program.

The Service supports the intent of H.R. 3805, and we particularly appreciate the support Rep. Wittman, Rep. Kind, Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown and the Subcommittee have shown for this program. H.R. 3805 would extend the pilot program for an additional two years, statutorily authorizing it through 2012. It is not clear to the Service that H.R. 3805 is necessary, however, for us to complete our evaluation of the program and to report to Congress. The Service is diligently pursuing the evaluation required under P.L. 109-266, and we believe our report will provide a complete and valuable tool for planning the future of this program. The Service looks forward to working with you to improve the program, based upon lessons learned during the pilot project.

H.R. 4973, THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE VOLUNTEER IMPROVEMENT ACT

The National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnerships Enhancement Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-242) amended the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 to promote volunteer programs and community partnerships for the benefit of national wildlife refuges. The National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-327) reauthorized the Enhancement Act and made permanent the pilot projects, removed the cap on the number of projects the Service could establish, and authorized \$2,000,000 each fiscal year through 2009 for the projects.

Today, volunteers and Friends organizations play a vital role in helping to fulfill the Refuge System's mission of administering a network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States.

The Enhancement Act, as amended, has enabled the National Wildlife Refuge System to expand its volunteer programs, encourage environmental education efforts and aggressively develop and grow community-based partnerships with refuge Friends organizations. The Enhancement Act also helps the Refuge System meet mandates of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 by strengthening public involvement and partnerships that support the six priority public uses, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation.

The National Friends Program was established in 1996 to encourage and organize community involvement in activities of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Friends organizations offer opportunities for grant funding and training, technical publications, websites, forums for networking and building skills, and customized mentoring visits for new Friends organizations. Since the passage of the Enhancement Act, the Service has successfully leveraged appropriated funding on at least a 1:1 matching basis to support visitor and habitat conservation programs.

The Refuge System has built a highly respected and effective model volunteer support program which has fueled the significant growth of our Friends movement from 74 organizations in 1996 to more than 230 with an estimated 42,000 members. For example, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge has undertaken many successful programs involving Friends and volunteers, including the operation of nationally recognized osprey and eagle cams for visitors and a cooperative education program with Dorchester County schools that brings students to the refuge as part of their science class.

The Refuge System Volunteer Program has grown from 4,251 volunteers in 1982 to nearly 42,000 volunteers in 2009. Last year, volunteers contributed to more than 1.5 million hours of support of our mission. Within the Refuge System, for each refuge employee, there are 9 volunteers. Volunteers are vital for working with the public on refuges. They offer interpretive talks, lead birding tours, and perform a variety of maintenance and office tasks that are essential to refuge operations.

H.R. 4973 would amend the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998 (16 U.S.C. 742f-1) to create the National Volunteer Coordination Program, statutorily authorizing the program until 2014, and increase the authorization of appropriations by \$1 million. The Service supports H.R. 4973 and believes it would allow us to build capacity to recruit, manage our volunteer workforce more effectively, and offer enhanced training and mentoring programs.

CONCLUSION

The Service greatly appreciates your leadership, and the interest and efforts of the Subcommittee, in supporting the conservation of the nation's fish and wildlife resources and wildlife-associated

recreation. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee as both pieces of legislation move forward. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and would be happy to answer any questions.