

**TESTIMONY OF SCOTT SUTHERLAND
DIRECTOR OF THE GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS OFFICE
DUCKS UNLIMITED**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE**

OCTOBER 25, 2011

CONCERNING:

**H.R. 3117, TO GRANT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR PERMANENT AUTHORITY
TO AUTHORIZE STATES TO ISSUES ELECTRONIC DUCK STAMPS.**

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is pleased to testify before the Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, in support of H.R. 3117, which would give permanent authority to the states to issue electronic duck stamps.

I am the Director of the Governmental Affairs Office for Ducks Unlimited, a charitable wetlands conservation organization. In my role, I lead our organization's public policy efforts to conserve, restore, and manage wetland and associated upland habitat for North America's waterfowl.

Originally enacted in 1934, the Federal Duck Stamp was created as the federal waterfowl hunting license and as a means to conserve waterfowl habitat. Over the last 77 years, the Federal Duck Stamp has generated sufficient funds to purchase, buy easements, or lease over 6 million acres of waterfowl habitat in the United States. These lands are now part of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System. The price of a federal duck stamp has remained at \$15 since 1991, while land prices across the U.S. have skyrocketed. In 1991, revenue from the duck stamp enabled conservation at an average cost of \$306 per acre. In 2010, only 1/3 as many acres were conserved because land values had tripled to an average cost of \$1,091 per acre. Based on the consumer price index, the stamp would need to cost \$24.86 today to have the same buying power that \$15 had in 1991.

For generations, waterfowlers have paid for conservation programs and the Duck Stamp is a good example of the effort to invest in the resource we care for. Funds from the purchase of this stamp go towards acquiring land beneficial to the public and waterfowl across the country. It is one of a suite of programs critical to wetlands conservation. Alongside this effort the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), a federal partnership program that is leveraged multiple times with non-federal dollars is used to restore and protect important wetland and upland habitat across North America. Legislation to reauthorize NAWCA for five years is pending before this Committee and we urge action very soon to move that legislation forward in order to renew that popular and effective program.

The commonality between these two efforts is that final outcomes are determined by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC). The MBCC is comprised of four Members of Congress and three Cabinet members. That body determines which projects should be funded with both duck

stamp dollars and NAWCA appropriations, making these programs an integral and related part of the way waterfowl habitat and wetlands are conserved and funded.

Duck stamps are used by every waterfowl hunter over the age of 16. Traditionally waterfowlers could buy their stamps at post offices if they were in stock, and some stores selling sporting goods would buy a quantity to re-sell as a convenience to their customers. When the internet became popularized they could also buy their duck stamps on-line through a contractor known as Amplex that serves as a USPS fulfillment center. However, if bought online then, the purchaser had to wait until their stamp was mailed in order to use it for hunting. Six years ago, the Electronic Duck Stamp Act (Act) was passed, making it possible to buy a federal duck stamp over the internet, and immediately go afield, and to make it easier for federal duck stamps to be sold to the public. Duck stamps are not always available at small rural post offices and even some larger ones, and are sometimes difficult for waterfowl hunters and collectors to purchase over the counter. This often happens later in the season when stores sell out of the supply they may have purchased earlier in the hunting season. Under the Electronic Duck Stamp Act, if a stamp is bought over the internet, the purchaser is given a special receipt valid for up to 45 days, which can be used while hunting in place of the actual stamp, giving sufficient time to mail a physical stamp to the purchaser.

It is important to note that even if a purchaser buys his/her stamp in this manner, they will still receive an actual stamp in the mail. We have concerns that if a physical stamp was not issued to the purchaser, the value of the federal stamps as collector's items and as tradition would be lost. This loss of value did occur to some state duck stamps when they were made available electronically, and the tradition and artistic value of the federal duck stamp program is too strong to risk losing. This has not happened, however, to the federal stamp, thanks to the fulfillment requirement of the Act.

The importance of the waterfowl art aspects cannot be overstated. An annual nationwide contest occurs to select a winning image that will grace the following year's stamp. In fact that contest is happening Friday and Saturday of this week in nearby Shepardstown, West Virginia. Hundreds of entries will be judged submitted by folks from most of the states and ranging in age from teenagers and young adults to internationally recognized wildlife artists.

The trial that was arranged under the Electronic Duck Stamp Act legislation has worked. Federal stamps are now available instantly over the internet and yet due to the requirement of fulfillment, it has not made the stamp just a novelty item. The integrity of the system is secure. Because of its success in making federal duck stamps easier to obtain while preserving the heritage and utility of the traditional stamps and attendant art, Ducks Unlimited supports the proposal to make this program permanent.

Thank you for inviting us to offer information on this proposal.