

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF PAUL SCHMIDT,
CHIEF CONSERVATION OFFICER
DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC.**

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

CONCERNING:

H.R. 5069, THE FEDERAL DUCK STAMP ACT OF 2014

July 23, 2014

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Paul Schmidt. I am the Chief Conservation Officer for Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU). Prior to joining DU in May 2011, I worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for 33 years. For the last six of those years, I was the agency's Assistant Director for Migratory Birds, overseeing all activities related to the management of migratory birds.

We are grateful for the opportunity to testify regarding the Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014 and appreciate the chairman's sponsorship of HR 5069 with several bipartisan co-sponsors. We applaud the introduction of a Senate bipartisan companion bill, reflecting broad support for this important legislation.

The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp has been a critically important tool used to benefit migratory bird populations over the last eight decades through the dedication of its receipts for habitat conservation on national wildlife refuges, and DU strongly supports H.R. 5069 to continue the success of this program. Since 1934, sportsmen and women have led the way to conserve critical migratory bird habitat across the country through the purchase of these stamps.

H.R. 5069 will increase the price of the stamp to \$25 from its current level of \$15 and will dedicate the amount of the price increase to voluntary conservation easements with private landowners. Ducks Unlimited strongly endorses this long overdue price increase, which hasn't occurred in over 23 years. During this same period, land prices have tripled, our conservation buying power has diminished greatly, and virtually all consumer goods from a loaf of bread (70 cents to \$1.38; 97% increase) to a gallon of gas (\$1.24 to \$3.27; 163% increase) have increased dramatically. Simply stated, we need to raise the price of the stamp merely to keep up with the times, and waterfowl hunters and passionate conservationists are willing to take the lead.

Further, in today's economy and with increasing pressures on land use, wildlife habitat conservation success will depend on the appropriate mix of public lands as national wildlife refuges in conjunction with conservation on private lands. Conservation easements provide an invaluable tool that allows landowners to retain ownership, continue to meet their individual land management objectives, and provide conservation benefits to the public. Conservation easements are already used appropriately as a component of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and DU welcomes this opportunity to further facilitate landowners' involvement in the delivery of voluntary incentive-based habitat conservation on private lands, thus keeping working lands working for the landowner and for conservation.

Founded by waterfowl hunters and conservationists in 1937, DU has more than 1 million members and supporters and is a world leader in wetlands conservation. We work in all 50 states and across the continent to further our science-based mission of conserving, restoring, and managing wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl, as well as for the benefits these resources provide to other wildlife and to all Americans.

During the early 1930s, the most devastating drought in U.S. history was turning vital wetlands into barren wastelands and decimating duck populations. It was the worst of times for ducks, and the bleakest of times for duck hunters and people concerned about the landscape. Hunters had seen duck numbers decline steadily since the turn of the 20th century, but the situation had never been so dire. Something had to be done—and fast—to save waterfowl. Duck hunters and their allies rallied, urging Congress to pass the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act, popularly known as the Duck Stamp Act, in 1934. What this program has done for waterfowl and other wildlife since is one of the greatest conservation success stories of all time. Yet, despite significant conservation achievements, we still continue to lose wetlands at an alarming rate. According to a recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report, an estimated 74,340 acres of wetlands were lost in the U.S. portion of the Prairie Pothole Region alone between 1997 and 2009 – and once again, we as duck hunters and conservationists must stand up and do our part, and increasing the price of the federal duck stamp is one important step.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the federal duck stamp. Since its enactment, this landmark initiative has generated over 900 million dollars—paid for and supported by waterfowl hunters, refuge visitors, conservationists, and stamp collectors—to conserve more than 6 million acres of wetlands across the United States. The program is a model of conservation, public-private partnerships and government efficiency. Approximately 98 cents out of every duck stamp dollar is spent to acquire or lease lands for the National Wildlife Refuge System. These refuges and waterfowl production areas not only benefit migratory birds but also hundreds of other fish and wildlife species. In addition, wetlands restored and protected on these lands provide clean water, mitigate floods, buffer storm surges, reduce soil erosion, and offer a host of other benefits for our nation.

Today, the Federal Duck Stamp Program remains a vital component of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which keeps wildlife in the public domain while promoting responsible use, ethical hunting, and science-based management. Funding for wildlife conservation in the United States is predicated on a user-pay/user-benefit model based on receipts from hunting and fishing licenses and stamps, but in reality, the Federal Duck Stamp Program is a user-pay/public-benefits program. So while hunters and wildlife enthusiasts are paying through stamp purchases to benefit waterfowl and other wildlife, the public is benefitting from goods and services derived from wetlands conservation.

For decades, Ducks Unlimited has partnered with the Service to conserve and restore wetlands on national wildlife refuges across the country. Many of these areas are crucial to DU's continental and regional conservation goals and to the objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and other continental bird plans. Ducks Unlimited looks forward to bringing its expertise in working with private landowners through conservation easements to realizing opportunities provided by H.R. 5069 to further wetlands conservation within the refuge system.

For example, much of DU's work with the Service is focused on the Prairie Pothole Region, where federal duck stamp dollars are used to purchase or lease critical wetland and grassland easements from willing landowners. In fiscal year 2014, it is estimated that more than \$53 million in public and private partner funds will be invested in the Prairie Pothole Region to protect these vital waterfowl breeding areas, including nearly \$34 million (64%) in federal duck stamp funding. By leveraging these dollars with

other DU private funds and public resources from popular programs like the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the Land and Water Conservation Fund, DU and its partners were able to protect 68,554 acres in North Dakota and South Dakota last year. Since 1997, this partnership between DU and the Service has protected approximately 1.6 million acres of some of the best waterfowl breeding habitat in North America. Today, substantial demand exists among agricultural producers to enroll in these voluntary conservation programs. We understand from discussions with the Service that more than 1,300 farmers and ranchers (reflecting over 390,000 potential acres) across the Dakotas are on a waiting list wanting to receive an easement offer from the Service. An increase in the federal duck stamp would help address this demand and a portion of this substantial backlog (with an estimated value of \$340 million) of willing landowners who want to enroll in the program.

The Mississippi Alluvial Valley, another DU conservation priority, is home to a number of national wildlife refuges, including Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge. Located in Avoyelles Parish near Marksville, Louisiana, this refuge was established with funds from the federal duck stamp program in 1989. Since then, DU and other partners have worked with the Service to restore 6,000 acres of wetlands and associated upland habitat on the refuge to provide important wintering habitat for waterfowl and recreational opportunities for duck hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts.

In the Great Lakes region, DU continues to enhance and restore vital wetlands on a number of national wildlife refuges purchased with federal duck stamp dollars. A prime example is Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, located in northwest Ohio on the shore of Lake Erie. Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and the Service are leveraging Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grants to enhance about 2,500 acres of coastal wetlands in this marsh complex to provide vital feeding and resting habitat for waterfowl during spring and fall migration.

The duck stamp's conservation impact also extends west to the Pacific Flyway, where federal funds are helping restore wetlands in the Central Valley of California. Located in the Sacramento Valley, Colusa National Wildlife Refuge comprises 5,000 acres and supports as many as 234,000 ducks and 133,000 geese during fall and winter. Over the years, DU has worked closely with the Service to enhance more than half the refuge's wetland habitat, including 388 acres of wetlands and adjacent uplands recently purchased thanks to federal duck stamp dollars. DU and the Service are also currently working on plans to restore habitat on a parcel of land recently acquired through the federal duck stamp program.

Unfortunately, the conservation buying power of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp has never been lower because its price has not been raised since 1991. This 23-year lapse is the longest in the program's history without a price increase to keep up with inflation. Meanwhile, land costs have tripled, and wildlife habitat needs have continued to increase, while the federal duck stamp has lost 40 percent of its conservation buying power. This decline in the stamp's buying power is a step backward for wetland and waterfowl conservation. More than 30 hunting and wildlife conservation organizations—ranging from Ducks Unlimited to the National Rifle Association—have signed a letter supporting the price increase from \$15 to \$25. This letter is attached for the committee record.

We thank the chairman and this committee for your commitment to wetlands and waterfowl conservation. The Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014 will secure vital habitat for generations of waterfowl hunters and wildlife enthusiasts to come. On behalf of DU's more than 1 million supporters, we pledge our commitment and support to work with you to enact H.R. 5069.

**Archery Trade Association * Bear Trust International * Boone & Crockett Club
Bowhunting Preservation Alliance * Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation * Conservation Force * Dallas Safari Club * Delta
Waterfowl Ducks Unlimited * Izaak Walton League of America * Masters of the Foxhounds
Association Mississippi River Trust * Mule Deer Foundation * National Rifle Association
National Wild Turkey Federation * North American Bear Foundation
North American Grouse Partnership * Pheasants Forever * Pope and Young Club
Public Lands Foundation * Quail Forever * Quality Deer Management
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation * Ruffed Grouse Society * Texas Wildlife Association
The Conservation Fund * The Wildlife Society * Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited * Wild Sheep Foundation * Wildlife Forever * Wildlife Habitat Council
Wildlife Management Institute * Wildlife Mississippi**

April 29, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Boxer, Chairwoman
Senate Environment & Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Vitter, Ranking Republican
Senate Environment & Public Works Committee
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Doc Hastings, Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Ranking Democrat
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Boxer, Chairman Hastings, Senator Vitter and Congressman DeFazio:

We write representing millions of hunter conservationists, wildlife conservationists, and wildlife scientists to support the vital need to increase the price of the Federal Duck Stamp from its current price of \$15 to \$25. The Duck Stamp was enacted in 1934 during the worst depression and drought the United States has ever known by a group of dedicated waterfowl hunters who stepped forward and asked to pay a user fee dedicated to conserving wetland habitat. In the program's 80th year, the buying power of the Duck Stamp has unfortunately never been lower.

Since its inception, over 6 million acres of waterfowl habitat have been conserved through the revenues of Duck Stamp sales. Approximately \$0.98 of every \$1.00 of Duck Stamp receipts is spent on habitat conservation of wetlands. These habitats not only benefit waterfowl and other wildlife but also provide flood attenuation, water filtration and buffering of storm surges for our citizens.

The price of the Duck Stamp has not been raised since 1991, while the cost of land has tripled. Wildlife habitat needs have continued to increase and the stamp has lost 40 percent of its value. The cost of electricity, eggs and gas have increased due to market forces and now it's time we do our part and meet the market by increasing the price of the Duck Stamp. In order for us to pass down our hunting heritage from generation to generation and sustain a vital and viable resource for wildlife and people, we must increase the price of the Duck Stamp this year.

We pledge our commitment and support to work with you to enact an increase to the Federal Duck Stamp to \$25 in this Congress.

Thank you for your attention to our request.

CC: Full U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives