

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS,
ON H.R. 1494, THE ELECTRONIC DUCK STAMP ACT

By Gary Taylor, Legislative Director
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am Gary Taylor, Legislative Director of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the Association's views on the Federal Duck Stamp. The Association appreciates Congressman Kind's long-standing attention to this legislative initiative and strongly supports H.R. 1494 with some modifications in program administration. I will share these with you in my remarks.

The Association, founded in 1902, is a quasi-governmental organization of public agencies charged with the protection and management of North America's fish and wildlife resources. The Association's governmental members include the fish and wildlife agencies of the states, provinces, and federal governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. All 50 states are members. The Association has been a key organization in promoting sound resource management and strengthening federal, state, and private cooperation in protecting and managing fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest.

Mr. Chairman, the state fish and wildlife agencies have a long and valued partnership distributing the Federal Duck Stamp to waterfowl hunters and collectors on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I would like to assure you the Association and the state fish and wildlife agencies share the same desires of this Committee and all interested parties to preserve the tradition and conservation benefits the artistic Federal Duck Stamp has inspired over its 71- year existence. From this stamp's inception, state fish and wildlife agencies and their license issuers or agents have demonstrated their commitment to this program by partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to distribute Federal Duck Stamps to hunters and collectors, issuing each stamp without receiving the commissions that they would receive issuing state hunting and fishing licenses. We appreciate the opportunity to be here today in front of your Committee to explore ways to complement and, in our opinion, reinforce the tradition and add another chapter to the history of the Federal Duck Stamp.

Annually, our members assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners in issuing more than 1.7 million Federal Ducks Stamps to waterfowl hunters and collectors as a customer service so that hunters can more easily fulfill their requirements to gain hunting privileges. Even so, many waterfowl hunters still travel great distances, especially in rural areas, to many sales outlets because of limited availability of the printed stamp. These customers are voicing their frustrations to their state fish and wildlife agencies, and our members have asked us to help them solve this customer service problem.

In 1994, state fish and wildlife agencies began automating their recreational licensing systems, issuing licenses through credit card-like terminals, personal computers, and other cutting edge technologies. The automation of recreational licensing systems enables the licensee to carry one document that lists all the state angling and hunting privileges they are authorized to exercise. Needless to say, hunters and anglers in the automated states have grown accustomed to the convenience of purchasing their licenses from anywhere and at anytime, and the great convenience of carrying just one licensing document. Many waterfowl hunters do not understand why the Federal Duck Stamp cannot be included on this single licensing document and be in the same format as their state privileges. Currently, there are 30 agencies that have point-of-sale capabilities, 30 with telephonic licensing and 48 agencies have the ability to license hunters and anglers from their web sites.

Since 1995, the state fish and wildlife agencies and the IAFWA have encouraged the United States Congress and the Fish and Wildlife Service to authorize, recognize and allow the electronic issuance of Federal Duck Stamps. At our 85th and 89th Annual Meetings in Branson, Missouri (September 12, 1995) and Killington, Vermont (on September 21, 1999), the Association adopted two resolutions that urged the creation of an electronic Federal Duck Stamp, and encouraged the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to embrace technology already proven in the states by implementing an electronic issuance and recognition program for the Federal Duck Stamp.

The Association strongly supports H.R. 1494, the Electronic Duck Stamp Act of 2005; however, we would like to see a few changes made to the language as it proceeds through the legislative process. The state fish and wildlife agencies, working through the Association, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have cooperatively drafted language for these amendments to H.R. 1494, as follows:

The first change regards Section 5(b)(5), which sets the requirement for the participating state to specify how they will deliver the actual artistic stamp. It is the position of this Association with which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurs that the participating states should not be responsible for the fulfillment or delivery of actual stamps, but the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, acting on behalf of the Secretary of Interior, will be responsible for the delivery of actual stamps. Furthermore, the Association surveyed our members in 2002 to determine how supportive they would be of an electronic Federal Duck Stamp program. All members of the Association support this program, and all members declared their desire to not be responsible to fulfill the actual stamp because they are facing staff and budget cutbacks and this would place undue burdens on each agency. However, there may be circumstances where a state agency would be willing to take on the fulfillment of the actual stamp to electronic federal duck stamp customers as a customer service initiative; we request that the legislation provide this opportunity, but only if specifically requested and agreed to by the participating state agency.

The second section we request to be amended is Section 6(a), which more strongly sets the requirement for the participating state to deliver the actual stamp. As I shared previously, this is not a requirement that is supported by the Association nor the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We find it more appropriate if this language reads 'Delivery of Actual Stamp – The Secretary shall require that each individual to whom the State sells an electronic stamp under the pilot program shall receive an actual stamp, by not later than the date the electronic stamp expires under section 7(c), and in a manner agreed upon by the State and the Secretary.' Again, it has never been the intent of the Association, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to burden the state fish and wildlife agencies with the additional work of fulfilling actual Federal Duck Stamps to electronic stamp customers.

Finally, we suggest consideration be given to revising Section 7(c) which states the electronic duck stamp expires after a maximum of 45 days from the date of purchase. Again, Mr. Chairman, the Association understands the importance of preserving the actual stamp as a manifestation of federal authority to hunt migratory game birds and a hallmark of conservation. We simply request flexibility in this requirement so that all circumstances and needs can be met by making this a specification that is mutually agreed upon by the State and the Secretary in the application process. By doing so, we can make this a true pilot that tests different delivery schedules, the acceptance of the electronic duck stamp and helps law enforcement with standard practices.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the attention you and the committee are devoting to the electronic Duck Stamp. We strongly believe that the states, waterfowl hunters and the whole American public will benefit from the expanded availability and enhanced customer friendliness of electronic duck stamps. Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives and I would be pleased to respond to any questions.