

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Hunting and Migratory Birds

How Hunters Benefit Many Migratory Bird Species

As our appreciation of migratory birds and our understanding of their role in the natural world grows, it's important to recognize the critical contributions of sportsmen to migratory bird conservation efforts. For more than 60 years, hunters have provided a steady stream of revenue to build the National Wildlife Refuge System, and to restore waterfowl habitat on millions of acres of public and private lands across the country. These habitat projects also benefit migratory songbirds and other wildlife.

In the early 1930s, the accumulated impacts of plundered forests, heedlessly plowed grasslands, and commercial exploitation of wildlife from the turn of the century were brought sharply into focus by the worst drought and the worst economic depression in America's history. People realized something needed to be done. With a handful of farsighted conservationists leading the way, organized sportsmen were instrumental in the creation of two programs that changed the course of wildlife conservation.

The Duck Stamp Program

On March 16, 1934, Congress passed and President Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. Popularly known as the Duck Stamp Act, it required all waterfowl hunters 16 years or older to buy a Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp annually.

In the years since its enactment, the Federal Duck Stamp Program has generated more than \$501 million that has been used to preserve nearly five million acres of waterfowl habitat in the United States. Many of the more than 500 national wildlife refuges have been paid for all or in part by Duck Stamp money.

Waterfowl are not the only wildlife to benefit from Federal Duck Stamps. Numerous other birds, wildlife and plants have similarly prospered because of habitat protection made possible by the program. Further, an estimated one third

of the nation's endangered and threatened species find food or shelter in refuges preserved by Duck Stamp funds.

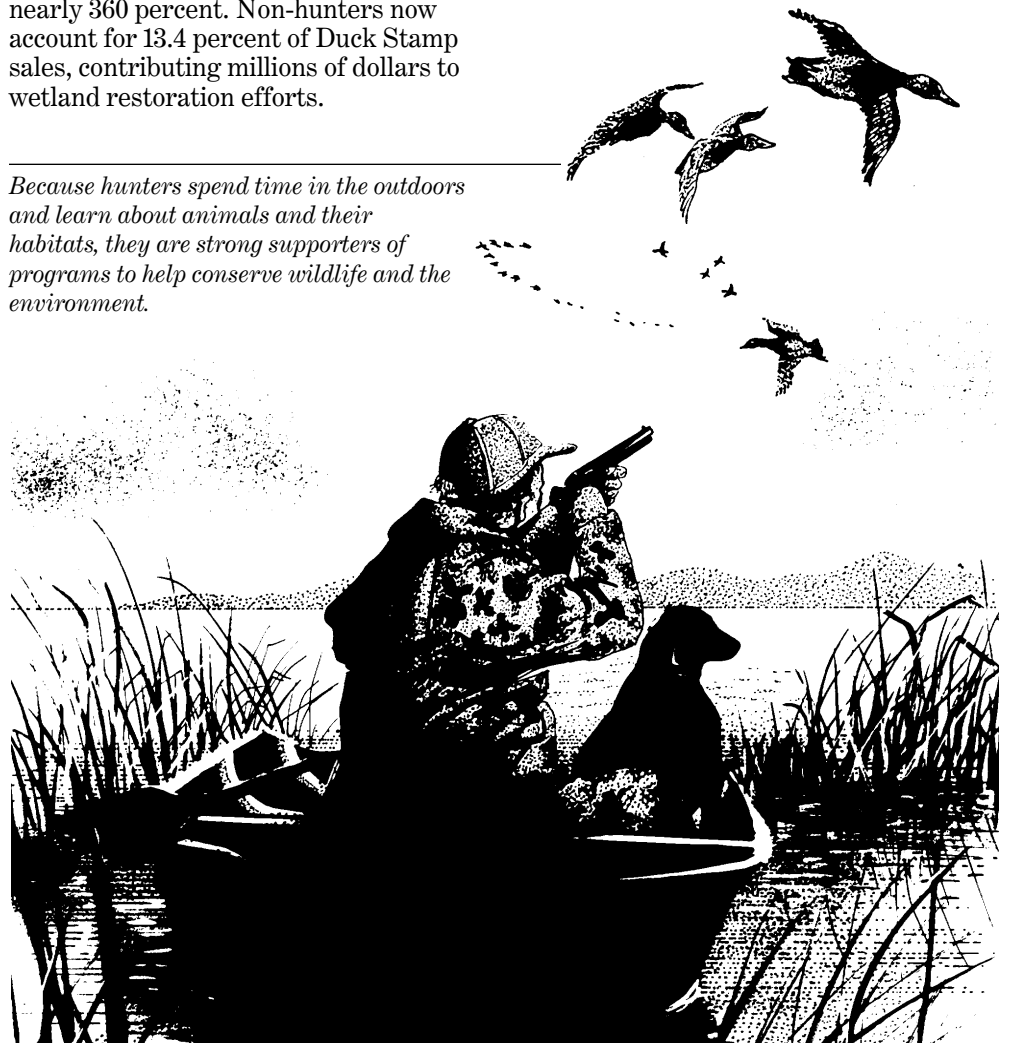
Outdoor enthusiasts have gained places to hike, bird watch or merely visit. Moreover, the protected wetlands help dissipate storms, purify water supplies, store flood water and provide food for many migratory birds.

In recent years, Duck Stamp sales to hunters have declined as the number of Americans who hunt has decreased. The proportion of Duck Stamps purchased by non-hunters, however, has increased nearly 360 percent. Non-hunters now account for 13.4 percent of Duck Stamp sales, contributing millions of dollars to wetland restoration efforts.

Because hunters spend time in the outdoors and learn about animals and their habitats, they are strong supporters of programs to help conserve wildlife and the environment.

Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration

Conservationists, hunters and the firearms and ammunition industries joined efforts with State wildlife agencies to meet the wildlife crisis of the 1930s with another ingenious long-range plan. At their urging, Congress earmarked the proceeds of an existing tax on sporting ammunition and firearms for distribution to State wildlife agencies. The money was to be used for scientific research and habitat management to give animals a solid chance to reestablish healthy populations.



The result was the 1937 Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, better known as the Pittman-Robertson Act. Thanks to habitat restoration efforts funded by the excise tax—now generally 11 percent of the manufacturer's/importer's price on sporting arms, ammunition, handguns and archery equipment—numerous species have rebuilt their populations and expanded their ranges far beyond what they were in the 1930s.

More than 62 percent of the Federal Aid money available to States is used to buy, develop, maintain and operate wildlife management areas. The bulk of remaining funds pays for surveys and research. Some four million acres have been purchased outright with Federal Aid funds since the program began, an area equal to the combined size of Connecticut and Rhode Island. Nearly 40 million additional acres are managed for wildlife under agreements with other landowners.

Although Pittman-Robertson is financed wholly by firearms users and archery enthusiasts, its benefits extend to a much larger number of people who never hunt but who do enjoy such outdoor pastimes as birdwatching, nature photography, hiking and camping. Wildlife management areas and wetlands acquired by the States support substantial use by outdoor enthusiasts. Almost all the lands purchased with Federal Aid money are managed both for wildlife production and for other public uses. Recent estimates indicate an average of 70 percent, and as many as 95 percent of the people using these areas are not hunting.

North American Waterfowl Management Plan

After steady improvement in the decades after the Depression, waterfowl numbers plunged again in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a prolonged and severe drought damaged wetland habitat across the hemisphere. In response, hunters and conservationists played a prominent role in the creation and implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), an international conservation initiative that places a renewed emphasis on partnerships and cooperative management.

The plan is founded on a series of ongoing public-private partnerships, called joint ventures. Currently, 16 joint ventures are in operation in every region of the country and Canada, all of which have substantial benefits for nongame birds. The plan's partners played a significant role in passage of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act in 1989, which established a grants program to further wetland habitat conservation in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Since 1986, partners including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, hunters, conservation groups and local and State agencies have invested more than \$1.5 billion to protect, restore, enhance and manage more than five million acres of wetlands and associated uplands. A portion of that investment has also gone to research and monitor specific populations of waterfowl, and to provide environmental education and conservation planning.

NAWMP has endorsed three important planning efforts for non-game migratory birds—Partners in Flight, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan. Many joint ventures are working to coordinate their habitat restoration efforts with these critical initiatives.

North American Bird Conservation Initiative

NAWMP and the three non-game initiatives will be integrated into the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), an international effort that strives for the conservation of all birds in all habitats in the hemisphere. NABCI forms an umbrella structure for achieving the goals of all four plans, and offers government agencies and conservation organizations a forum in which to coordinate their activities.

For more information on these programs, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

Migratory Bird Information:
703/358 1714 or on the Internet at <http://www.birds.fws.gov/>

Duck Stamp Office
1 877/887 5508 or 202/208 4354, or on the Internet at <http://duckstamps.fws.gov/>

Division of Federal Aid
703/358 2156, or on the Internet at <http://fa.r9.fws.gov/>

North American Waterfowl and Wetlands Office
703/358 1784 or on the Internet at <http://northamerican.fws.gov/>

North American Bird Conservation Initiative: On the Internet at <http://www.nacwcp.org/nabci.htm>

Partners in Flight: 970/226 9487 or on the Internet at <http://www.partnersinflight.org/>

U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan:
508/224 6521 or on the Internet at <http://www.manomet.org/USSCP.htm>

North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan: On the Internet at <http://www.nacwcp.org/>

**For more information, contact:
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Office of Migratory Bird Management
703/358 1714
www.fws.gov/r9mbmo/homepg.html**

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