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# WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

## A Stamp Success Story: Silvio O. Conte NFWR



*Photo: David Govatski*

With this *Wingtips*, we continue our journey through the National Wildlife Refuge System, and we focus on Region 5, in the Northeast, roughly from Maine to Virginia. We also recognize a refuge not particularly known for the high proportion of MBCF funds that have been used to acquire its land. This unique refuge was designed to protect a river valley and its ecosystems, rather than to provide a stopover for migrants following a flyway; it is one of only three refuges in the system that has the word *Fish* in its name. Also unusually, this refuge comprises properties that lie in four different states.

[Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge](#) was established in 1997 to protect the native plant, fish, and wildlife of the 7.2 million acres that comprise the Connecticut River watershed. Today, the refuge

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## Did You Know?

- 1) The 1982 art contest for the Stamp was the first one to require an entry fee. It cost \$20.
- 2) In the late 1940s, the Izaak Walton League passed a resolution asking the Department of the Interior to place Ding Darling's portrait on the 1950-1951 Stamp. Darling dashed off a letter to the Secretary, imploring him to reject the suggestion. "I want to be the first to protest against it," he wrote.
- 3) For some time (e.g., the 1940s), the

(more than 35,000 acres) is organized into six divisions and seven units, with portions in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. A relatively modest 57% of the refuge's land was acquired with MBCF money. And it continues to grow, with an additional [191 acres coming under protection in the past year](#).

Rising just across the border with Canada, the Connecticut River flows more than 400 miles to its mouth at Long Island Sound. There are 142 species of fish; 250 birds; 100 mammals, reptiles, and amphibians; 1,500 invertebrates; and 3,000 plants in the watershed. It supports a variety of habitats - northern forests, rivers and streams, and a significant complex of tidal fresh, brackish, and salt marshes. Nine species of the watershed are federally listed as endangered or threatened. With such an extensive range of habitats, the list of focal species is quite diverse; a few examples include Shortnose Sturgeon, American Woodcock, Bank Swallow, and Cerulean Warbler.

The refuge cooperates in partnerships with a wide variety of organizations and individuals to provide environmental education, to support habitat conservation and management on public and private lands, and to protect additional habitat in the Connecticut River watershed.

The refuge owes its existence to the advocacy of Silvio O. Conte (R-MA), who introduced legislation in 1991 to protect the river and its lands. The Congressman was a 26-year member of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC).

Of his fellow conservationist and Congressman, John Dingell (D-MI) said, "Silvio Conte was a fierce defender of the fragile resources protected by the National Wildlife Refuge System and naming the refuge after him was a fitting tribute. Were he with us today, he would still be making his persuasive and colorful speeches in support of the Connecticut River Basin, the largest river basin in New England. As his colleague in the House of Representatives and fellow member of the MBCC, he was a dear friend and one I was happy to fight beside."

The refuge is graced with the support of not one, but at least [five different friends groups](#), as well as coalition participation by state, regional, and national organizations. Conte NFWR is powered by partnerships with 40 organizations and agencies. It is a symbiotic relationship that focuses on working together to achieve goals.

Refuge visitors are welcome at four facilities, including an education center at the Montshire Museum of Science. To celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Stamp next month, the [Friends of the refuge's Pondicherry Division](#) will sponsor a guided snowshoe hike on 16 March.

Law Enforcement section of the USFWS handled matters related to the Duck Stamp.

4) There were 2,099 artwork submissions for the 1982-1983 stamp. This is the highest number of entries recorded.

5) After years of controversy, the Migratory Bird Conservation Act was passed on February 18, 1929. It created the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. The MBCC would have little power until five years later when passage of the Stamp act would provide a solid funding mechanism for habitat acquisition.

6) The first Federal Duck Stamp was put on sale on 22 August 1934. There were 635,000 of these Stamps sold.

7) The Stamp is usually released on or about the start of July of each year. Besides the first stamp (see #6, above), another exception was for the 1949-1950 stamp, when it was released on 1 September 1949, due to Congressional delay over raising the stamp price from \$1 to \$2.

8) The first national Jr. Duck Stamp contest began with eight states participating in 1993.

9) Rep. John D. Dingell (D - MI) has been the longest-serving member of the MBCC, since 1969.

## Refuge Land Acquisition and the Stamp - A Look at the Northeast

The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp and other groups and concerned individuals have long argued that since the current \$15 price of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp came into effect, in 1991, the Stamp has lost an estimated 40 percent of its value. This is based on the consumer price index. But land prices are another vital measurement, with overall targeted wetland and grassland prices having tripled, from an average of \$306 to \$1,091 per acre.

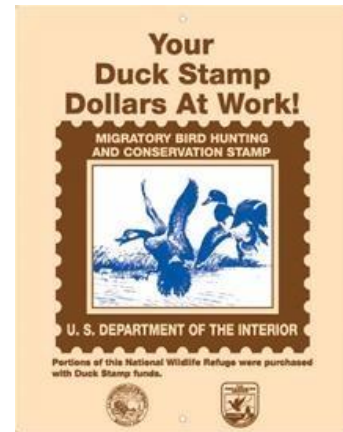
Since this particular issue of *Wingtips* began with a case study of a northeastern refuge (Silvio O. Conte NFWR), it may be instructive to look deeper into Region 5 land prices.

We can start by looking at [Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge](#) in southern New Jersey, a refuge still referred to as "Brigantine" by many old-timers.

The refuge was established in 1939 to protect and manage coastal habitats for wintering waterfowl. This area has long been a stronghold for wintering Black Ducks, and it is a major stopover site for huge numbers of migrating shorebirds. The boundary for potential acquisition has been expanded several times, most recently in 1994, and it currently includes over 72,000 acres, of which almost 48,000 acres, or 66 percent of the desired total, are protected in the NWR.

Just over 40,000 of these acres are protected in fee title, acquired through the Migratory Bird and Conservation Fund (MBCF), where Stamp dollars are deposited. The total cost has been about \$18 million.

Since 2001, approximately 2,000 acres were purchased at an average cost of \$4,500 per acre. But to achieve an 80 percent level of completion, Forsythe NWR would need to protect an additional 10,000 acres. At the rate of 200 acres per year, the rate over the past decade, it would take 50 years to reach 80 percent completion, and using the most recent 10-year average cost per acre, it would require \$45 million.



This is just one example of acquisition needs and acquisition reality. Clearly, more funding has to be available, including increasing funding through the MBCF and the Stamp.

At the same time, to get an idea about some other NWR costs in the Northeast, here are some recent (since 2009) refuge acquisitions in Region 5 using MBCF/Stamp dollars (but in two cases, in combination with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund - LWCF, marked \*):

<u>Refuge</u>	<u>Price Per Acre</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Date</u>
Bombay Hook (DE)	\$1,722	273	09/09
Lake Umbagog (NH/ME)	\$763	38	09/09
Blackwater (MD)*	\$2,795	823	09/09
Canaan Valley (WV)	\$6,740	73	08/11
Lake Umbagog (NH)*	\$800	4,532	03/12
Montezuma (NY)	\$3,800	625	12/12
Blackwater (MD)	\$4,992	201	09/13

In one case, between 2012 and 2013, the FWS had a 950+ acre tract in Virginia under option for \$8.3 million or about \$8,500/acre. It wasn't cheap, but it was among the highest priority tracts identified in the system's land protection plan and one that the USFWS had been negotiating over for more than a decade. Unfortunately, the opportunity to secure that property was lost because the USFWS could not come up with the funds during the year that it was under option. Partners would not step in due to the uncertainty of future funds being made available to re-purchase the land. Unfortunately, this is all too common a story.

Across the country, the USFWS has identified 5.07 million acres of fee lands for refuge purchase at a projected cost of \$10 to \$25 billion. An additional 3.75 million acres of easement property have also been identified at a projected cost of \$1.1 to \$2.8 billion. If 100,000 acres were actually secured per year - half fee title and half easement - it would still take a century to secure the fee title properties and 75 years to secure the easement properties.

The mix of funding - including the LWCF and the MBCF - will have to be increased considerably to reach these prospective goals.

Finally and significantly, the USFWS opened a comment period over a [Plan for Strategic Growth](#) to be incorporated as a [chapter](#) in their Service Manual. (All comments are due by March 3.) You can access our Friends group's comments on the plan [here](#).

## News and Notes

1) The 80th Anniversary for the Stamp is coming soon. It was March 16, 1934 when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the bill to create the Stamp. See our historic details [here](#). The 80th anniversary will be recognized a number of ways (including that field trip mentioned in the top article on the Conte NFWR.)

2) It's that time of year again, time to consider the Junior Duck Stamp Contest. State deadlines for most states and U.S. Territories will be March 15, 2014. There are some exceptions: South Carolina has already had its deadline pass earlier this month, and March 1 is the deadline for Arizona, Maine, and Ohio. Contest entries by state or territory should be through state coordinators. More information can be found on the [JDS website page](#) and from individual [state coordinators](#).



3) Looking for a pro-Stamp printed PSA for birders, one that's appropriate for your newsletter, website, or blog? Try a number of models found [here](#). A variation on the standard PSA appears regularly in [The Birding Wire](#).

4) Yes, you can connect on Facebook with fellow Stamp enthusiasts. It's quick, easy, and informative. See [here](#).

5) And remember life before Facebook? That was a decade ago. We used to have things called listservs to communicate. Well, we still have one for Stamp-supporters and their announcements/discussions. To get on the Stamp-support listserv, send a request to [Debbie Harwood](#). (When you post notices, however, be sure to start your subject line with the word "Stamp.")

6) Our Friends group will be at the 79th [North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference](#) next month in Denver. If you are attending, be sure to come to our display booth.

7) Don't forget the state wetland/conservation/waterfowl stamps! We've mentioned them a number of times in *Wingtips*. These are state-based stamps - usually the equivalent of licenses - with proceeds going to conservation. (For example, in 2012, 33 states issued such stamps, with 29

featuring a waterfowl species.) Exactly how the funds are spent may differ state to state, but the cause is usually parallel to the federal effort. Do inquire about your own state's program!  
8) Congressman [John D. Dingell](#) (D-MI), the longest-serving member of the U.S. House of Representatives and firm champion of the "Duck Stamp" on the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, announced that he will not stand for re-election in November. He will be leaving behind a tremendous legacy of work, dedication, and success.

## About the Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

Our Friends Group is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to two basic goals:

1. To increase promotional and educational efforts among various target audiences concerning the stamp and the National Wildlife Refuge system.
2. To increase the regular, voluntary purchase of the stamp among hunters and non-hunters alike.



The purchase of a stamp is, perhaps, *the easiest thing you can* do to protect crucial wetland and grassland habitat in the U.S. Indeed, a 15-dollar purchase of a stamp goes a very long way!

Our "Regular Friend" fee is modest, equal to the cost of one current Stamp (\$15), but all Friends are *also* asked to pledge to buy two stamps per year, joining with other individuals and organizations across the country with that promotional effort. Our "Friend's Year" also corresponds with the "year" of a valid Stamp - from July to July.

[Become a Friend Today!](#)