



Alaska's Waterfowl Stamp  
*First of State*

by Dolores A. Larson

**T**he thrill of a cloud of honking geese spiraling overhead is exciting for most Americans. Few people realize, however, that Alaska is the breeding ground for approximately ten million ducks and 1 million geese that leave the state each fall. Although most ducks and geese from Alaska use the Pacific flyway, many others travel as far east as the Atlantic coast.

Good news for Alaskans is that they now have a mechanism to participate in funding the waterfowl program of our state. Just as the name im-

plies, "The Alaska Waterfowl Conservation Stamp" is intended to raise money for conservation and enhancement of waterfowl, acquisition of wetland habitats, and related projects, much like the federal migratory bird hunting stamp, better known as the "duck stamp." Alaska's stamp will provide hunters and non-consumptive users alike with a means of contributing to waterfowl management, while giving them something to show for their contribution.

The Alaska waterfowl conservation stamp act was authorized by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Bill Sheffield in 1984. The \$5.00 stamp is mandatory for the 1985 hunting season for all waterfowl hunters in Alaska between the ages of 16 and 60. Exceptions are low-income persons eligible for the 25-cent hunting license and disabled veterans. Waterfowl hunters must purchase both the Alaskan stamp and the Federal Duck Stamp.

First of State stamps are available now and will be on sale until June 30, 1987. Stamp collectors and hunters may order directly from the Department of Revenue or purchase through the usual license outlets.

An acrylic painting by Minnesota artist Daniel Smith of emperor geese beside a tundra pond was selected for Alaska's first stamp design. Artwork was selected as part of an artist-publisher partnership package. That is, all the artwork was submitted by artists already sponsored by publishers. Ten proposals from six publishing companies were submitted in a national competitive bid process. The number and quality of the original designs and proposals were exceptional and included a total of 35 waterfowl paintings. Selection criteria included the need for the proposal to provide a good opportunity for fundraising while establishing the Alaska Waterfowl Stamp series as a fine, collection-quality art. The Department of Revenue, the Alaska State Council of the Arts, and ADF&G judged the proposals.

Approximately 130,000 stamps are to be printed with 25,000 set aside to go with the limited edition prints of the artwork. The actual number of limited edition prints will be determined by the number of prints ordered by October 31, 1985. Approximately 4,000 art-quality posters are also available for sale. The posters and limited edition prints will be on sale at most art dealers. Prints will be issued to distributors no later than January 10, 1986, and perhaps earlier.

Regular edition prints, numbered, signed by the artist and accompanied by the mint stamp will retail at \$140.00. A special "First of State" collector medallion and print set, numbered and signed by the artist and with a gold plated medallion, plus stamp will retail for \$305.00. Executive edition prints, numbered and signed by the artist with stamp medallion and a color *remarque* hand painted by the artist will retail for \$755.00. Posters will sell for \$16.00. Collectors may purchase plate block numbers for \$20.00 and full sheets of 30 stamps for \$150.00. Records of all print numbers and buyers will be kept so that matching numbers will be available in future years.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game believes that more than 85 percent of revenue will come from sale of art prints and stamps outside the state. Revenue estimates of \$200,000 to \$1 million for next fiscal year contrast with the department's present waterfowl budget of \$76,000. Appropriately, some of the revenue will help to bring back the emperor goose which has recently declined to less than 60,000 birds.

Many bird watchers and ornithologists rate the emperor goose as the most beautiful goose in the world. The throat and lower neck of this moderate-sized goose are black. The remainder of the head and neck is white, but is often stained a rusty hue from feeding in tidal ponds where concentrations of iron oxide occur. The short bill is pink, and its legs are orange or yellow. Adult birds have symmetrically scalloped gray, black and white plumage. Sometimes called "beach geese," emperors frequently forage for seaweed and eelgrass along coastal flats, occasionally thrusting their heads into the mud to eat mussels or clams.

Wetlands and coastal salt marshes are vital to emperors and other waterfowl. It has been estimated that nearly one-half million acres of wetlands are lost each year. With about one-third of our nation's endangered or threatened species utilizing these areas, the conservation of these key habitats is critical.

Alaska joins with New York in becoming the 30th and 31st states with waterfowl stamp programs. Other states and a growing number of private organizations are raising funds for fish and wildlife conservation by meeting a growing demand for wildlife art.

In 1934, waterfowl enthusiasts began collecting federal duck stamps. A complete set in mint condition is worth as much as \$6,000. Art prints of the federal stamps have been sold individually by the artists; the only two complete sets in existence are worth \$85,000 each. State stamp and print programs offer collectors a chance to invest in wildlife conservation and art simultaneously. State stamp series have rapidly gained in value, and "First of State" art prints have doubled in value within the first year.

In addition to being a good investment, wildlife stamps and art prints offer opportunities for the public to address the growing concern for the welfare of fish, wildlife, and wildlife habitat. During the last ten years, North American waterfowl populations have fallen dramatically, primarily due to continued loss of habitat. Problems in the "lower 48," such as drought in the prairie region, disease, and overcrowding of wintering areas, require a great deal more attention on the part of both state and federal agencies. A combination of good breeding grounds, adequate food, and protection will allow goose populations to expand and restore depleted stocks. Broad public support is imperative for that situation to occur.

Department of Fish and Game officials are hopeful that Alaska's first waterfowl stamp and beautiful emperor goose art prints will be highly successful in assisting state waterfowl programs. Both the mystique of Alaska and public demand for wildlife art should bring great benefits to Alaska's waterfowl.

*Dolores Larson has been an Information Officer with the Department for the past 14 years. Oil painting and pastel work are among her hobbies.*



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