



NEW ENGLAND COASTAL PROGRAM

Craig R. Ferris, Ph.D.
3 Orange Pippin Road
Sandy Hook, CT 06482
(203) 426-2466 Fax (203) 426-2733
cferris@ducks.org

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Senator Edward Meyer, Co-Chair
Representative Richard Roy, Co-Chair
Environment Committee
3200 Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: HB 6371

Dear Senator Meyer and Representative Roy;

Ducks Unlimited appreciates the opportunity to comment on HB 6371 that is before your Committee. **Specifically, Ducks Unlimited is opposed to the changes in Sections 49-51 related to the Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program.** We understand the difficult fiscal situation Connecticut and every state faces, but now is not the time to eliminate funding for vital wildlife habitat.

With more than a million supporters including more than 3,000 members in Connecticut, Ducks Unlimited is the world's largest and most effective wetland and waterfowl conservation organization. A non-profit organization, Ducks Unlimited has conserved more than 12 million acres in North America since its founding in 1937 and works closely with the Department of Environmental Protection conserving over 1,400 acres of wetlands and associated habitat in Connecticut. Ducks Unlimited is committed to partnering with the State to conserve at least 500 acres of habitat in Connecticut over the next ten years. This goal will not be met without the vital funding provided by waterfowl hunters through the Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp. We applaud the proposed increase in the stamp price, but these funds must be dedicated to wetland conservation.

Presently, all funds raised from the sale of state duck stamps must be used for:

“(1) The development, management, preservation, conservation, acquisition, purchase and maintenance of waterfowl habitat and wetlands and purchase or acquisition of recreational rights or interests relating to migratory birds; and (2) the design, production, promotion and procurement and sale of the prints and related artwork.”

In addition, under current law, the decisions as to how these funds are expended are made by the Citizen's Advisory Committee, a committee on which Ducks Unlimited has been proud to serve since its inception in 1993. Changes proposed by HB 6371 eliminate these provisions, and the disposition of funds from the Stamp program is ambiguous. Although not explicitly stated in the language of the bill as written, one can only assume these funds will revert to the general fund, as do most of the other funds addressed in this bill. Raising the stamp price then reverting the funds is nothing more than a tax increase on waterfowl hunters to fill the coffers of the General Fund.

Ducks Unlimited strongly objects to these changes. The Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp Program was patterned after the highly successful Federal Migratory Bird Stamp program, and Migratory Bird Stamp programs in other states, with the express purpose of raising funds to help conserve habitat for migratory waterfowl. Since it was established in 1993, the Connecticut program has raised nearly \$1.2 million, of which nearly \$900,000 has been expended to conserve 2,240 acres on over 50 different wetland restoration projects. More important, these funds have been used to leverage over \$2 million in federal funds and funds from other conservation partners. In addition to benefitting waterfowl, the habitat conservation efforts made possible by these funds have benefitted literally hundreds of species of plants and wildlife that utilize the state's valuable wetland resources.

When the Migratory Bird Stamp Program was first proposed, waterfowl enthusiasts, largely sportsmen and women, embraced the program on the premise that the money would be used to provide habitat for the state's waterfowl resources. Subsequently, when an increase in the cost of the stamp from \$5 to \$10 was proposed, this too was enthusiastically supported by waterfowl enthusiasts. These sportsmen and women know the key to healthy wildlife populations is habitat, and they were, and still are, willing to shoulder the burden of providing habitat for the resource they love. To divert these funds after the fact represents a significant breach of trust of the people of Connecticut, and Ducks Unlimited urges the members of the Environment Committee to reconsider these changes. Ducks Unlimited respectfully request that you allow the Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp program to continue to function as it was intended, and to continue the excellent habitat conservation work that has been the hallmark of this program.

Sincerely;

Craig R. Ferris, Ph.D.
Regional Biologist
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.