

Texas Waterfowl Stamp Program

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Abstract: With the creation of a waterfowl stamp in 1981, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department opted for a bid procedure rather than an art contest and established stringent specifications to select a successful bidder. The procedure paid off, and Texas made \$1.2 million from the sale of stamps and art prints with its first year stamp. All revenue from stamp sale receipts may be spent only for research, management and protection of waterfowl; for the acquisition, lease, or development of waterfowl habitats in the state; or for grants as provided by the enabling legislation.

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In June 1981, the 67th Texas Legislature passed a law creating a state waterfowl stamp. The intent of the law was to provide funds for research, management and protection of waterfowl, and for the acquisition, lease or development of waterfowl habitat in the state. Funds can also be used to make grants to appropriate international nonprofit organizations for the purpose of acquiring, developing, and maintaining waterfowl propagation areas within the Dominion of Canada that provide waterfowl for the Central Flyway. The legislation was passed late in the session when all other licenses and stamps were in the process of being printed for delivery to license deputies at mid-August. With the passage of the bill, the immediate problem was getting a stamp designed, printed and distributed to Department offices and license deputies by 1 September.

Although the Department has been producing 2 other stamps for years, a white-wing dove stamp and an archery stamp, these had always been produced by in-house artists with no attempt made to sell prints. The enabling legislation creating the waterfowl stamp authorized the Parks and Wildlife Commission to prescribe by regulation the form, design, and manner of issuance of the stamp, and it also designated that the Department would retain reproduction rights to the stamp. (A copy of the legislation may be obtained from the author.)

No one in the Department had any experience or first-hand knowledge about selling art prints, and it was concluded that the required expertise and marketing capabilities to print, advertise, and distribute such prints was not within the realm of possibilities for in-house productions.

Artists began calling, wanting to know how to participate in the waterfowl art contest. A couple of artists brought paintings to the Department, offering them free, just for the privilege of having produced the first Texas Waterfowl Stamp.

Some research revealed that most other states having waterfowl stamps were making little if any money from the sale of prints of the stamps. A competitive bid procedure was designed wherein art firms or artists would submit a package proposal to the Department, and a guaranteed minimum to the Department, to be established in an escrow account upon award of the bid. Each bidder had to submit the original art, along with their marketing proposal and guaranteed income to the Department. The Parks and Wildlife Commissioners would review all submissions, including the original works of art, and make the final selection based primarily on the amount of revenue to be accrued, but also on the quality of the art.

Bid specifications were written and approved by the Parks and Wildlife Commission. (A copy of the 1982 bid specifications may be obtained from the author.) Upon approval, news releases informing the public of the bid procedures went to all Texas newspapers, radio and television stations. Letters were also written to every art dealer in the Ducks Unlimited magazine. Deadline for submission of art and bid was 15 July.

Most of the comments received were complaints that the program should be restricted to only Texas artists.

For the 1981 stamp, 7 bids were received. Royalties bid ranged from \$40.63 to \$25.97 with a minimum guaranteed amount of \$300,000 and \$10,000 respectively. Collectors Covey was awarded the bid for the first waterfowl stamp, and 16,000 prints of Larry Hayden's pair of mallards were sold, earning the Department \$670,000 (excluding stamps purchased to accompany the prints). The successful bidder prints, distributes and sells art prints only. The Department uses a contract printer for the actual production of the stamps and makes distribution to its own offices and license deputies. Except for providing the design, the successful bidder is in no way involved with the stamp production. Sales of stamps to sportsmen and collectors were in excess of 131,000 bringing in approximately \$600,000 for a total of \$1,270,000. (As of this writing, October 6, 1982, all the figures are not in; the total could be as much as \$1.4 million.)

Bid specifications for the 1982 stamp were essentially the same as 1981, but artists and/or firms had more time to prepare art and bids. Bid specifications were released January 2, 1982, and all entries had to be received by

the Department no later than April 1, 1982. Although there was considerable interest, and many artists checked with the Department to ensure they were complying with bid specifications, only 4 submissions were received. The royalties bid were lower than those for 1981, ranging from \$35.63 to \$12.50. The guaranteed minimum bids ranged from \$350,000 to \$100.

Again, Collectors Covey was awarded the bid to produce the second Texas waterfowl stamp art prints. Orders were taken by Collectors Covey through August 31, 1982, to determine the edition size. Orders were received for 9,500 prints which means that the \$350,000 guarantee will be all the income from prints the Department will earn this year, since the royalty per print is \$35.63. It would take an edition size of nearly 10,000 to earn the \$350,000 guaranteed minimum.

Some artists within the state still want to see the bid specifications changed to make it easier to submit entries (a simple contest), and they also prefer that competition be restricted to Texas artists. Others who think the extra income to the Department for waterfowl research and habitat is great, and they don't mind competing on the present basis. There are 2 things certain. The intent of the legislation creating the waterfowl stamp was to raise money for improvement of waterfowl and waterfowl habitat; it was not intended to promote artists. Secondly, Texas did it right. As of this date, neither the federal program or any other state program has been as successful as Texas with a waterfowl stamp.