

The National Duck Stamp Collectors Society (an APS affiliate) has and will continue to support the Federal Duck Stamp Office in its mission to promote wetlands conservation through the sale of duck stamps. This support does not mean that we should not call them to task for mistakes such as those that led to the fiasco around the 2nd duck stamp minisheet. These mistakes were even more grievous, given the widespread criticism last year of their handling of the 1st minisheet. Didn't they learn anything from that experience?

Last year the minisheet (Scott RW72b) was issued in a miniscule quantity of 1000 with little advance notice and no restrictions on sales through the USPS Stamp Fulfillment Services. As a result, dealers "in the know" bought large quantities and most collectors were shut out and had to buy them in the aftermarket.

This year the distribution to collectors was not much improved, and an unnecessary, more valuable variety was created through the addition of a signature line for the engraver below that of the artist. The quantity sold was increased to 10,000 and the price increased to \$10 over face value, but information and order quantities were both mishandled.

First it was announced that the minisheets would be introduced at the Washington International Stamp Show, with no orders taken by the USPS until after the show. In fact, advance orders were taken for half the print run, with no advance notice and none left to sell after the show. Both advance orders and sales at the show allowed 10 copies to be sold to each person, so that just 1000 people could buy out the total supply. A similarly generous limitation applied to press sheets of the water activated and self-adhesive duck stamps, which were increased from 100 to 250 sheets this year and also sold out rapidly to a small group of buyers.

At the show, dealers were allowed to line up and make minisheet purchases ahead of the general public. In addition, the engraver was on hand to sign copies purchased at the show, since this line was blank on all copies sold, but he only signed about 2000 copies, thus creating another instant rarity. Those collectors who were successful in buying sheets and getting them signed reaped a windfall of \$1000 or more if they bought 10 copies, as most did.

So here are the sins: not printing enough for the demand that could reasonably be expected, not providing correct information about advance sales, not limiting individual sales enough, allowing dealers to purchase ahead of individual collectors, and not having all sheets issued signed by the engraver as well as the artist.

Of all of these, I feel the treatment of the individual collector to be the most egregious. The DSO is part of our government and as citizens, we are entitled to fair and equal opportunity to buy these sheets, with no special privileges to anyone. If there are not going to be enough printed to meet

the demand, then the allocation should be by lot, just as was done for the reissued Legends of the West sheetlet.

I think the DSO owes the collecting public - indeed, the American public - a full explanation of what happened and why, identification of who was responsible, and an apology and a promise that this will not happen again. If the DSO needs collector input to avoid such mistakes in the future, our society is ready to offer it.

Ira Cotton  
President, National Duck Stamp Collectors Society

**NOTE TO MEMBERS:** After emailing this to Linn's, I asked them to add a note stating that even though I am president, the letter is my opinion and not necessarily the view of our society.

Please email me ([Cotton@Novia.net](mailto:Cotton@Novia.net)) with your views, pro or con. Also, please indicate if we can post your comments or publish them in Duck Tracks. Thanks!