



Conway teen's painting to be seen on U.S. stamp

BY HEATHER WECSLER

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A Conway youth will see his artwork featured on a new stamp.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service selected Paul Willey, 18-year-old senior at Conway High School-West Campus, as the winner of this year's Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest.

Judges named his picture, titled "An Elegant Pair," the top entry among the best-of-state entries from the 50 states, the District of Columbia and American Samoa.

His mixed-media depiction of two widgeons will appear on the 2007-08 Federal Junior Duck Stamp, which will be released for \$ 5 to stamp collectors and others on June 22.

The stamps cannot be used for postage. But proceeds from the stamps sales will be used to support environmental education efforts as well as prizes for the award winners. As the firstplace winner, Willey will receive a trip to Washington, D. C., along with the contest's state coordinator, his art teacher and a parent. Willey also will receive \$ 5, 000 for his artwork and another \$ 500 for his conservation message.

"This is a turning point for me because I've been wanting to get this since the sixth grade," Willey said. "It's a milestone for me." His conservation message, on the back of his entry, was simple: "Conservation is the key to better environment for all." Willey's mother, Maureen Willey, credits his sixth-grade art teacher Suzanne Kunkel with introducing her son to the contest. Kunkel is now Willey's art teacher in independent study. Originally created in 1934 as the federal licenses required for hunting migratory waterfowl, Federal Duck Stamps now help fund wetland conservation. Of every dollar generated by the stamp sales, 98 cents goes directly to buy or lease wetland habitat for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The more than \$ 700 million raised by the program has been used to acquire more than 5. 2 million acres of habitat.

Contest winners must not only be talented artists but also knowledgeable about the ducks they are portraying. They must show the birds in the right environment and with all the right feathers in place.

"As I've grown as an artist, I've also gotten very good with duck identification," Willey said. "I know where they live and where they migrate."

He said he also now knows a great deal more about the importance of preserving wetlands.

Willey has won the state's "Best of Show" three times.

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Across the nation this year, more than 34, 000 Junior Duck Stamp design entries poured in, including 1, 100 in Arkansas.

The “Best of Show” designs were then sent to Washington, D. C., where the top three entries were chosen Friday by a panel of five judges.

The judges are people active in wildlife art, conservation and the business community.

“It is a great joy for me to acknowledge Paul Willey’s artistry today,” said David Verhey, acting assistant secretary of the U. S. Department of the Interior, in a news release Friday. “Paul’s eye for the natural world and his skill in putting their observations to canvas is an inspiration.”

Willey said he plans to save his prize money for now, but he hopes to use it to further his art while he is in college. He plans to enroll at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway this fall.

His painting can be seen at [www. fws. gov / duckstamps /](http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/).

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Contact: webmaster@nwanews.com