

# Clarity needed in duck stamp contest

By David Lias

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In case you hadn't heard, 6-year-old Madison Grimm of Burbank recently won the 2013 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest.

Then, she had the first place award taken away when questions arose about whether she properly followed contest rules.

A firestorm (at least in some media circles) ensued. Eventually, Madison was once again declared the contest winner.

After national attention began to focus on Madison in mid-April and spilled over into early May, this issue now seems to be settled.

Some disturbing things surfaced as this all played out. And the source of the controversy – the question of whether the rules were correctly

followed – still hasn't been properly addressed.

Madison, the daughter of Adam and Janet Grimm of rural Burbank, learned April 19 that she won the annual duck stamp contest, then was told April 26 that she had been disqualified amid questions of how she had done her painting.

On May 2, that decision was reversed.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a statement that day saying Madison had been reinstated as the winner after further analysis of the contest rules.

"Following the contest, concerns were raised about the authenticity of the work," the statement said. "The service disqualified the artwork last week. Since that time, the service has continued to evaluate its decision and has decided to reinstate the original winner."

The Fish and Wildlife

Service said in its statement that its decision to reinstate Madison as the winner "was made in recognition of the fact that her work was judged the winner during a fair and open public contest."

"The service respects the decision of the contest judges and apologizes for any distress this process may have caused the top-placing artists and their families, teachers and friends," the agency said.

It would appear that the people that run the Junior Duck Stamp Contest might have concluded that the easiest way to solve this mess was to give the award back to Madison.

Madison used an unpublished photo of a duck that her father supplied as a reference for her painting. She also used a technique called a graphite transfer, in which an artist applies a

pencil lead to a print of the photo to create an outline for a painting. Both are legal, and both are accepted and common among artists, said Robert Lesino, who was chief of the Federal Duck Stamp Program from 1993 until 2001 and defended Madison.

We must question, however, whether Lesino's conclusions can be easily accepted with the rules written the way they are currently.

Those rules state, in part, "Design entries must be the contestant's original, hand-illustrated creation and may not be traced or copied from published photographs or other artists' works."

Adding to the controversy is last year's junior duck stamp winner, Christine Clayton, now 18, of Sidney, OH. She told the *Argus Leader* last month, shortly after Madison's

award was taken back, that she also used the graphite transfer method, again with an unpublished photo by Adam Grimm, to assist her in creating her winning entry.

Laurie Shaffer, current chief of the federal duck stamp program, had defended the decision to disqualify in a letter, dated April 29, that she sent to Madison's parents. She added that "the clarity of language in the rules is in question and we will be working to refine them so there is less ambiguity."

This is one of those situations where relying on one's hunches – you know, if it "quacks like a duck, it must be a duck" isn't sufficient.

We hope the contest awards will go at least one step, and perhaps several steps further, and consider revising the

rules of the contest so that they are easier to understand by all participants, and contain some ironclad statements that truly define what can and cannot be done, and what practices would disqualify an artist.

More clarity to the rules is indeed needed, and we hope as Madison grows as an artist, we'll be publishing more stories about her winning more contests – without controversy.

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