

## Highly-valued duck blinds create fierce competition

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The Daily Advance  
Saturday, August 25, 2012

CURRITUCK — Duck blinds in Currituck County are highly prized among hunters. In many cases, the blinds have been in families for generations.

But one slip, one late application, could land the family heirloom in a pool of new applicants. A hunter with a duck blind license can keep it for life, as long as he or she renews the application with the Currituck Game Commission on time. If the license lapses, the duck blind is awarded in a drawing for anyone who signs up.

The competition for any unclaimed duck blinds can be fierce.

Local hunter and author Travis Morris said he knows one farmer who lost his license and never got it back.

Duck hunting has been a long-time tradition in Currituck. Morris said the sport is not what it was decades ago when ducks, geese and other wildfowl were more abundant, but hunting is still a big business.

“It’s still important in Currituck. If you don’t think so, try to get somebody’s duck blind,” said Morris.

At one of the Currituck Game Commission’s drawings earlier this month, 60 people were after one floating blind.

N.C. Wildlife Resources officer Steve Jarvis said Dare and Currituck counties have about 1,000 blinds between them.

Rules for the blinds are designed to give newcomers a priority in securing a blind. But locals find ways to keep duck blinds in the family.

“Very seldom does a good blind come open,” said Jarvis.

For a couple hundred hunting guides, the 60-day hunting season is their livelihood, said Jarvis. In summer, many of the guides turn toward commercial crabbing.

Hunting guides will take out parties of two or three, usually from outside Currituck, for about \$250, said Jarvis. Some outfitters hire several guides as they gain a favorable reputation among hunters.

Hunt clubs, such as the Currituck Club and Pine Island Club, also stake out patches of marsh for duck blinds. Historically, the Currituck County hunt clubs have catered to wealthy sportsmen who rely on local guides to set up the hunt.

Some years the wildfowl cooperate with the hunt. The warm winter last year meant most of the birds stayed farther north. Colder weather the year before was better for hunting because ducks and geese flew farther south to escape freezing temperatures.

First to arrive is the more cold-sensitive blue-winged teal, usually seen around the first of September. Later in the season, Snow Geese will arrive in Currituck, one of their traditional wintering grounds, said Jarvis.

Josh Bass, president of Currituck's Chamber of Commerce, said he doesn't have figures on the hunting parties' economic impact, but expects their mark must be far-reaching. Consider the wood sold by hardware stores for repairing the blinds, the meals sold to hunters, the gun shops and decoy-makers, and the sport must be big business, he said.

"It's probably a bigger industry than you realize," said Bass.