



January 18, 2024

House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee
Chesapeake Subcommittee

RE: **House Bill 288** (Wiley) - *Stationary blinds for waterfowl; providing location of blinds to Department of Wildlife Resources*

Position: **SUPPORT**

Chairman Bulova,

On behalf of the members of Delta Waterfowl, both in Virginia and around the country, I'm writing you today in **support** of **House Bill 288** – legislation that will direct the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to publish the GPS coordinates of stationary waterfowl blinds on its website in a searchable, publicly accessible, and conspicuous manner.

For some background, Delta Waterfowl is the largest organization in North America dedicated to ducks and duck hunters. Founded at the famed Delta Marsh in Manitoba in 1911, with its United States Headquarters in Bismarck, North Dakota, we work to produce ducks through intensive management programs and conservation of breeding duck habitat. We also conduct vital waterfowl research and promote and protect the continuing tradition of waterfowl hunting in North America.

Waterfowl hunting has a long, rich history in the Commonwealth. From the miles of shoreline of marshes and rivers, to the famed Chesapeake Bay, hunters and conservationists from across the United States flock to Virginia each fall and winter to take part in this migration event.

With this rich history comes a series of complex rules, regulation and statues around stationary waterfowl blinds licensed in public waters east of Interstate 95. These structures, licensed through the DWR, offer hunters concealment from waterfowl during the hunt. Each hunter applying to license a blind in public waters, whether riparian or non-riparian, are required to give the DWR the GPS coordinates of the exact location of the blind site on an annual basis.

This commonsense legislation would take what is essentially already public data – the location of stationary blinds - and make it easily accessible and readily available to the public. It would require little to no staff time on the part of the DWR to develop and maintain this information in a conspicuous manner on a yearly basis.

For years, our neighbors to the north in Maryland have made waterfowl blind locations publicly accessible through their Department of Natural Resources website. This offers hunters, boaters and the general public with the knowledge of where these structures are erected in public waters. Waterfowl hunters have viewed this tool as a resource in Maryland and it has yielded no incident to date.

There are more than 24,705 waterfowl hunters in the Commonwealth. In 2023, Virginia had 1,145 Non-Riparian blinds and 2,852 Riparian blinds licensed in the public waters east of Interstate 95. By providing the sportsmen and women in Virginia with this knowledge, it will help shed light on additional areas for hunting opportunities in public waters in the eastern part of the state while ensuring they stay far enough away from surrounding stationary blinds.

This legislation is also good for private riparian land owners wishing to make the location of their stationary blinds known to prevent accidental encroachment or would-be trespassers. Finally, this legislation is good for the general public accessing public waterways in the Commonwealth east of Interstate 95 ensuring they can safely navigate without fear of concealed structures in their path.

Delta Waterfowl supports any legislation that seeks to make the rules, laws and statues around waterfowl hunting easier to understand and more inviting for the general public. This legislation will create awareness of where these stationary blinds are and bring access to public waters into the 21st Century.

We look forward to working with Delegate Wiley, this subcommittee, the full House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee, and the rest of the General Assembly in supporting this legislation and sending it to Governor Youngkin's desk.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cy Baird". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Cyrus Hunter Baird
Senior Director of Government Affairs
Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Cc:

Delegate Herring
Delegate Clark
Delegate Hernandez
Delegate Laufer
Delegate Ware
Delegate Wilt
Delegate Webert
Delegate Bloxom
Delegate Lopez