

Hyde County Waterfowl Blind Committee Meeting #1

7:00pm Tuesday, April 9, 2019 / Hyde County Government Center / Extension Teaching Kitchen

Members Present: Randy Hignite, Michael Dean Sadler, Thomas Edward Newman, Ray Tooley, Adam Jones, Teddy Gibbs, Marco Gibbs, Brett Mason, Chase Luker

Members Absent: Gregory Berry (prior professional commitment)

Chase Luker opened the meeting by introducing the purpose and intent of the meeting and fielded initial questions about placement of members on the committee. Members were appointed by Hyde County Commissioners in three categories. The three classifications of member are landowners, guides, and public water hunters, plus an at large member to serve as moderator. The three landowners selected were Ray Tooley, Randy Hignite, and Gregory Berry. Hunters included Marco Gibbs, Thomas Edward Newman, and Michael Dean Sadler, with the latter 2 expressing comment at the Public Hearing hosted in March. Brett Mason, Adam Jones, and Teddy Gibbs represent guides, while Chase Luker moderates the meetings and serves as a liaison to the County Commissioners. The charge of the committee is to propose a set of blind laws that protects residents' abilities to hunt, conserves the Hyde County guides' abilities to outfit, allow for safe public use, and to conserve the hunting resource (waterfowl) on public lands and waters adjacent to Mainland Hyde County, all with a commitment to compromise.

Members were allowed to introduce themselves and to identify both a challenge and an opportunity that is present with current open water waterfowl hunting. An overwhelming majority expressed concerns with increased hunting pressure, growing distressed boater emergencies, and trespassing on private land and/or public waterfowl hunters setting up within unsafe distances of other established/occupied hunting sites. Opportunities noted include better resource management, reduction in enforcement requirements, improvement of public access, and increased economic viability for Hyde County.

Chase Luker introduced submitted public comments and a review was held by all. Many comments fell short of offering solutions, instead being rather critical of the prior proposal. All members felt that the prior proposal was far too prohibitive and agreed that the hunting public does have an interest.

A roundtable discussion was held concerning firsthand encounters and other anecdotal statements in regards to the decline in ability for private land use by landowners, as well as overcrowding on public marshes and waters. Discussion was had to interface with refuge officials regarding a permitting process to ensure safe distances and regulate overcrowding.

Private land ownership and use was then discussed. Key topics within were safe and ethical distances for setbacks of other hunters. All agreed that 500 yards was far too great and that landowners, while they certainly have a right to hunt waterfowl, may not tie up acres of public water. However, deeds can be pulled to establish riparian rights through surveying.

A discussion of other local blind laws was conducted by the moderator, with discussion over negative and positive aspects of each. Adam Jones and Teddy Gibbs commented on how other blind laws in

other counties have concentrated the general hunting public as well as guides into waters traditionally hunted by Hyde County residents and had infringed on residents' ability to hunt waterfowl on public water. Others agreed that unlawful camping at public access areas and unlawful mooring on open water were safety hazards. One thing that was brought up was the prevalence of stake blinds built over open waters within 1 mile of mainland Hyde County. All agreed that these devices invited turmoil and prevented one's ability to safely travel the open waters. The first item in the proposal was then agreed upon, unanimously (pending Greg Berry's approval), that no stake blinds may be built over the open waters within one mile of mainland Hyde County.

The meeting ended by setting the date for the May meeting, scheduled for 7:00pm, Wednesday May 8, 2019 at the Hyde County Government Center, Extension Teaching Center.

Minutes submitted by Chase Luker and approved by Committee