



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex
752 County Road 99W, Willows, CA 95988
530-934-2801
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sacramento/>

WINTER PHOTOGRAPHER BLIND GUIDELINES **Updated January 2017 ***NEW UPDATES THIS YEAR***

The updated photography information can be found at our website at:
http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Sacramento/visitor_activities/photography.html

Please read the entire set of guidelines BEFORE submitting a request AND prior to using the blind! With large number of applicants and few choices available, these guidelines have been created to allow everyone to have the opportunity to use the blinds. Photographers that consistently do not follow the rules (example: not showing up on time to a blind, not informing us of their cancellation, late payments, etc.) will lose their next opportunity to use a photography blind.

1. Photography Blind Availability 2016-2017

The blinds may be used two times each week from Wednesday through Sunday. The following blinds are estimated to be available the dates below. Changes in water availability can alter the dates listed. If you list a date on your reservation form outside of the dates offered, you forfeit that choice on your form.

- A. Sacramento NWR Blind #1: Oct. 12 – March
- B. Sacramento NWR Blind #2: Nov. 2 – March
- C. Colusa NWR Blind #3: Oct. 22 – March
- D. Delevan NWR Blind #4: Nov. 2 – March

2. Processes for Requesting a Blind

Photographers may receive up to two photography blind reservations in a season. Each blind reservation is for up to two days in a week between Wednesday and Sunday. One of the assigned days must occur on a Saturday or Sunday. For example, if circumstances change and a photographer cannot be present on an assigned date (due to weather, etc.), he/she has the option to change to another day within their assigned set of days in that week as long as at least one of the two uses is on Saturday or Sunday.

Photographers may apply through a lottery system and then, depending on any remaining availability, blind choices will be assigned by a first-come, first-served system. To apply for blind dates through either system, photographers must e-mail sacramentovalleyrefuges@fws.gov or send an application to the Sacramento NWRC, Photography Program, 752 County Road 99W, Willows, CA 95988 using the Reservation Form with their photography blind and date choice(s). See the sections below for the appropriate dates to enter via each system.

A. Lottery Process:

1. Blind requests must be received between August 1 and August 31. The lottery will be held in mid-September.
2. The blind requests may consist of up to 10 date/blind combinations in priority order. We suggest that you put in 10 options to have the best chance of receiving a blind. You may list the same day/week for several different blinds.

Example of how to make your request: (see the request form on the [website](#))

Choice 1 (first priority): Dec. 17 – Blind #4

Choice 2: Nov 18 – Blind #3

Choice 3: Jan 18 – Blind #1

Choice 4: Jan 18 – Blind #2

3. During the lottery, all individuals entered are randomly assigned a number, which indicates the order in which their blind request(s) will be processed.
4. The individual selected first will be given their first priority. Then the second individual, then the third, etc. The first priority date available is selected from each blind request. If an applicant's first choice is during a week that has already been selected by a previous individual, the applicant will be given their next choice.
5. After all of the applicants have received one blind assignment (their highest priority date not already assigned), the blind assignment process continues back to the beginning of the list until all applicants receive their next priority date of choice that remains or until all available dates are filled.
6. All applicants given a blind assignment will be notified by e-mail or telephone during early to mid-September.
7. If the entire applicant's date/blind choices have already been assigned, photographers will be contacted by refuge staff about remaining available date(s).

B. First come, first served process:

1. Following the completion of the lottery, any available dates/blinds will be posted on the website. www.fws.gov/refuge/Sacramento/visitor_activities/photography.html
2. Photographers that missed entering the lottery in August, or that received less than two blind assignments under the lottery system, may apply for any remaining dates through a first-come, first-served system, beginning October 1.
3. The blind requests may consist of up to 10 date/blind combinations in priority order. See the examples in Section A, #2 above.
4. Photographers' names will be put on a list and processed chronologically by the e-mail date/time or letter postmark.
5. The order of names on the list will remain until the applicants' choices (up to two) are assigned.
6. The blind requests will be processed as described in Section A, #4 above.
7. If the entire applicant's date/blind choices have already been assigned, photographers will be contacted by refuge staff about remaining available date(s).
8. If all dates were assigned through the lottery system, then the first-come, first-served list becomes the blind cancellation refill list beginning on October 1.

C. Waiting List:

1. A waiting list will be created if additional users would like to use the blind and no dates/blinds are available.
2. When a user cancels their reservation, refuge staff will work through the waiting list to try to fill the opening.
3. Waiting list users will have up to 24 hours to respond back to the Complex to reserve the photo blind.
4. The waiting list will have a maximum of 10 people.

3. Payment of Photography Blind User Fee

There is a non-refundable component to the blind user fee for all blinds: **a \$25 fee per reservation for selected days even if you only use the blind once during the week.**

- a. Photographers must pay the blind fee by October 15 in order to confirm their blind date selection(s). If a blind assignment is made after October 15, the user fee is due within 3 weeks of their notice or before the blind is used.
- b. Photographers may make checks payable to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and drop off at the visitor center or mail to: Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Photography Program, 752 County Road 99W, Willows, CA 95988.
- c. If using blind #1 or #2 on Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, an additional daily entrance pass or equivalent is required. The refuge entrance pass (\$6 Refuge Day Pass or \$12 Refuge Annual Pass) is required by all photographers who do not possess a Federal Duck Stamp, Golden Access/Age or America the Beautiful Interagency Pass. See the Sacramento NWR's [website](#) for day pass information. The day pass is available at the kiosk at the entrance to the refuge or in the visitor center. Please place this pass on your dashboard while at the refuge that day.
- d. If the photography blind payment is not received by Oct. 15 all blind reservations for that individual will be cancelled and available to the first-come, first-serve photographers.**

4. Registration

On the photography day, photographers must pick up a "Photography Blind Folder", which is located in a mailbox at the designated locations listed below. The folder should be placed on your vehicle's dashboard while at the blind. The folder contains a Photography Blind Report form, directions/map to the blind, and other important information. You may also pick up the folder the day before.

The folder may be picked up at the following locations:

- i. Blind #1 and #2 at the Sacramento NWR office between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. the day before the confirmed blind date or photographers may pick up the folder in the mailbox behind the visitor center. The mailbox is the black one labeled Photo Blind Info Binder located on the right of the line of mailboxes.
- ii. Blind #3 at Colusa NWR in the black mailbox across from the observation deck on the auto tour.
- iii. Blind #4 at Delevan NWR in the black mailbox near the gate on Four Mile Road.
- iv. It is required that all photography blind users fill in the photography blind report. This is how we keep records and improve the program. If the report is not completed the visit will be considered as a no-show and that user will have their next reservation cancelled.**

5. Proceed to Blind

Photographers must be in the blind at least 1 hour before sunrise. Photographers must park in the designated parking area and proceed directly to the assigned blind on foot. Give yourself adequate time to get to the blind!

- a. For blinds #1 and #3, the route from the parking area to the blind will be marked by stakes with reflective tape in the water. The route is designed to minimize disturbance; therefore, deviation from the staked route is not allowed. A flashlight will be needed to follow the staked route. Sometimes only one guide stake can be seen at a time. While in route to the blind, photographers may encounter deep water (waist high), ankle-deep mud, and slippery footing. Use chest waders and proceed with caution.
- b. Blinds #2 and #4 have an accessible walkway to the blind and do not go through water.
- c. Photographers may leave the blind at any time, but once the blind has been vacated, returning to the blind is not permitted.

6. Weather Closure and Safety

- a. Access to some blinds and the surrounding area may flood; therefore, blind use depends on road and habitat conditions. If the access road is closed due to flooding, the photo blind will also be closed. During adverse weather, it is highly recommended that photographers call before their blind assignment date to check on the blind and road conditions.
- b. Refuge staff will contact blind users as soon as possible if there is a closure. Staff will try to provide the cancelled user a replacement opportunity if feasible.
- c. This is a natural area, be alert! You may encounter ticks, mosquitos, wasps, yellow-jackets, bees, poison hemlock, and other natural occurrences that may cause you harm.
- d. Use caution while wading through water or walking on roads. Surfaces may be uneven, slippery, and muddy.

7. Directions

Blind #1: Sacramento NWR

The blind access is from the auto tour. Drive approximately two miles on the auto tour to the parking area marked with the brown sign "Photo blind #1, By Reservation Only". Place the "Photography Blind Folder" and the refuge entrance pass on the dash of your vehicle. Look for a boat ramp on your left. At this site, a small sled is located just north of the boat ramp and is available for transporting your gear to the blind. It is typically out of view of the auto tour to prevent vandalism. Walk down the boat ramp and into the water until you see the first guide stake. Continue to each stake until you reach the blind (about 250 yards). If the sled is used, it should be hidden in the tules behind the photography blind. Please return the sled to the edge of the pond beside the boat ramp, turn it upside down to keep the inside dry and latch it to the post.

Blind #2: Sacramento NWR

Vehicle access to the blind is from the viewing platform parking area on the auto tour. From the platform parking lot, open the metal gate and close it before proceeding to the blind. Follow the road south along Logan Creek approximately 6/10 of a mile until you reach the brown sign "Parking Area #2". Place the "Photography Blind Folder" and the Refuge entrance pass on the dash of your vehicle. Look for the signs and guide stakes and follow them until you reach the access levee to the blind (about 200 yards). The road has been graveled to provide vehicle access to the parking area during the winter. Individuals using wheelchairs may drive south past the "Parking Area #2" sign to the beginning of the access levee (marked with a sign with "Photo Blind #2" and a right arrow). Do not attempt to drive down this levee to the back of the blind.

Although not required, it is highly recommended that people who use a wheelchair have an able-bodied companion park their vehicle back at the “Parking Area #2” sign to reduce disturbance to wildlife using the area.

Blind #3: Colusa NWR

Vehicle access to the blind is from the Colusa NWR auto tour. A space for parking is located approximately 0.5 miles from the observation deck. It will be before the bridge and on the right (north) will be a brown sign marked “Photo blind #3, By Reservation Only”. Place the “Photography Blind Folder” on the dash of your vehicle. Proceed north on foot and follow the directional signs along the levee road (about 200 yards) until you reach a sign that will direct you into the water. At this site a small sled is available for transporting your gear to the blind. The water in this section of the pond is about 2 feet deep, so chest waders are needed. Follow the reflective markers about 150 yards to the blind. If the sled is used, it should be hidden in the cattails behind the blind. Please return the sled to the edge of the pond, turn it upside down to keep the inside dry and latch it to the post.

Blind #4: Delevan NWR

Vehicle access to the blind is from Four Mile Road on the west boundary of Delevan NWR. A space for parking marked with a sign labeled “Photo blind #4, By Reservation Only” is located at the gate on Four Mile Road. Heading south, on Four Mile Road the parking site is approximately 2 miles south of the intersection with Delevan Road. Heading north, the site is approximately 3½ miles north of Maxwell Road. Place the “Photography Blind Folder” on the dash of your vehicle. Proceed east on foot and follow the directional signs along the levee road (about 150 yards) until you reach a levee covered with plastic mats that provides entry to the blind. Individuals using wheelchairs should contact the refuge for the combination to the gate to allow vehicle access to the start of this entrance levee. Do not attempt to drive down this levee to the back of the blind. Although not required, it is highly recommended that people who use a wheelchair have an able-bodied companion park their vehicle back at the gate to reduce disturbance to wildlife using the area.

8. Blind Description and Use

- a. Sacramento NWR blinds #1 and #2 and Delevan NWR Blind #4
 - i. Size: 5' deep x 6.75' wide X 6.5' high.
 - ii. These blinds have adjustable camera size openings in three sides.
 - iii. They can accommodate two people.
 - iv. Four adjustable shelves, which can be used for camera mounts are present in each blind.
 - v. There is one swivel chair and a can of wasp spray in each blind.
 - vi. Tree snags and islands have been placed to encourage birds to perch or rest 30-50 feet from the blind.
 - vii. Blinds #2 and #4 are accessible for people using wheel-chairs (no waders needed).
- b. Blind #3 at Colusa NWR
 - i. Size: interior dimensions 5' deep X 6' wide X 5' high at the front and 4.5' at the back.
 - ii. It has 3 sets of openings on each side and the front.
 - iii. There are two chairs and a can of wasp spray in the blind.
 - iv. Tree snags and logs have been placed in the water about 30-50 feet from the blind to provide sites for water birds and turtles to use.

9. Check Out

Photographers must check out of the blind by returning the "Photography Blind Folder" with a completed report form to the mailboxes.

10. Cancelling

If you will not be able to use the blind on your designated date/week, contact the refuge as soon as possible. This allows people on a waiting list to utilize the blind. No refunds are issued.

Cancellations must be received by the Sacramento NWRC at the latest by noon on the Monday prior to the assigned reservation.

11. Additional Photographic Opportunities

The auto tour and walking trail on both Sacramento NWR and Colusa NWR provide excellent photographic opportunities. Some of the photography blinds may be available for use during April – June/July, depending on habitat conditions. Please call the Sacramento NWR for current conditions and blind availability or visit the website.

A portion of the hunt area is open for photography from February 15 through June 30 on Sacramento and Sutter NWRs. Visitors may utilize the existing directional blind, directional assigned pond and free roam boundary signs to access the areas. Some of the in-ground, concrete hunting blinds on Sacramento NWR will be available for photographic use from mid-February through June without the photography user fee or reservations. Maps for these areas are available on the refuge website or upon request.

12. Refuge reserves the right to revoke photography privileges

Anyone found to be in violation of any of the conditions in these guidelines or refuge regulations will have their photography privileges immediately revoked and will be asked to leave the area.

Checklist of helpful items to bring to the blind:

- flashlight
- warm clothes or layers
- field guide(s)
- binoculars
- insect repellent
- snacks and water
- sack for garbage
- seat for a second person (blind #1, 2, 4)
- chest waders (needed for Sacramento NWR Blind #1 & Colusa NWR Blind #3)
- ballhead or tripod head for using adjustable shelves in Blinds #1, #2 and #4
- tripod or bean bag camera rest for Blind #3