



MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Meeting Notes for MHAG Meeting #62
August 16, 2024, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Washington Cattleman’s Association, Ellensburg

MHAG Members		WDFW Staff	Guests
Region 1	(Vacant)	Kris Thorson, Hunter Education Section Specialist	
Region 2	Monty Pyle	Steve Dazey, Region 1 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
Region 3	Don Brunssen	Nick Montanari, Region 2 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	John McAuliffe	Aaron Garcia, Region 3 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Kyle Smith	Jackie McBride, Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	David Solem (excused)	Amy Elliott, Region 5 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator (virtual)	
Region 4	Jason Armstrong	Bill Montgomery, Region 6 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jeff Fjelstul (excused)	Jason Earl, Region 1 Conflict Supervisor	
	Jeff Larsen, Secretary	Kevin OConnor, Region 4 Conflict Specialist	
	Ian Stewart, Chair	Steve Wetzal, Region 3 Conflict Specialist	
Region 5	George Dennis		
	Keith Pfeifer, Vice Chair		
Region 6	Michael Bartoldo		
	David Ward		
	Gary Tennison (excused)		

Procedural Business

- **Call to order and announcements (*Ian Stewart, 5 minutes*)**
 - Ian wanted to congratulate Steve Dazey on his IHEA Field Coordinator of the year award.
 - George Barlow emailed Kris and has resigned as an MHAG member.
 - His work scheduled and work obligations line up just perfectly to not allow him to participate in meetings, so he resigned.
 - Since this is a director appointed group, we will wait until the next recruitment cycle to fill his seat for the remainder of his term.
 - Ian suggested we check with the IAC to see if they wanted to rotate to Friday instead of Saturday some meetings.
- **Introduction of members and guests (*Ian Stewart, 15 minutes*)**
 - All the members and staff in attendance introduced themselves.

New Business

- **Field Coordinator Report Questions (*Kris Thorson, 15 minutes*)**
 - No questions were heard.
 - The group liked this approach, and we will move forward with this for future meetings.
 - Jeff Larsen asked if the coordinators wanted to elaborate on any of their reports and Jackie talked a little bit about her report.
- **MHAG member updates and Master Hunter communications (*Ian Stewart, 10 minutes*)**
 - Kris asked if anyone had any communications with Master Hunters recently that they wanted to share.
 - Jeff has talked a Master Hunter ask if they don't turn into their hunting reports and if they would be removed from the program for not reporting and having to pay the \$10 administrative fee.
 - The administrative fee does not constitute a RCW 77.15 infraction and does not constitute removal from the program.
 - Monty has added a slide to the end of his hunter education class PowerPoint about the Master Hunter Permit Program and has seen some positive interactions.
 - Dave Ward had a project with Scott Harris and found more projects to work on coming up this fall.
- **Conflict staff working session (*Kris Thorson, 60 minutes*)**
 - At the last meeting there was an ask to have some conflict staff to come present about their challenges with the MHPP so we can have a clearer picture of what is going on out there.
 - Kris invited Jason Earl from Region 1, Steve Wetzel from Region 3, and Kevin OConnor from Region 4.
 - Kris explained that each of the conflict staff will have about 10 minutes to talk about their challenges, their regions damage, and then five minutes of questions with more time for questions at the end.

- First Kris introduced Jason Earl from Region 1.
- Jason gave a history of the reason they do not historically use Master Hunters more in District 3 which is part of Region 1.
- There is a wildlife area that is directly adjacent to a lot of their conflict areas.
- They do not have many Master Hunters in the area and have had difficulty getting folks out to the site in a timely manner.
- Jason asked Kris to run a report on how many Master Hunters there are in District 3 ((Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla Counties) and there are a total of four.
- They also have had some issues with Master Hunters not showing up to fulfill their obligations.
- They now have two staff who are hazers whose job it is to move elk out of the area to make sure the damage stays minimal.
- District 3 also gives out landowner permits to landowners to help mitigate damage and allow for the harvest of elk causing damage.
- The blue mountains herd is currently below objective, so the wildlife managers do not want to harvest more elk.
- Jeff Larsen asked if there would be interest from Jason to create an elk area kind of like Elk Area 3911.
 - There was talk about doing something like this but with the herd being below objectives they aren't looking to harvest more elk.
- Kris introduced Steve Wetzel from Region 3.
- Region 3 is a little different from the rest of the state in that the region has a lot of elk areas that are open for Master Hunter general seasons for close to six months a year.
- Since the region is open for a lot of time with the elk areas, there is not a lot of need from the conflict staff to deploy Master Hunters to properties.
- The landowners in the region also seem to have a group of their own Master Hunters that they have used in the past that they continue to work with in the future.
- Monty asked what Steve would do in the instance of a landowner who has deer on their property that calls the department for help.
 - He generally doesn't have issues like this but in this case, he would explain to the landowner the program and if they want to use Master Hunters he would then put the next Master Hunter on the damage list in contact with the Landowner.
- Kris introduced Kevin OConnor from Region 4.
- Kevin covers King and Snohomish counties which is know as Region 4 south.
- Kevin has been in his position for two years but has heard of past issues with Master Hunters.
- He has had very good luck working with Master Hunters.
- The properties in Region 4 south are small parcels of less than 40 acres.
- In the past two years they have filled eight or nine tags.

- He has started working with Jeff Larsen recently and it has been extremely beneficial.
- Kevin asked other conflict specialists on the west side of the mountains about their challenges/issues with Master Hunters.
- One thing that came about is the landowners know each other and talk frequently which means that if something happens then they all know in a short period of time.
- The issues Kevin has heard about are not reporting harvest on damage properties, multiple animal harvest, trespassing, and non-contact with Master Hunters.
- Kevin has a possible project this fall about hazing elk out of commercial agriculture areas like pumpkin patches, corn mazes, etc.
- Jeff commented that Kevin's people management is a great asset and is always a constant professional in the interactions he has seen Kevin do.
- Michael had a question for all three-conflict staff in connection with bears and the removal of the spring bear seasons.
 - In conversations with other staff, Kevin has heard that the loss of the spring bear season has not vastly impacted the conflict with bears.
- Jason has some concern on Master Hunters who are just getting certified and not having opportunities to connect with landowners in some areas and not able to build the relationships.
- There was talk about requiring a Master Hunter who is applying for a special permit that they be a resident of the region they apply for.
 - This is something we can investigate.
- It would help in the orientation PowerPoint to identify that elk area 3911 is mostly private ground and the public ground fills up too quickly.
 - John McAuliffe suggested we add into the orientation PowerPoints that some of these kinds of scenarios to set the expectations where they should be.
- John McAuliffe suggested that the MHAG could help interview the applicants for the MHPP and help set the applicants expectations and clearly identify the expectations for Master Hunters.
- Keith talked about wanting to do three things:
 - Have the right people come into the program
 - Have something to determine who is a Master
 - Set the expectations in the rules
- There was a fair amount of discussion of the expectations of Master Hunters and when to then give that to the applicants.
- Monty suggested doing a lesser group like a Junior Master Hunter program or a Master Ambassador Program.
- Jeff suggested adding to the requirements for damage permits that they must do a mandatory test or orientation/PowerPoint, or something along those lines to remove possible Master Hunters causing issues.

- **Lunch (60 minutes)**
- **NHFD Update (Kris Thorson and Amy Elliott, 15 minutes)**
 - The planning is quickly progressing.
 - We have the volunteer registration project open on CERVIS.
 - We are planning for 500 youth but as of August 16 have only 23 registrations.
 - The Communications staff are going to be pushing the event on our social media platforms soon.
 - Non-government organizations that will be there participating are: Back Country Hunters and Anglers, Backcountry Horsemen (Scatter Creek Chapter), Cascade Forest Conservancy, Cowlitz Tribe, Home Range Wildlife Research, Hunters of Color, Lewis and Clark Bowmen, Mule Deer Foundation, National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), National Wildlife Turkey Federation, Operation Lifesaver, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Washington State Trappers Association, Washington Waterfowl Association, and Wayne Buckles primitive skills.
 - We will be having two art tents this year for the attendees.
 - There will be fish ponds as well as .22, .223, archery, air rifle, and 20 gauge shotgun shooting.
- **2024 Workplan discussion (Kris Thorson, 60 minutes)**
 - The 2024 workplan was updated on June 11 and distributed to the MHAG at the June meeting.
 - It was suggested that we have a working session at this meeting to help further the workplan and get members together to discuss the workplan items.
 - The items identified in the workplan are: Continue face to face contact with conflict specialists, strategic plan update, opportunity enhancement, roadkill salvage coordination, enhance hunting access, MHAG member onboarding, and the orientation PowerPoint Update.
 - The MHAG members divided up into groups and discussed the workplan items for 30-minutes to figure out how we can best work through the topics at hand.
 - The MHAG then had each group give a report about possible next steps.
 - Continue face to face contacts with conflict staff – Monty, Kyle, Keith, Michael
 - The group talked about they needed to continue having these kinds of meetings in the regions and report back to the MHAG when they have the meetings.
 - Strategic plan update
 - The group talked about creating a plan like an operational plan that points to the strategic initiatives.
 - The group felt that there was not a need to reinvent the wheel but use the 2015 strategic plan to be the operational plan with edits.
 - Opportunity enhancement – Jason A., Ian, Don, Dave W.
 - The group would like to talk to Fenner and/or Jim Brown to get a short list of conflict specialists to talk to about the bear timber damage program.

- They also want to ask for an invite to the conflict section meetings this fall or early winter.
 - There also needs to be development of the right criteria for Master Hunters to make the list.
 - The group might want to be invited to the timber meetings in February to answer questions about the MHPP.
 - MHPP Orientation PowerPoint
 - The group thinks that we should have a form of the orientation that can be sent to current applicants to attend/view.
 - The group will get a script of what to talk about and how to put the orientations on.
 - The group also thought that special permit winners should have an orientation of the expectations on these damage hunts with the conflict specialists.
 - Ian asked to have a report out at the next meeting.
- **MHPP Orientation discussion (*Kris Thorson, 60 minutes*)**
 - As part of the workplan, there is an effort to rework the Master Hunter Permit Program Orientation PowerPoint and get those restarted.
 - Earlier this year some of the members went through a historical version as well as an abbreviated version that was used at the 2023 statewide hunter education instructor in-service training.
 - Using the notes from the group, Kris came up with the version sent to the MHAG members last week.
 - This version is a mash up of the old version, the notes on the old version, and the new version.
 - Kris and Bill are looking for comments on the draft version so we can review the comments and build a draft presentation for final viewing at the December meeting.
 - What is not in the draft that you feel needs to be in there?
 - Jeff thinks putting into the orientation the harvest statistics and the draw statistics to show that your likelihood of drawing is small.
 - Look at slide 8 in depth.
 - What is in the draft that shouldn't be?
 - Slide 25.
 - Some of the language on slide 8.
 - The group gave their input on the orientation PowerPoint and fine tuning the PowerPoint.
 - Kris will make the updates to the orientation PowerPoint and send the MHAG members the final draft before the December meeting.
- **Other avenues of completing the Master Hunter Removals Expectation letter (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - As a refresher, Master Hunters who are selected for a hunt coordinator hunt are required to complete and send in the expectations letter MHAG designed before they can be deployed.

- The letter was meant to get Master Hunters to really think about their role in helping manage deer and elk causing agricultural damage before causing any headaches for a landowner or conflict specialist.
- Recently a new instructor policy manual was sent out to all the hunter education instructors and WDFW allowed some other avenues of submitting their required Policy Agreement form.
- Those avenues were:
 - Email Huntered@dfw.wa.gov with the following information:
 - Subject line: Policy Agreement Form
 - Email Body: This email signifies that I, (NAME HERE), have read all Hunter Education Instructor policies and WDFW agency policies contained in the Hunter Education Policy Manual published on July 15, 2024, and I understand and agree to abide by them. My instructor number is (NUMBER).
 - Digitally sign the Policy Agreement Form (copy/paste a digital signature or type your name into the form) and email it to huntered@dfw.wa.gov with the subject line Policy Agreement Form.
 - Sign, scan, and attach the Policy Agreement Form to an email sent to huntered@dfw.wa.gov with the subject line Policy Agreement Form.
 - Print and sign the Policy Agreement Form (Page 105) and mail it to:
 - WDFW Hunter Education
PO Box 43137
Olympia WA 98504
- Kyle suggested we discuss this agenda topic, and he envisioned some similar avenues of returning the expectations letter like:
 - Have an option to scan/email the letter to WDFW so we don't have to worry about the letter getting lost/delayed in the mail.
 - Provide a link to a page on the WDFW website where an Master Hunter Special Permit winner can access the letter, scroll through the letter to accept, and then electronically sign at the bottom before submitting.
- These options could help streamline the process for WDFW.
- What does the MAHG think about exploring some of these other options moving forward?
- The group thought that the other ways are good to explore for damage season 2025.
- Kris will also investigate the internal process on the expectations letter.

Conclusion

- **Recap action items (Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes)**
 - Kris to complete the MHPP Orientation PPT and send to MHAG before the December meeting.
 - Kris to investigate other methods of submitting MH Expectations letter.
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (Ian Stewart, 5 minutes)**
 - NHFD Recap

- Workplan working session and report out
- Michael asked if there was a way to get a presentation on CWD and how the department will move forward.
 - Kris will check with Melia.
- MHAG Recruitment overview
- **Good of the order (*All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes*)**
- **Adjourn**