



# MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

**Meeting Notes for MHAG Meeting #59**  
**August 18, 2023, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**Central Washington University SURC 137A, Ellensburg**

<b>MHAG Members</b>		<b>WDFW Staff</b>	<b>Guests</b>
Region 2	Monty Pyle	David Whipple, Hunter Education Section Manager (virtual)	
Region 3	Don Brunssen (excused)	Kris Thorson, Hunter Education Section Specialist	
	(vacant)		
	John McAuliffe, Chair		
Region 4	Kyle Smith	Steve Dazey Region 1 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jason Armstrong	Aaron Garcia, Region 3 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jeff Fjelstul		
	Jeff Larsen, Secretary		
Region 5	Ian Stewart, Vice Chair	Jackie McBride, Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	George Dennis	Bill Montgomery, Region 6 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator (virtual)	
	Keith Pfeifer		
Region 6	Dean Thornberry	Diane Tilton Volunteer Program Manager	
	Michael Bartoldo		
	David Ward		
	Gary Tennison	Branden Oates Ungulate Specialist (virtual)	

## Procedural Business

- **Call to order and announcements (*John McAuliffe, 5 minutes*)**
- **Introduction of members and guests (*John McAuliffe, 5 minutes*)**
  - Kris introduced Diane Tilton, the new Volunteer Program Manager.
  - The members and WDFW hunter ed staff also quickly introduced themselves.
  - Kris distributed the appreciation plaques to the members who were not at the last MHAG meeting.
  - He also distributed WDFW volunteer belt buckles to the MHAG.
  - Dave mentioned that Nate Pamplin may want to come to future MHAG meetings to keep his finger on the pulse of what we are doing.

## New Business

- **WDFW reports and updates (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
  - MHPP Participation statistics
    - As of August 17, we have 95 applicants to the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP).
    - One applicant has already been certified as a Master Hunter.
    - Currently there are 1,208 certified Master Hunters.
    - The group asked what the right number of Master Hunters to have to accomplish department goals and needs.
      - Kris doesn't have an idea on what that number is.
    - Six applicants have taken the 2023 test so far.
    - Five of the applicants passed the test on their initial attempt.
    - Kris has taken many calls from interested persons in the past few weeks.
    - There was a discussion on the opportunities being less driving less interest for applicants and less reason for current Master Hunters to renew.
    - One member asked for Jeff to send the historical opportunity PowerPoint he did a while back out to the membership so they could review the information.
    - Gary has written several articles to publications on some of the volunteer opportunities that he has been on and they have been published.
    - Ian asked about the increase the commission has requested to pay for damage claims and if that is a concern for the conflict staff to not use Master Hunters.
      - No, the requests are currently far exceeding the budget for the conflict staff and Kris didn't think there would ever be a time where the funding outweighs the need.
    - Diane invited MHAG members to submit Master Hunter volunteer project pictures to the department so they could be used to promote the program.



- She is working on the Lake Terrel duck blind project.
  - There is also a Samish blind project she is working on.
  - Jackie put in time on the Camano Island fence project.
  - She has been helping with volunteers for the I90 fence project at mile post 27 which is now 90 percent complete.
  - Jackie has two more projects in the works with lands unit and non-government organizations.
- Bill Montgomery – Region 6 Field Coordinator
  - Bill helped at a few events in April and early May.
  - He completed two MHPP Orientations.
  - Bill is working on a fencing project in Orting as a possible MHPP volunteer opportunity, but they are awaiting the permits to start the project.
  - He worked with Assistant Wildlife Program Manager Blankenship on a hazing project and was a packer for a damage removal where no animals showed.
  - A couple nights later, two animals causing damage were removed from the property.
  - He also fielded a couple of calls with questions about the program and one complaint on how the hunt masters deploy in 3911.
- **MH Hoof Disease Hunt Report (*Brendan Oates, 60 minutes*)**
  - Brendan is an ungulate specialist for WDFW.
  - There are two participation groups for this opportunity, General Season west side elk hunters and Master Hunters.
  - General season hunters requirements are:
    - 3 pt min antler restriction
    - Special permit or hunt for cows
    - If you harvest an elk and submit “abnormal” hooves, you get into a pool for a special permit draw (19 tags available)
    - 20-25% chance to be drawn for special permit
  - Master Hunters have the following requirements:
    - Must apply and get drawn for one of the 40 Master Hunter special permits
    - Antlerless only
    - Season valid December through February
    - Three permit areas in southwest Washington
    - Can harvest a 2<sup>nd</sup> elk if submitted hooves are abnormal, using unfilled general season tag
  - Hunters who are successful deposit hooves into a collection bin at several locations.
  - If there is an exhibited abnormality general season hunters will be put into the special permit draw and Master Hunters can use their unfilled general season tag to harvest a second elk in those areas.
  - TAHD Prevalence in License Year 2022

- Mount St Helens Core – 27 percent
  - Mount St Helens all – 26 percent
  - Willipa North – 11 percent
  - Willipa South – 11 percent
  - South Rainer – 13 percent
  - North Rainier – 7 percent
  - Olympic – 6 percent
  - North cascades – 12 percent
- For the general season 2021 incentive program there were 143 submitted sets of hooves with 134 showing as abnormal.
- In 2022, 106 sets of hooves were submitted with 89 sets showing abnormalities.
- For the Master Hunter season in 2021, there were 25 submitted hooves with 23 abnormal and there were eight Master Hunters who harvested a second elk.
- Master Hunters submitted 21 sets of hooves in 2022 with 17 showing abnormalities.
- Four Master Hunters harvested a second elk.
- WSU is using a lot of WDFW data on TAHD for their research.
- Brendan shared some hunter-engagement survey data with the MHAG.
- Brendan had several questions to the MHAG to see if they had feedback from the program.
- When he asked about suggestions to the structure of the program it was suggested that WDFW change the drawing timeframe to more line up with the Weyerhaeuser permit purchase timeline so folks can plan more effectively.
- Brendan asked if there were suggestions to increase participation from General Season Hunters.
  - Kris suggested increasing the number of Master Hunter hunts to offset the lesser general season hunters.
- Brendan will send the PowerPoint presentation to Kris so he can get it to the MHAG members.
- There was also a suggestion to Have Brendan, Kris, and Dave work together to suggest to Weyerhaeuser to increase access for Master Hunters who draw the TAHD permits for more effective harvest of animals displaying TAHD.
- **MHAG Strategic Plan Discussion (*Kris Thorson, 60 minutes*)**
  - Kris sent the draft plan to the MHAG members on August 4 for their review before the MHAG meeting.
  - On the orientations, we may need to change the timeframe we give the orientations to help get more attendance.
  - There was also discussion about making the orientations mandatory in the future.
  - Kris and Bill will work on updating the orientation PowerPoint to improve the experience.
  - Michael suggested that the strategic plan is more general and from his military background that it should be high level than it currently is with the strategic plan giving an overall view of the reason, then having an operational plan level where

there would be some tasks assigned to different work groups, and then a tactical level document that assigns how those tasks in the operational document are worked on.

- Monty suggested that the document was good as is with the stipulation of updating the document into a more positive tone rather than a negative tone.
- This spurred a discussion to show the linkage of the MHPP strategic plan to link to the 25-year strategic plan and the R3 plan.
- The annual MHAG workplan should point back to the strategic plan on how the work plan item helps the strategic plan.
- John suggested to form a subcommittee for the strategic plan.
  - John McAuliffe, George Dennis, and Michael Bartoldo will be on the subcommittee.
- Kris and Dave will also work with Rob Geddis, a WDFW staffer with more strategic planning experience to help solidify the document before the subcommittee meets.
- **MHAG member updates and Master Hunter communications (*John McAuliffe, 10 minutes*)**
  - Does anyone have anything to add?
    - George had contact with Mike Britton to talk about the addition of GMUs to the general season Master Hunter hunt in region 1.
      - Kris was notified of this effort a couple years back and now that the three-year season setting process is underway, the regional biologists are adding this recommendation into the changes to the regulations.
      - This will still have to go through the rule making process and be approved by the commission next spring.
    - Jeff Larsen spoke to a Master Hunter who got a region 3 permit, and his challenge was that he had to send the expectations in within 7 days of receiving the letter or he may be excluded from the hunt.
      - Kris suggested the letter state the expectations must be received before deployment.
    - Jeff also asked about the transport project and if it was a go.
      - Kris will check with Jen Mannas to see where that program stands.
- **Lunch (*45 minutes*)**
- **NHFD Update (*Kris Thorson, 10 minutes*)**
  - Kris gave a brief history of NHFD to the MHAG members.
  - Kris and Steve have been working with Staci Lehman in the communications division on planning NHFD.
  - The event will be at Camp Cowles in Newport on September 30.
  - Currently there are 25 confirmed groups coming to the celebration.
  - There will be grab bags for the first 500 attendees that will have eye protection, hearing protection, an orange safety vest, a WDFW tape measure, and a WHEIA safety bandana.

- Some of the events that the attendees can do is catch and keep a fish, NWTF mock hunt, Kalispel tribal display, fly tying and casting, casting station, as well as WDFW .22, 20-gauge, air rifle, and archery ranges.
- Kris and Steve had a participant question and answer presentation with some of the NGOs coming to the event.
- Those that attended got a good history of the event and now know more about the site and what is feasible at the event.
- During the meeting, a couple of the NGOs asked some questions that Steve and I had not considered previously.
- As of August 17, there are 126 attendees preregistered.
- Regional coordinators will reach out to their respective Master Hunters to recruit for volunteers at NHFD.
- There is currently a volunteer event in CERVIS for folks to sign up.
- **Corner crossing discussion (Jeff Fjelstul, 15 minutes)**
  - Jeff Fjelstul read an article from MeatEater about a corner crossing case in Wyoming.
  - He described the corner crossing issue, which is when two pieces of public land come together at a corner of ownership lines.
  - It is not legal to step across this line in most states because at that point you are not only on public land but those owned by private entities on the other two properties.
  - He presented information how the decision in Wyoming will most likely not affect Washington state until a case like this is take by the supreme court.
  - There was an article in an OnX article praising Washington state for our private lands access programs.
  - Keith believes that there are laws that are currently on the books called right-of-way that provide for access to your own property and since public property is owned by the public this might be of use to getting access to these landlocked lands.
- **MHAG Workplan Items Discussion (Kris Thorson, 60 minutes)**
  - Does anyone have anything to report on?
  - Keith and the Region 5 Salvage group is waiting on the new regional director to get her feet before working this workplan item.
    - Amy has had preliminary discussions with the regional director about this and Rian Sallee has indicated she may be in favor of this kind of program.
  - Jeff Larsen will send the assignment list for the workplan back out to the MHAG members.
- **Face to Face meetings with conflict staff (Kris Thorson, 45 minutes)**
  - The Region 3 MHAG members, Don Brunssen, Kyle Smith, John McAuliffe, and Monty Pyle had a face-to-face meeting with the Region 3 conflict staff members.
  - One take away from that meeting was that Master Hunters shouldn't pester landowners for access.
    - There was an incident when a Master Hunter said, "I am here to solve your elk problem so let me go hunt those elk."

- John thought that the not pestering landowners was strange.
- John also heard from a hunt coordinator that some conflict staff are giving landowner tags or kill permits instead of having to contact a Master Hunter and hoping they can come to the property.
- There was also thought that the 3911 season appears to be regulating damage control in the elk area.
- Keith feels the contacts that the MHAG has had with the conflict staff has increased the use of the Master Hunters by the conflict specialists.
- Monty met with Joe and Ellen in Region 2 recently.
- He got a great overview of the challenges with deployments vs landowner request.
- Ellen's area landowners do not like Master Hunters from western Washington.
- Joe has smaller landowners in the area he serves as well that are not generally conducive to removals.
- Monty discussed with the Region 2 conflict staff the expansion of possible trapping of nuisance/predator by MHPP as a resource.
- The Region 5 folks, George, Dean, and Keith had a beneficial meeting with the Region 5 conflict staff.
- Dave Ward, Gary, and Michael are continuing to work with Region 6 conflict specialists to keep MHPP as a conflict option for the region.
- Steve had set up a Region 1 meeting with conflict specialists with Jeff L to attend but calendar issues prevented that meeting from happening.
- Jeff and Steve will hopefully meet with the Region 1 conflict staff soon.

## Conclusion

- **Recap action items (*Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes*)**
  - Kris and Dave will work on the Strategic plan with Rob Geddis.
  - Kris will start working on the 2024 workplan and send it to MHAG members this fall.
  - Jeff Larsen will send out the Master Hunter opportunity loss PowerPoint.
  - Kris will send the hoof disease permit PPT presented by Brendan Oates to the membership.
  - Jeff Larsen will send out the assignment list for the workplan.
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (*John McAuliffe, 5 minutes*)**
  - Private Lands Access Presentation
  - Update on CWD from Meila DeVivo.
- **Good of the order (*All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes*)**
- **Adjourn**