



MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Meeting Notes for MHAG Meeting #63
December 12, 2024, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Central Washington University SURC 137A, Ellensburg

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

Procedural Business

- **Call to order and announcements (*Ian Stewart, 5 minutes*)**
- **Introduction of members and guests (*Ian Stewart, 15 minutes*)**
 - Kris asked the members to introduce themselves.

New Business

- **SWAP discussion and presentation (*Wendy Connolly, 30 minutes*)**
 - Wendy Connolly is the department's Statewide Action Plan or SWAP coordinator, and Kris asked her to come to the meeting to discuss the SWAP and her work.
 - The SWAP update is due to United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) October 1, 2025.
 - The draft SWAP will be ready for review in late spring 2025.
 - This is our third SWAP.
 - Back in 2000 many organizations were successful in convincing US government officials to fund conservation projects across the country and created something called State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (SWG).
 - The SWAP must meet eight required elements:
 - Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)
 - Related habitats and systems
 - Threats and issues
 - Conservation Actions
 - Monitoring and adaptive Management
 - Plan review and update process
 - Agency, tribe, and organization coordination
 - Public engagement
 - We have demonstrated that we need more funding to facilitate more conservation and US legislation created the SWG to help fund these actions in 2017.
 - The SWAP is referenced in the Agencies 25-Year Strategic Plan.
 - 2025 SWAP values provide current info and guidance to identify scope, fund, and inspire actions that address important conservation needs in our state to preserve, protect, and perpetuate fish, wildlife, and ecosystems.
 - We want the SWAP to be scalable like taking into consideration species that travel through Washington during their migration but also those species that call Washington home.
 - The updated SWAP is organized by ecoregion.
 - Past SWAPs were organized by the eight required elements.
 - SGCN is a required and important part of the SWAP, it is not only about SGCN.
 - SGCN species are defined status as:
 - Endangered Species Act listed as endangered, threatened or candidate
 - State-listed endangered, threatened or candidate
 - WDFW Priority Habitat Species
 - NatureServe rank G1, G2, S1, or S2

- Also included in the update to the SWAP we are adding plants as part of the plan.
- The updated plan is designed to be nimbler with shared urgency for implementation.
- Previous versions engagement was more scientist to scientist but in the 2025 update there was more engagement.
- Jackie asked if there were considerations to habitat lost in the SWAP and those are taken into consideration the SWAP.
- For more information about the SWAP please see <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/swap>.
- **Field Coordinator Report Questions (Kris Thorson, 15 minutes)**
 - Does anyone have any questions on the reports?
 - John asked for more information from Bill about his tribal partnerships on Hunter Education and Bill talked about his partnerships that he has built over the past year.
- **MHAG member updates and Master Hunter communications (Ian Stewart, 10 minutes)**
 - Does anyone have anything to add?
 - Michael went onto a Department of Natural Resources meeting about Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Strategic Plan.
 - The plan can be found online at <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/StateRecPlan>.
 - There were several members who received an email about the Treponeme Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) Permits and the subsequent emails from WDFW staff on the permits.
 - Kris contacted Brendan Oates about this issue and the department is reverting to allowing a reissue of the permit for those hunters who submit their hooves for examination.
 - Dave Ward worked with Scott Harris on a few projects recently.
 - Jason has had some contacts with First Hunt Foundation, and he talked to a couple of mentees about hunting.
- **Bear Timber Damage Workplan Item Update (Kris Thorson, 15 minutes)**
 - Ian, Don, Jason, and Dave Ward have all been working hard on this issue and trying to get something going for spring 2025.
 - The initial push was to get a program in place to allow Master Hunters who are experts at bear hunting to assist timber landowners experiencing bear timber damage.
 - The subgroup developed a great survey to the conflict section to determine their needs so we could craft a program to enhance opportunities and alleviate damage to timber.
 - After Kris sent the initial email out to the conflict staff, he was contacted by the conflict section and Landowner Services Division and there were good internal discussions about the possibility of a program and enhanced opportunities.
 - In more discussions with the Landowner Services Division, it has proven more difficult to nail down a product that we can offer to Master Hunters.

- The best way for Master Hunters to help timber owners experiencing damage is to establish a relationship with those landowners.
- Because the bear timber damage program is extremely political and tenuous these days and there does not seem to be a need for Master Hunters as timber companies already know of hunters who can hunt on the permit, we have decided to close this item off the workplan.
- While this program is not moving forward, Ian thinks we might want to curate lists of Master Hunters with special skills to help conflict staff with possible issues moving forward.
- Don asked if we could get a list of the bear timber damage permits so they can contact the permit holders.
- **NHFD Recap (*Kris Thorson and Amy Elliott, 30 minutes*)**
 - There were 134 youth who attended the 2024 event with 147 parents/guardians attending as well.
 - The average age of the attendees was 8.7 years old.
 - We also looked at their travel data and we had attendees travel between just a couple miles from Castle Rock to 126 miles from Redmond.
 - The attendees identified that 63 of the 134 (47 percent) had not ever fired a bow or firearm.
 - We also asked if the attendees had taken hunter education yet and 113 of the 134 (84 percent) had not.
 - We sent out an attendee survey and volunteer/non-government organizations (NGOs) survey to capture information that will help WDFW, and our partners understand the event's value to attendees, to what extent the event supports the Washington Hunting and Angling Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation Plan, and improve the event for the future.
 - We had 25 attendees or their parents take the survey.
 - For times sake, Kris didn't go through all the questions and responses but the main things he wanted to give the MHAG as for the responses was:
 - How much time did your attendee spend at National Hunting and Fishing Day?
 - 88 percent responded with 2+ hours and 12 percent responded at 1-2 hours.
 - How satisfied were you with your attendee's overall experience at National Hunting and Fishing Day?
 - 84 percent were very satisfied and 16 percent were satisfied
 - How likely are you to attend a future NHFD event?
 - 96 percent were very likely and 4 percent were likely.
 - Was this the first time your attendee caught a fish?
 - 44 percent responded yes and 56 percent responded no
 - They were also asked how strongly they thought their attendee intends to go hunting and fishing:
 - Fishing: 71 percent strongly agrees, 21 percent agrees, 8 percent neutral

- Hunting: 42 percent strongly agrees, 21 percent agrees, 29 percent neutral, 4 percent disagree, 4 percent strongly disagree
 - We also did a survey for the volunteers, staff, and NGOs in attendance and those results can be made available to IAC members.
 - After the 2024 event, staff had a meeting to discuss how it went and what we may want to do for the future.
 - We are still in discussions on how the future events might look.
 - It has been suggested to do more smaller events around the state to spread the joy of NHPD moving forward.
 - Nick has started to investigate using the North Central Washington Gun Club for an event in 2025 in East Wenatchee.
 - Steve is also planning an event at the Waitsburg Gun Club.
 - The MHAG members asked Kris to email the complete survey results.
- **2024 Workplan Breakout and Report Out (*Kris Thorson, 60 minutes*)**
 - With 2024 coming to an end, Kris asked the group members to break out to their subgroups on the workplan to talk about what they need to do on their workplan item.
 - One thing that the groups should discuss is do we move those items not completed in 2024 forward to the 2025 workplan.
 - The groups broke out to discuss the 2024 workplan items for 30 minutes.
 - After the 30-minute break out session, the group came back together and reported out on the workplan items.
 - Kyle reported out about the Continue face to face contact with conflict specialists and they suggest MHAG members hold meetings with the conflict specialists after the first of the year.
 - Amy gave a report about the Roadkill Salvage Coordination and has been working with Keith and the regional management team about this topic.
 - Enhance hunting access group talked about the DNR recreation plan and how we can help improve hunting access on private lands.
 - For the MHAG member onboarding, the group talked about having a current member to call and talk to the person who is coming on kind of like a buddy.
 - John also suggested that in Kris's chat with the new members that he should go over CERVIS.
- **Lunch (*60 minutes*)**
 - The group had a 30-minute lunch and wants to continue that moving forward.
- **2025 Workplan Planning Session (*Kris Thorson, 60 minutes*)**
 - Kris asked the group if they like having a workplan.
 - Ian thinks we should put more tangible items that we can complete in the calendar year, hold only report outs at the meetings and not have breakout sessions.
 - Jeff L. suggested that each year, each MHAG member come up with one idea that they can bring forward for possible work.
 - Kris asked the group which items from the 2024 workplan that they want to move forward to the 2025 workplan.

- All the unfinished items on the 2024 workplan except the roadkill salvage coordination should move forward but might need some focusing on how it effects the MHPP.
- Kris asked the MHAG which new items they want to address/work on for 2025.
- Jason suggested discussion on how to remove the bad actors out of the program.
- It was also suggested that MHAG work on recruitment and how to vet applicants to possibly stop bad actors from getting into the program in the first place.
- Kris asked if the MHAG wanted to revisit the current materials for the 2025 or 2026 applicants and they thought that it was a possibility.
- A review of the test for possible changes in department direction was suggested.
- Kris will compile the 2025 workplan and send it to the MHAG in January for approval before the March meeting.
- **MHPP Orientation discussion (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - Recently the orientation PowerPoint workplan group completed their assessment and provided WDFW with final thoughts/comments.
 - Kris has since made those changes in the presentation.
 - One of Bill's statewide duties is to lead the Master Hunter Permit Program orientations.
 - He will start presenting these orientations in 2025, hopefully before the application window starts on July 1.
 - Bill noted that the orientations are hit and miss based on his previous experience.
 - The group also asked if we could make the orientations mandatory for applicants in order to increase participation and uptake by applicants.
 - David suggested we have an introductory information about what the program is and what it does that is less than the full-blown orientation.
 - John asked Kris to send the updated orientation to the MHAG.
- **Recent 3911 Incident (*Don Brunson, 15 minutes*)**
 - This was actually an event in 3912 where there was an egregious incident.
 - In September when Don was hunting, he went to a property where the landowner had told him that he didn't want other Master Hunters on the property.
 - This was because of a previous Master Hunter who shot an elk, wounded it, but couldn't get the job done.
 - Don is recommending MHAG propose two new changes to the requirements to the program.
 - Those changes are:
 - Applicants must have proof of harvesting some number of game animals before they could be admitted as an applicant.
 - Modify the shooting proficiency to require applicants to have the proficiency via WDFW staff, MHAG member, or current Master Hunter.
 - Monty suggested the department could have three levels of Master Hunter:
 - Master Hunter
 - Master Hunter Ambassador – non-hunting

- Junior Master Hunter – Must be afield with a Master Hunter
 - Kris will review the WACs and RCWs to determine if we could have multiple types of Master Hunters.
- **MHAG Recruitment Update (*Kris Thorson, 10 minutes*)**
 - Kris sent out the recruitment to the Master Hunters on October 8.
 - The MHAG was reminded that there are six seats being recruited for since we had a member vacate their seat mid-term.
 - After the recruitment was sent out, Kris received four applications.
 - On November 25 he sent a reminder email out to the Master Hunters.
 - Kris has five applications as of December 13.
 - Kris is also planning on sending a reminder email on December 17.

Conclusion

- **Recap action items (*Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes*)**
 - Kris will reach out to Brandon about 2025 TAHD permits and if they will be single permits in 2025, did they increase the number of permits, did they contact timber companies to see if there was a chance to open lands for more harvest.
 - Kris will see if we can get a list of the bear timber damage permits so Master Hunters can contact the permit holders and start building relationships.
 - Kris to send out the complete NHFD survey results.
 - Kris will compile the 2025 workplan and send it to the MHAG in January for approval before the March meeting.
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (*Ian Stewart, 5 minutes*)**
 - Invite Dr. Wise from WSU to talk TAHD and how their research is progressing.
- **Good of the order (*All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes*)**
 - Meeting dates for 2025
 - March 14
 - June 13
 - August 15
 - December 12
- **Adjourn**