



MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Meeting Notes for MHAG Meeting #60
December 8, 2023, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Teams Meeting

MHAG Members		WDFW Staff	Guests
Region 2	Monty Pyle	David Whipple, Hunter Education Section Manager	Rick Webber Region 4 Master Hunter
Region 3	Don Brunssen	Kris Thorson, Hunter Education Section Specialist	
	(vacant)		
	John McAuliffe, Chair		
Region 4	Kyle Smith	Nick Montanari, Region 2 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jason Armstrong (excused)	Aaron Garcia, Region 3 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jeff Fjelstul	Jackie McBride, Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jeff Larsen, Secretary	Amy Elliott, Region 5 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
Region 5	Ian Stewart, Vice Chair	Bill Montgomery, Region 6 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	George Dennis		
	Keith Pfeifer		
Region 6	Dean Thornberry		
	Michael Bartoldo (excused)		
	David Ward		
	Gary Tennison		

Procedural Business

- **Call to order and announcements (*John McAuliffe, 5 minutes*)**
- **Introduction of members and guests (*John McAuliffe, 5 minutes*)**
 - There was a recent addition to the Hunter Education team on December 1.
 - The hunter education section recruited for the Region 2 field coordinator earlier this year and hired Nick Montanari.
 - Nick's first day in his new position was December 1.
 - He comes to hunter education from the Wells Wildlife Area team.
 - Kris asked Nick to introduce himself to the group.
 - Kris then asked each member to introduce themselves.

New Business

- **WDFW reports and updates (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - MHPP Participation statistics
 - As of November 28, there were 1,171 certified Master Hunters.
 - There were 145 applicants in 2023.
 - We have had five Master Hunter applicants complete all the requirements and get certified so far.
 - So far, 19 test have been taken in 2023.
 - Thirteen of the 19 have passing scores.
 - That is a pass rate of 68 percent.
 - Eleven applicants passed the initial test.
 - Three applicants retook the test and all three passed on their second attempt.
 - The highest score was 96 and the lowest score was 66.
 - The average score of all tests is 81 percent.
 - On November 6 Kris sent the reminder email to all the Master Hunters whose permits are set to expire in 2024.
 - He has seen several renewals generated from this reminder.
 - The group had some questions on the certification rates of years past.
 - Monty suggested we have a trend line graph to see what the certification levels are over the years so we can determine if there are issues.
 - Don suggested we add into the application process a more intensive vetting process or a different requirement like an interview or something similar.
 - John asked if there was a way we could ask a question on the application to determine if they would be able to be part of the program like how many elk have you harvested in your hunting experience.
 - This is something that could be done on the application.
 - Monty asked if there was a way we could preclude a person for not having harvested a certain number of animals etc.
 - Kris does not think that we could do that because of the way the rule and statute are written.

- Amy suggested that limiting the number of Master Hunter applicants based on hunting history may limit the number of Master Hunters who give back to the resource through their hours and never put in for permits.
 - Keith thinks we should talk more about non-subjective requirements like the number of big game tags that the applicant has purchased and require a person to have at least five years of hunting licenses.
 - Monty suggested that we create a junior Master Hunter qualification that would introduce folks to the program, but they wouldn't be able to get a Master Hunter tag without having a Master Hunter mentor in the field with them.
 - The junior would graduate to a regular Master Hunter after their initial 5 year permit.
- Field coordinator reports
 - Aaron Garcia – Region 3 Field Coordinator
 - Not a lot of volunteer projects going on at this point other than pheasant releases.
 - He talked to the Joe Watt Canyon staff members about the closed sign on one gate because it made little sense to have that one gate closed but you can enter at a different gate and drive to the back of the closed gate.
 - Aaron had a Master Hunter call him about replacing/repairing some fence.
 - Jackie McBride – Region 4 Field Coordinator
 - Jackie had a master hunter do some work on the house and barn along with accessibility projects for the hunting areas at the Lake Terrel Wildlife Area.
 - She had several Master Hunters participate in pheasant releases for region 4.
 - Master hunters helped at a hunter ed class in Machias.
 - Jackie had several Master Hunters doing trash clean up at the duck hunting wildlife areas and popular spots including shotgun shells, wads, and trash left by various area users.
 - Jackie has a bat boxes project coming up this spring.
 - Amy Elliott – Region 5 Field Coordinator
 - Amy attended a youth hunt with the Vancouver Wildlife League in September where she was available for questions, gave an interview to a local paper on the event and hunter ed/R3, and helped connect some people to opportunities.
 - She is getting requests for more mentoring opportunities.
 - The regular events for the Mount St Helens wildlife area are starting to get scheduled for 2024 and Amy will be reaching out to Master Hunters soon.

- Amy is getting some questions on the Region 5 hoof disease permits and worked with staff to help with these calls.
 - Bill Montgomery – Region 6 Field Coordinator
 - Bill has proctored about five tests so far in 2023.
 - He had the Davis Creek wildlife area pheasant hunt this year.
 - Bill was also working on recruiting volunteers for a large fencing project in Orting but the project was waiting on permits until recently but now the weather is not conducive.
- **MHAG Strategic Plan Update (*Kris Thorson, 15 minutes*)**
 - Kris met with Rob Geddis, WDFW's Lean Performance Manager, about the strategic plan.
 - Kris then corresponded with the Strategic Plan Subcommittee about the discussion he had with Rob.
 - John held a meeting with some of the MHAG members with on the strategic plan last week and their determination was that the strategic plan should be a Master Hunter Permit Program strategic plan vs a MHAG strategic plan.
 - There was also a conversation about the budgetary shake out of the cost of the program vs the intake of funds and volunteer hours submitted.
- **Reporting of Master Hunter Hours (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - Kris has sent emails to Master Hunters and added a standing master hunter newsletter article about reporting hours to WDFW when they are completed vs sending them in at the end of their renewal cycle.
 - Hours are submitted to Kris via paper form, CERVIS, Kalkomey, and email.
 - When hours are submitted, they are reviewed to ensure they meet the requirements listed online.
 - If Master Hunters or applicants have questions on hours being approved or not, the field coordinators or Kris can approve or deny the projects.
 - Currently WDFW uses hunter education instructor hours as match for our Pittman-Robertson grant.
 - However, WDFW could use Master Hunter hours that are not instructor hours for match on other grants.
 - Jeff suggested that we encourage Master Hunters to report all their Master Hunter hours to get a better handle on the number of hours and what the return of the program is.
 - Monty suggested that to get more of the hours submitted, make it easier to report.
 - Kris asked a question for the group's consideration, are the hours that Master Hunters volunteer over 40 hours considered Master Hunter hours.
 - John thought it was an interesting question but in the vein of garnering the benefit of the program we should ask for all the hours the Master Hunters are putting into conservation.
 - Jeff commented that his volunteering is in direct correlation to his Master Hunter status.

- Currently Master Hunters are not submitting volunteer hours that would not meet the volunteer hour qualifications.
- Occasionally Kris will talk to a Master Hunter or applicant that has a question on hours or acceptable projects and steers them in the right direction.
- Jeff has reached out to Region 4 Master Hunters and they have identified that travel time on some projects like traveling to NHTD in Spokane was a concern.
 - We will work with the volunteer program to talk about driving hours.
- Keith suggested that if a person qualifies for mileage reimbursement that they would be able to have volunteer hours credited for their drive time.
- **Timber company outreach for bear timber damage program (Kris Thorson, 30 minutes)**
 - Kris and Dave met with Jim Brown and Fenner Yarborough about the bear timber permits.
 - The commission agenda item that sparked that conversation was revising the WAC for permitting industrial timberlands to get a permit to remove bears.
 - Fenner and Jim suggested that the MHAG could reach out to the timber companies to discuss the MHPP, its benefits, and why using a Master Hunter on their bear timber damage permit may be beneficial.
 - Ian asked to have a discussion on whether/how the MHAG might reach out to timber companies on behalf of the MH program as suggested.
 - Kris checked with the landowner services division staff and they have a contact list that MHAG could use to send letters, or MHAG could give the Landowner Services Division Staff the letter to give to the permittees when they are talking with them.
 - Ian believes that the removal of bears causing damage on these properties is analogous to the agricultural damage of deer and elk.
 - He also suggests setting up a subcommittee to work on this letter.
 - John suggested working these kinds of permits through the special permit process to help make the permit award fair.
 - Don thinks that this kind of project would meet part of the workplan in increasing opportunities and helping alleviate damage on these industrial timberlands.
 - Monty suggested that if we want to approach the landowners that we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the landowner and what they need/want.
 - Dave Ward supported the proposal of sending a letter or creating the program.
 - Jeff asked if we are compensating the private timber lands for bears peeling trees.
 - Bill checked with Conflict Specialist Harris and the conflict section does not reimburse for timberlands damage, only agricultural crop damage.
 - Monty asked if the private landowners must pay for the USDA Aphis program.
 - Kris checked and the Aphis program do charge a fee and most small independent operations cannot afford the fees.
 - Ian, Don, Dave W. will be on the subgroup.

- **MHAG member updates and Master Hunter communications (*John McAuliffe, 10 minutes*)**
 - Does anyone have anything to add?
 - Jeff Larson helped was a mentor for a new Master Hunter on a hunt in region 4 and felt that it went well, like the Region 5 mentored hunts previously.
 - Jeff Fjelstul also volunteered to be a mentor for a Master Hunter hunt in region 4 for the conflict specialist.
 - Ian was alerted to a hazing effort by WDFW to move elk off property and onto public lands with a helicopter in the Ellensburg valley.
 - Aaron will do some research into the incident and will let the MHAG know the specific information later.
 - Aaron reported after lunch that the hazing effort was a last attempt to move elk from a private property onto public property after exhausting all other means of moving the animals failed. This included deploying Master Hunters to the property.
- **Lunch (*45 minutes*)**
- **NHFD Recap (*Kris Thorson, 15 minutes*)**
 - WDFW, the Kalispel Tribe, Boy Scouts of America Inland Northwest Council, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation sponsored the 2023 National Hunting and Fishing Day (NHFD) celebration on September 30, 2023.
 - At the 2023 event, there were 540 youth and at least 355 parents/guardians in attendance.
 - Youth were surveyed at the event and during pre-registration if they had completed hunter education before and if they had fired a firearm or bow before.
 - Only 10 percent of the attendees had completed a hunter education class and 65 percent of the youth had fired a firearm or bow before NHFD.
 - There were 16 non-government organizations that came and had a presenter booth. Those groups are:
 - Inland Empire Bass Club
 - Kalispel Tribe
 - Puget Sound Flint Knappers
 - Spokane Fly Fishers
 - Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club
 - Washington State Falconers Association
 - Northwest Game Hawkers
 - National Wild Turkey Foundation
 - Conservation Northwest
 - Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
 - Ducks Unlimited
 - Delta Waterfowl
 - Washington Waterfowl Association
 - Spokane Walleye Club
 - Inland Northwest Wildlife Council

- Stonerose Interpretive Center and Eocene Fossil Site
 - Youth were introduced to the shooting sports by allowing them to shoot .22 rifles, 20-gauge shotguns, air rifles, bb guns, and archery equipment.
 - They also were able to catch and keep a trout.
 - After the event, WDFW sent a survey to the attendees to ask about their experience.
 - We had 38 responses from the 229 people we had valid email address for.
 - Over 47 percent of the responses indicated that they youth caught their first fish at the event.
 - The average rating out of 5 stars for the event was 4.53.
 - We also surveyed the volunteers and the presenters.
 - This survey was sent to 96 people and only 22 responded.
 - The volunteers and presenters rated their NHFD experience as a 3.95 out of 5.
 - We got a lot of good comments from the surveys that we hope to use to make 2024s event better.
 - Our 2024 event will be held at the Cowlitz Public Shooting Range located at 1000 Toutle Park Rd, Castle Rock, WA 98611 on Saturday, September 28, 2024.
- **2023 MHAG Workplan Items Discussion (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - Does anyone have anything to report on?
 - The MHAG identified 11 items that they wanted to work on during 2023.
 - MHAG completed work on 4 of the 11 items.
 - Work on the Strategic Plan Update was started but given the large scope of work, it was tabled until staff and a subcommittee could meet and talk about the future of the plan.
 - The Roadkill Salvage Coordination was also tabled because WDFW had a change of the Region 5 Regional Director and they needed to become more familiar with the regional operations.
 - Amy had a short conversation with Regional Director Rian Sallee on a possible project and gave her some high-level details.
 - The other five workplan items didn't get worked on because of other work needs.
 - In the workplan, there is a note that if not completed, the topic may move to the next years workplan.
 - Does MHAG want to move some of the uncompleted workplan items to the 2024 plan?
 - The group wanted to move items 1, 5, 6, and 8 forward.
- **2024 Workplan discussion (*Kris Thorson, 60 minutes*)**
 - The group wanted to modify item 4 from the 2023 workplan and take it forward to the 2024 workplan for continuing the relationships.
 - They also suggested adding to the 2024 workplan an item titled Modification/Updating of the orientation PowerPoint.
- **Advisory group member compensation & reimbursements (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - Second Substitute Senate Bill 5793 was passed in July 2023.

- This bill gives Washington state agencies the ability to start compensating advisory group members for their participation if they are not otherwise compensated.
- Before this bill's passage, the Department was only able to reimburse advisory group members for lodging and mileage when funding was available.
- This bill was designed to remove barriers to participation on advisory groups.
- Advisory group members can self-attest that they are eligible for compensation if they align with one of the following:
 - Person has direct personal experience in the subject matter being addressed in the advisory group OR
 - Person is an individual whose income is not more than 400% of the federal poverty level, adjusted for family size.
- Advisory group members must complete the [Advisory Group Member Compensation and Reimbursement Eligibility form](#) and submit via email to Kris.
- Compensation rates are:
 - Up to and including 1 hour - \$45
 - Between 1 and 2 hours - \$90
 - Between 2 and 3 hours - \$135
 - Between 3 and 4 hours - \$180
 - Over 4 hours - \$200
- We need to make sure that we are accurately tracking volunteer hours for advisory group members.
- Kris verified that each of the current members are registered as part of the MHAG project so they can log their hours.
- The advisory group will need to start logging their service hours in the departments volunteer program CERVIS if they haven't already.
- Monty asked the question on is the compensation is only for meetings or for all advisory group work.
 - Kris will report back.
- Jeff asked if they choose the compensation are they are volunteers at that point.
 - Kris will check with Rachel Blomker and Diane Tilton about the volunteer aspect vs paid employees.

Conclusion

- **Recap action items (Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes)**
 - Visual graph for MH trend line
 - Ask the question of Diane and Rachel about the compensation.
 - Ask Diane and the volunteer program.
 - 2024 workplan
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (John McAuliffe, 5 minutes)**
 - Recertification and non-completion survey results
 - MH Hours revisited – over 40 hours of service and reporting of hours are MH hours or no? (standing blurb in newsletter to talk about why we are tracking, etc.)

- Don would like to have more discussion on defining a Master Hunter, what they are and can do and what it means to be a Master Hunter.
- The 2024 meeting dates are:
 - March 8
 - June 14
 - August 16
 - December 13
- **Good of the order (*All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes*)**
- **Adjourn**