



# MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

**Meeting Notes for MHAG Meeting #64**  
**March 14, 2025, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**Washington Cattlemen’s Association**

<b>MHAG Members</b>		<b>WDFW Staff</b>	<b>Guests</b>
Region 1	(Vacant)	Kris Thorson, Hunter Education Section Specialist	Dr. Margaret Wild, Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine (virtual)
Region 2	Monty Pyle	Aaron Garcia, Region 3 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
Region 3	Don Brunssen (absent)	Jackie McBride, Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	John McAuliffe	Rachel Blomker, Public Engagement Division Manager	
	Kyle Smith (excused)	Leia Althausser, Community Involvement and Education Section Manager	
	David Solem	Joey McCanna, Private Lands Program Manager (virtual)	
Region 4	Jason Armstrong	Kelly Riordan, R3 State Hunting Coordinator (virtual)	
	Jeff Fjelstul		
	Jeff Larsen, Secretary		
	Ian Stewart, Chair		
Region 5	George Dennis		
	Keith Pfeifer, Vice Chair		
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, 10 minutes*)**
  - All the staff and MHAG members introduced themselves.

## New Business

- **2024 R3 report and 2025 efforts (*Kelly Riordan, 30 minutes*)**
  - Kris introduced Kelly Riordan, R3 State Hunting Coordinator.
  - Recruit, Retain, Reactivate or R3 is integral to WDFW's 25-year plan.
  - The messages are hunting is conservation, hunting funds conservation, connection to nature, and local funds are spent at local businesses.
  - R3 promotes hunting by providing mentored hunts, websites and social media information, and how-to clinics.
  - There is a focus on adult-onset hunters who are between 25 and 40 who have an interest in hunting and where their food comes from.
  - In 2024 there were many mentored hunting events that covered deer, turkey, and pheasant.
  - There are also clinics that present on Intro to Hunting and special permit/multi-season permits how-to.
  - Currently there is a turkey camp opportunity on the clinics page but soon there should be intro to archery clinics and some foraging clinics that will teach folks about how to pick mushrooms and local flora.
  - WDFW partners with many organizations like First Hunt Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, and Delta Waterfowl.
  - Michael asked who to contact to talk about the possibilities of not cutting the Western Washington Pheasant Hunting Program.
    - Rachel suggested that since this is a legislature and governor budget writers' question that folks could write to their senator or representative with their concerns.
  - Jeff asked if the license fee for the western pheasant license could cover the cost of producing pheasants for the program.
    - Kris doesn't know how the pheasant program uses their budget but if the legislature sets the funding it would be difficult to fully fund the program.
  - Jason asked if WDFW as a non-cabinet agency could ignore the issue.
    - If we don't get funding for these programs from the legislature and don't have dedicated funding outside state general funds, then we can't fund the program.
  - George asked what the return on investment was for clinic participants.
    - Aaron indicated that he knows folks are returning to hunt after being part of the hunting community moving forward but there hasn't been a widespread study on the efficacy.
  - Jeff L. suggested adding a shed hunting clinic.

- **Workplan finalization (Kris Thorson, 60 minutes)**
  - Kris sent the initial workplan to the leadership for their review and comment on January 7.
  - After their review Kris sent the draft to the rest of the MHAG on February 11.
  - Kris asked the MHAG for any comments, questions, or edits to the current draft so assignments could be established but there were not any changes to the document.
  - The group assigned themselves to the tasks in the workplan.
  - Members who were not at the meeting, they can pick a workplan item and send an email to Kris so he can update the assignments.
  - Kris will send out the most updated workplan to the group with the notes.
- **Break (15 minutes)**
- **Private Lands Access Program (Joey McCanna, 60 minutes)**
  - Kris introduced Joey McCanna, the Private Land Access Program Manager.
  - Joey has been with the agency for 31 years.
  - Joey is a part of the Landowner Services Division.
  - The Private Lands Access team works with landowners to increase opportunities for hunters.
  - Areas of emphasis for the Private Lands Section are recreational access and habitat conservation.
  - Recreational access focuses depend on local resources but there are multiple opportunities seasonally.
  - It also has hunting, wildlife viewing, and fishing as areas of emphasis under recreational access.
  - For habitat conservation, the section works with duck stamp funding, pheasant enhancement, farm bill programs, conservation districts, and partner with non-government organizations.
  - There are eight private lands focus areas currently.
  - Joey has been the manager for about 14 months.
  - The program has two private lands supervisors, 10 private lands biologists, and six natural resource technicians with split funding.
  - The program is 90 percent funded by Pittman-Robertson funding and 10 percent general fund state funded.
  - There is a map of Washington that has all the private lands staff listed online at [wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/wdfw-private-lands-biologists.pdf](https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/wdfw-private-lands-biologists.pdf) and Master Hunters can reach out to those folks to find out if there are any upcoming projects.
  - The private lands bios work on building relationships and partnerships for collaboration.
  - They do voluntary, incentive-based projects with landowners.
  - For private lands projects they start small and upscale as possible.
  - The private lands program has four types of access programs; Feel free to hunt, register to hunt, hunting by reservation only, and hunting by written permission
  - They also work with landowner hunting permits and a timber access program.

- Landowners receive some benefits by being part of the program like signage, flexibility to control access, more WDFW enforcement presence, and limited liability.
- The private lands access program also does habitat restoration on private lands that once completed they have a high success rate of having species use the habitat.
- Private lands staff use Master Hunters on habitat enhancement work parties.
- Michael asked how the Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Strategic Plan from DNR may or may not affect the Private Lands Access Program.
  - Joey is aware of the program and is working with DNR on how this may impact recreational access.
- David Solem had a question on the state purchase of the boat ramp at Sekiu.
  - That is managed by Shane Belson in Lands Division, not the private lands staff.
- Jeff asked if Joey's group oversees acquiring access to landlocked public lands.
  - There are some areas that they have acquired public lands access through private lands but not all have been able to happen.
- Monty had an experience where property that he hunts had a lot of folks on it in years past that before didn't have signage but once signage was posted, the number of people without written permission decreased.
- Jeff asked about kill permits for private landowners and if there was a nexus with conflict and private lands to provide access on lands that are having an inordinate amount of damage.
  - Yes, to qualify for those kinds of permits they must allow public access.
- **Lunch (30 minutes)**
- **Community Engagement and Outreach Section (Leia Althausen, 30 minutes)**
  - Kris introduced Leia Althausen, the Community Involvement and Education Team Manager.
  - She supervises seven staff members with vastly different areas of focus.
  - Her team manages the following programs:
    - Wild Washington school curriculum
    - Habitat at home
    - Community partnerships and outreach
    - Volunteer coordination
    - Statewide outreach
    - Watchable wildlife
    - Conservation education
  - Having a link to relevant experience helps combat extinction of experience.
  - The vision for the team's work is a future where all people feel connected to nature. We cultivate experiences that inspire conservation action and build public trust to ensure WDFW's work is relevant and supported.
  - This team is under the Communication and Public Engagement Division and is akin to the Hunter Education Section.

- The team has participated at over 200 events and served about 50,000 people since they started.
- Some of their upcoming outreach events are:
  - Coordinating archery classes for Seattle and Tacoma community groups.
  - Working with R3 coordinator to explore the intersection(s) between foraging and hunting.
  - Supporting Wenatchee Sportsmen’s Association in National Hunting and Fishing Day 2025
  - Exploring first ever National Public Lands Day “service learning” on WDFW wildlife areas
- Habitat at home is a two-part program.
- It certifies habitat and creates wildlife corridors through urban and suburban areas that also allows folks to experience wildlife where they work and play.
- It also teaches to coexist with wildlife and helps to increase human physical and mental wellbeing.
- Some ongoing Habitat at Home projects are habitat planning and design workshops, partnerships with housing authorities in Vancouver and Seattle, habitats at schools, Ridgefield pilot of HOA habitat, and east of the Cascades native seed packets.
- The Watchable Wildlife program provides opportunities for people to connect with wildlife virtually or in-person in rural and urban settings.
- Wildlife viewing is defined as a recreational activity of observing fish and wildlife or signs of fish and wildlife in their habitats (e.g. tracks, nests, scat).
- Outreach by the Watchable Wildlife program can be a bridge for many different programs and divisions within WDFW.
- It can also be an active (walks, events, or talks) or passive (website information, cameras, social media, etc.) outreach tool.
- Wild Washington is the Department’s K-12 and family education program.
- It seeks to give students and their families fish and wildlife themed learning opportunities that are place-based and experiential both formally through school learning and outside of the classroom through family engagement.
- WDFW has developed school curriculum and is holding teacher trainings to get help provide these lessons to students through schools.
- WDFW Wild Washington team is coordinating Wild Washington Outdoor Classrooms that are led by local partners and subject matter experts.
- One of the largest is the Beebe Springs class that was held in May 2024 and will be held in May 2025.
- Volunteers are needed for this May, see CERVIS for more details.
- They are also doing field trips on wildlife areas and at WDFW hatcheries.
- The Community Involvement and Education Team is also working on staffing a Volunteer Outreach Team that will assist WDFW at events.
- The team also loves to use Master Hunters in their outreach because they are so knowledgeable and willing to jump right in.

- Recently the Community Involvement and Education Team helped the Hunter Education Program update their pre-service training process and PowerPoint.
- **TAHD research update (Dr. Margaret Wild, 60 minutes)**
  - Kris introduced Dr. Margaret Wild, Professor at the Department of Veterinary Microbiology and Pathology, College of Veterinary Medicine, Washington State University.
  - Hoof disease is the preferred nomenclature because hoof rot is too like foot rot, a different disease that affects primarily cattle and sheep but has also been diagnosed occasionally in elk.
  - Treponeme Associated Hoof Disease or TAHD has not been identified in wildlife species other than elk.
  - WSU was designated as the state lead in developing a program to monitor and assess causes and potential solutions for elk hoof disease.
  - The objective for WSU is to increase knowledge base regarding cause(s) and contributing factors, identify mitigating actions, and enhance stakeholder involvement and outreach activities.
  - Dr. Wild wanted to identify to MHAG the most common questions that she receives and wanted to provide some answers.
    - Have you solved it yet?
      - No but they are making headway. Causes of wildlife diseases are extremely complex and can take a long time to truly understand the disease.
    - Are disease causes increasing or spreading?
      - There are multiple causes of abnormal hooves. Based on the number of positive cases, it does seem like it is spreading.
    - What causes elk hoof disease?
      - Lesions are associated the *Treponema spp.* bacteria.
      - Association with treponemes confirmed.
      - Association with other groups of bacteria also confirmed, including newly discovered bacteria.
    - Do other factors contribute to disease occurrence?
      - Mineral deficiency can impact hoof health.
      - Testing the mineral levels via hair indicated that TAHD positive elk had lower levels of selenium. In testing elk livers from California selenium and copper levels were low in elk with and without TAHD.
      - Supplemental minerals are not recommended at this time because the animals would likely congregate and possibly increase transmission.
      - There is a correlation of higher levels of clay in the soil and occurrence of TAHD. This might be due to improved bacterial survival that increased the possibility of transmission. Also, agricultural lands were associated with increased occurrence of

TAHD, perhaps due to congregation that increased the possibility of the transmission of TAHD.

- Is there anything we can do to control this disease?
  - There is a similar disease that infects cattle and sheep.
  - The similar disease is managed by foot baths, antibiotics, and continued treatment, which are not feasible for free-ranging elk.
  - What is most likely to work is removal of infected animals, limiting human assisted movement, limiting unnatural congregation, and habitat management.
  - Hunters can help by completing the hunter reports and participate in incentive programs, collect samples for research, report elk with abnormal hooves from GMUs and counties where TAHD has not been confirmed, and share observations and ideas.
- Remember that TAHD is a regional issue and also occurs in Oregon, Idaho, and California.
- WSU built an enclosure for a captive elk study.
- The initial experiment exposed healthy elk to unhealthy hooves in soil and there was transmission in controlled conditions.
  - The experiment location was free of herbicides and potential risk factors..
- During the experimentation, it was indicated that this is a transmissible infectious disease with strong evidence of a bacterial cause.
- Necropsies findings from captive elk studies find that the lesions are generally limited to the feet, have low level of inflammation in some organs, muscles appeared fine but these elk we euthanized before TAHD had a chance to limit their nutritional intake and become severely debilitated.
- There is a strong correlation of TAHD positive elk and having antler asymmetry with an increased prevalence of asymmetry with increasing point counts.
- **Break (15 minutes)**
- **Field coordinator report questions (Kris Thorson, 15 minutes)**
  - Does anyone have any questions on the reports that were sent out on Monday?
  - Jeff wanted to give a shout out to Jackie about the work she does with her Master Hunters.
- **MHAG member updates and Master Hunter communications (Ian Stewart, 15 minutes)**
  - Does anyone have anything to add?
  - Jeff Larsen had contact with a Master Hunter who had a question on the Eyes in the Woods and Criminal Observation Reporting Training.
    - He proposed we remove that information since the group is now defunct.
  - Jeff also had a person contact him about wanting to be a Master Hunter but had an infraction when he was 19.
    - If the infraction was 10 years or more from their application, they can still apply to the program.

- Monty had a contact with someone who asked if there was a “junior” Master Hunter program, and they asked if other states have this kind of program and if they have different levels of participation.
  - Kris will look at other states and see if they have programs and what they look like.
- Jeff Larsen proctored the test several times and talks to the applicants about what to expect.
- Dave Ward and Gary had a meeting with the region 6 conflict staff, and they discussed hoof disease hunts and access to private timberlands.
  - Dave Ward contacted Weyerhaeuser to see if they would be willing to open access to allow hoof disease permit holders on those properties and it sounded like they would be agreeable.
- Gary in that meeting heard that the conflict staff were having a lot of Master Hunters are calling them about the list and when the Master Hunters are going to be deployed etc.
  - Gary suggested we add to the next newsletter information on not calling the conflict staff.
- At that meeting Gary also heard from the conflict staff that they were needing to indicate what hunting equipment the Master Hunter has qualified with.
  - We can work with conflict specialists to either identify those folks who qualified with the hunting equipment or add to the expectations letter what hunting equipment they are proficient with.

### **Conclusion**

- **Recap action items (*Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes*)**
  - Email test stuff to workplan folks.
  - Workplan to MHAG.
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (*Ian Stewart, 5 minutes*)**
- **Good of the order (*All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes*)**
- **Adjourn**