

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM  
PROGRESS REPORT  
2014<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting and outdoor recreational activities in Washington, and are “stewards of the hunt”. Members of the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP) give back to the wildlife resource through their volunteer work and help promote and strengthen the heritage of hunting through their actions.

Master Hunters are used as a tool to help achieve Wildlife Program goals and initiatives through:

- Strengthening the conservation ethic and the image and heritage of hunting in Washington by engaging in public outreach related to the role of hunting today and in the future.
- Improving landowner relations through the practice of ethical and responsible hunting.
- Helping to resolve human/wildlife conflicts or public safety issues through the control of game populations causing damage to public and private property.
- Increasing hunter access to private lands through volunteer efforts.
- Increasing recruitment and retention of hunters through participation in Hunter Education Training, Hunter Training Clinics, and mentoring of first-time-hunters.
- Protection and enhancement of critical habitats through volunteer projects associated with WDFW Wildlife Areas and Water Access Sites.
- Participating in Citizen Science wildlife data collection.
- Serving in an administrative or coordination capacity for a volunteer network.
- Providing a communications link with the general public to impart accurate information about WDFW’s management activities associated with wildlife and hunting.

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) represents master hunters statewide, and advises WDFW on issues and opportunities affecting master hunters and the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP). The MHAG works in partnership with WDFW to identify and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities for hunters and Master Hunters throughout the state. These opportunities are intended to promote the conservation ethic and address priority needs of the Wildlife Program and the Department, as well as to develop a dependable means of coordination and management of Master Hunter volunteer efforts within each WDFW Region.

---

<sup>1</sup> While this annual report covers calendar year 2014, it includes some activities that occurred in January 2015.

## Participant Update

As of December 2014, there are 1,701 certified Master Hunters in good standing. Below is a summary of participation in the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP) since 2010. The MHPP replaced the former Advanced Hunter Education Program in 2008. There was no open enrollment period for calendar year 2013. Enrollment was closed to allow WDFW time to review the program, clarify its role, and to identify strategies that better engage members in high-priority volunteer work. The table below summarizes the annual number of Master Hunters since 2010.

**Certified Master Hunters by Year**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013*</b>	<b>2014</b>
Applicants	806	708	510	0	521
Applicants certified	150	132	83	2*	135
Percent certified	19%	19%	16%	n/a	26%
<b>Total Master Hunters</b>	<b>1,956</b>	<b>1,975</b>	<b>1,938</b>	<b>1,815</b>	<b>1,701</b>

\* There were two applicants from 2012 that were not certified until 2013 due to administrative issues.

The percentage of Master Hunters renewing their certification has remained relatively constant, and has averaged about 55% each year since 2010 (see table below).

**Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
Certification renewals	241	163	210	207	221
Non-renewals	209	140	144	145	224
<b>Renewal Rate</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>50%</b>

## Master Hunter Advisory Group

During the 2014 calendar year, Jim Fitzgerald served chair of the Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) and John McGlenn served as vice-chair during that time period.

The MHAG conducted four formal business meetings in 2014, all in Ellensburg. All meeting notices and agendas were posted in advance on the MHPP webpage (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>), as were notes from meetings, which were held on January 10, April 25, July 18 and October 3.

## **Program Refinements**

This year was the first full year of the MHPP being administered by the Wildlife Program, and was the first opportunity to begin implementing the Wildlife Program Policy Statement adopted in 2013. The policy statement describes the role of Master Hunters and how the Department will utilize them, and can be found at

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/files/2013\\_mh\\_policy\\_statement.pdf](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/files/2013_mh_policy_statement.pdf).

In conjunction with the WDFW Volunteer Program Manager, the Hunter Education Division presented volunteer and Master Hunter information at the Lands Division winter meeting, to help promote the use of Master Hunter volunteers on Wildlife Area and Access Area projects. A similar presentation was provided at the Game and Diversity Division winter workshop in January 2015. Additionally, the Hunter Education Division Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator has made great progress in assisting Region 4 staff (as well as other WDFW Regions) successfully utilize Master Hunters on volunteer projects.

The Hunter Education Division, in cooperation with the MHAG, reviewed the Master Hunter certification and re-certification requirements, and decided that once sufficient meaningful volunteer work is identified by WDFW and Master Hunters are substantially engaged, the volunteer hour requirements for certification and re-certification may be reviewed.

A Strategic Plan was developed over the course of 2014 and was adopted in January 2015. The strategic plan focuses on work activities aimed at improving landowner-sportsman relations, promoting access to private land, stimulating hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation/reengagement, and ensuring the corps of Master Hunters can effectively address wildlife depredation issues in a safe, legal and ethical manner. These focus areas are intended to help all Washington citizens celebrate and perpetuate the heritage of hunting in Washington State. Upcoming work of the group will focus on identifying specific work plan elements for 2015 and beyond. The strategic plan will be posted to the MHAG website in the near future (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>).

Discussion and review of the Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT) occurred over the year between WDFW, MHAG and the Eyes in the Woods (EITW) CORT liaison. Refinements to be made in 2015 include twelve guaranteed classes (two per WDFW Region), and enhanced EITW CORT webpage information, calendar, class registration process, and CORT regional contact information. In addition, an emphasis will continue to be placed on combining CORT with the proctoring of MHPP applicant examinations to provide efficiencies. The two new MHPP applicant tests jointly developed by WDFW and the MHAG were used for the first time in 2014.

## **Communications and Outreach**

Members of the MHAG routinely met with WDFW Regional staff in order to foster closer working relations and identify volunteer efforts to address priority agency needs.

MHAG members were also provided contact information for all certified Master Hunters living in their respective Regions and many have begun the process of creating email group communications systems.

## **Policy and Programmatic**

Former MHAG member and current Master Hunter Mike Britton continued to implement his Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant pilot project within WDFW Region 1 (Spokane). The goals of the project are to increase the use of Master Hunter volunteers, decrease WDFW staff resources used to train and utilize volunteers, coordinate with landowners, staff and Master Hunter services, and to assist staff in landowner contacts and citizen science. The general focus of the effort is on facilitation of game damage control using Master Hunters, but other important volunteer efforts are also being successfully coordinated.

The Hunter Education Division filled a new position in WDFW Region 4 in January 2014. The position is located in the Mill Creek office and is responsible for the coordination of wildlife-related volunteer work (50%) and Hunter Education Division work (50%). This has substantially enhanced WDFW's ability to utilize Master Hunters (as well as other volunteers) on priority projects. The position also greatly increased the Department's capacity in assisting and coordinating volunteer Hunter Education Instructors, resulting in improved customer service to hunter education students. While these activities occurred within Region 4, positive effects were realized across the Westside as well at a statewide level. In addition, the Hunter Education Division created two new positions; one in Region 3 and one in Region 6. These positions will coordinate wildlife-related volunteer work (25%) and Hunter Education Division work (75%), and were filled in January 2015.

Six members of the MHAG were appointed by Director Phil Anderson in December 2013 for terms beginning in March 2014. These appointments consist of new members and reappointments, and include John Glenewinkel (Region 1), Carissa Craghead (Region 2), Lance Ostrom (Region 3), Jim Fitzgerald (Region 4), George Dennis (Region 5) and Dave Berg (Region 6). Regional representation is retained with these appointments.

The Hunter Education Division in cooperation with the MHAG reviewed existing documents containing the group's bylaws and its roles and responsibilities. The purpose for doing so was to provide clarity, to make improvements, and reflect refinement of the advisory group's roles and responsibilities, consistent with WDFW's Operating Protocols and Guidelines for Advisory Groups. Content from the two documents was combined into one, duplicity was removed and clarity was added. This effort began in 2013 and was completed in 2014 with the adoption of the "Master Hunter Advisory Group Purpose, Roles and Operating Procedures" in July 2014, which has been posted to the MHAG webpage at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/MHAG\\_Bylaws.pdf](http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/MHAG_Bylaws.pdf).

## **Program Integrity**

During 2014, no Master Hunters were removed from the MHPP for life due to a conviction related to a Title 77 RCW violation. Nine Master Hunters were suspended until their cases are adjudicated. This is the fifth year that the special Master Hunter identifier (MH) has appeared on WDFW licensing, which is intended to facilitate timely and appropriate action on those Master Hunters that violate hunting and fishing rules.

## **Future Direction**

Currently, individuals applying to become Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 20 hours of approved volunteer conservation hours, and existing Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer conservation hours every five years in order to renew their certification.

Volunteer efforts by Master Hunters continue to some degree to be provided to organizations and agencies other than WDFW. However, the new Wildlife Program Policy for the Master Hunter Permit Program, as well as the Hunter Education Division's new staff member in Region 4 have been effective at facilitating an increased use of Master Hunters by Wildlife Program divisions to address priority needs. The addition of the Region 3 and Region 6 Hunter Education Division staff will also greatly help the Wildlife Program more fully utilize volunteer Master Hunters on priority projects. Priority projects include game damage control, improving private lands access, hunter recruitment and retention, Wildlife Area habitat improvement, Access Area improvement, data collection, Hunter Education classes, etc. Once sufficient meaningful volunteer work is identified by WDFW and Master Hunters are substantially engaged, the volunteer hour requirements for certification and re-certification may be reviewed.

More emphasis will likely be placed on engaging Master Hunters in Hunter Education training, as well as future hunter training clinics conducted by WDFW.