

# **Master Hunter Permit Program**

## **2015 Strategic Plan**

*Adopted January 9, 2015*

### **Introduction**

Hunting has played an important role in shaping the responsible and conservation minded character of people in the United States. Hunting in the U.S., unlike in Europe and other regions, is available to all citizens. The percentage of those who hunt in the U.S., once very high, has been dropping in recent decades but the total number is still around 10 million and in some sectors the number is growing.

Because the benefits from hunting are numerous and broad, WDFW and hunters in general, want to see active participation in hunting. Major benefits of hunting include the following:

- Hunters have played a very significant role in conservation of the habitat essential for healthy wildlife populations that benefit all those who enjoy the presence of wildlife.
- Hunting families teach safe and responsible behavior to their children and to their communities.
- Harvested game provides a nutritious addition to the tables of many.
- Hunters are a critical element for management of impacts to crops by wildlife.

The Master Hunter Permit Program was developed to:

- 1) Promote safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting;
- 2) Promote support in the general public for hunting;
- 3) Promote the highest standards of hunting;
- 4) Improve landowner-sportsman relations;
- 5) Engage applicants and participants in volunteer conservation projects that benefit wildlife, wildlife habitat, promote hunting access on private land, and the associated priorities; and
- 6) Develop a Corps of Master Hunters that can be engaged in addressing highly sensitive wildlife depredation issues.

Master Hunters are role models for the rest of the hunting community and, through their actions act as ambassadors for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

## **Master Hunter Advisory Group**

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).

MHAG's mission is to develop a corps of sportsmen dedicated to preserving the heritage of hunting by giving back to the sport, displaying the highest standards of conduct, and working to conserve wildlife habitat and hunting opportunity.

Additionally, for the purposes of this strategic plan, MHAG has adopted the mission to ***Celebrate and Perpetuate the Heritage of Hunting in Washington State***. This mission statement is intended to compliment the group's formal mission, as well as advance the goals of the MHPP by driving specific actions and activities that can be taken by WDFW, MHAG and Master Hunters to advance the goals of the MHPP.

## **Master Hunter Permit Program Strategic Plan**

The purpose of the Master Hunter Program is to focus on the positive aspects of hunting so that hunting will remain as a strong element in the management and enjoyment of healthy wildlife populations.

This Strategic Plan was developed by WDFW in conjunction w/ MHAG, and will serve to direct agency and MHAG actions, in the implementation and evolution of the MHPP. The plan captures what WDFW & MHAG believe are currently some of the most important actions to take to promote the MHPP goals. The plan is a living document and will be modified to reflect current issues and efforts to address them.

Some of the current, more pressing issues facing WDFW related to the Master Hunter Permit Program include:

- Improving landowner-sportsman relations
- Promoting access to private land
- Stimulating hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation/reengagement
- Ensuring the corps of Master Hunters can effectively address wildlife depredation issues in a safe, legal and ethical manner.

## Strategic Plan Elements

The following actions are those that WDFW, MHAG and Master Hunters believe are of high priority in order to address the current most significant needs, and will receive focus beginning in 2015. These elements may be modified over time to reflect accomplishments and adjustments in priorities. In addition to the focus areas below, MHAG will coordinate with WDFW's Hunter Recruitment, Retention and Reengagement Advisory Group (HR3AG) via MHAG's representatives on that group and the Hunter Education Division Manager. MHAG will remain abreast of the HR3AG's work and will assist as appropriate with implementing actions consistent with the pending hunter recruitment and retention plan.

- Mentored Youth Hunts.

Providing a positive and successful hunting experience for youth hunters is important to recruit and retain young hunters. Master Hunters can play a key role in providing mentored youth hunts. Possible avenues to provide mentored youth hunts may include:

- Developing opportunities on private land where youth and parent or guardian would be able to hunt with a good chance of success. The role of Master Hunters would be to utilize their skills and contacts with private landowners to facilitate these mentored hunts, and possibly coach the youth and parent/guardian pair during the hunt.
- Developing mentor permits to allow Master Hunters to participate in mentored youth or 1st-time youth hunters (e.g. 3911). Some Master Hunters may be interested in mentoring youth hunters and some landowners may embrace providing youth hunters with this opportunity. The concept is:
  - To enable landowners to provide youth or 1<sup>st</sup> time youth hunters with damage permits.
  - Individual Master Hunters would be responsible for helping coach youth on specifics of the hunt and necessary safety practices under the damage permit.
  - Master Hunters may be able to utilize their Master Hunter permit as well.
  - WDFW Conflict Specialists may serve as a conduit between landowners & Master Hunters and youth hunters.
  - Where possible, parents/guardians of the youth may hunt with the Master Hunter and youth hunter.

- Education and Training. Assist in educating, teaching and training new and existing hunters, as well as other recreationalists, on the Hunting Heritage & the contributions hunters make to all conservation, the Hunters Code of Conduct, game management, hunting methods and skills, where to hunt, etc., appropriate to the audience and venue. Opportunities include:
  - Development and dissemination of web and print based informational content that Master Hunters could use to assist hunters, particularly first-time-hunters and novice hunters, in all aspects of hunting. The information would also assist parents, guardians, or others to be more effective mentors for those people wanting to become hunters, first-time-hunters, or novice hunters.
  - Master Hunters provide guidance & serve as a liaison/consultant to parents/guardians regarding how, when, where to hunt on private property where access is limited & the likelihood of seeing animals & hunting success is higher. Game species could include waterfowl, small game, big game.
  - Development of Master Hunter opportunities to participate in educational and training activities such as hunting clinics, sports show seminars, sporting goods outlets, non-governmental organization events (e.g. RMEF, DU, etc.), Hunter Education classes and continuing education events, Washington Outdoor Women, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, school presentations, specific state and national events such as National Hunting & Fishing Day, etc.
  - Development and delivery of information and key messages to outdoor writers, with the goal of conveying the Hunting Heritage, stories describing the benefits of families hunting together and historic actions and events that have shaped hunting privileges and practices in WA.

- Improve the Image of Master Hunters and the MHPP. Components may include:
  - Identify & assess existing and possible new ways to ensure responsible, respectful, and ethical practices of Master Hunters during Master Hunter hunts.
  - Engage Master Hunters to assist WDFW in the coordination of Master Hunter volunteers and projects in each Region
  - Pursue ALEA grants to facilitate more Master Hunter volunteer projects and better coordination of Master Hunters
  - Utilize MHAG members and other Master Hunters to help WDFW facilitate successful implementation of the volunteer coordination staffing enhancement in Regions 3, 4 and 6.
  - Capitalize on opportunities to engage Master Hunters to assist landowners in repairing and maintaining wildlife damaged property
  - Make the benefits and accomplishments of the Master Hunters and the MHPP more visible to the hunting public, general public, WDFW, and Fish and Wildlife Commission
  - Evaluate the pilot Master Hunter Ranked-list Subset Project and consider expansion statewide
  - Assess & update the Master Hunter Hunt Coordinator Guidelines if needed
  - Assess and possibly improve the MHPP information in the WDFW Hunting Rules and Regulations pamphlets
  - Consider possible elimination of antlered deer and elk opportunities for Master Hunters
  - Consider posting MHPP applicant study materials and curricula on the MHPP webpage, to provide all hunters the opportunity to improve their knowledge and outdoor skills