

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

Introduction

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting and outdoor recreational activities in Washington. They are also “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 resource to help achieve the following Wildlife Program goals and initiatives:

- Strengthening the conservation ethic, 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 causing damage to public and private property.
- Increasing hunter access to private lands through volunteer efforts.
- Increasing recruitment, retention, and re-engagement of hunters through participation in hunter education classes, hunter training clinics, and mentoring of first-time-hunters.
- Protecting and enhancing important 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.

Participant Update

As of December 2015, there are 1,650 certified Master Hunters in good standing. 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

	2010	2011	2012	2013*	2014	2015
Applicants	806	708	510	0	521	375
Applicants certified	150	132	83	2*	135	97
Percent certified	19%	19%	16%	n/a	26%	26%
Total Master Hunters	1,956	1,975	1,938	1,815	1,701	1,650

* 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 approximately 56% each year since 2010 (see table below).

Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Certification renewals	241	163	210	207	221	250
Non-renewals	209	140	144	145	224	169
Renewal Rate	54%	54%	59%	59%	50%	59%

** These numbers are approximations due to the fluidity of the data in the database.

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). 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.

The MHAG consists of 15 members, who serve three-year terms. Five members are appointed by the Director each year, with the goal of maintaining at least two Master Hunters per Department administrative region. The group appoints a chair and vice-chair who serve one year terms, and a secretary who serves two year terms.

Five members of the MHAG were appointed by former Director Phil Anderson in January 2015 for terms beginning in April 2015. These appointments consist of new members and reappointments, and include Tim Bruya (Region 1), Shawn Woodard (Region 1), Bernard Brown (Region 2), John McAuliffe (Region 4), and Chris Brong (Region 5). Regional representation is retained with these appointments. During 2015, Jim Fitzgerald (Region 4) served chair of the MHAG and John McGlenn served as vice-chair through the April MHAG meeting. From April through the end of the calendar year, Jim Fitzgerald continued to serve as chair, and George Dennis (Region 5) served as vice-chair.

The MHAG conducted four formal business meetings in 2015, 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 9, April 24, July 17, and October 9. All Master Hunters are invited to attend the four MHAG meetings held quarterly in Ellensburg

Program Refinements

The MHPP replaced the former Advanced Hunter Education Program in 2008, and 2015 was the second full year the MHPP has been administered by the Wildlife Program. The Wildlife Program adopted a MHPP Policy Statement in 2013, which describes the role of Master Hunters and how the Department will utilize them. The policy statement can be found at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/Masterhunter/files/2013_mh_policy_statement.pdf.

The Hunter Education Division has added field coordinators in Region 3 and Region 6 who have volunteer coordination as a portion of their job duties. Adding these staff members has helped to increase WDFW volunteer projects but especially to market agency volunteer opportunities to MHPP applicants and existing Master Hunters.

The MHPP Strategic Plan was revised over the course of 2015, based on suggestions from MHAG members. 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. The strategic plan is posted on the MHAG website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>). MHAG members and WDFW staff are currently developing hunting opportunities for youth on private lands, whereby the youth hunters and their parents/guardians would have a high probability of success. Master Hunters, through their contacts with private landowners, will play an important role in facilitating access for these hunts.

Discussion and review of the Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT) occurred over the year between WDFW, MHAG, and Eyes in the Woods (EITW). Refinements are scheduled to be made in 2016. WDFW, MHAG, and EITW will be working together to promote and make this training course more accessible to MH applicants as well as the general public.

Communications and Outreach

Members of the MHAG occasionally met with WDFW Regional staff to foster closer working relationships 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, to facilitate regional communication and information sharing relative to MHPP and wildlife management related topics.

The Hunter Education Division conducted a public meeting on July 31, 2015 in Ellensburg to discuss and help educate landowners and Master Hunters on Elk Area 3911 issues. Elk Area 3911 encompasses all or part of six Game Management Units in Kittitas County. This elk area is a Master Hunter general season hunt intended to help address elk damage on private lands. Specific items discussed included the then recent Commission-approved elk area boundary change, agency goals and management strategies for Elk Area 3911, and also information to assist Master Hunters in effectively and ethically hunting the area, which is comprised largely of private lands. Two MHAG members assisted WDFW staff in delivering the information and answering questions. Over 100 attendees were present, and the response from Master Hunters was overwhelmingly positive. WDFW intends to conduct this meeting in future years, to continue increasing knowledge and understanding among Master Hunters and landowners.

The Hunter Education Division, in cooperation with the MHAG, reviewed and updated the Master Hunter Permit Program website information. The update focuses the information more sharply on the role of the Master Hunter in giving back to our hunting heritage, volunteering to assist the agency, etc., versus additional hunting opportunity. The Hunter Education Division and MHAG members will continue delivering this message through other outreach and communication avenues, such as outdoor shows and sporting goods store events, as well as hunter education classes, hunting clinics, etc.

Policy and Programmatic

The Hunter Education Division created and filled two new positions in January 2015, in Regions 3 and 6. These two positions are responsible for the coordination of wildlife-related volunteer work (25%) and hunter education coordination (75%). Since there are currently no volunteer coordinators in Regions 1, 2, and 5, the Region 3, 4, and 6 field coordinators assist with volunteer coordination in those areas when possible. This has substantially enhanced WDFW's ability to utilize Master Hunters (as well as other volunteers) on priority projects. These positions also greatly increased the Department's capacity in assisting and coordinating volunteer Hunter Education Instructors, resulting in improved customer service to hunter education students.

The Hunter Education Division's vacant Program Specialist position was filled in July. This has allowed WDFW to make quicker updates and improvements to the MHPP, implement priorities of

the MHPP Strategic Plan, and will also help foster new volunteer opportunities in the future. Among other tasks, the program specialist is currently working with Hunter Education Division and other Wildlife Program staff to develop hunting clinics, intended to help improve hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation.

Program Integrity

Chapter 77.15.760 RCW and WAC 232-12-073 dictate the actions of the department relative to Master Hunter suspensions. During 2015, four Master Hunters were removed from the MHPP for life due to convictions related to Title 77.15 RCW violations or other misdemeanor charges. In addition, three Master Hunters were suspended for two years due to paying a fine for a Title 77.15 infraction. Finally, one Master Hunter was suspended until his/her case is adjudicated. This is the sixth 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. The Hunter Education Division is working with the Enforcement Program to streamline and formalize the internal Master Hunter suspension process to ensure efficiency and consistency.

Future Direction

Currently, individuals applying to become Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 20 hours of approved volunteer conservation service, and existing Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer conservation work 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 2013 Wildlife Program Policy for the Master Hunter Permit Program, as well as the Hunter Education Division's new staff members have been effective at facilitating an increased use of Master Hunters by Wildlife Program staff to address priority needs. The Hunter Education Division and the Volunteer Program Manager continue to work with other department staff to increase the use of volunteers. Priority projects include game damage control, improving private lands access, hunter recruitment, retention, and re-engagement, Wildlife Area habitat and facility improvements, Water Access Site improvements, scientific data collection, teaching 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.

In addition to increasing the number of agency volunteer projects for Master Hunters, emphasis in the future will be placed on continuing to engage Master Hunters in Hunter Education classes, delivering Crime Observation and Reporting Training, proctoring Master Hunter exams, assisting with private lands access (particularly for youth hunters), and utilizing their knowledge and skill during WDFW's hunting clinics.