

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
2018 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 Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) 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 WDFW 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 January 1, 2018, there are 1,632 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 2012.

Certified Master Hunters by Year

	2012	2013*	2014	2015	2016	2017
Applicants	510	0	521	375	317	350
Applicants certified	83	2*	135	97	89	85
Percent certified	16%	n/a	26%	26%	28%	24%
Total Master Hunters	1,938	1,815	1,701	1,650	1,648	1,632

* 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. Over the last six years it has averaged approximately 58 percent.

Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Certification renewals	210	207	221	250	198	124
Non-renewals	144	145	224	169	104	86
Renewal Rate	59%	59%	50%	60%	66%	59%

** These numbers are approximations due to the fluidity of the Master Hunter renewals.

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 MHPP. The MHAG works in partnership with WDFW to identify and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities for 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 WDFW administrative region. The group appoints a chair and vice-chair who serve one year terms, and a secretary who serves a two year term.

Five members of the MHAG were appointed by Director Jim Unsworth in January 2017 for terms beginning in April 2017. These appointments consist of new members and reappointments, and

include Tom Conrads (Region 3), David Floyd (Region 4), Jeff Larsen (Region 4), Shane Briel (Region 6), and Jim Zimmerman (Region 6). Regional representation is retained with these appointments. During 2017, George Dennis (Region 5) served as chair and John McAuliffe (Region 4) served as vice-chair.

The MHAG conducted three formal business meetings in 2017, all in Ellensburg. All meeting notices, agendas, and meeting notes are posted on the MHAG webpage (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>). Meetings were held on January 27, April 28, and October 6. In 2018 there are currently four business meetings scheduled for January 19, April 13, July 20, and October 26. 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 2017 was the fourth full year the MHPP has been administered by the Wildlife Program. The Wildlife Program adopted a MHPP Policy Statement in 2013. It 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.

With cooperation from the Game Division, management has made clarifications to the Master Hunter Special Hunt Permit letter to address issues in past years, as well as provide information on program goals and expectations. These letters were sent by the Regional Program Managers to permit recipients in late August.

Study materials that Master Hunter applicants currently receive to study for the Master Hunter exam contain some outdated material. The Master Hunter Manager is working with the MHAG to produce not only updated study materials, but a new 100 question exam that will likely be implemented in 2019.

Communications and Outreach

MHAG members were provided contact information for all certified Master Hunters living in their respective Regions to facilitate regional communication and information sharing relative to the MHPP and wildlife management related topics.

Master Hunters are required to provide 40 hours of volunteer service every five years on projects associated with WDFW initiatives or that complement WDFW private and public partnerships. Collectively, Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants provide approximately 10,000 hours per year on volunteer projects.

WDFW has three field coordinators who have volunteer coordinator duties. These coordinators are a contact point for WDFW staff to help solicit Master Hunters and other volunteers for various wildlife projects within their counties of responsibility. Below is a map of the coordinators areas.

The Hunter Education Division, which manages the MHPP, held six Master Hunter orientation meetings across the state in early 2018.. The orientations provided information on the MHPP and its goals to Master Hunter applicants, current Master Hunters, and members of the public. During these orientations, department staff clarified certification requirements for the Master hunter Program, volunteer opportunities, the expectations of Master Hunters on special hunts, wildlife conflict information, as well as behavior regarding harvest proficiencies and game care. The intent of providing this information is to ensure Master Hunter applicants fully understand the obligations, commitments and skill sets that are requirements of the program.



In 2017, the Hunter Education Division began publishing a Master Hunter Permit Program bi-monthly newsletter for all Master Hunters, Master Hunter applicants, and Wildlife Program staff who might use Master Hunters. The newsletter includes articles from the Director’s report for the previous two months, Master Hunter success stories, upcoming volunteer opportunities, and other information. These newsletters have been widely accepted by the MHAG and Master Hunters alike. Staff submittals for entry into the newsletter are growing.

Hunter Education staff met with Rick Brazell from the First Hunt Foundation in late 2016. The First Hunt Foundation sponsors several hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation programs. The department, with MHAG’s support, is partnering with First Hunt Foundation to provide mentored hunts using Master Hunters and Hunter Education Instructors as mentors. The department funneled new hunters who took a WDFW turkey clinic to the First Hunt Foundation mentors and were able to get at least 33 new turkey hunters into the field.

The department held a free celebration of National Hunting and Fishing Day near Snohomish this year. 750 youth participated, averaging 9.5 years of age. Those participants were required to have an accompanying adult. The exact number of adults was not recorded, however the department estimated there was at least one adult per youth at the event. WDFW Fish Program stocked 850 1.5 lb. trout in the lake for participants to catch and keep. WDFW had 100+ volunteers at the event. There were 14 non-government organizations that participated in the festivities. Major donors for the event were the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, NRA Foundation, Don Curtis and Volterra Restaurants, as well as Boy Scout Camp Pigott. Participants received training, guidance, direction, and encouragement from certified Master Hunters and Hunter Education Instructors. They had the ability to visit five shooting stations throughout the day to experience target shooting with .22 rifles, bb guns, and air rifles, as well as trap shooting, and archery shooting. Only

443 (59 percent) participants had previously shot a bow or firearm and seventy-two (9.6 percent) participants had previously taken Hunter Education.

Policy and Programmatic

As noted above, the expansion of WDFW's field coordinator's areas of coverage has substantially enhanced WDFW's ability to utilize Master Hunters (as well as other volunteers) on priority projects.

In 2015, WDFW began offering clinics to the public on how to hunt specific game species. WDFW held 24 clinics in 2017. These clinics consisted of 14 turkey clinics, eight upland bird clinics, one waterfowl clinic, and one deer clinic. Informational booklets were created by WDFW to assist in teaching these clinics, and are available online (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/clinics/booklets.php>). Several clinics had an associated mentored hunt component, and several of the participants were able to harvest during the season.

The Hunter Education Division staff met with Conflict Section staff and Private Lands staff in March 2017 to discuss possible improvements to the MHPP. That meeting prompted Hunter Education staff to create a document to capture and track possible program improvements. This document will be updated as needed and will be used to determine if changes did in fact address the issues and challenges.

Program Integrity

Chapter 77.15.760 RCW and WAC 220-412-030 dictate the actions of the department relative to Master Hunter suspensions. During 2017, three Master Hunters were suspended for two years due to paying a fine for a Title 77.15 infraction. This is the eighth year that the special Master Hunter (MH) identifier has appeared on WDFW licenses, which is intended to facilitate timely and appropriate action on those Master Hunters that violate hunting and fishing rules. The Hunter Education Division continues to work with the Enforcement Program to streamline the internal Master Hunter suspension process to ensure efficiency and consistency.

Future Direction

Currently, Master Hunter applicants 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.

Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants have had increased volunteer opportunities to address Wildlife Program priority needs thanks to Hunter Education Division staff and the Volunteer Program Manager, who continue to work with other department staff to increase the

use of MHPP 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, and teaching hunter education classes. Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants are also permitted to volunteer with other wildlife organizations and agencies to fulfill their Master Hunter volunteer obligations on projects beneficial to WDFW's mission. Once sufficient meaningful volunteer work is identified by WDFW, and Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants 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 (CORT), proctoring Master Hunter exams, assisting with private lands access (particularly for youth hunters), and utilizing their knowledge and skill during WDFW's hunting clinics.

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