

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM  
2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

**Introduction**

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting in Washington state. Their dedication helps promote and strengthen our hunting heritage.

Master Hunters help achieve Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Wildlife Program goals and initiatives by:

- Strengthening the conservation ethic, image of hunting, and hunting heritage
- Improving landowner relations
- Helping resolve human/wildlife conflicts
- Removing deer and/or elk causing damage to property
- Increasing hunter access to private lands through volunteer efforts
- Participating in hunter education classes, hunting clinics, and mentoring new hunters
- Protecting and enhancing important habitats
- Participating in WDFW Citizen Science wildlife data collection
- Serving in an administrative or coordination capacity for a volunteer network
- Providing accurate information about WDFW's management activities to the public



## Participant Update

As of January 14, 2022, WDFW had 1,278 certified Master Hunters. The table below summarizes the number of certified Master Hunters at year's end since 2016. WDFW postponed the open enrollment period for the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP) in 2019 due to budgetary uncertainty. Once the budget was finalized and funding was available, WDFW opened enrollment on July 1, 2019, and closed the open enrollment period on August 15, 2019. Applicants were given until May 15, 2020 to complete the requirements for certification. The open enrollment period and completion period are the same length of time applicants had in previous years. WDFW believes that continued budget uncertainty and the mid-year open enrollment are two reasons for the low number of Master Hunter applicants in 2019.

On March 16, 2020, WDFW closed its offices and halted use of volunteers due to COVID-19. Most of the 2019 applicants had not completed their certification requirements before the shutdown. Since the shutdown, the MHPP has not been able to open testing at regional offices. Limited testing resumed in September 2021. Testing requires proctors and applicants to follow the COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures for Proctoring the Master Hunter Permit Program Exam. Also, WDFW has only been able to use volunteers in a limited capacity due to COVID-19 protocols.

**Certified Master Hunters by Year**

	2016	2017	2018	2019*	2020**	2021
Applicants	317	350	310	110	0	48
Applicants certified	89	85	104	7	0	0
Percent certified	28%	24%	34%	5%	0%	0%
<b>Total Master Hunters</b>	<b>1,648</b>	<b>1,632</b>	<b>1,671</b>	<b>1,454</b>	<b>1,361</b>	<b>1,278</b>

\* Data for the 2019 application period as of March 1, 2020.

\*\*The 2020 open application period was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions

Master Hunters renewing their certification rebounded in 2020 and continued at a high rate in 2021. This could be due to the program being funded.

**Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year\*\*\***

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Certification renewals	198	124	162	140	251	212
Non-renewals	104	86	69	214	97	92
<b>Renewal Rate</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>70%</b>

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

To recertify, Master Hunters are required to provide 40 hours of volunteer service in the past five years. Collectively, Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants provide approximately 15,000 hours per year on volunteer projects. These volunteer hours are valued at roughly \$450,000.

## **Master Hunter Advisory Group**

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) advises WDFW on issues and opportunities affecting Master Hunters and the MHPP. They also help identify and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities for Master Hunters statewide. The volunteer opportunities promote the conservation ethic and address WDFW needs.

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. MHAG members appoint a chair and vice-chair to one-year terms, and a secretary to a two-year term.

Director Kelly Susewind appointed six members to the MHAG in March 2022 for terms beginning in April 2022. The director appointed Jeff Fjelstul (Region 4), Jeff Larsen (Region 4), Michael Bartoldo (Region 6), Gary Tennison (Region 6), and Jim Gleiter (Region 6) to three-year terms and Dean Thornberry (Region 5) to a two-year term to fill a vacated term. Regions 1 and 2 did not have any applicants for 2022. During 2021, Jeff Larsen (Region 4) served as chair and John McAuliffe (Region 3) served as vice-chair.

The MHAG met three times in 2021. The meetings were held via Teams call. Meeting dates were March 12, June 11, and August 20. The December 10 meeting was cancelled. All meeting notices, agendas, and notes are posted on the MHAG webpage (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>). In 2022, MHAG plans to meet four times. Meeting dates for 2022 are March 11, June 10, August 19, and December 9. These meetings will take place via Teams until COVID-19 restrictions are eased and in-person meetings can resume.

## **Program Refinements**

The MHPP replaced the Advanced Hunter Education Program in 2008. In 2013, the Wildlife Program began administering the MHPP. The Wildlife Program created a MHPP Policy Statement ([https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2013\\_mh\\_policy\\_statement.pdf](https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2013_mh_policy_statement.pdf)) to guide the MHPP, which describes the role and use of Master Hunters.

At the start of the 2019 application period, the Master Hunter exam materials were posted to the MHPP webpage. The information consists of an Excerpt from the 2015-2021 Game Management Plan, Master Hunter Handbook, Big Game Hunting Seasons & Regulations, Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons, and the Washington Hunter Education Online Study Guide. In 2021, the Master Hunter handbook was downloaded 953 times.

When WDFW offices closed for COVID-19 protocols, Master Hunters whose permits were expiring in 2020 were given a longer time to renew their permits because the lack of volunteer

projects during the spring of 2020. In July 2020, WDFW and the MHAG came up with a virtual volunteer option. The virtual option allows Master Hunters to accumulate volunteer hours at home by educating themselves. With more education on what WDFW does and how WDFW uses Master Hunters so they can be better ambassadors. Allowing the virtual volunteer option may change based on COVID-19 restrictions in the future. Once in-person volunteer options are more available in the future, the MHPP may allow Master Hunters who are renewing their permits to complete some virtual volunteer hours for educational purposes. The virtual option has had 2,091.2 volunteer hours reported since it was started.

The MHAG and WDFW have been monitoring applicant responses to the 2019 version of the Master Hunter exam for issues with test taker success. After administering the test over 35 times, 24 questions that test takers answered correctly less than 50 percent of the time were identified. The MHAG and WDFW reviewed the 24 identified questions for possible issues/challenges with the questions. Several questions were kept, but most had ambiguous qualities and were rewritten with clarified language or replaced with a new question. As of the writing of this report, three MHPP applicants have taken the 2022 version of the exam and all three have passed.

### **Communications and Outreach**

MHAG members serve as a communication link between WDFW and Master Hunters in their region. Email contact information for each MHAG member is on the MHAG webpage for use by Master Hunters.

Six bi-monthly Master Hunter Permit Program Newsletters were distributed to Master Hunters, applicants, and WDFW staff in 2021. Newsletters give Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants information about WDFW projects, Master Hunter success stories, and volunteer opportunities. The newsletter has been widely accepted by the MHAG and Master Hunters alike.

On June 25, 2021, the MHPP sent an email survey regarding the MHPP to all current Master Hunters, lapsed Master Hunters whose permits expired in the last five years, and Master Hunter applicants for the past five years who had an email in the Master Hunter database. The MHPP also sent a survey to the WDFW conflict specialists to determine their motivations when using Master Hunters. The survey was designed to be anonymous to get better responses. The survey questions are noted at the beginning of each section so the reader can understand what kind of information the MHPP was trying to get data on.

Respondents had until July 15, 2021 to complete the survey. Once the surveys were completed the information was compiled into the below tables. The MHPP is going to use the responses to help inform the department on future changes to the MHPP.

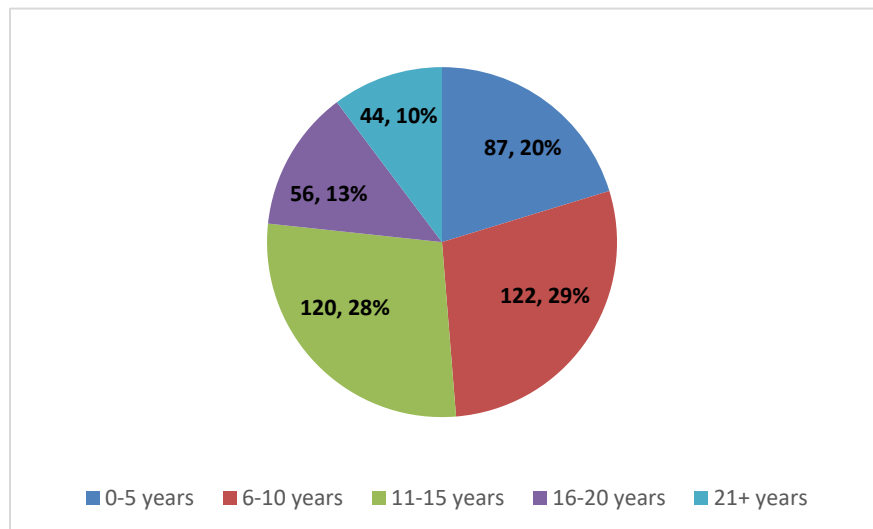
## Survey of Master Hunters

The survey of Master Hunters was sent to 1,242 current Master Hunters with emails in the database. Master Hunters were asked the following questions in the survey:

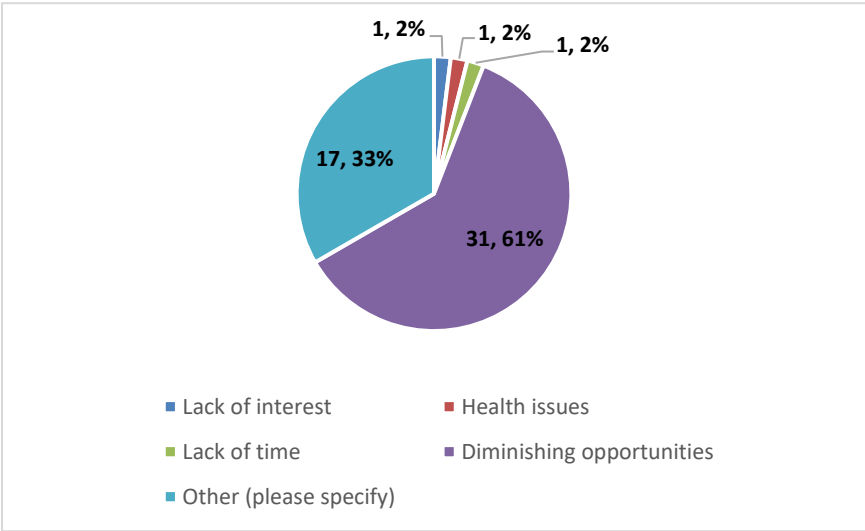
- How long have you been a Master Hunter?
- Do you plan on renewing when your permit expires?
- What is the primary reason you decided not to renew your Master Hunter permit?
  - This was only asked if the Master Hunter answered no to the second question in the survey.
- What is your primary motivation for being a Master Hunter?
- On a scale from one to five with one being the lowest and five being the highest, how would you rate your satisfaction with the current program?
- What one item below could be changed in increase your satisfaction with the program?

Of those 1,242 current Master Hunters that were sent the survey, 429 responded. That is a 35 percent response rate.

Of the respondents, 122 have been Master Hunters for six to ten years. The lowest number of respondents to the survey, 44, have been Master Hunters for 21 or more years. The rest of the respondents were 120 in the 11-15 year range, 87 in the 0-5 year range, and 56 in the 16-20 year range.



Of the respondents, an overwhelming 88 percent, or 378, stated they plan on renewing their permits when the permits expire. The other 12 percent, or 51, stated they did not plan on renewing. These 51 respondents were then asked "What is the primary reason you decided to not renew your Master Hunter Permit?" The 378 who stated they were planning on renewing their permit were not asked the question and therefore are not in the graph.



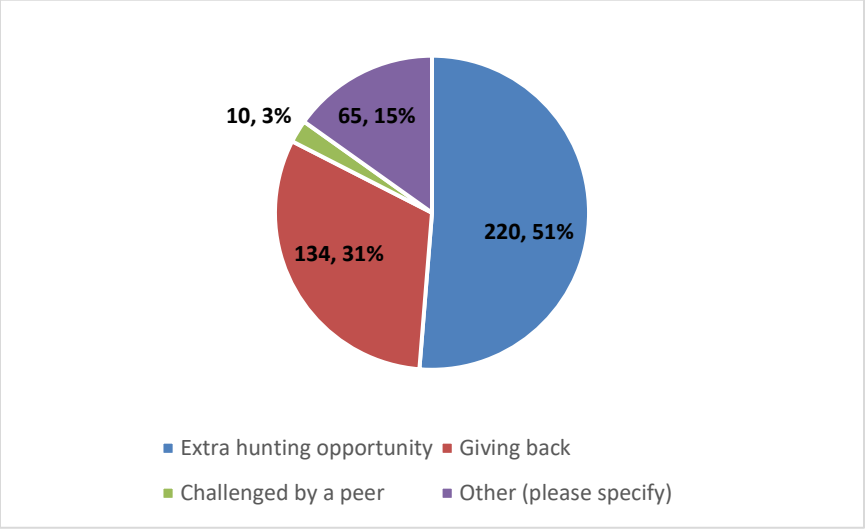
Of the 51 who were not planning to renew their permits, 61 percent of the respondents chose the diminishing opportunities as the reason they are not planning to renew their permit. The least selected answers of lack of interest, health issues, and lack of time all had one response. The respondents also were given a choice of Other (please specify) and

asked to explain their reason.

The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Recent regulation changes and diminishing opportunities
- Lack of benefits
- Game management concerns
- Perceived favoritism
- Lack of volunteer project diversity (fence clean ups were mentioned)

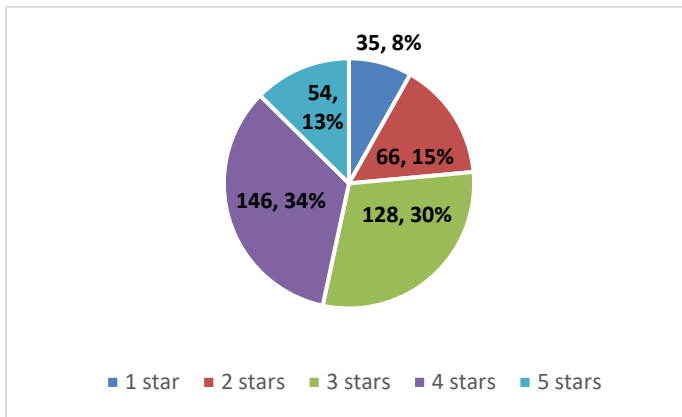
The next question asked of the respondents was “What is your primary motivation for being a Master Hunter?” Two hundred and twenty of the respondents, or 51 percent, responded that their primary motivation was extra hunting opportunity. Being challenged by a peer had the least responses with 10, or 2 percent. Giving back was second in the responses with 134, or 31 percent and Other (please specify) was selected 65 times or 15 percent.



The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Both extra hunting opportunity and giving back
- Help landowners control animals causing damage
- To help and promote ethical hunting

- More information and involvement with WDFW decisions
- Master Hunter required where they want to hunt
- Meet like-minded people and landowners
- More educational opportunities
- Mentoring opportunities
- Lands access
- Credibility with other hunters and hunter education students



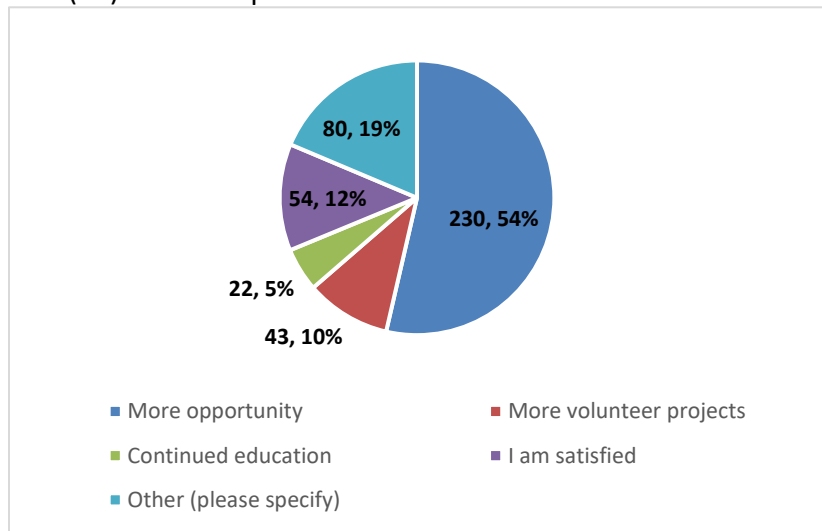
Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the program on a scale from one to five. The average rating by the respondents was 3.28 stars. Below is a graph of the responses.

For the final question WDFW asked what could be done to increase the Master Hunters satisfaction with the program. More opportunity response was 54

percent (230) of the responses. The next highest of the responses was other (please specify) at 19 percent (80). The other responses of “I am satisfied with the program” had 13 percent (54) of the responses, “More volunteer opportunities” had 10 percent (43) of the responses, and “continued education” had 5 percent (22) of the responses.

The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Increase and restore opportunities
- Rename the program to accurately reflect the purpose
- Support from WDFW in building landowner
- inconsistent management



### Survey of Lapsed Master Hunters

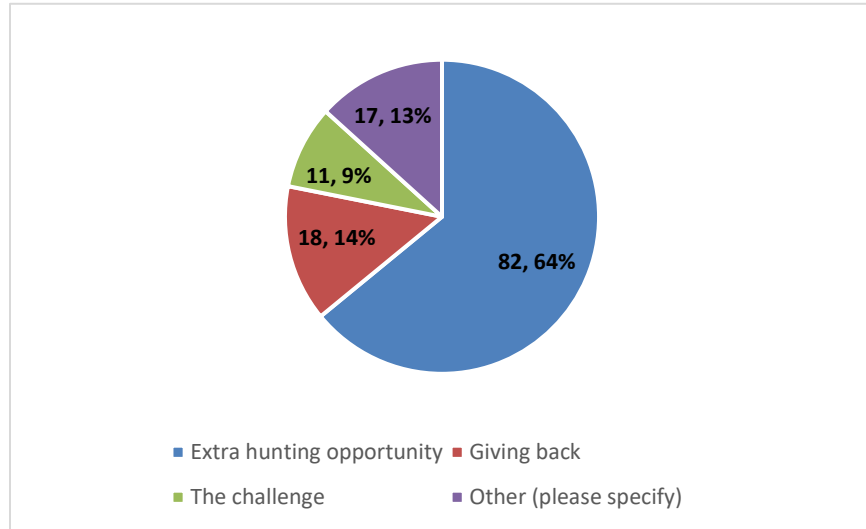
The survey of lapsed Master Hunters was sent to Master Hunters whose permits expired in the last five years and had an email in the Master Hunter database. The email was sent to 465 lapsed Master Hunters. They were asked the following questions in the survey:

- What was your primary motivation for entering the Master Hunter Permit Program?
- What was the primary reason you let your permit lapse?

- On a scale from one to five with one being the lowest and five being the highest, what is your level of interest in reapplying to the program?
- Would you like to suggest any improvements to the current program?

Of those 465 lapsed Master Hunter that were sent the survey, 128 responded. That is a 27 percent response rate.

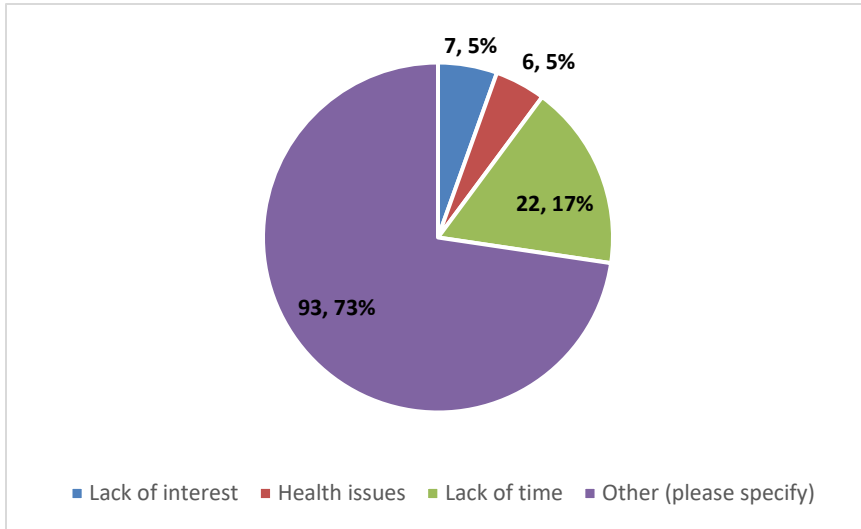
Of the respondents, 64 percent (82) of the lapsed Master Hunters primary motivation was extra hunting opportunities. Giving back was the second highest response at 14 percent (18). Third highest response was other (please specify) with 13 percent (17) and fourth was the challenge at 9 percent (11).



The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Lack of time
- Injuries
- Lack of volunteer opportunities
- Lack of benefits
- Forgot to renew
- Had an RCW 77.15 violation and was suspended
- Moved out of state
- WDFW Management decisions





Lapsed Master Hunters were asked why they let their permit lapse. Other (please specify) was answered by 73 percent (93) of respondents. Lack of time was the second most identified reason with 17 percent (22) of the responses. Lack of interest was the third most selected option at 6 percent (7) with health

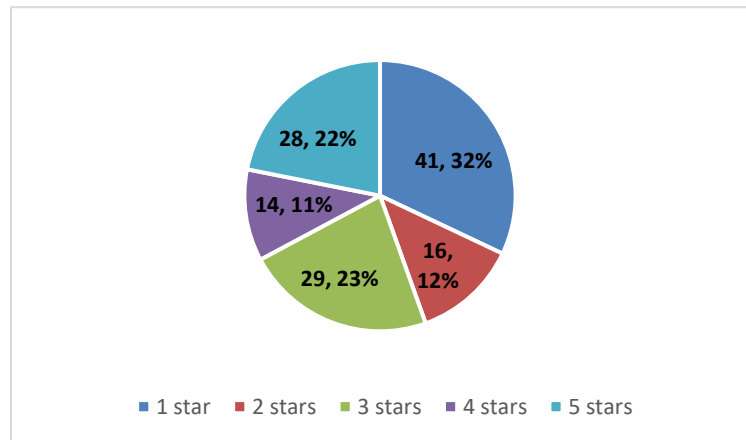
issues the least identified option at 5 percent (6).

The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Lack of time
- Injuries
- Lack of volunteer opportunities
- Lack of benefits
- Forgot to renew
- Had an RCW 77.15 violation and was suspended
- Moved out of state
- WDFW Management decisions

Respondents were asked what their level of interest in reapplying to the program was on a scale from one to five. The average rating by the respondents was 2.78 stars. Below is a graph of the responses.

The last question asked lapsed Master Hunters if they would like to suggest any improvements to the program. Seventy-one percent (90) of respondents identified they would like to provide suggestions. The other 29 percent did not want to provide suggestions. The suggestions provided by the respondents have been categorized into the following list:



- More diverse volunteer opportunities
- Make it worthwhile

- Better program management
- Opportunity to hunt male animals
- Reminders on permit expirations
- Revamp the program to more align with original goals
- Increased communication from conflict staff when on damage hunts
- Easier process to reapply if lapsed
- Change requirements to more classroom based to ensure good applicants

### Survey of Master Hunter applicants

The survey of applicants was sent to applicants who were not certified as a Master Hunter in the past five application cycles (2014 through 2019) and had an email on file in the database. The 2019 applicants were included in the survey but still have until November 15, 2021 to complete the requirements. The number of applicants that were sent an email was 1,239. The applicants were asked the following questions in the survey:

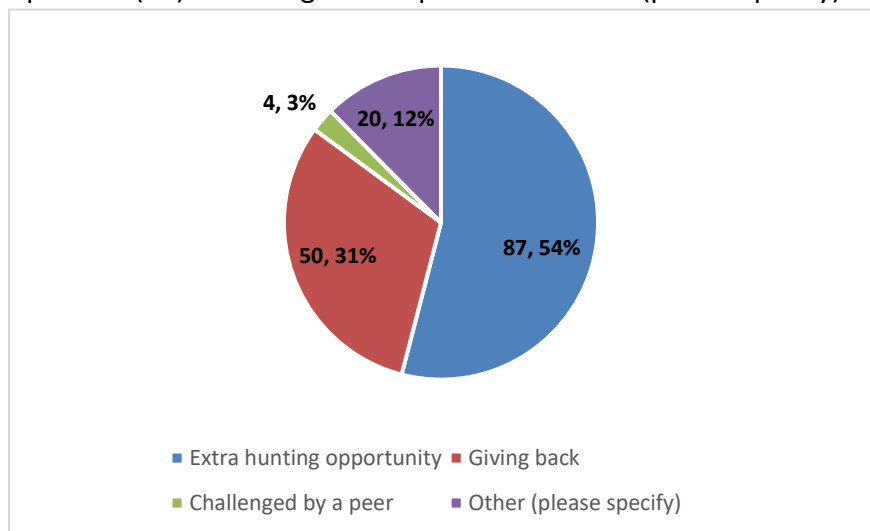
- What was your primary motivation to apply for the program?
- What was the primary reason you did not complete the requirements?
- What was the most difficult part of the requirements you completed?
- On a scale from one to five with one being the lowest and five being the highest, what is your level of interest in reapplying to the program?

Of those 1,239 applicants that were sent the survey, 161 responded. That is a 13 percent response rate.

Below is a graph of the survey results. Of the respondents, 54 percent (87) of the Master Hunter applicant’s primary motivation was extra hunting opportunities. Giving back was the second highest response at 31 percent (50). Third highest response was other (please specify) with 12 percent (17) and fourth was the challenge at 9 percent (11).

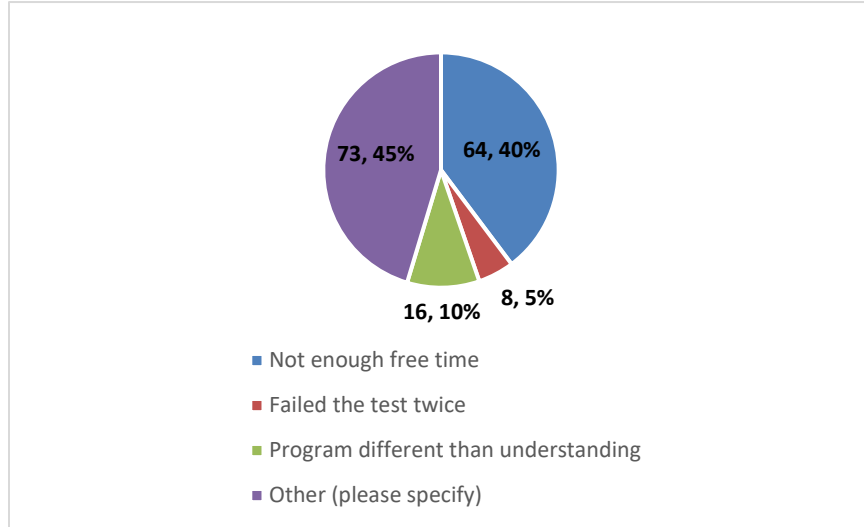
The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Learning experiences
- Developing youth outreach
- Helping with wildlife management
- Private lands access



- Becoming a better and more ethical hunter
- Both giving back and opportunities

The applicants were asked what was the primary reason they did not complete the program and 45 percent (73) responded with other (please specify). Not enough free time was second with 40 percent (64) of responses.



The third highest response was the program design was different from how the applicant understood the program with 10 percent (16). Only 5 percent (8) responded that they failed the test twice and were not able to continue that year.

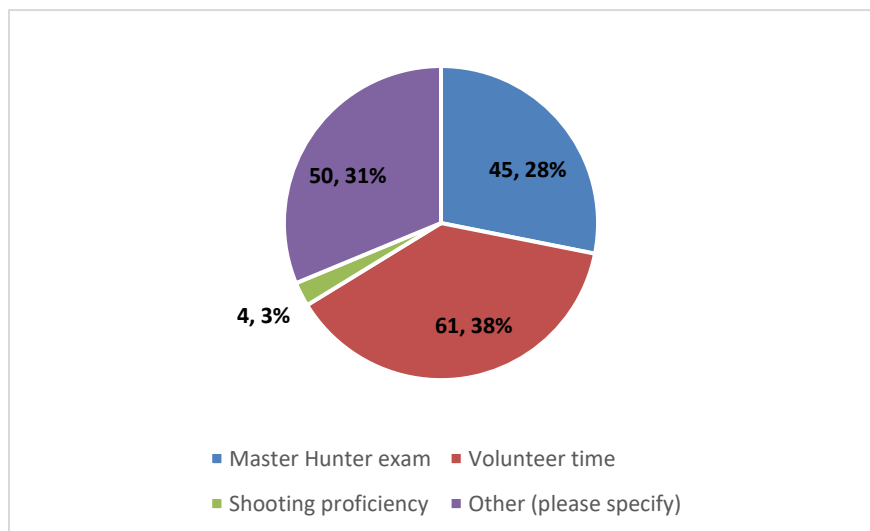
The other (please specify) option responses included

the following broad categories:

- Difficult test
- Limited volunteer opportunities
- Violation of RCW 77.15 within past 10 years
- Moved out of state
- Lost interest

When identifying what the applicants thought was the most difficult part of the requirements they completed, 38 percent (61) identified volunteer time. The second highest response was other (please specify) with 31 percent (50).

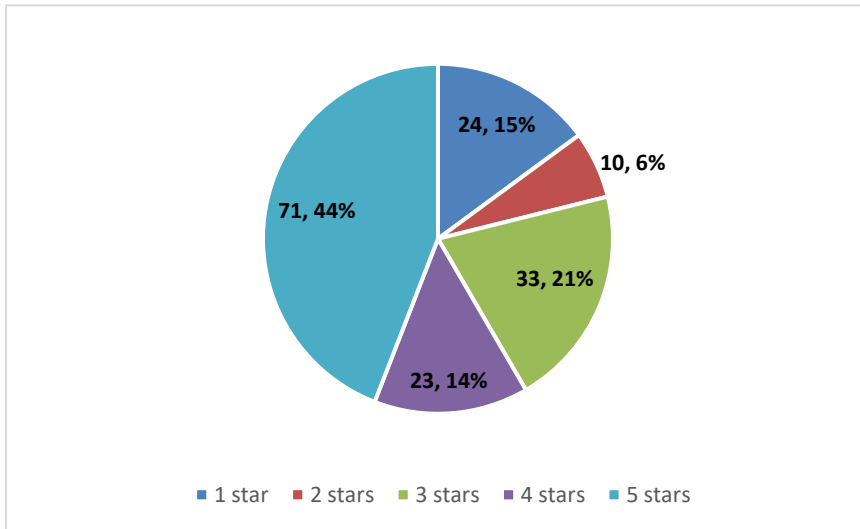
Third most difficult part of the process identified by respondents was the Master Hunter exam with 28 percent (45). Shooting proficiency was the least identified at 3 percent (4).



The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Travel to meetings and testing was too far

- Lack of study time
- Health issues
- Life got busy



Applicants were also asked on a scale from one to five what their level of interest is in applying to the program in the future. The average score was 3.66 stars.

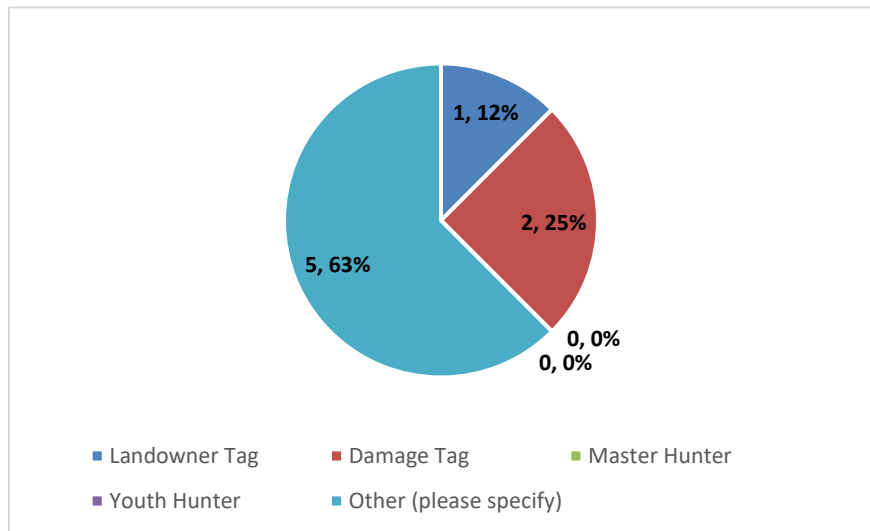
### Survey of conflict staff

The survey of conflict staff was sent to the 26-conflict staff in the conflict section. The conflict staff were asked the following questions in the survey:

- What is your preferred method for removing animals causing damage?
- Please give a quick explanation on your preferred method for removing animals causing damage.
- On a scale from one to five with one being the lowest and five being the highest, how would you rate your satisfaction using Master Hunters?
- On a scale from one to five with one being the lowest and five being the highest, how would you rate your satisfaction with the current program?
- Would you like to suggest any improvements to the current program?

Of those 26-conflict staff that were sent the survey, eight responded. That is a 31 percent response rate.

The conflict staff was asked what their preferred method for removing animals causing damage and eight (63 percent) selected the other (please specify) option. Two (25 percent) conflict staff selected the damage tag option and one (13 percent) selected the landowner tag option. The other two options, Master Hunter and youth hunter, received no selections.

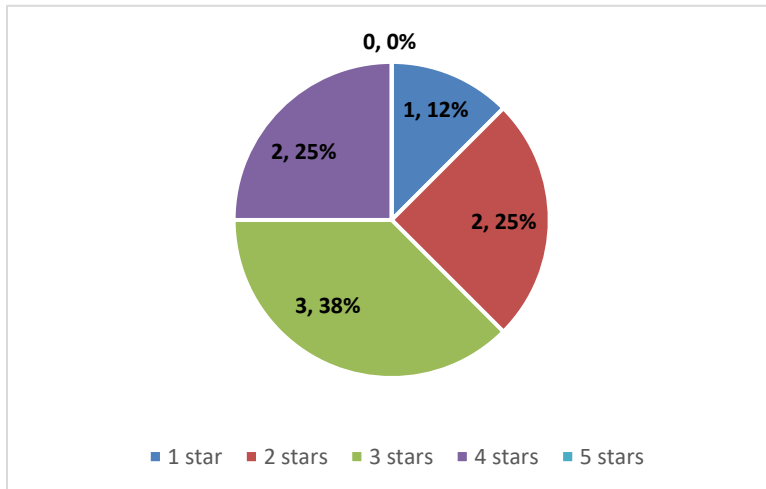


The other (please specify) option responses included the following broad categories:

- Non-lethal actions preferred
- Combination of all responses

The conflict staff were then asked to explain the reasoning for their preferred method. The information is as follows:

- See above
- In instances where multiple animals need to be removed to prevent damage, I prefer to utilize a combination of Kill Permits, Damage Prevention Permits, MH, and Youth/Disabled hunters all on the same property, often alternating between options.
- Using damage tags puts the responsibility on the landowner to solve the damage concerns they have. It also allows the landowner more autonomy in selecting the individuals who will hunt on their property.
- Please see Question 1, answer "other."
- Multiple tools.
- In some cases landowner tag works best, others damage or MH. A lot depends on the landowner
- A landowner tag and a damage tag are probably the same thing. do you mean a landowner kill permit? that is different. I prefer NOT to lethally remove anything or use any type of tag/permit, but if absolutely needed the landowner damage tag is the safest and most effective from the landowner's perspective.
- A landowner tag and a damage tag are probably the same thing. do you mean a landowner kill permit? that is different. I prefer NOT to lethally remove anything or use any type of tag/permit, but if absolutely needed the landowner damage tag is the safest and most effective from the landowner's perspective.



The average satisfaction with using Master Hunters on a scale from one to five is 2.75. Respondents selected one star once (12 percent), two stars twice (25 percent), three stars three times (38 percent), and four stars twice (25 percent). No respondent selected five stars.

The average satisfaction with using the current program on a scale from one to five is 2.5.

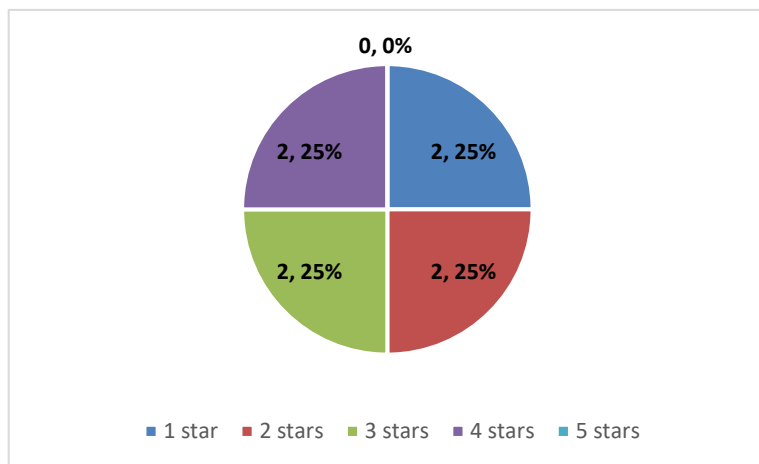
Respondents selected one star twice (25 percent), two stars twice (25 percent), three stars twice (25 percent), and four stars twice (25 percent). No respondent selected five stars.

Conflict staff were also asked if they would like to suggest improvements to the program. Seven (88 percent) of the respondents answered yes and one responded no. The suggestions were as follows:

- A better vetting process for MH to make sure they are not using the program to pressure landowners to allow them to hunt later.

Also, making sure MH are ethical and adhere to WDFW's mission and direction (especially when associated with carnivores). Also, ensuring MH are efficient and accurate with their weapon(s). I have less than ten MH that I feel are a good representation for WDFW as hunters, the remaining 100 (or so) that I have worked with in the past are a poor representation.

- Include some sort of checks in the MH system to revoke certifications for MH that violate rules or are disrespectful to landowners/Agency staff
- Master hunter's need to be reminded, constantly, it seems that they are being deployed to assist landowners with damage concerns and not sent out to have an easy harvest opportunity. The deployment process is also problematic. I'm supportive of that process being fair to the MH, as they do volunteer their time to assist us in other areas, however, we do need to get MH to landowners in a reasonable amount of time. While those drawn for damage hunts are required to sign a letter acknowledging the process, I still constantly have MH trying to negotiate hunt start times, sometimes days away, and becoming very upset and aggressive that I will pass on them if they aren't able to begin



hunting within 24 hours. I think this aspect of the program needs to be stressed even more to the MH so they have the right expectations.

- please don't send the survey to the landowners
- Move it back to enforcement.
- The purpose of the program is to help mitigate damage on private lands. MH is one of many tools. It is best to ask landowners how they would like to see the program improved. Some landowners won't allow MH on their property.
- 1. more required accountability from master hunters. 2. no anonymous master hunter activity 3. better master hunter reporting of harvest or activity. this needs significant change as there is no way to know what general season master hunters are doing at this time. 4. a better way to make corrections in poor master hunter ethics or behavior 5. a change in the entitlement mentality of master hunters 6. a move away from animal harvest as a goal to reduction of crop damage as a primary goal

### **Policy and Programmatic**

In 2019, WDFW changed the timeframe to apply to the MHPP to July 1 through August 15. This change aligns the programs application period to the fiscal year calendar. It will allow WDFW to know if the program is funded before accepting applications, which is one of the reasons WDFW believes the applications were down severely in 2019. Applicants have until May 15 of the following year to complete the requirements.

The 2020 application period was suspended after 8 days in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. All applicants were refunded their application fees. In 2021, WDFW opened the program for applications starting July 1, 2021. There were 48 applicants. The lower than normal number of applications may be due to COVID restrictions or the change of the application timeframe as noted in the 2019 application period.

### **Program Integrity**

Chapter 77.15.760 RCW and WAC 220-412-030 dictate the actions of WDFW relative to Master Hunter suspensions. During 2021, four Master Hunters were suspended for two years due to paying a fine for a Title 77.15 infraction.

### **Future Direction**

Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants have had increased volunteer opportunities to address WDFW needs thanks to Hunter Education Division staff and the Volunteer Program Manager. 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
- Hunter education classes
- Continuing to improve the image of the MHPP

Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants can volunteer with other wildlife organizations and agencies to fulfill their Master Hunter volunteer obligations on projects beneficial to WDFW's mission.

Emphasis in the future will be on continuing to engage Master Hunters in:

- Proctoring Master Hunter exams
- Assisting with private lands access (particularly for youth hunters)
- Utilizing their knowledge and skill during WDFW's hunting clinics
- Expanding mentoring activities