



MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Notes for MHAG Meeting #51
August 21, 2020 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Teams Meeting

MHAG Members		WDFW Staff	Guests
Region 1	Shawn Woodard (absent)	Dave Whipple Hunter Education Division Manager	
Region 2	Carissa Craghead, Secretary (excused)	Kris Thorson Hunter Education Division Specialist	
	Jim Hope		
Region 3	Jonathan Barr	Aaron Garcia Region 3 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Wes Clogston		
	Kyle Smith		
Region 4	David Floyd (absent)	Steve Dazey Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jeff Larsen, Chair		
	John McAuliffe (excused)		
	Ian Stewart, Vice Chair		
Region 5	George Dennis	Amy Elliott Region 5 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Keith Pfeifer		
Region 6	Michael Bartoldo	Bill Montgomery Region 6 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Jim Gleiter		
	Thomas Woodruff		

Procedural Business

- **Call to order and announcements (*Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes*)**
- **Introduction of members and guests (*Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes*)**

Old Business

- **Budget and legislative news/update (David Whipple, 15 minutes)**
 - There is nothing new on the legislative front since the June MHAG meeting.
 - In June, Dave presented information on the reductions WDFW will take in the current fiscal year (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021). The following information covers the next biennium (July 1, 2021–June 30, 2023).
 - In the director's July/August Director's Bulletin there was a summary of the new enhancements requested for high priority work.
 - There is a general fund request to backfill shortfalls in Pittman-Robertson (PR) funding, Dingell-Johnson (DJ) funding, personalized license plate funds, Mitchell Act, and National Park Foundation funds for:
 - Big game surveys & hunting access programs
 - Hatchery production, and operations & maintenance
 - Conservation of non-game species
 - Hatchery production on Lower Columbia
 - Closure of the Elwha hatchery
 - For the next biennium, the state anticipates a reduction of \$9 billion in general tax receipts due to COVID. WDFW (all cabinet agencies) was directed to reduce 15% out of the base budget and to assume the reductions may be permanent. WDFW's reduction target is \$23.5 million in general fund dollars. However, due to PR & DJ declines (despite the recent spike in firearm & ammo sales), WDFW's reduction target is \$30M.
 - Each WDFW Program identified more than their share of the funding shortfall to allow prioritization flexibility.
 - WDFW's Executive Management Team removed some of the proposed reductions from the proposal such as some game species management, some regional habitat biologist capacity, some fish hatcheries, and some fish management activities. \$1.1 million in Wildlife Program proposals were removed from consideration for reduction.
 - The remaining agency reduction proposal items were sent to the commission for consideration:
 - Salmon and steelhead hatchery production (\$3.7 million)
 - Trout hatchery production (\$2.9 million)
 - Fisheries opportunity and management (e.g., fin fish, crab) (\$6.3 million)
 - Warmwater gamefish management (\$2.4 million)
 - Orca and global wildlife trafficking enforcement (\$1.2 million)
 - Partnering with volunteers (ALEA grants) (\$1.3 million)
 - Land use, habitat restoration, habitat protection (\$2.7 million)
 - Enforcement (~\$2 million)

- The Wildlife Program's share of the reductions is \$6.2 million with potential personnel impacts. The reductions proposed include funding for the following activities:
 - Land Stewardship activities
 - Game species projects funding (e.g., previously used for things like mountain goat translocations)
 - Reductions to deer and elk survey and monitoring (every other year)
 - Data management support for Game and Diversity Divisions (vacant positions)
 - Lure Crop contracts
 - Reduced equipment purchase flexibility
 - Reduced Hunting Pamphlet production
 - Pheasant release (reduced productivity)
 - 50% reduction in elk feeding
 - Hunter Education volunteer training and supplies
- The Hunter Education Division identified \$186 thousand in reductions
 - WDFW increased the fee Kalkomey can charge for the online course by \$5. This saves the department \$44 thousand.
 - The division saves \$67 thousand each year for the statewide instructor in-service training (IST) which is held every three years. Regional ISTs will still be held.
 - The National Archery in the Schools (NASP) grant to the Washington State Archery Association was decreased by \$15 thousand due to COVID impacts to schools, including budget reductions and ability to participate in NASP.
 - Reductions to miscellaneous supplies, travel, and a vacant position will save an additional \$60 thousand of PR dollars, but \$50 thousand of that will be made up by using funds from the dedicated Firearm Account (comprised of a portion of the late fee for CPL license renewals).
- Dave also gave an overview of the Capital Budget. The commission approved requesting \$233 million in capital funds to support shovel-ready WDFW projects. The projects could generate an estimated 2,500 private industry jobs across the state beginning July 2021. Proposed projects would include:
 - Forest health improvement and wildfire risk reduction work
 - Hatchery and fish management improvements
 - Recreation site improvements
 - Fencing to reduce deer and elk damage to agricultural lands.
- The Commission has approved some aspects of the budget proposals and is discussing certain budget aspects right now at the Commission meeting. After final Commission approval, WDFW will submit reduction proposals to the Governor's Office of Financial Management (OFM) September 14, 2020.
- There is a long time between now and the release of the final budget (April/May 2021), and many things can change.

- The director has said that we would meet our obligation to submit reductions and then fight to keep them from happening.
- Jeff asked about the recent increases in firearm and ammunition sales, and what effect that has had on WDFW's PR revenue.
 - The recent increase in sales has been very beneficial but hasn't been and isn't expected to overcome revenue declines over the past few years.
 - There is also a time lag between excise tax collection from manufacturers and when it is available to the states.
- Dave also provided updates on other topics:
 - Hunter Education Classes have been cancelled through December 31.
 - See July 25 Instructor Advisory Committee meeting notes for more information at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/heiac>.
 - Public comments on the 2021-2023 hunting season proposals are being taken online and virtual public meetings.
 - See WDFW main webpage or <https://wdfw.wa.gov/news/public-asked-provide-feedback-2021-2023-hunting-season-proposals-online-live-meetings-mail-or>.
 - The Commission was expected to adopt an update to the target shooting rule in August, but the adoption is now scheduled for October. The rule effective date remains unchanged at January 1, 2021.
 - In addition to the five furlough dates taken since the end of June, many WDFW employees will be furloughed Sept. 4, Oct. 30, and Nov. 25. WDFW enforcement officers will remain on duty.

New Business

- **WDFW reports and updates (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - MHPP Participation statistics
 - Currently there are 1,386 certified Master Hunters.
 - There have been no changes in applicants since COVID started.
 - Ian asked if the department has conducted any exit surveys for Master Hunters to determine why they are leaving the program?
 - No, we have not surveyed Master Hunters in the past.
 - Wes asked if there is a statewide level of Master Hunters we are looking for?
 - No, we do not have a target number of Master Hunters.
 - Jeff proposed to make a subgroup of the MHAG to discuss the decrease in opportunities and bring forward possible solutions.
 - Dave was in favor of doing a sub-group.
 - Jon had a conversation with Steve Wetzel about the Master Hunter permits for region 3 and he is not sure how many Master Hunters will be called this year.
 - Thom thinks it would be good to survey the Master Hunters about why they are in the program.

- Wes has had some interactions with landowners in the Ellensburg area where the landowners have a group of Master Hunters they use and continue to work with.
 - Field coordinator reports
 - Aaron Garcia - Region 3 Volunteer Coordinator
 - Aaron has a couple possible volunteer opportunities coming up that can move forward during COVID-19.
 - Aaron has been invited to assist in developing a mentoring training program with the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the First Hunt Foundation.
 - Steve Dazey
 - Steve participated in the goat translocation project.
 - He is working with wildlife program staff members to identify possible volunteer opportunities.
 - Bill Montgomery
 - Bill has been working with a Diversity Division staff member on a bat box building project.
 - He also participated in the goat translocation project.
 - Bill participated in a project collecting bear hairs to help generate a population estimate for bear in Washington.
- **MHAG member updates (*Jeff Larsen, 10 minutes*)**
 - Does anyone have anything to add?
 - None
- **MHAG communications with Master Hunters (*Kris Thorson, 10 minutes*)**
 - Has anyone had communications with MHs?
 - Thom sent an email and he received some questions from the Master Hunters. He sent them responses based on discussions with WDFW. They appreciated the responses and information.
 - Kyle received an email back from a Master Hunter stating the volunteer hours requirement is too narrowly defined.
 - We will discuss this topic in the next agenda item.
 - Kyle received an email from a Master Hunter who has a tag for the Rattlesnake area and he is seeing landowners use landowner tags instead of using Master Hunters. He also had a question about the narrowing of the GMU 371 season dates.
 - Jeff sent an email out and received some responses. One Master Hunter had issues with the deployment process and how Master Hunters are deployed.
 - Ian had a contact with a hunter education instructor who was concerned the program was going to go all online in the future.
 - Kris commented that the program will go back to the way it was once COVID is past us.
 - Ian had a comment from a Master Hunter whose permit was not expiring in 2020 and he was wondering how he can get hours now instead of waiting until the last minute.

- WDFW may investigate opening the virtual option to other Master Hunters.
 - Ian was contacted by a Master Hunter who was deployed but the elk were on the neighboring property and was upset he did not have the ability to pursue those elk.
 - The difficult part of this issue is the neighboring property could want elk on their property or they are ok with elk on the property.
- **Approved volunteer projects discussion (*Jeff Larsen, 15 minutes*)**
 - This topic stems from an email string from earlier this year.
 - A Master Hunter submitted for approval of his volunteer hours from a mentoring event in Oregon.
 - Kris did not know Aaron had previously approved the project.
 - Jeff requested MHAG discuss what kinds of projects should be allowed in the future.
 - Jeff suggested we add guardrails to the volunteer opportunities.
 - The current site notes the project needs to be completed in Washington state.
 - Thom thinks if there is a direct benefit to WDFW then out of state work could be included.
 - Jim H. thinks any out of state work should be narrowly defined and strongly enforced.
- **COVID impacts to MHPP (*Kris Thorson, 15 minutes*)**
 - 2019 Applicants
 - Still have 110 applicants and no movement on testing currently.
 - The division discussed what to do with the 2019 applicants regarding completing the program and passing the test.
 - The consensus was the applicant's deadline should move to May 15, 2021 due to the current uncertainty regrading COVID.
 - We may have to review and develop other options for completion if COVID continues to be an issue.
 - No issues arose from the proposed extension.
 - Volunteer projects
 - There are extremely limited opportunities currently.
 - Mentored hunts
 - Mentored hunts are postponed until further notice.
 - Renewals
 - Kris has processed 100 renewals so far during COVID.
 - Jeff asked during the call early in August how many Master Hunters whose permits were going to expire in 2020 had been drawn for a special permit.
 - There are 19 special permit winners whose permit expires in 2020.
 - Two of the permit hunters were selected for non-hunt coordinator hunts.
 - Two of the 19 were selected for both deer and elk permits which means a total of 21 permits may go unused if folks do not renew.

- **Virtual volunteer hour option (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
 - The virtual option was sent to all Master Hunters whose permit expires in 2020 on August 13.
 - Kris had John Wisner at the WDFW warehouse send letters to those Master Hunters whose permits expire in 2020 and do not have an email address in the database.
 - Are there any questions, comments, concerns about the option?
 - Thom thinks the virtual option was a good idea and showed great creativity and flexibility to allow for volunteer hours during this uncertain time.

Conclusion

- **Recap action items (*Carissa Craghead, 5 minutes*)**
 - Possible sub-group for MH opportunities.
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (*Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes*)**
 - Sub-group work and items
 - Renewal notice review
- **Good of the order (*All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes*)**
 - Next meeting Dec 11
 - 2021 meeting dates
 - March 12
 - June 10
 - August 20
 - December 10
- **Adjourn**