

FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

POLICY DECISION

POLICY TITLE: Master Hunter Program

POLICY NUMBER: C-6005

Cancels: N/A

Effective Date: December 7, 2007

Termination Date: N/A

See Also: WAC 232-12-073

Approved by: 
Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission

Discussion: As the human population of Washington State continues to increase and expand into areas previously used by wildlife, negative interactions between humans and wildlife continue to increase. There are two primary categories of interaction: 1) incidents of humans with potentially dangerous wildlife (cougar, bear, coyote, etc.) and small problem wildlife such as raccoon, possum, rodents, etc.; and 2) large browsing and foraging wildlife, primarily deer and elk.

The scope of this policy addresses category 2 wildlife. Deer and elk populations in Washington have been displaced from some traditional habitat areas by residential outbuilding and development, agricultural expansion and, in some instances, inappropriate use of off-road vehicles including snowmobiles, two- and four-wheel recreational vehicles and other technologies.

In addressing the problem of deer and elk being forced to migrate from their traditional habitats to locations that affect human residential and agricultural resources, the Department will explore two options:

- 1) Develop a comprehensive road management program that defines seasonal and permanent road closures on Department lands and, where possible, on other ownerships to minimize disturbance of wildlife outside of hunting seasons; and
- 2) Develop a Master Hunter program that will:
 - a) provide the necessary hunter assets to resolve deer and elk encroachment that produces significant damage on agricultural lands;
 - b) reduce elk and deer populations in certain residential areas where they are a nuisance;
 - c) reduce wildlife populations in areas where vehicle or accidents with deer and/or elk on public highways is concentrated; and
 - d) use Master Hunters as appropriate in situations where other wildlife species such as turkeys and geese are a nuisance.

Policy: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will develop a Master Hunter Program that provides an adequate number of hunters, with specific qualifications, to address the wildlife/human interaction outlined in the discussion above.

It must be understood and fundamental to the policy that Master Hunter certification is a privilege and not a right. Further, the Master Hunter resource is a tool that will be employed by the Department to resolve certain human/wildlife conflict situations. These hunting situations will require hunting in areas that may be highly visible to the public and may be on private property. In all cases, these hunting situations will require good judgment and professional conduct by Master Hunters. Violations of hunting rules or regulations will not be tolerated and will result in loss of Master Hunter privileges and possibly all hunting privileges, depending on the violation.

Master Hunters are role models for the rest of the hunting community and, through their actions, act as ambassadors for the Department. Qualifications for the Master Hunter program are:

- 1) No wildlife convictions in violation of WAC rules imposed under the authority of Title 77 RCW within the last ten years;
- 2) Commitment to completing Master Hunter training as outlined by the Department, including the revised Advanced Hunter Training, Eyes in the Woods, etc.;
- 3) Achieve a minimum of 40 hours of service to the Department every 5 years. This may include wildlife population surveys, assistance with hunt administration, creek surveys, manning game check stations, teaching hunter education classes, or other activities that support the Department;
- 4) The Master Hunter Program will have an advisory group that will provide to the Department recommendations on how to improve the Master Hunter Program and will develop processes that improve efficiency and effectiveness of Master Hunter qualification, monitoring, and administration. The advisory group will not be involved in determining when or where Master Hunters will be utilized. This responsibility rests with the Department.
- 5) Master Hunters will consider safety and public perception as fundamentals when engaged in any hunt.

The Director will designate a manager accountable for the Master Hunter Program. The responsibilities of the manager include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Development of a systematic approach to tracking and monitoring Master Hunters (educational status, service hours accomplished and validated by the Department, background check for violations, and process for updating data) hunter participation and success. No one should get more than two animals of the same species in any one year.
- 2) Development of an Advanced Hunter Education Program, which includes all aspects of hunting safety, public perception, standards of conduct, program focus on problem animals. These are not intended to be trophy hunts.
- 3) Working with regions on the development of meaningful activities that Master Hunters can engage in to support region staff.
- 4) Development of an approach to screen new applicants and recertify current population of Advanced Hunters to Master Hunter status.
- 5) Working with Master Hunters on development of an efficient management and communication network that supports the needs of the Department and the Master Hunters.
- 6) Working with region staff to identify Master Hunter opportunities within the scope outlined above. Development of, within the Master Hunter group, an organization that will assist the Department in planning and administering these hunts.

The Director is accountable to the Commission for staffing the Master Hunter Program and will report on the Master Hunter Program implementation and performance twice annually or as otherwise requested by the Commission. The Commission recognizes the dynamics of wildlife populations and habits and understands that future wildlife situations may warrant expanded use of Master Hunters.