

MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM PROGRESS REPORT

-2011-

Participant Update

As of December 2011, there are 1,975 certified Master Hunters in good standing. This compares to 1,956 certified Master Hunters during the same period in 2010.

During the 2011 open enrollment period, 708 applications for membership were received. There were 132 applicants that completed all requirements by the November 15, 2011 deadline and subsequently certified. This compares to 806 applicants during 2010 of which 150 were certified.

A total of 15 applicants were denied entry into the program during 2011 based upon criminal background check information.

There were 238 applicants that actually took the Master Hunter exam. Of those, 71 passed on the first attempt; 68 passed on the second attempt; and 32 failed on the second attempt. Applicants are only allowed to take the test two times.

Total # of certified Master Hunters in good standing (As of December 2011)	1,975
# of members certified in 2011	132
<i># of members certified in 2010</i>	<i>150</i>
<i>Total # of applications in 2010</i>	<i>806</i>
Total # of applications in 2011	708
# denied based on criminal background check	15
# of applicants who passed Master Hunter exam	139
# passed on first attempt	71
# passed on second attempt	68
# failed on second attempt	32

Master Hunter Advisory Group

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) conducted three business meetings during 2011 (March, June, and October). The notes from all MHAG business meetings have been posted on the Master Hunter Permit Program website (http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/advisory_groups/meeting_notes.html).

During the year, Mr. Bob Cromwell resigned as chair of the MHAG and was replaced by Mr. Mike Estes. Also Mr. Kent Keller resigned as vice-chair of the MHAG and was replaced by Mr. Mike Britton. Four new members were appointed by Director Anderson to the MHAG during the year. The new members include Craig Broadhead, Dennis Clay, Jim Fitzgerald, and Ted Wolkenhauer. Mr. Mike Britton was reappointed by Director Anderson for another three-year term. Mr. Mike Estes was reappointed by Director Anderson to fill the remaining two years of an unexpired term. WDFW is currently recruiting to fill 4 vacancies on the MHAG but as many as 7 positions may be filled depending upon reappointment of existing members and whether enough qualified candidates are interviewed to bring the total MHAG membership up to a maximum 15.

Policy & Programmatic

During 2011, the MHAG continued to work with WDFW to develop guidelines for Hunt Coordinators of Master Hunter hunts. These guidelines were finalized by WDFW in December.

The MHAG is also working cooperatively with WDFW to develop guidelines for the establishment of Master Hunter hunts. These guidelines could be used for the 2012-2014 hunting season setting process. The primary guidance has come from Commission Policy C6005. An important attribute must be a reasonable level of incentives in order to maintain sufficient numbers of Master Hunters to adequately address depredation issues throughout the state.

The MHAG has had a long standing concern about the inadequate volunteer opportunities for Master Hunters. Mike Estes, MHAG chair, received a written commitment from Director Anderson that WDFW would make a sincere attempt to increase the use of volunteers and to engage them in meaningful work to address such priorities as public access to private lands, habitat protection, and landowner relations.

MHAG chair, Mike Estes, signed an MOU between WDFW, MHAG, and Central Washington University to conduct a Hunt Behavior Study of Master Hunters. A survey has been designed by Central Washington University in cooperation with WDFW staff. The survey will be conducted by Central Washington University and will be mailed out to 200 randomly selected Master Hunters as a test group.

The MHAG submitted two ALEA grant requests to WDFW, both of which were rejected for the first fiscal year. One focused on increasing hunting access to private lands through a partnership with WDFW; the other requested continued funding for costs associated with MHAG member participation in meetings as well as for special projects.

Communications & Outreach

Applicant Orientation and Information and Outreach meetings were not held during 2011 at the direction of the WDFW staff liaison. There are no plans to conduct them during 2012 due to lack of funding.

The Master Hunter Permit program website continues to be updated, expanded, and refined because it is the primary source of information for current certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants. Suitable volunteer projects from WDFW and other agencies and organizations are routinely posted.

MHAG membership continues to interface with the Big Game Management Roundtable as well as the Game Management Advisory Committee.

The MHAG has created a private Gmail account (MHAGofWA@google.com) to use for surveys of Master Hunters and other direct communications. The Gmail address and the site's purpose will be posted on the Master Hunter Permit program website; included in a future WDFW news release; and included in other WDFW communications with the general Master Hunter membership.

Program Refinements

Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT) will continue to be a mandatory requirement for certification within the Master Hunter Permit Program. CORT is a partnership with the Eyes In The Woods Association and WDFW Enforcement.

Boundary descriptions for Master Hunter seasons, related background information, and landowner information was developed by the MHAG and posted on the Master Hunter Permit program webpage.

During 2011 a pilot program was initiated by WDFW that allows Master Hunters to hunt bear in the spring in Western Washington. Private property owners were issued 16 bear baiting permits and given the names of interested Master Hunters in Regions 4, 5, and 6 that resided in counties where bear damage typically occurred. Those Master Hunters that were called and subsequently participated were considered agents of the state for the purpose of the bear hunts, and no bear tags were required. Only 2 bears were harvested by Master Hunters during the pilot spring program.

Qualification criteria for cross bow were developed and added. There are now seven different categories of hunting implements that Master Hunters may qualify for. Only one Master Hunter, George Coulbourn, has qualified with all seven, thus far.

Program Integrity

During 2011, 5 Master Hunters were removed from the Master Hunter Permit Program for life due to convictions related to Title 77 RCW violations. This is the second year that the special Master Hunter identifier (MH) has been added to WDFW licensing documents in order to facilitate timely and appropriate action on those Master Hunters that violate hunting and fishing rules.

Future Plans

The MHAG is preparing another ALEA grant request for the second fiscal year period. The focus will target Master Hunter assistance to enhance private property hunter access. The previous grant request will be strengthened by the inclusion of more specific detail and further discussions with and recommendations from WDFW field personnel.

The MHAG will consider the cooperative development of Master Hunter Hot Spot Hunt criteria, guidelines, and procedures. The strategy may include assistance by Master Hunter volunteers with the administration of this tool at the field level.

The MHAG will consider the cooperative development of a communications system with Regional Wildlife Program Managers, Regional Enforcement Captains, and Regional Directors. This would ensure full understanding of the utility of Master Hunters to alleviate depredation issues and to provide volunteer service addressing local priority needs including private land hunting access, wildlife, habitat, and the administration of Master Hunter hunts.

The MHAG will consider engaging with the WDFW and USFWS in the planning, development, and administration of the proposed Hanford Reservation Elk Control Program.

The MHAG will consider engaging with WDFW and the Hunter Education Instructor Advisory Group in the development of an Advanced Hunter Training (AHT) program within Hunter Education. Such a program is currently envisioned to supplement the information provided during basic Hunter Education Courses and be open to any hunting license buyer regardless of age or experience. The full range of firearms and archery equipment including handguns, muzzle loading rifles, and cross bows would be handled and fired. Expanded instruction on such topics as ethics, sportsmanship, scouting, tracking, building fires, building shelters, emergency field first aid, field care, etc would be included. The AHT program might be based upon the model being used by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The MHAG is preparing a report summarizing the history and accomplishments of the Master Hunter Permit program and the precursor program to mark the 20 year anniversary. When completed, it will be posted on the Master Hunter Permit program webpage.

Master Hunter Successes

Master Hunters have played a key in role in helping resolve conflicts between residents and the 350-400 elk living in the North Bend area. Master Hunters have been engaged by WDFW Enforcement Officers and the Upper Snoqualmie Valley Elk Management Group to conduct herding and hazing of elk. There is also a Master Hunter season (Elk Hunt #2711 in Elk Area 4601) with 25 permits valid from August 15-March 31 to remove problem animals.

The largest proportion of antlerless elk harvest in the Colockum herd is taken by Master Hunters within the 3911 unit. Antlerless harvest in this area has leveled off to approximately 145-160 animals for the past 3 years since peaking at over 220 animals in the 2007-2008 season. There were no known damage claims in the 3911 area during 2011. Since 2006, unit boundaries and Master Hunter seasons have diminished in size and length to more precisely target the “problem elk”. Due in part to the effective use of Master Hunters, the Colockum elk herd has grown over the past 3 years and is currently at or above management objective levels allowing for the consideration of more general season cow harvest in the future.