



MASTER HUNTER PROGRAM PROGRESS REPORT

July – December 2009

On January 11, 2008, the Fish and Wildlife Commission formally amended WAC 232-12-073 terminating the former Advanced Hunter Education (AHE) program and transitioned into the Master Hunter Program. Policy and programmatic changes and related initiatives with regards to the development of the program have been summarized in previous progress reports which are posted on the Master Hunter website;

http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/polices_procedures.html

This report summarizes some of the Master Hunter Program progress and activities initiated or completed from July - December 2009.

Participant Update

As of December 31, 2009, there were 1892, certified Master Hunters in good standing. During the three month 2009 open enrollment period, 1,288 hunters applied for entry into the program. Current status of the 1288 applicants shows 600 failed to complete one or more of the required activities, 3 failed to pass the written exam, 395 are still pending, and 290 have successfully completed all requirements and will be issued Master Hunter Permits.

Master Hunter Advisory Group

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) conducted three business meetings during this progress report period (July, September, and December). The notes from all MHAG business meetings have been posted on the Master Hunter website. At the December meeting, Mr. Bill Vincent completed his term as chair of the MHAG and Mr. Dustin Albright was elected as his successor. Additionally, at the December meeting Mr. Bob Cromwell was elected as Vice Chair and Mr. Jim Reinbold was elected as Secretary.

The MHAG will be replacing five members in 2010 and will be forwarding recommendations to the director. MHAG members serve staggered three year terms and each year up to five new members may be appointed by the WDFW Director.

Policy & Programmatic

The MHAG is currently working with the Enforcement Program liaison on developing a formal Master Hunter Program Policy Manual. This document will explain the Master Hunter Program's standard policies and procedures. It is intended to serve as a guide and framework in which decisions for the Master Hunter Program can be made.

The MHAG and the Enforcement Program liaison will be working on development of several new applicant exams and a testing policy. This is an effort to maintain veracity of the MHP testing process. In addition, the MHAG and Enforcement Program liaison will also be evaluating the current Master Hunter curriculum and study guide to continue the evolution of the program. Focus will be on areas to best achieve the vision and spirit of the program while helping to address high priority wildlife, habitat, and hunting constituency needs.

Communications & Outreach

Master Hunter Applicant Orientation meetings were held on January 9th in Yakima and January 16th in Olympia. The MHAG and WDFW jointly conduct both meetings. A related statewide news release announcing the meetings and the opening of the application period was issued on December 23rd. The MHAG will be working with the WDFW liaison to evaluate the effectiveness of the Orientation meetings.

[The Information and Outreach meetings for existing Master Hunter Permit holders tentatively scheduled for 2010 have been put on hold pending the outcome of the 2010 ALEA granting process.] In the past, funds from ALEA grants have been utilized for financing these activities. In addition, the MHAG will be working with the Enforcement Program liaison to evaluate the effectiveness of past meetings and determine if the content and scope are serving the desired purpose.

The Master Hunter website continues to be expanded and refined as it now serves as the primary source of information for current certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants. WDFW volunteer project opportunities are posted for new/re-certification applicants who are trying to satisfy time requirements. To date, there has been approximately 40,000 hours of volunteer service to conservation projects by Master Hunters. Some of the projects include; deer and elk damage control, elk fence repair, control of coyotes on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, and a WSU pilot project on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area to study the effects of cattle grazing on deer and elk. In addition, WDFW and the MHAG, continue to seek partnership opportunities with the "Eyes in the Woods" Association to help facilitate new Master Hunter conservation projects throughout the state.

Program Refinements

Master Hunter applications will not be accepted before January 1, 2010 and will not be accepted after close of business on February 15, 2010. The intent of the shortened open enrollment period is to slow the growth rate of the program. The need for more than nearly 2,000 certified Master Hunters is not anticipated in the near term.

WDFW and the MHAG reviewed the master hunter testing requirements with regards to number of re-takes an applicant is allowed when trying to enter into the program. Beginning January 1, 2010 Master Hunter applicants will be allowed only one retest of the MH exam. For 2010, there will no longer be a hard copy option for applicant study materials. All study materials will be issued on CD which contains supplements for the curriculum text books on ethics.

Program Integrity

During 2009, four Master Hunters had their Master Hunter Permit privileges suspended for life due to convictions for title 77 RCW violations. There are several pending investigations of possible wildlife violations involving master hunters; however, overall information continues to indicate that the number of wildlife violation complaints involving Master Hunters is significantly decreased when compared to the AHE program.

Policy C-6005 requires the Director to report on the Master Hunter Program implementation and performance twice annually or as otherwise requested by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.