

MASTER HUNTER PROGRAM PROGRESS REPORT
JANUARY – JUNE 2009

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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.

Background

On January 11, 2008, the Fish and Wildlife Commission formally amended WAC 232-12-073, Master Hunter Program. The amended rule effectively terminated the former Advanced Hunter Education (AHE) program and launched the transition into the new Master Hunter Program. Policy and programmatic changes and related initiatives are summarized in the two previous Master Hunter Program Progress Reports posted on the Master Hunter website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/>) of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

The new Master Hunter Program has been in place for about 18 months. This progress report summarizes activities for the January – June 2009 period.

Participant Update

1. As of June 8, 2009, there were 1,723 certified Master Hunters in good standing.
2. During the three month 2009 open enrollment period, 1,288 hunters applied to become Master Hunters. The level of interest in the new program has increased significantly since its makeover in early 2008. For comparison, during the period July 1, 2006 – December 31, 2007, 447 hunters applied to join the former Advanced Hunter Education program.
3. About 20% (204) of the 1,034 Master Hunter applicants during 2008 completed all necessary requirements and were subsequently certified.

4. During 2009, four Master Hunters had their Master Hunter privileges suspended for life due to wildlife convictions. That number represents less than ¼ of one percent of the current certified Master Hunters. Anecdotal information continues to indicate that the numbers of complaints about Master Hunters from Enforcement Officers and landowners has significantly decreased since the creation of the Master Hunter Program in January 2008.

Master Hunter Advisory Group

1. The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) conducted two business meetings during the first half of calendar year 2009 (January 22, and March 5). Meetings are also planned for July 9, September 3, and December 3, 2009. The minutes from all MHAG business meetings continue to be posted on the Master Hunter website.
2. Mike Estes completed his term as the first chair of the MHAG. His leadership and commitment are primary reasons for the recent success of the program. Bill Vincent became the second chair of the MHAG and is currently serving in that capacity.
3. All 15 positions on the MHAG are filled. Members include: Bill Vincent (Chair), Camano Island; Dustin Albright (Vice-Chair), Oak Harbor; George Coulbourn (Secretary), Black Diamond; Ray Boone, Leavenworth; J.M. (Mike) Britton, Spokane; Brian Davern, Kalama; Mike Estes, Kennewick; Bob Holtfreter, Yakima; Bill Madison, Selah; Mike Parris, Poulsbo; Richard Mathisen, Spokane; Ron Poppe, Wenatchee; Harold Costa, Longview; James Reinbold, Chelan; and Bob Cromwell, Sammamish. Contact information for all members of the MHAG is posted on the Master Hunter website. Members serve staggered three year terms. Each year five new members are appointed by the WDFW Director following a statewide recruitment process.
4. At the request of WDFW, the MHAG is now undertaking a review of the Master Hunter Administrative Requirements.
5. The MHAG and WDFW jointly developed a new 100 question validated and weighted Master Hunter examination, and Study Guide.
6. The MHAG continues to discuss potential future focus areas to best achieve its vision for the program while helping the WDFW address high priority wildlife, habitat, and hunting constituency needs. The group will pursue its responsibilities within the context of Master Hunters assuming the mantle of being “Stewards of the Hunt”.
7. The MHAG is working cooperatively with the Wildlife Program and Enforcement Program to develop consistent statewide guidelines for Hunt Masters/Coordinators.
8. The MHAG assisted the Department in the development of the Master Hunter statute approved by the 2009 Legislature and signed into law by the Governor.
9. The MHAG assisted WDFW in the development of pending amendments to WAC 232-12-073-Master Hunter Program.

10. The MHAG submitted and was approved for an ALEA Volunteer Cooperative Grant for \$25,890 covering the 2009-2011 biennium. The funding will be used to conduct Master Hunter public meetings, business meetings, and a variety of special projects benefiting Master Hunters.

Communications, Outreach, and Partnerships

1. The following Master Hunter meetings occurred in the first half of 2009: MHAG business meetings on January 22 and March 15; Master Hunter Information and Outreach public meetings on March 14 in Kennewick (21 attending), and April 4 in Longview (22 attending); and Master Hunter Applicant public meetings on February 14 in Yakima (110 attending), February 21 in Spokane (60 attending), and February 28 in Olympia (100 attending). A Special Hunt Management meeting for Elk Area 3911 will be held in Ellensburg on July 18, 2009. Surveys were distributed at all public meetings and roll-up summaries are posted on the Master Hunter website. The MHAG and WDFW jointly conducted all Master Hunter meetings.
2. The following Master Hunter related statewide news releases occurred: Announcement of Master Hunter Applicant Orientation public meetings (January 12); Announcement of Master Hunter Information and Outreach public meetings (February 24); and Announcement of the opening of the 2009 Master Hunter application period (December 4, 2008). A news release will be prepared and circulated regarding the Elk Area 3911 public meeting scheduled in Ellensburg on July 18, 2009.
3. All Master Hunters were mailed on February 9, 2009, a Master Hunter Update from Bruce Bjork, Chief of the Enforcement Program, and Mike Estes, Chair of the MHAG. Information supplemented that provided by Chief Bjork on December 1, 2008 (Important Master Hunter Information). Each Certified Master Hunter received a new Master Hunter shoulder patch. The general intent of the second memo was to remind Master Hunters of their individual responsibilities and to encourage each to do their part to improve landowner-sportsmen relations and to apply peer pressure to others in the program, where necessary.
4. The Big Game Management Roundtable (BGMR) took the lead, in cooperation with the MHAG and WDFW, on the development of three new detailed maps covering the entire Elk Area 3911 boundary (upper, middle, and lower). These latest maps reflect the boundary changes implemented in 2009, and are posted on the Master Hunter website.
5. A list of 2009 Master Hunter applicants and a list of 2009 Certified Master Hunters, both with contact information, were sent to Enforcement Captains for enforcement purposes and as a potential tool in locating willing volunteers to address local elk herding/hazing and fence repair needs.

6. The expansion and refinement of the Master Hunter website continues. It now serves as the primary source of information for certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants. Judging from the response to some posted Conservation Projects, use of the website is quite high. Some of the updates include:
 - An alphabetical listing of re-certification (anniversary) dates has been posted for all certified Master Hunters due to expire during the period April, 10, 2009 – May 31, 2010.
 - The “Special Hunt Update” feature has been expanded and now reflects information about the Master Hunter hunts in Elk Area 3911 and in the Dungeness elk hunt. It is anticipated that general formation and related requirements about all Master Hunter seasons will be posted, eventually. Elk Activity Reports may also be expanded beyond Elk Areas 3911 and 3912.
 - Specific contact information for Hunter Education Division staff involved with the Master Hunter Program has been updated.
 - An extensive list of Master Hunter test proctoring dates and locations throughout the state is included under “Requirements”—“schedule your exam”. The test proctoring network now includes the following counties: Benton (1), Clark (1), Cowlitz (1), Grant (1), Grays Harbor (1), King (1), Pierce (1), Snohomish (2), Spokane (2), Thurston (2), Yakima (1), and Whitman (1).
 - A listing of updated volunteer conservation projects for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Yakima Training Center, and Eyes In The Woods is posted under the Conservation Projects page.
 - An updated Master Hunter Orientation document was posted.
 - A Proof of Service form was specifically modified for renewals, reflecting the current 40 hour requirement.
 - A Master Hunter Identification Merchandise Order Form has been added.
 - The Master Hunter News section has been expanded to reflect examples of the many good things done by Master Hunters.
 - The website was updated on a weekly basis.
7. The Eyes In The Woods partnership with the WDFW to provide C.O.R.T. sessions again worked well during 2009. There has been a significant increase in the demand for C.O.R.T. sessions as a result of one-time attendance being made a requirement for the Master Hunter program. In 2007, 307 students received C.O.R.T. training in 25 classes. In 2008, 1,059 students received C.O.R.T. training in 47 classes.
8. A special insert was developed for application packets providing guidance on how best to successfully navigate through study materials and other requirements.

Conservation Projects

1. The process of tracking volunteer hours provided by Master Hunters has undergone an extensive upgrade allowing for better evaluation. The following eight categories of volunteer conservation projects are being tracked: game damage control; Master Hunter program administrative support; cooperative road management; lands and habitat management; hunting access; hunter education; mentoring (hunting related); and other (wildlife surveys, etc.).
2. Since January 2008, at least 10,200 hours of volunteer conservation time has been worked by Master Hunter applicants and certified Master Hunters.
3. About 75% of the Master Hunter volunteers are applicants; providing about 60% of the total work effort.
4. About 25 % of the Master Hunter volunteers are certified Master Hunters; providing about 40% of the total work effort.
5. About 59 % of the time donated collectively by certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants is directly tied to WDFW activities or programs. The remainder of volunteer time was contributed to other resource agencies, nonprofit organizations, or private landowners.
6. A pilot Internet Registration Project for Herding/Hazing/Fence Repair/Fence Construction was posted on January 2009. It allowed certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants to register to be involved with non-lethal control of game damage throughout the state. Fish and Wildlife Officers are routinely using this resource. On January 29 the total number of statewide entries was 45; on February 27 it was 190; on March 27 it was 329; on April 28 it was 436; and on May 27 the total number of registration entries was 537.
7. The Master Hunter website now clearly explains that projects involving wildlife feeding, rearing, or release, must first be approved by WDFW Regional Wildlife Program staff before ever being considered by Master Hunter program staff.
8. A variety of interesting WDFW project opportunities have been posted that have attracted significant attention by Master Hunters. These include but are not limited to: deer and elk damage control; Kittitas and Yakima County elk fence repair; control of coyotes on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area to benefit Sage Grouse; Youth Outdoor Experience EXPO; and WSU pilot project on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area to study the effects of cattle grazing on deer and elk.
9. The MHAG continues to seek partnership opportunities with the Eyes In The Woods Association to help facilitate Master Hunter conservation projects throughout the state.

Program Refinements Implemented, and Under Consideration

New Requirements

1. Effective July 26, 2009, the Master Hunter Permit Program will be a legislatively mandated program. SHB 1778, Title 77 RCW, Sections 15 and 16, were approved by the 2009 Legislature and signed into law by the Governor. A number of significant changes are included in this new statute:
 - The law basically substitutes a Master Hunter permit for the existing Master Hunter card concept. This is an important distinction because it allows WDFW to suspend the privileges of a certified Master Hunter when they are cited as opposed to waiting until bail forfeiture or conviction occurs---see discussion below.
 - The law establishes a fee structure for Master Hunter Permit applicants (up to \$50.00) and for renewing of Master Hunter permits (up to \$25.00).
 - The law clearly defines criteria to be used and length of suspensions associated with certified Master Hunters.
 - If a Master Hunter pays the required fine or is found to have committed an infraction under Chapter 77.15 RCW or WDFW rules, WDFW shall suspend his/her Master Hunter permit for two years.
 - If a Master Hunter pays the required fine or is convicted of a misdemeanor, gross misdemeanor, or felony under Chapter 77.15 RCW, WDFW shall suspend his/her Master Hunter permit for life.
 - If a Master Hunter pays the required fine or is convicted of trespass, reckless endangerment, criminal conspiracy, or making a false statement to law enforcement while hunting, fishing, or engaging in any activity regulated by the Department, WDFW shall suspend his/her Master Hunter permit for life.
 - If a Master Hunter pays the required fine or is convicted of a felony prohibiting the possession of firearms, unless firearm possession is reinstated, WDFW shall suspend his/her Master Hunter permit for life.
 - If a Master Hunter has a hunting or fishing license revoked or has hunting or fishing license privileges suspended in another state, WDFW shall suspend his/her Master Hunter permit for life.
 - If a Master Hunter submits fraudulent information to WDFW, WDFW shall suspend his/her Master Hunter permit for life.
 - If a Master Hunter is cited, or charged by complaint, for an offense under Chapter 77.15 RCW; or for trespass, reckless endangerment, criminal conspiracy, or making a false statement to law enforcement while hunting, fishing, or engaging in any activity regulated by WDFW, WDFW may immediately suspend his/her Master Hunter permit until the offense has been adjudicated.

2. A new 100 question Master Hunter examination is being used in 2009. All questions were validated and the test was weighted according to the following general subject areas and percentages: ethics, conservation, hunter responsibilities, sportsmanship (25%); laws and regulations (20%); wildlife biology and habitat (20%); politics, and hunting demographics (15%); firearms and technology (10%); and woodsmanship (10%).
3. A companion Study Guide was provided to 2009 Master Hunter applicants and posted on the website. The source of many test questions is the WDFW Hunter Education Student Manual, which was added to the basic curricula in 2009.
4. During 2010, the open enrollment period for applying to obtain a Master Hunter permit will be January 1 – February 15, 2010. This will be the only opportunity during 2010. Applications will not be accepted before January 1, 2010. The intent of the shortened open enrollment period is to slow the rate of growth of the new Master Hunter permit program while maintaining the momentum and progress made collaboratively by WDFW and MHAG. The need for more than 1,800-2,000 certified Master Hunters is not anticipated on the short term.
5. Beginning in 2010, there will no longer be a hard copy option for applicant study materials. Materials will include a CD containing the majority of background information plus a number of small booklets focusing on ethics. Master Hunter permit applicants wishing a hard copy of the Alberta Conservation and Hunter Education Manual will need to obtain that book directly from the Alberta Hunter Education Instructor's Association (AHEIA) at: 911 Sylvester Crescent S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2W 0R8, ph# 1-866-85-AHEIA.

Pending Changes

1. A companion Administrative Rule must be developed and approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission that reflects the direction and statutory authority provided by SHB 1778, Title 77 RCW. WDFW, in consultation with the MHAG, has developed corresponding amendments to WAC 232-12-073 – Master Hunter Program, that will accomplish that goal and that will include other needed changes in the program. It is anticipated that the Commission will take formal action at their August 2009 public hearing. The proposed rule:
 - Establishes the fee for applicants for Master Hunter permits at \$50.00; and establishes a new fee of \$25.00 for renewing a Master Hunter permit every five years.
 - Continues to subject applicants for Master Hunter permits to a thorough criminal background check.
 - Stipulates that WDFW deny entry into the Master Hunter permit program to those applicants who have:
 - Paid the required fine or been convicted within the last ten years of a Chapter 77.15 RCW offense.

- Paid the required fine or been convicted within the last ten years of trespassing, reckless endangerment, criminal conspiracy, or making a false statement to law enforcement, while hunting, fishing, or engaging in any activity regulated by WDFW.
 - Prior felonies prohibiting the possession of firearms, unless firearm possession is reinstated.
 - A current hunting or fishing license revocation or a current suspension of hunting or fishing license privileges in another state.
 - Stipulates that a Master Hunter permit applicant found to have submitted fraudulent information to WDFW or to have cheated on the Master Hunter examination be excluded from the Master Hunter permit program for life.
 - Requires that certified Master Hunters renewing their permit must authorize WDFW to conduct a criminal background check each time they renew. The criminal background check will go back five years from the Master Hunter's anniversary date or the date of the rule amendment adoption, whichever period of time is shorter.
 - Mirrors the criteria to be used and length of suspensions associated with certified Master Hunters as discussed above under New Requirements for the Master Hunter permit statute (SHB 1778, Title 77 RCW, Sections 15 and 16). Those criteria and standards will be applied during criminal background checks for each permit renewal, as well as throughout the five year permit certification period.
 - Stipulates that if a certified Master Hunter has his/her Master Hunter permit suspended for a period less than life, they must reapply and repeat the entire Master Hunter permit application process once the suspension period is over.
 - Stipulates that only Washington residents as defined in RCW 77.08.010 (39) may apply for a Master Hunter permit.
2. Because of technical difficulties, the implementation of the new Master Hunter hunting license designator will be delayed until the beginning of license year 2010. An "MH" and certification anniversary date will appear on all hunting licenses purchased by certified Master Hunters to aid Enforcement Officers in the field.
 3. Interim guidelines for Hunt Masters/Coordinators are under development to achieve better statewide consistency and to ensure all eligible Master Hunters are treated fairly and equitably with respect to hunt opportunities. Factors to be addressed include: qualifications, appointment/orientation, duties, protocols for the order of contact for permit holders, and restricted activities.
 4. Master Hunter cards will be replaced by Master Hunter permits, following approval by the Fish and Wildlife Commission of amendments to WAC 232-12-073.

Changes under Consideration

1. The MHAG has been asked by WDFW to evaluate and make recommendations regarding current Master Hunter Administrative Requirements. Some of the general categories under most active discussion include: shooting proficiency; renewal conservation hours; Hunter Education training; testing protocols; and volunteer conservation project types. Resultant MHAG recommendations and changes in Administrative Requirements approved by WDFW will be posted on the Master Hunter website.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Things to be done

1. An e-mail group account should be developed for the Master Hunter Program to improve routine communications with certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants. Master Hunters should be encouraged to provide up-to-date e-mail addresses.
2. Confirmation, by the MHAG, of future areas of focus to best achieve its Roles and Responsibilities, Vision Statement, and to assist the WDFW in addressing the high priority needs of wildlife, habitat, and the hunting constituency. Potential areas of consideration include: targeted volunteer wildlife conservation projects; acting as “Stewards of the Hunt” on behalf of the WDFW and all Master Hunters; and mentoring of first-time hunters, and hunters with disabilities.
3. Approval by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission of rule amendments that reflect the new Master Hunter permit statute and that address existing critical flaws with WAC 232-12-073.
4. Development of an alternative mechanism to a Peer Review Committee to address ethical complaints about Master Hunters.
5. One of the most frequent complaints by Master Hunters continues to be the lack of access to property during established Master Hunter hunts. An evaluation of this issue should be conducted by the MHAG and recommendations prepared for WDFW consideration.
6. Completion and implementation of Hunt Master/Coordinator guidelines by 2010 Master Hunter permit seasons and permit hunts.
7. There continues to be a level of reluctance on the part of many WDFW staff to take full advantage of the Master Hunter volunteer pool to address significant wildlife, habitat, and hunting constituency related needs. It is estimated that a minimum of 10,000 hours of volunteer conservation project time must be donated each year by certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants.
8. The current Master Hunter Liaison and Policy Lead is a temporary employee who will not be able to work past August 2009. Other members of the Hunter Education Division will need to assume those functions given the reality of budget shortfalls in the WDFW.
9. Consideration should be given to the development of a second Master Hunter examination by rearranging the questions currently used in the 2009 version.

10. A statewide Master Hunter test proctoring network needs to be re-established in 2010. A continued partnership with WDFW Regional Offices, MHAG members, and Hunter Education Instructors should be pursued.
11. The facilitation of conservation project partnerships with Eyes In The Woods, Yakima Training Center, DNR, and USFWS, as well as additional non-profit conservation organizations should be continued so that specific volunteer opportunities can be posted. A follow up contact with the United States Forest Service (USFS) should be initiated.
12. The partnership with the Eyes In The Woods organization to provide C.O.R.T. sessions and to help facilitate the volunteer efforts of Master Hunters should be strengthened through reciprocal attendance at Board meetings by representatives.
13. WDFW should improve the process by which Master Hunters being cited for or convicted of hunting and fishing violations in Washington and other states are identified to Master Hunter staff in a timely fashion.
14. WDFW should continue to improve the Master Hunter database, and consider offering electronic registration by Master Hunter applicants sometime in the future.
15. WDFW and the MHAG should be cognizant about the concerns of general hunters regarding the growing use of Master Hunters to resolve sensitive game damage issues throughout the state. The MHAG should routinely update/interface with the Game Management Advisory Group (GMAC) to ensure understanding and mutual support.
16. WDFW needs to conduct a statewide recruitment process beginning in late July to fill the five positions on the MHAG which will become vacant in March 2010. The MHAG should assist with the interview and selection process.
17. WDFW should again send Master Hunter applicants a postcard in August reminding them of the date by which all requirements must be completed. Applicants only have a nine month period to complete all steps and have no extensions.
18. WDFW should again post in August a list of Master Hunter applicants and the date by which they need to complete all requirements in order to be certified.
19. A statewide news release needs to be circulated by WDFW regarding the July 18, 2009, Elk Area 3911 public meeting in Ellensburg.
20. Specific information and restrictions about each Master Hunter season and hunt should eventually be posted on the Master Hunter website under "Special Hunt Updates". Hunt Master/Coordinator guidelines should also be posted, once finalized.
21. WDFW should prepare and submit bi-annual Master Hunter Progress Reports to the Fish and Wildlife Commission under Policy C-6005.
22. Following the amendment of WAC 232-12-073 by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, WDFW should provide all certified Master Hunters with a newly designed Master Hunter Permit.
23. The Master Hunter website should be updated in a timely fashion to reflect SHB 1778, Title 77 RCW, Sections 15 and 16; amendments to WAC 232-12-073; and any changes to Administrative Requirements, as appropriate.

24. The MHAG should evaluate the effectiveness of its current Public Communications Plan to determine whether Applicant Orientation public meetings, Master Hunter Information and Outreach public meetings, and Special Hunt Management public meetings are achieving the intended purposes.
25. WDFW should provide specific harvest information for each Master Hunter season or permit hunt as part of the annual assessment of the Master Hunter program. The estimated minimum total harvest during 2007 was 249 elk, 62 % of which were taken in Elk Area 3911.
26. WDFW should consider working with the GMAC and the MHAG to evaluate the current raffle and auction permit program to determine how best to address perceived concerns for the hunts.
27. The MHAG should continue to pursue formal partnerships to provide mentoring services by Master Hunters to returning service men and women that are persons of disability.
28. The WDFW Licensing Division should be contacted in October by the Enforcement Program to ensure that the Master Hunter designator concept will be implemented for license year 2010, as scheduled.