

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

Introduction

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting and outdoor recreational activities in Washington. They are also “stewards of the hunt.” Members of the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP) give back to the wildlife resource through their volunteer work and help promote and strengthen the heritage of hunting through their actions.

Master Hunters are used as a resource to help achieve the following Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Wildlife Program goals and initiatives:

- Strengthening the conservation ethic, image, and heritage of hunting in Washington by engaging in public outreach related to the role of hunting today and in the future.
- Improving landowner relations through the practice of ethical and responsible hunting.
- Helping to resolve human/wildlife conflicts or public safety issues through the control of game causing damage to public and private property.
- Increasing hunter access to private lands through volunteer efforts.
- Increasing recruitment, retention, and re-engagement of hunters through participation in hunter education classes, hunter training clinics, and mentoring of first-time-hunters.
- Protecting and enhancing important habitats through volunteer projects associated with WDFW Wildlife Areas and Water Access Sites.
- Participating in WDFW Citizen Science wildlife data collection.
- Serving in an administrative or coordination capacity for a volunteer network.
- Providing a communications link with the general public to impart accurate information about WDFW’s management activities associated with wildlife and hunting.

Participant Update

As of January 1, 2017, there are 1,648 certified Master Hunters in good standing. There was no open enrollment period for calendar year 2013. Enrollment was closed to allow WDFW time to review the program, clarify its role, and to identify strategies that better engage members in high-priority volunteer work. The table below summarizes the annual number of Master Hunters since 2011.

Certified Master Hunters by Year

	2011	2012	2013*	2014	2015	2016
Applicants	708	510	0	521	375	317
Applicants certified	132	83	2*	135	97	89
Percent certified	19%	16%	n/a	26%	26%	28%
Total Master Hunters	1,975	1,938	1,815	1,701	1,650	1,648

* There were two applicants from 2012 that were not certified until 2013 due to administrative issues.

The percentage of Master Hunters renewing their certification has remained relatively constant. Over the last six years it has averaged approximately 57%.

Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year**

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Certification renewals	163	210	207	221	250	198
Non-renewals	140	144	145	224	169	104
Renewal Rate	54%	59%	59%	50%	60%	66%

** These numbers are approximations due to the fluidity of the Master Hunter renewals.

Master Hunter Advisory Group

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) represents Master Hunters statewide and advises WDFW on issues and opportunities affecting Master Hunters and the MHPP. The MHAG works in partnership with WDFW to identify and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities for hunters and Master Hunters throughout the state. These opportunities are intended to promote the conservation ethic and address priority needs of the Wildlife Program and the department, as well as to develop a dependable means of coordination and management of Master Hunter volunteer efforts within each WDFW Region.

The MHAG consists of 15 members who serve three-year terms. Five members are appointed by the Director each year, with the goal of maintaining at least two Master Hunters per department administrative region. The group appoints a chair and vice-chair who serve one year terms, and a secretary who serves a two year term.

Five members of the MHAG were appointed by Director Jim Unsworth in January 2016 for terms beginning in April 2016. These appointments consist of new members and reappointments, and

include Tom Conrads (Region 3), David Floyd (Region 4), Jeff Larsen (Region 4), Shane Briel (Region 6), and Jim Zimmerman (Region 6). Regional representation is retained with these appointments. During 2016, Jim Fitzgerald (Region 6) served chair of the MHAG and George Dennis (Region 5) served as vice-chair through the April MHAG meeting. From April through the end of the calendar year, George Dennis (Region 5) served as chair and John McAuliffe (Region 4) served as vice-chair.

The MHAG conducted four formal business meetings in 2016, all in Ellensburg. All meeting notices and agendas were posted in advance on the MHAG webpage (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>), as were notes from meetings, which were held on January 29, April 29, July 22, and October 7. All Master Hunters are invited to attend the four MHAG meetings held quarterly in Ellensburg

Program Refinements

The MHPP replaced the former Advanced Hunter Education Program in 2008, and 2016 was the third full year the MHPP has been administered by the Wildlife Program. The Wildlife Program adopted a MHPP Policy Statement in 2013. It describes the role of Master Hunters and how the department will utilize them. The policy statement can be found at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/Masterhunter/files/2013_mh_policy_statement.pdf.

The Hunter Education Division, which manages the MHPP, added three coordinators in 2014 and 2015. These coordinators, located in Regions 3, 4, and 6, have volunteer coordination as a portion of their job duties, and have been instrumental in helping to increase the number of volunteer opportunities.

The MHPP Strategic Plan focuses on work activities aimed at improving landowner-sportsman relations, promoting access to private land, stimulating hunter recruitment, retention and reengagement, and ensuring the corps of Master Hunters can effectively address wildlife depredation issues in a safe, legal, and ethical manner. These focus areas are intended to help all Washington citizens celebrate and perpetuate the heritage of hunting in Washington State. The strategic plan is posted on the MHAG website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>). MHAG members and WDFW staff are currently developing hunting opportunities for youth on private lands, whereby the youth hunters and their parents/guardians would have a high probability of success. Master Hunters, through their contacts with private landowners, will play an important role in facilitating access for these hunts.

Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT) classes were more plentiful in 2016. WDFW, MHAG, and Eyes In The Woods (EITW) are working together to make further refinements in 2017. WDFW, MHAG, and EITW will be working together to promote and make this training course more accessible to Master Hunter applicants as well as the general public.

Communications and Outreach

Members of the MHAG occasionally met with WDFW Regional staff to foster closer working relationships and identify volunteer efforts to address priority agency needs.

MHAG members were also provided contact information for all certified Master Hunters living in their respective Regions to facilitate regional communication and information sharing relative to MHPP and wildlife management related topics.

WDFW expanded the volunteer coordination boundaries for the three coordinators who also have volunteer coordinator duties. The entire state is now served by these coordinators (see map below).



The Hunter Education Division conducted two orientation meetings on the MHPP in 2016. These meetings occurred July 30 in Ellensburg and August 1 in Mountlake Terrace, and were designed to help educate Master Hunters, Master Hunter applicants, and the public on the program. Specific items discussed included MHPP current activities, the increase in staff resources to help in soliciting volunteers, WDFW conflict management activities, Master Hunter general season areas and hunts, and Master Hunter Special Permit hunts. Two MHAG members' assisted WDFW staff at each meeting in delivering the information and answering questions. Over 100 attendees were present at each meeting, and the response from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive. WDFW is holding four orientation meetings in 2017 to increase knowledge and understanding among Master Hunters, Master Hunter applicants, and the general public. These meetings will all be held before the MHPP application deadline in February.

In late 2016, the Hunter Education Division initiated a bi-monthly MHPP newsletter, which informs existing Master Hunters, as well as Master Hunter applicants, of possible volunteer opportunities in each region. The newsletter also conveys information on many WDFW conservation projects.

This information helps Master Hunters fulfill one of their commitments as an agency ambassador, in that it allows them to be in communication with the general public and convey accurate and interesting information on WDFW's wildlife management activities.

In 2016, coordinators Garcia and Dazey conducted a tour of Regions 1 and 2 to discuss the MHPP with department staff. The goal was to increase awareness of the MHPP and how the coordinators can assist staff with volunteer projects. The tour successfully resulted in increased understanding and staff contacts, which are expected to result in additional MHPP volunteer opportunities in Region 1 and 2. The trip also produced the concept for the MHPP newsletter discussed above. Coordinator Montgomery also did a tour of Region 5 to inform staff that Master Hunter volunteers could be a huge help to them.

The department held a celebration for National Hunting and Fishing Day in East Wenatchee this year. Seventy eight youth ages 2 to 17, and approximately 120 adults joined us for a FREE National Hunting and Fishing Day celebration. Participants received training, guidance, direction, and encouragement from certified Hunter Education Instructors and Master Hunters. They had the ability to visit six shooting stations throughout the day to experience target shooting with .223 rifles, .22 rifles, and air rifles, as well as trap shooting, and archery shooting.

Policy and Programmatic

As noted above, the expansion of the coordinator's area of coverage has substantially enhanced WDFW's ability to utilize Master Hunters (as well as other volunteers) on priority projects.

WDFW began offering clinics to the public on how to hunt specific game species. In 2016, the department conducted eight turkey clinics, one introduction to bowhunting clinic, three upland bird clinics, and two deer clinics. Informational booklets were created by WDFW to assist in teaching these clinics, and are available online (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/clinics/booklets.php>). Several clinic participants were able to harvest this season after taking the clinic.

The Hunter Education Division held a meeting with the wildlife conflict staff to discuss possible improvements in the way those staff utilize Master Hunters to address wildlife damage issues. The department is also working with wildlife conflict staff to update the hunt coordinator guidelines, with the goal of improving program implementation as well as relationships between Master Hunters, landowners, and the department.

With the assistance of MHAG, WDFW updated the Master Hunter exam to current 2017 regulations and wording. The test will also be updated as needed over the next few years. The department is examining, and may update, the educational materials given to Master Hunter applicants.

Program Integrity

Chapter 77.15.760 RCW and WAC 232-12-073 dictate the actions of the department relative to Master Hunter suspensions. During 2016, two Master Hunters were removed from the MHPP for life due to convictions related to Title 77.15 RCW violations. In addition, four Master Hunters were suspended for two years due to paying a fine for a Title 77.15 infraction. Finally, three Master Hunters were suspended until their case is adjudicated. This is the seventh year that the special Master Hunter identifier (MH) has appeared on WDFW licenses, which is intended to facilitate timely and appropriate action on those Master Hunters that violate hunting and fishing rules. The Hunter Education Division continues to work with the Enforcement Program to streamline and formalize the internal Master Hunter suspension process to ensure efficiency and consistency.

Future Direction

Currently, Master Hunter applicants must provide a minimum of 20 hours of approved volunteer conservation service, and existing Master Hunters must provide a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer conservation work every five years in order to renew their certification.

Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants have had increased volunteer opportunities to address Wildlife Program priority needs thanks to Hunter Education Division staff and the Volunteer Program Manager, who continue to work with other department staff to increase the use of MHPP volunteers. Priority projects include game damage control, improving private lands access, hunter recruitment, retention, and re-engagement, wildlife area habitat and facility improvements, water access site improvements, scientific data collection, and teaching hunter education classes. Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants are also permitted to volunteer with other wildlife organizations and agencies to fulfill their Master Hunter volunteer obligations. Once sufficient meaningful volunteer work is identified by WDFW, and Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants are substantially engaged, the volunteer hour requirements for certification and re-certification may be reviewed.

In addition to increasing the number of agency volunteer projects for Master Hunters, emphasis in the future will be placed on continuing to engage Master Hunters in hunter education classes, delivering Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT), proctoring Master Hunter exams, assisting with private lands access (particularly for youth hunters), and utilizing their knowledge and skill during WDFW's hunting clinics.