



# **MASTER HUNTER ADVISORY GROUP**

## **WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE**

**Meeting Notes for MHAG Meeting #61**  
**June 14, 2024, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**Washington Cattleman’s Association, Ellensburg**

<b>MHAG Members</b>		<b>WDFW Staff</b>	<b>Guests</b>
Region 1	George Barlow	David Whipple, Hunter Education Section Manager	Fenner Yarborough, Landowner Services Division Manager
Region 2	Monty Pyle	Kris Thorson, Hunter Education Section Specialist	Rick Webber, Region 4 Master Hunter
Region 3	Don Brunssen	Nick Montanari, Region 2 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	John McAuliffe, Chair	Aaron Garcia, Region 3 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
	Kyle Smith	Jackie McBride, Region 4 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator (virtual)	
	David Solem	Amy Elliott, Region 5 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator	
Region 4	Jason Armstrong	Bill Montgomery, Region 6 Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator (virtual)	
	Jeff Fjelstul (excused)	Ericka Thomas, Hunter Education Administrative Assistant	
	Jeff Larsen, Secretary		
Region 5	Ian Stewart, Vice Chair		
	George Dennis		
Region 6	Keith Pfeifer		
	Michael Bartoldo		
	David Ward		
	Gary Tennison		

## Procedural Business

- **Call to order and announcements (*John McAuliffe, 5 minutes*)**
- **Introduction of members and guests (*John McAuliffe, 15 minutes*)**
  - John welcomed the membership to the meeting and asked each member to introduce themselves starting with the two newest members of the MHAG.

## New Business

- **Meeting Ground Rules Reminder (*Kris Thorson, 15 minutes*)**
  - Meeting ground rules were developed through the WDFW Diversity Advisory Council to help all voices be heard during advisory group meetings.
  - The hunter education section has adopted these ground rules for both of its advisory groups.
  - MHAG started using these ground rules as of March 2024.
  - The ground rules are:
    - Assume others have the best intentions and are contributing in a positive, constructive manner.
      - Foster trust and model civility.
      - Negative or corrective comments towards other members is not permitted
      - Be hard on the issues, not on the people
      - Be open to others' perspectives and new ideas
      - Be present and engaged
    - Minimize digital distractions
      - Respect time
      - Start and end on time
      - Follow the agenda
      - Keep stories relevant to the topic being discussed
    - Respect others' privacy
    - Share air time
      - Staff will track hands for comment to ensure each member gets their time to provide input on the topic being discussed.
    - Teams chat should be used for supplemental info like weblinks, documents, resources, or positive remarks like "agreed" or "I support". Members should ask questions or make comments verbally because some members cannot access the teams chat during the meeting.
    - Empower group and facilitators to manage the agenda and enforce rules
    - A staff member will monitor raised hands and call on members in the order the hands are raised.
    - Bring your humor, and have fun
- **WDFW reports and updates (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
  - MHPP Participation statistics
    - As of June 12, there were 1,152 certified Master Hunters.
    - There were 145 applicants in 2023.

- Fifty-six of the applicants completed all the requirements and were certified.
- That is a 39 percent certification rate.
- We had 66 applicants take the test in 2023 with an average score of 81 percent.
- Forty-three of the 66 passed their initial test.
- That is a pass rate of 65 percent.
- Sixteen applicants retook the test and fourteen passed on their second attempt.
- The highest score was 96 and the lowest score was 47.
- Jeff Larsen asked if we had the non-renewal numbers.
  - Kris looked in the database and since July 1, 2023 there have been 91 Master Hunters who did not renew their permits.
- Field coordinator reports
  - Nick Montanari – Region 2 Field Coordinator
    - Nick completed his NRA Range Safety Officer, NRA basic Rifle and Shotgun, and NRA Instructor for Rifle and Shotgun trainings.
    - He visited classes in Okanogan, Chelan, Moses Lake, Oroville, and Marlin.
    - Nick coordinated two free First Aid classes for instructors.
    - He attended the Ephrata Sportsman Association, Quincy Gun Club, and Wenatchee Sportsman Association board meetings.
    - He began planning for Bat Night near Wenatchee with Wenatchee River Institute and local biologists for Conservation Education.
    - Nick assisted with three IST events.
    - He helped coordinate a spring planting volunteer event at Swakane Canyon for Master Hunters.
    - He did a wildlife education station at the Desert Unit Wildlife Area outdoor classroom for seventh graders for one day.
    - He assisted at the Foster Creek outdoor classroom with third and fifth and seventh graders for two days.
    - Nick helped coordinate and educate at the Wild Washington outdoor classroom for three days at Beebe Springs Wildlife Area for fifth graders.
    - He certified seven new instructors and completed a PST for three applicants in Ephrata and held a PST on the Colville Reservation for seven Colville Natural Resource Enforcement Officers.
    - He helped with Policy 7011 Firearm training and qualifications for staff.
    - Nick helped teach an NRA Basic Rifle and Hunter Education class for Civil Air Patrol youth.
    - He mentored a mentee at the Turkey Hunt Clinic in partnership with NWTF and First Hunt Foundation where his mentee learned a lot and was fortunate to harvest her first turkey.

- He attended a workshop with other coordinators and new Administrative Assistant Ericka to work on improving systems within the team.
  - Nick attended the Washington Backcountry Hunters and Anglers first Rendezvous event and helped collect five instructor applications and network with other organizations such as Pheasants Forever and Woman on the Wing.
  - He collected five dozen duck decoys for donation to the R3 effort.
  - He called all 115 instructors in the database to get caught up on background check forms, update contact information, RSVP for IST, and provide help connecting with teams.
  - He is conducting the Region 2 IST events in Okanogan on the 16th and Moses Lake on the 22nd.
  - Nick met with Region 2 customer service staff to discuss hunter ed, Master Hunters, and conservation ed programs.
  - He also created a reference and FAQ document for the Region 2 customer service staff.
  - He attended the Cascadia Conservation District open house and established partnership for conservation ed.
- Aaron Garcia – Region 3 Field Coordinator
    - The spring turkey camp was big success.
    - Aaron is working on planning the fall turkey camp, pheasant clinics, and deer camp.
    - WDFW Used Kalkomey for the hunting clinic/camp registration which went well and WDFW plans to keep using it.
    - He sent a trail ambassador program info to Region 3 MH's.
    - The LT Murray WLA Manager is supposed to get Aaron information on some projects soon.
    - A fish display project for the region 3 office was sent out and one person replied.
    - The First Hunt Foundation “find a mentor” website is live which should make mentor/mentee matching much better.
  - Jackie McBride – Region 4 Field Coordinator
    - Jackie has lots of projects in Region 4 like a planting project with Conservation NW, building Bat Houses for Whidbey Island Deception Pass State Park and adjacent properties, elk Fencing with Kevin OConnor, beach area cleanups at popular hunting spots on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island and surrounding Whidbey island areas, and cleanups at local shooting spots.
    - She has upcoming projects with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, DNR forest stewards program, and Sky Valley Chamber of Commerce recreation partners, project with Lervick Lumber for enforcement, duck blind rehab, bird Carvings for Habitat at home project.

- Master Hunters also assisted with the annual Naval Air Station Whidbey Island safety fair.
- She is also working with conflict and MHAG members for some current bad actors and how to navigate repairing landowner relationships in the Skagit Valley/Whatcom valley.
- Region 4 is also looking at doing several clinics this year which will require MH help again such as the post hunt clinic, duck hunting clinic, etc.
- Amy Elliott – Region 5 Field Coordinator
  - Region 5 is still trying to fill the third conflict specialist for the region and that has been a challenge.
  - There was a couple in Packwood that needed some assistance with bear conflict and Dean Thornberry and Keith Pfeifer went and built an electric fence around the conflict area.
  - Amy is getting ready to send out some R3 fishing events this summer.
  - Amy helped recruit for a region 5 project removing English ivy where 12,860 pounds of almost all ivy was collected the first weekend and 15,760 pounds of mostly ivy with some wood debris was collected the second weekend.
  - In total, 28,620 pounds of ivy and debris went to the dump.
  - There were 91 total people who worked on the four-day project that removed 372 pounds of ivy and/or debris per person.
  - She is also working with conflict specialists and wildlife area managers to adhere to volunteer policy requirements.
  - Amy is also working on NHRD planning, continuing outreach to sponsors/participants, working with range to get things dialed in, registration live, and starting to do public outreach.
- Bill Montgomery – Region 6 Field Coordinator
  - Bill sent out 72 invites for setting up Fish Tacoma rods and reels and three Master Hunters signed up and two showed.
  - He sent out a blast for helping USFS on an elk forage project by Crystal Mountain, but he just relayed the information and doesn't know the response as the USFS are handling the reservations.
  - Bill went to fur school in Idaho and got to learn how to trap in Idaho and process different trapped animals.
- The Instructor Advisory Committee gets the reports and updates section as an email prior to the meeting.
- Is this something that the MHAG would like to do for future meetings, or does it work better to get the information during the meeting?
- The group liked the idea of having the reports before the meeting so they can review the information and bring any questions and comments to the meeting.

- **Report of Master Hunter reports and harvest statistics for 2023 (*Kris Thorson, 30 minutes*)**
  - After our March meeting, John McAuliffe emailed Kris and asked about the harvest statistics and reporting of Master Hunters on their tags.
  - Kris asked the game division and science division staff if they could break down the reports and give us an idea of how many Master Hunters are hunting, harvesting, and reporting.
  - There are some difficulties with accurately identifying Master Hunter harvests across all hunting equipment and seasons.
  - The WILD system reporting tool asks hunters who are submitting a hunting report which Game Management Unit (GMU) they were hunting in.
  - Elk area 3911 overlaps several GMUs in region 3, so if Master Hunters were harvesting during the 3911 Master Hunter only season, WDFW may count it as a general season harvest instead of a Master Hunter harvest.
  - We have a lot better way to identify the special permit hunter reports for Master Hunters.
  - Kris looked up the hunting reporting statistics from the 2023 hunting season.
    - Game harvest reports are located at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-harvest>.
  - Looking at the special permits, only six deer hunters were deployed on hunt coordinated hunts with three harvesting.
  - We had 30 Master Hunters deployed on hunt coordinator hunts in 2023 with 15 harvesting elk.
  - So, both deer and elk harvest rates on hunt coordinator hunts was 50 percent.
  - One interesting thing that Kris found when doing the research on this topic is that the reports do not necessarily line up to the number of Master Hunters deployed on a hunt.
  - The reporting requirement is required even if you are not contacted for a Master Hunter HC hunt because the deployments are handled outside of the WILD system.
  - Looking at hunt choice 2709 for example, the points restoration spreadsheets submitted from conflict specialists indicate that 11 folks were deployed and did not require points restoration.
  - However, looking at the hunt reporting information, 14 submitted reports and only 5 of those 14 hunted.
  - Jeff checked with his WILD ID profile and it requires a report even though he has not yet purchased his second tag.
  - John McAuliffe asked if we could get a count of other tags like kill permit etc. and compare that and harvest to MH harvest.
- **MHAG member updates and Master Hunter communications (*John McAuliffe, 10 minutes*)**
  - Does anyone have anything to add?
  - John has not had any region 3 Master Hunters reach out to him since the March meeting.

- Gary has had some contacts with Master Hunters who cannot find volunteer projects and he told them that they can contact him and he will find them volunteer projects.
- David Ward proctored a Master Hunter test and the applicant was also looking for volunteer hours and he helped point him in the right direction.
- Jeff Larsen did a bunch of proctoring and he heard the same from applicants that they were having some issues finding hours and he points folks to the volunteer website.
- Amy asked the MHAG if they should expand the marketing of volunteer opportunities to more regions.
  - Jeff cautioned that cross state travel may have Master Hunters asking for travel time.
- Jeff was contacted by a Master Hunter who had a lapsed Master Hunter who had medical issues and we as the MHAG may want to talk about the current grace period.
- Kris was contacted by the Western Washington RMEF state chair about changing the volunteer policy about allowing Master Hunter hours at banquets and Kris agreed to bring this issue to the MHAG.
- Amy thinks that it could depend on what the Master Hunters are doing at the events.
  - If they are doing outreach to the group members and not collecting funds, it could possibly be ok.
- Gary thinks that the volunteering for a banquet is off the mark and the volunteers are there to benefit the organization.
- Michael thinks that since there is a lot of good benefits these groups present and a ton of hours given, that some of the volunteer hours could be counted.
- Monty agrees with Gary that Master Hunters shouldn't get hours from banquets because there should be a direct impact to WDFW.
- The consensus seemed to indicate that the MHAG was not in favor of allowing volunteer time at the banquets unless the Master Hunter was staffing a Master Hunter informational booth at the event.
- **Landowner Services Division Overview (*Fenner Yarborough, 60 minutes*)**
  - Kris introduced Fenner Yarborough, the new Landowner Services Division Manager.
  - The division started about a year ago.
  - There are three different sections in the division, Private Lands Section, Conflict Section, and Farm Bill work.
  - Private lands section has employees across the state and they have areas of emphasis on recreational access, wildlife viewing, habitat conservation, and much more.
  - These staff are funded directly by Pittman-Robertson funds and state dollars.
  - There are four types of private lands access programs WDFW uses to allow access to private lands.

- The conflict management section is about managing for negative human-wildlife interactions, to provide for better co-existence in a shrinking space for both.
- Conflict management staff are not funded through Pittman-Robertson funds.
- There are a lot of tools that the conflict staff have to be able to address human wildlife conflict.
- Fenner wants to focus the conflict section more on the outreach, education, and communication within the conflict management section in the future but with the current workload that may not be feasible.
- The Farm Bill is a 5-year cycle, but the last bill expired in 2023.
- The program funds a lot of different programs like CRP and SAFE.
- Fenner gave an overview on the status of the Bear Timber Damage Permit Program and its possible use of Master Hunters to help address bear timber damage in the future.
- Jackie suggested that having a mentor/mentee be added to the permit to help create new/more bear hunters.
- Fenner suggested WDFW or the MAHG members have a sit down with the timber companies to talk about how the program would work and what the MHPP can offer.
- Fenner is going to talk with the conflict staff more about Master Hunters and the Master Hunter Permit Program as well as asking Kris or Dave to come to a division meeting and talking about the MHPP.
- **Lunch (60 minutes)**
- **Officer Elections (Kris Thorson, 15 minutes)**
  - Each year the MHAG elects a chair and a vice chair.
  - Every two years the MHAG elects a secretary.
  - Jeff Larsen was appointed secretary in 2023 and will continue to serve in that role through the June 2025 meeting.
  - Since the August 2023 meeting, John McAuliffe served as the MHAG chair and Ian Stewart served as the MHAG vice chair.
  - Kris opened the floor for nominations for chair.
    - George nominated Ian Stewart for chair.
    - Keith Pfeifer seconded the nomination.
    - The group unanimously approved Ian Stewart as chair.
  - Kris opened the floor for nominations for the vice chair.
    - Jeff nominated Keith Pfeifer to be the vice chair.
    - Ian seconded the nomination.
    - The group unanimously approved Keith as vice chair.
  - The officers will be in their roles at the August 16 meeting.
- **USFWS Barred Owl Removal Discussion (Kris Thorson, 15 minutes)**
  - Jeff Fjlstel brought this forward for discussion.
  - He felt that the pool of master hunters would be the most efficient pathway to recruit volunteers who are willing to undergo qualification as noted in the USFWS's Draft Barred Owl Management Strategy.



- The strategy can be found online at <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Final%20draft%20Barred%20Owl%20Management%20Strategy.pdf>.
- The service has held two public meetings on their Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- WDFW is a cooperating entity on the EIS and has been supportive of the draft Barred Owl Management Strategy.
- The final EIS is not yet out and then the Record of Decision would follow.
- Once the USFWS decides, they will start working on actual implementation planning.
- There are still several things WDFW needs to do internally to develop engagement and implementation support/approach, should an action alternative be selected as the decision.
- How does the MHAG feel about this as a possible Master Hunter project moving forward?
- Ian thinks that this would be a good opportunity for Master Hunters for conservation.
- Monty thinks that it should be a possible opportunity for removal.
- The group all were ok with this being a possible Master Hunter opportunity depending on the outcome of the EIS.
- Kris passed out a WDFW barred owl management talking points that were developed by WDFW's Diversity Division for MHAG's reference.
- More information on the project can be found on the USFWS website at <https://www.fws.gov/project/barred-owl-management>.
- **NHFD Update (*Kris Thorson and Amy Elliott, 15 minutes*)**
  - The 2024 NHFD event planning is moving along.
  - The new event coordinator, Jessica Ostfeld, has been great at helping organize the event, plan updates, and ensure we meet our deadlines.
  - The 2024 event will be on September 28 from 9am-3pm.
  - Since the site is a bit smaller than what we have had in the past, we decided to have two sessions.
  - The first session will start at 9am and run through 11:30am.
  - The second session will start at 12pm and run through 2:30pm.
  - We are planning for up to 500 youth to be in attendance but starting registrations for 150 at each session.
- **2024 Workplan discussion (*Kris Thorson, 15 minutes*)**
  - At the April 2023 hunter education instructor in-service training (IST), Bill gave a quick orientation to the MHPP.
  - This orientation was geared towards giving instructors a more generalized but clearer picture of what the MHPP is and does.
  - After that presentation, George reviewed the current orientation and the IST version.
  - After his review he thinks we need to stick with the current orientation with some minor changes.

- He sent those suggested changes to Kris and Bill in February.
- Kris started to work on the orientation in late-May.
- Kris hopes to have a reviewable version for MHAG at the August meeting.
- As was talked about earlier, Don, Ian, and David Ward have been working hard on the bear timber damage opportunity.
- This would fit into the opportunity enhancement portion of the workplan.
- After this meeting, Kris is planning on talking to George B. and David S. about how to improve the onboarding process for next year since this was their first meeting and they might have ideas on how to improve the process.
- Jason asked if we could have some conflict staff in the meeting to talk about their specific issues.
  - Kris will investigate this as a possibility.
- **MHPP representation as volunteers or agents of WDFW (Jeff Larsen, 30 minutes)**
  - The last three to four months a couple Master Hunter approached landowners as "agents" or working on behalf of WDFW and indicated that they are allowed on private lands.
  - This has caused confusion and in some cases anger from the landowners and the department.
  - Jeff wanted to bring this up for discussion to come up with a strict policy statement and program announcement of exactly how Master Hunters are to represent themselves externally and make it clear that, as a rule, Master Hunters are not employees or de facto agents for the WDFW outside the confines of their volunteerism and solely at the explicit direction and approval of the department.
  - Jeff also wanted to discuss if there should be repercussions from knowingly misrepresenting oneself in these kinds of situations.
  - Other MHAG members were not aware of any other issues like Jeff described and they determined that this is likely a non-issue with most Master Hunters.
- **Report on ExpertVoice (Kris Thorson and Nick Montanari, 15 minutes)**
  - Nick jumped in with both feet after our last meeting and emailed ExpertVoice about possible participation.
  - The staff at ExpertVoice reached back out about what a Master Hunter does and how their staff can determine if a person would qualify.
  - Kris sent the staff an example Master Hunter card so they could know and understand what to look for to grant discounts to Master Hunters.
  - Kris will compile an article for the July Master Hunter Newsletter regarding the ExpertVoice development.

### Conclusion

- **Recap action items (Jeff Larsen, 5 minutes)**
  - Articles for the newsletter on MH reporting and not an agent of WDFW.
- **Agenda topics for next meeting (John McAuliffe, 5 minutes)**
  - FYI, next meeting is August 16 at the WCA building.
- **Good of the order (All; General discussion items by MHAG, 5 minutes)**
- **Adjourn**