

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

Introduction

Master Hunters are ambassadors of safe, ethical, responsible, and legal hunting in Washington state. Their dedication helps promote and strengthen our hunting heritage.

Master Hunters help achieve Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Wildlife Program goals and initiatives by:

- Strengthening the conservation ethic, image of hunting, and hunting heritage
- Improving landowner relations
- Helping resolve human/wildlife conflicts
- Removing deer and/or elk causing damage to property
- Increasing hunter access to private lands through volunteer efforts
- Participating in hunter education classes, hunting clinics, and mentoring new hunters
- Protecting and enhancing important habitats
- Participating in WDFW Citizen Science wildlife data collection
- Serving in an administrative or coordination capacity for a volunteer network
- Providing accurate information about WDFW's management activities to the public



Participant Update

As of January 4, 2019, the department had 1,671 certified Master Hunters. The table below summarizes the number of certified Master Hunters at year's end since 2013. The department had no open enrollment period in calendar year 2013. Enrollment was closed to review the program, clarify the role, and identify strategies to better engage members in volunteer projects.

Certified Master Hunters by Year

	2013*	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Applicants	0	521	375	317	350	310
Applicants certified	2*	135	97	89	85	104
Percent certified	n/a	26%	26%	28%	24%	34%
Total Master Hunters	1,815	1,701	1,650	1,648	1,632	1,671

* There were two applicants from 2012 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 61 percent.

Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year**

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Certification renewals	207	221	250	198	124	162
Non-renewals	145	224	169	104	86	69
Renewal Rate	59%	50%	60%	66%	59%	70%

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

To recertify, Master Hunters are required to provide 40 hours of volunteer service in the past five years. Collectively, Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants provide approximately 15,000 hours per year on volunteer projects.

Master Hunter Advisory Group

The Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG) advises WDFW on issues and opportunities affecting Master Hunters and the MHPP. They also help identify and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities for Master Hunters statewide. The volunteer opportunities promote the conservation ethic and address department needs.

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 WDFW administrative region. MHAG members appoint a chair and vice-chair to one-year terms, and a secretary to a two-year term.

Director Kelly Susewind appointed six members to the MHAG in February 2019 for terms beginning in April 2019. The director appointed Tom Conrads (region 3), Jeff Larsen (region 4), David Floyd (region 4), Thomas Woodruff (region 6), and Ronald Gleiter (region 6) to three-year terms. Jonathan Barr (region 3) was appointed to a one-year term to fill a vacated seat. The appointments maintain regional representation. During 2018, George Dennis (Region 5) served as chair and Jeff Larsen (Region 4) served as vice-chair.

The MHAG met four times in Ellensburg during 2018. Meetings dates were Jan. 19, Apr. 13, Jul. 20, and Oct. 26. All meeting notices, agendas, and notes are posted on the MHAG webpage (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>). In 2019, WDFW plans to meet four times. The first meeting was on Jan. 11. The second meeting is scheduled for May 17. The other two meetings will be posted to the MHAG webpage.

The MHAG also assisted WDFW staff members with updating the MHPP curriculum. The previous version of the study materials were outdated. MHAG also assisted in updating the MHPP exam and the creation of a practice MHPP exam. Updating the materials will help ensure the quality of new Master Hunters for the future.

Program Refinements

The MHPP replaced the Advanced Hunter Education Program in 2008. In 2013, the Wildlife Program began administering the MHPP. The Wildlife Program created a MHPP Policy Statement (https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2013_mh_policy_statement.pdf) to guide the MHPP, which describes the role and use of Master Hunters.

In August 2018, the department filled the region 5 field coordinator position. This position's duties now include volunteer coordination. This change will enhance WDFW's use of Master Hunters and other volunteers for region 5 projects.

MHPP staff received reports of poor Master Hunter behavior and skills. To modify those

Volunteer Coordinators



- Steve Dazey (425-775-1311 Ext 106)
- Aaron Garcia (509-654-8727)
- Amy Elliott (360-915-4779)
- Bill Montgomery (360-902-8413)

behaviors MHAG and WDFW staff created an expectations document, which was sent to Master Hunters who drew a Hunt Coordinator damage permit. Master Hunters reviewed, signed, and returned the expectations to the hunt coordinator. Preliminary feedback from the conflict specialists has been positive. However, the effectiveness will be tracked going forward.

The department created new study materials for Master Hunter applicants. These study materials will be available online when the next application period opens, which will reduce staff time and shipping costs. Hard copy

packets will be available upon request.

Communications and Outreach

MHAG members serve as a communication link between WDFW and Master Hunters in their region. Email contact information for each MHAG member is on the MHAG webpage for use by Master Hunters.

MHPP staff held six Master Hunter orientations in early 2018. The orientations provided information on the MHPP and its goals. During the orientations department staff discussed:

- Certification requirements
- Volunteer opportunities
- Expectations of Master Hunters hunting general seasons and damage permits
- Wildlife conflict information
- Harvest proficiency and hunting behavior
- Game care

Discussing the above topics helps participants understand the obligation, commitment, and skill set that is required.

Six bi-monthly Master Hunter Permit Program Newsletters were distributed to Master Hunters, applicants, and WDFW staff in 2018. Newsletters give Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants information about WDFW projects, Master Hunter success stories, and volunteer

opportunities. The newsletter has been widely accepted by the MHAG and Master Hunters alike.

Master Hunters again assisted in the annual National Hunting and Fishing Day celebration in Moxee. This event introduces youth and their parent/guardian to different kinds of outdoor activities like target shooting, flint knapping, fishing, trapping, and track identification. Fourteen non-government organizations presented youth friendly activities at the event. Sixty-five participants received training, guidance, direction, and encouragement from certified Master Hunters and hunter education instructors. Participant's average age was nine years. Only 35 (54 percent) participants had previously shot a bow or firearm and three (five percent) participants had previously taken Hunter Education.

In 2015, WDFW began offering clinics on how to hunt specific game species. Master Hunter participation was integral to WDFW's 12 clinics in 2018. WDFW offered five turkey clinics, six upland bird clinics, and one waterfowl clinic. Several clinics had an associated mentored hunt component, and several of the participants were able to harvest during the season. Informational booklets are available online (<https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/hunting-clinics>).

Policy and Programmatic

The 2019 application period was suspended due to budget uncertainty. The program may open for new Master Hunter applicants in 2019 if funded. Current Master Hunters were notified of the budget issues and the possibility of the program being cut.

Program Integrity

Chapter 77.15.760 RCW and WAC 220-412-030 dictate the actions of the department relative to Master Hunter suspensions. During 2018, two Master Hunters were suspended for two years due to paying a fine for a Title 77.15 infraction.

Future Direction

Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants have had increased volunteer opportunities to address WDFW needs thanks to Hunter Education Division staff and the Volunteer Program Manager. 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

- Hunter education classes

Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants can volunteer with other wildlife organizations and agencies to fulfill their Master Hunter volunteer obligations on projects beneficial to WDFW's mission.

Emphasis in the future will be on continuing to engage Master Hunters in:

- Delivering Crime Observation and Reporting Training (CORT)
- Proctoring Master Hunter exams
- Assisting with private lands access (particularly for youth hunters)
- Utilizing their knowledge and skill during WDFW's hunting clinics
- Expanding mentoring activities