

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
MASTER HUNTER PERMIT PROGRAM
2020 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 March 1, 2020, the department had 1,454 certified Master Hunters. The table below summarizes the number of certified Master Hunters at year's end since 2014. The department postponed the open enrollment period in 2019 due to budgetary uncertainty. Once the budget was finalized and funding was available for the Master Hunter Permit Program (MHPP), WDFW opened enrollment on July 1, 2019 and closed the open enrollment period on August 15, 2019. Applicants were given until May 15, 2020 to complete the requirements for certification. The open enrollment period and completion period are the same length of time applicants had in previous years. WDFW believes that continued budget uncertainty and the mid-year open enrollment are two reasons for the low number of Master Hunter applicants.

Since the annual report is being published before the end of the completion period, the number of certified applicants will be in high contrast to previous years.

Certified Master Hunters by Year

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Applicants	521	375	317	350	310	110
Applicants certified	135	97	89	85	104	6
Percent certified	26%	26%	28%	24%	34%	5%
Total Master Hunters	1,701	1,650	1,648	1,632	1,671	1,454

* Data for the 2019 application period as of March 1, 2020.

Master Hunters renewing their certification dropped significantly in 2019. This is in part due to the budget and program uncertainty. Also, some Master Hunters have identified the decrease in Master Hunter opportunities to be a contributing factor.

Master Hunter Renewal Rates by Year**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Certification renewals	221	250	198	124	162	140
Non-renewals	224	169	104	86	69	214
Renewal Rate	50%	60%	66%	59%	70%	40%

** 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 March 2020 for terms beginning in April 2020. The director appointed Carissa Craghead (region 2), Jonathan Barr (region 3), Wes Clogston (region 3), Kyle Smith (region 3), and George Dennis (region 5) to three-year terms. Michael Bartoldo (region 6) was appointed to a two-year term to fill a vacated seat. Region 1 did not have any applicants for 2020. Kyle Smith (region3) was placed in the region 1 seat. During 2019, John McAuliffe (Region 4) served as chair and Jeff Larsen (Region 4) served as vice-chair.

The MHAG met four times in 2019. Three of the meetings were at the Washington Cattlemen's Association in Ellensburg and one was a Skype call with physical locations in regions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. Meetings dates were Jan. 11, May 17, Aug. 23, and Dec. 13. All meeting notices, agendas, and notes are posted on the MHAG webpage (see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/advisory/mhag/>). In 2020, WDFW plans to meet four times. Meeting dates for 2020 are Mar. 13, Jun. 12, Aug. 21, and Dec. 11.

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.

At the start of the 2019 application period, the Master Hunter exam materials were posted to the MHPP webpage. The information consists of an Excerpt from the 2015-2021 Game Management Plan, Master Hunter Handbook, 2019 Big Game Hunting Seasons & Regulations, 2019 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons, and the Washington Hunter Education Online Study Guide.

The 2019 Master Hunter Exam has proven to be a difficult test for applicants. Of the 16 (15%) applicants to take the exam, only three passed on their first attempt. Five applicants have attempted the exam a second time and all five passed on their second attempt. For contrast, in 2018, 126 of the 310 (41%) applicants took the exam and 86 passed on their first attempt. Of the 25 applicants who took the test a second time in 2018, 22 passed on their second attempt.

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.

Six bi-monthly Master Hunter Permit Program Newsletters were distributed to Master Hunters, applicants, and WDFW staff in 2019. 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, which was held in Puyallup in 2019. This event introduces youth and their parent/guardian to different kinds of outdoor activities like target shooting, flint knapping, fishing, trapping, and track identification. Twenty-two non-government organizations presented youth friendly activities at the event. Over 450 participants received training, guidance, direction, and encouragement from certified Master Hunters, hunter education instructors, and other volunteers. Participant's average age was nine years. Only 168 (34 percent) participants had previously shot a bow or firearm and 25 (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 10 clinics in 2019. WDFW offered four turkey clinics or mentored hunts and six upland bird clinics or mentored hunts. Several of the participants were able to harvest their first turkey or pheasant during the season. Informational booklets are available online (<https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/hunting-clinics>).

Policy and Programmatic

The open application period was postponed in 2019 until July 1 due to budget uncertainty. WDFW sent a news release out to notify interested persons on Jun. 26, 2019. Since the start of 2020, staff have received several calls about the open application period for the MHPP. WDFW will postpone the open application period until after the 2020 Legislative session and WDFW's budget situation is known.

Program Integrity

Chapter 77.15.760 RCW and WAC 220-412-030 dictate the actions of the department relative to Master Hunter suspensions. During 2019, one Master Hunter was suspended for two years due

to paying a fine for a Title 77.15 infraction. One Master Hunter was suspended until their adjudication.

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:

- 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