

MASTER HUNTER PROGRAM PROGRESS REPORT  
JULY - DECEMBER 2008

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Commission 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 June 2008 Master Hunter Program Progress Report which is posted on the Department’s Master Hunter website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/>).

The new Master Hunter Program has been in place for about one year. This progress report summarizes activities for the July – December 2008 period and supplements the previous January – June 2008 progress report.

**Participant Update**

1. As of 12/09/2008, there were 1,514 certified Master Hunters in good standing.
2. As of 12/09/2008, only 75 of the 1,034 hunters submitting applications to join the Master Hunter Program during the 2008 open enrollment period had completed all necessary steps and been certified (7.25 percent).
3. Thirty-two percent of applicants passed the Master Hunter examination on the first attempt; 75 percent of applicants passed the Master Hunter examination on the second attempt; and 75 percent of applicants passed on the third attempt.
4. There were 291 former Advanced Hunter Education (AHE) members that did not submit required information and forms, and consequently were not transitioned into the new Master Hunter Program.

5. During the transition from the AHE program to the Master Hunter Program, 51 individuals that submitted required information and forms failed to meet criminal background check standards and were excluded from entry into the new program. Each was notified of their rights to appeal, and 24 did so. Eleven of those appealing were reinstated into the Master Hunter Program.
6. Anecdotal information indicates that the numbers of complaints about Master Hunters from Enforcement Officers and landowners have 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 three business meetings during the second half of calendar year 2008 (June 26, August 28, and October 23), and a fourth meeting is planned for December 18, weather permitting. The minutes from all MHAG business meetings continue to be posted on the Master Hunter website.
2. A recruitment process to fill five vacancies on the MHAG began in August. A total of 16 letters of interest were received. During preliminary phone interviews, five applicants subsequently waived further consideration. A follow-up vetting process was conducted by the Master Hunter Program Liaison and Executive Committee of the MHAG. Finalists were interviewed via conference phone by the full MHAG. The following five certified Master Hunters were appointed to the MHAG by Director Koenings in November: Richard Mathisen, Spokane; Ron Poppe, Wenatchee; Harold Costa, Longview; James Reinbold, Chelan; and Bob Cromwell, Sammamish. Contact information for all 15 current members of the MHAG is attached.
3. A three-year replacement rotation has been implemented for the MHAG. Newly appointed members received a three-year term. Half of the existing ten MHAG members received a one-year term extension in October, and half received a two-year extension. Thus each year, five new members of the MHAG will be recruited. Eventually, the intent is to have at least two MHAG members from each of the six WDFW Regions and three members from any portion of the state. That balance will be sought during the 2009 recruitment process.
4. The Master Hunter Liaison formally withdrew the request for the MHAG to conduct a review of the Elk Area 3911 Master Hunter hunt. It was determined that such an analysis was no longer needed given the outstanding partnership that has been established between WDFW Region Three staff and the MHAG. Numerous briefings have occurred giving everyone a much better understanding of the management objectives for Elk Area 3911 and the Colockum Elk Herd. In addition, the Chair of the MHAG and Master Hunter Liaison met with the Big Game Management Roundtable (BGMR) and WDFW Region Three staff to develop recommendations for changes in the management of Elk Area 3911 including boundary descriptions.

5. It is not anticipated that the MHAG will need to establish a Peer Review Committee in the future to assist the WDFW with ethical complaints regarding Master Hunters. A policy decision has been made by the WDFW, based upon input from the Attorney General's Office, that implementation would be too complex and difficult to defend from a legal perspective.
6. The MHAG is discussing potential future focus areas or niches to best achieve its vision statement and responsibilities while helping the WDFW address high priority wildlife, habitat, and hunting constituency needs.

### **Communications, Outreach, and Partnerships**

1. The following Master Hunter meetings occurred in the last half of 2008: MHAG business meetings on June 26, August 28, and October 23, with a fourth meeting planned for December 18, weather permitting; Master Hunter Information and Outreach public meetings on June 14 in Spokane (24 attending), August 16 in Bothell (13 attending), and August 23 in Wenatchee (3 attending); Special Hunt Management meeting for Elk Area 3911 in Ellensburg on July 29 (125 attending); BGMR partnership meeting on July 11; and Region Three WDFW partnership meeting on June 19. Surveys were distributed at all three Information and Outreach meetings and a roll-up summary is posted on the Master Hunter website. The Elk Area 3911 Power Point presentation is also posted.
2. The following Master Hunter related news releases occurred: Spokane Information and Outreach Meeting (May 30); Ellensburg Elk Area 3911 Special Hunt Management Meeting (July 14); Bothell and Wenatchee Information and Outreach Meetings (July 25); MHAG recruitment announcement (July 30); and opening of 2009 Master Hunter application period (December 4).
3. Postcards were sent to 940 hunters who applied to join the Master Hunter Program during the previous 2008 open enrollment period reminding them of the time each had left to complete the certification process. Applicants must complete all requirements within a nine-month period.
4. In late November, each certified Master Hunter was mailed a new Master Hunter shoulder patch along with a memo from Chief Bjork titled "Important Master Hunter Information" attached. The purpose was to encourage them to make full use of the new Master Hunter website, and to assist them through the re-certification process.
5. The BGMR took the lead, in cooperation with the MHAG and WDFW, on the development of three detailed maps covering the entire Elk Area 3911 boundary (upper, middle, and lower) which have been posted on the website.
6. A survey was conducted by the WDFW regarding the opinions of landowners in the Yakima/Kittitas and Benton/Franklin counties about recent changes in the Master Hunter Program. The results are attached and have been posted on the Master Hunter website. It appears that improved communications are needed with landowners in the Benton/Franklin counties area.

7. A list of 2008 Master Hunter applicants and contact information was sent to Enforcement Captains and Sergeants in December as a potential tool in locating willing volunteers to address local elk herding/hazing and fence repair needs.
8. Development continues on the Master Hunter website. It now serves as the primary source of information for certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants.
  - A listing of re-certification (anniversary) dates has been posted for all certified Master Hunters due to expire during the period May 2008 – May 2009.
  - A listing of 2008 applicants that have not yet completed the necessary steps in order to be certified has been posted along with the exact date by which requirements must be completed within the nine-month window.
  - The “Special Hunt Update” feature has been expanded regarding Elk Area 3911. The following additions have occurred: three downloadable maps covering the entire boundary; special notices, tips and reminders; information on the local elk tagging project; elk activity reports, when provided; and information about gaining access on the Wild Horse Wind Farm.
  - A formal definition of a conviction (RCW 77.15.050) has been posted. A notice to former AHE program members that did not transition into the Master Hunter Program warning them that they no longer have any privileges under either program has been included under “Policies and Procedures”.
  - Specific contact information for Hunter Education Division staff involved with the Master Hunter Program has been included in numerous locations.
  - The results of a landowner survey in Yakima/Kittitas and Benton/Franklin counties regarding opinions about the Master Hunter Program are included.
  - An extensive list of Master Hunter test proctoring dates and locations throughout the state is included under “Requirements, Schedule Your Exam”.
  - A list of volunteer conservation projects for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), United States Forest Service (USFS), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Yakima Training Center, and Eyes In The Woods has been posted under “Conservation Projects”.
  - A link to the Eyes In The Woods site has been included to facilitate scheduling of Criminal Observation and Reporting Training (C.O.R.T.) sessions.
  - A Study Guide for the Master Hunter examination has been posted reflecting the newly designed test for 2009.
9. The Eyes In The Woods partnership with the WDFW to provide C.O.R.T. sessions worked well during 2008. Few issues surfaced related to the number of classes offered throughout the state.
10. The MHAG, BGMR, and WDFW cooperatively conducted the Elk Area 3911 Special Hunt Management public meeting on July 29, 2008, in Ellensburg.
11. Inquiries to the Yakima Training Center, USFS, USFWS, and DNR produced a number of excellent wildlife related volunteer conservation projects for Master Hunters.

## Program Refinements and Plans

1. The MHAG is developing a new 100 question Master Hunter examination for use during 2009. All questions will be validated and the test will be weighted according to the following general subject areas and percentages: ethics, conservation, responsibilities, sportsmanship (25%); laws and regulations (20%); wildlife biology and habitat (20%); politics, and hunting demographics (15%); firearms and technology (10%); and woodsmanship (10%).
2. A Study Guide has been developed by the MHAG to assist 2009 Master Hunter applicants prepare for taking the examination. It has been posted on the Master Hunter website.
3. The Master Hunter database has been modified to track the following eight categories of volunteer conservation work: game damage control; Master Hunter Program administrative assistance; cooperative road management; lands and habitat management; hunting access; hunter education; mentoring (hunting related); and other (wildlife surveys, etc). These eight categories will be further broken into activities tied to WDFW, public entities, private entities, and non-profit entities. In the future, roll-up summaries will be possible.
4. The Hunter Education Student Manual has been added to the basic curricula for Master Hunter applicants beginning in 2009. The Student Manual will be the source for many Master Hunter examination questions dealing with safety, ethics, conservation, hunter responsibilities, and sportsmanship.
5. A Master Hunter hunting license designator will be implemented beginning in 2009. An "MH" will appear on all hunting licenses purchased by certified Master Hunters to aid Enforcement Officers in the field.
6. The MHAG plans to conduct three Master Hunter Orientation public meetings during 2009. The purpose of these meetings is to assist those interested in becoming Master Hunters with the application process and to provide advice on how best to be successful in becoming certified. Orientation meetings will occur in January and February in Olympia, Yakima, and Spokane.
7. The open enrollment period for applying to become a Master Hunter will be January 1 – March 31, 2009. This will be the only opportunity during 2009. Applications will not be accepted before January 1, 2009.
8. The MHAG plans to conduct three Information and Outreach public meetings during 2009 during March and April. The purpose of these meetings is to allow certified Master Hunters to be updated and to interface directly with members of the MHAG.

9. The WDFW, with input from the MHAG, has drafted a Master Hunter statute (RCW) for consideration by the 2009 Legislature. A companion rule (WAC) has also been drafted. The draft language in both the statute and rule are intended to address numerous existing flaws inherent in WAC 232-12-073 Master Hunter Program. An example of clarifications include: application of all Title 77.15 RCW convictions as part of the “zero tolerance policy”; the establishment of a Master Hunter Permit to replace the current Master Hunter Card; the authority for the WDFW to suspend Master Hunter Permits; and the requirement that Master Hunters be subjected to criminal background checks each time they renew their certification. Once the Legislature approves the Master Hunter statute (RCW), WDFW staff will submit the draft rule (WAC) to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for consideration, approximately late summer of 2009.
10. A data bank of 300-400 questions is being developed so that the task of creating additional Master Hunter examinations will be simplified.
11. A new Master Hunter logo design and shoulder patch was approved by the Director. Patches were distributed in late November to all certified Master Hunters.
12. The addition of a Customer Service Specialist position within the Hunter Education Division has led to a significant improvement in the accuracy of the Master Hunter database and the timeliness of data entry.

### **Opportunities and Challenges**

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. Determination 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. This is especially important given pending budget cutbacks within WDFW. Potential areas of consideration include: targeted volunteer wildlife conservation projects; acting as “Stewards of the Hunt” on behalf of the WDFW; and mentoring of first-time hunters and hunters with disabilities.
3. Approval by the Legislature of a Master Hunter statute.
4. Approval by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission of rule amendments that reflect the Master Hunter statute and that address existing issues with WAC 232-12-073 Master Hunter Program.
5. Development of an alternative mechanism to a Peer Review Committee to address ethical complaints about Master Hunters.
6. Completion of a new validated and weighted 100 question Master Hunter examination for 2009.

7. 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 and development of recommended solutions should be conducted.
8. Hunt Masters are used to facilitate Master Hunter hunts in many portions of the state. Protocols should be developed for Hunt Masters so that hunting access opportunities are provided in a consistent, transparent, and fair fashion.
9. There continues to be 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 15,000 – 20,000 hours of volunteer conservation project time must be donated each year by certified Master Hunters and Master Hunter applicants. The complexity of the WDFW's Volunteer Management Policies is the likely deterrent. However, staffing reductions in the near future may necessitate an increased use of volunteers.
10. The current Master Hunter Liaison and Policy Lead is in a temporary position. Other members of the Hunter Education Division should be prepared to assume those duty functions given the reality of pending budget shortfalls in the WDFW.
11. A data bank of 300-400 questions should be developed to facilitate the creation of future Master Hunter examinations.
12. A statewide Master Hunter test proctoring network needs to be re-established in 2009 as was accomplished in 2008. A continued partnership with WDFW Regional Offices should be pursued.
13. The facilitation of conservation project partnerships with Eyes In The Woods, Yakima Training Center, USFS, and USFWS, as well as additional non-profit conservation organizations should be continued so that specific volunteer opportunities can be posted.
14. The partnership with the Eyes In The Woods organization to provide CORT sessions should be continued. More frequent communications should be pursued.
15. The administrative requirements for certification as a Master Hunter should be evaluated and refined, as needed. Consideration should be given to requiring Master Hunters to qualify with any legal hunting implement they will use while hunting during Master Hunter hunts.
16. The 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 in a more timely fashion.
17. The MHAG should develop and submit an Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant to the WDFW for the 2009-2011 biennia to cover operating costs.
18. The WDFW should continue to improve the Master Hunter database by addressing remaining "Y2K", county of residence, address, and e-mail issues.
19. The WDFW should finalize and implement the Internet Volunteer Registration pilot for elk herding, hazing, and fence repair conservation projects.
20. The WDFW should develop protocols to better identify Master Hunters that have expired certifications so the WILD system can be updated in a more timely fashion.

## **Attachments**

1. Master Hunter Advisory Group Contact List
2. "Important Master Hunter Information" mailing
3. Master Hunter Landowner Survey for Yakima/Kittitas and Benton/Franklin counties (questions and survey results)