



MASTER HUNTER PROGRAM

A PROJECT OF ONE MONTANA

Program Impact 2023

The Montana Master Hunter Program improves working relationships between landowners and hunters; helps landowners and the State of Montana with their wildlife management goals; and creates ambassadors and mentors for the sport of hunting. Some 2023 highlights:

- **Program Manager, Bill Spahr**, has been consistently growing and improving the program.
- 227 Applications Submitted, 110 Offers Extended, 92 Accepted, 86 Participants.
- **78 new Master Hunters graduated in 2023, creating a community of 371 Master Hunters. Pass rate is 97.4%.**
- **15%** of our participants are **women** which we try to increase annually (national average is 10%).
- **Over 88%** of our graduates in 2023 shared that they want to be Hunter Education Instructors and mentors as a result of taking this program. About 20% of all graduates are currently Hunter Education Instructors.
- We hosted **23 on-ranch service projects** to teach Master Hunters about the role of private land stewardship in benefiting wildlife and other public resources. **Over 70 Master Hunters provided 600+ hours of combined volunteer hours** (see page 2).
- **Highly rated program by participants:** 100% completion on the 2023 Master Hunter Course Survey which provided a 9.1 (10 being the highest) overall program rating, with 9.2 for instructors and 9.4 for 1MT and MHP Staff.
 - Most impactful classes cited included Shooting and Precision (60%), Landowner Panel (57%) and Wildlife Management (36%).
- **Looking forward – Areas of Improvement for 2024:**
 - Online programming navigation needs improvement and should be more intuitive.
 - Implement a survey at the end of each weekend instead of just one at the end of the course.
 - Provide practical application for the Tracking & Trailing class – more practice before rendezvous and discussion after each station.
 - Combine our public land presenters into a panel instead of individual classes.
 - We have also started annual feedback sessions with instructors to ensure we are keeping the curriculum updated and relevant.
- **We offered four continuing education programs:** Turkey Hunting 101, Wild Game Charcuterie and Dry Aging, Shooting Precision and Accuracy Level 2, and Waterfowl 101. We are striving to increase practical skill development in areas of interest for our Master Hunter community to ensure we have the best ambassadors for the program.
- Continued **geographic growth** of the program. Participants represent **63 cities and towns (49%) and 30 counties (53%)** in Montana, both urban and rural.
- **2 New Ranch Partners** recruited into the program in 2023. Roughly 350,000 acres of private land are enrolled in the program through 25 ranches.
- **Featured on two major podcasts October 2023** – Montana Outdoors and Blood Origins.

The Master Hunter Program has changed my hunting practice and understanding in too many ways to count; most importantly, though it has introduced me to new friends, as well as changed my thinking with landowner stewardship and their management of wildlife resources. -John How, MHP 2021

Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide by Building Trust between Landowners & Sportsmen

The Montana Master Hunter Program creates valuable opportunities for hunters to interact with landowners and learn about the important role that landowners play in stewarding wildlife habitat and the challenges of land management. **In 2023 we partnered on 23 ranch projects. 70 Master Hunters provided 600+ combined volunteer hours** on projects including weed pulling, wildlife friendly fence installation, chicken butchery, trail building, and more.



King Ranch – Sage Grouse Fence Flagging

Master Hunters gathered at the King Ranch to flag cattle fence with white plastic tags to make them more visible to low-flying sage-grouse. This is part of a large-scale, fence-marking effort in eastern Montana around prime sage-grouse habitat, particularly near leks, or mating grounds. When the low-flying birds are active at dawn or dusk, times of low visibility, they can fly into wire fencing and be injured and even decapitated. The white tags help prevent lethal collisions. Master hunters completed 2.75 miles of fence tagging.

It was a great opportunity to meet a multi-generational ranch family and discuss the challenges they face, as well as some of the landowner/hunter relation issues that can cause challenges to both sides of that dynamic. – Dan Altschwager, Master Hunter



Milton Ranch – Pronghorn Fencing Project

Pronghorn have learned to traverse fences by crawling underneath them, but if the bottom wire is too low, movements can be impeded. Master Hunters worked with Bill Milton and his team to replace the bottom wire on several miles of fencing on his ranch near Roundup, MT. No easy feat as it required removing the old wire (setting it aside for reuse), replanting and reinforcing the end posts, removing rotted cedar posts and replacing them as needed with steel T-posts. The bottom wire was then completely replaced with enough room for Pronghorn to crawl under. Master Hunters learned about the Milton's grass-fed cattle operations and wild bird and conservation management, along with how they use both Block Management and outfitters to meet elk management goals, all accompanied by great stories from a lifetime in Montana. The Milton Ranch is part of the Gage Dome Block Management Area.



Encouraging the Next Generation of Hunters

The Carlton Falls Ranch in the Bitterroot Valley near Florence, MT provided some new opportunities for the MHP in 2023. The property is mostly mountainous terrain with 3 major creek drainages running through it. The owners, Eric and Jennifer Siegfried, are managing their property for quality hunting opportunities for new and experienced hunters. Managing the herds for herd size, age class, and genetics are important goals. Two Master Hunters were selected to take new hunters to harvest elk. MH Graduate Matt Ulberg helped this young lady to harvest her first animal and first cow elk. Mentoring is an

important part of being a Master Hunter and helps to share knowledge, skills and ethics, and sustain the culture and tradition of hunting.

Thank you for your support!

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