



MASTER HUNTER PROGRAM

A PROJECT OF ONE MONTANA

Program Impact 2022

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 2022 highlights:

- We **hired a full-time Program Manager, Bill Spahr**. This is a significant hire for the program and will help us continue to grow and expand across the state.
- **55 new Master Hunters graduated in 2022, creating a community of 291 Master Hunters** (12 more still need to complete their qualifications).
- **18%** of our participants are **women** and this number increases annually (national average is 10%)
- **Over 20%** of our participants are mentors or Hunter Education Instructors.
- We hosted **21 on-ranch service projects** to teach Master Hunters about the role of private land stewardship in benefiting wildlife and other public resources. **Over 80 Master Hunters provided 600+ hours of combined volunteer hours** (*see page 2*)
- We added **2 new classes**: Legislative Engagement and Tracking & Trailing.
 - **Legislative Engagement**: The management of wildlife in Montana is directed by biological science and social input. Sportsmen directly experience the impact of wildlife management policies but may not know how to have influence in the process. This class shows students how to involve themselves as wildlife policy advocates, as well as what it takes to present a credible and coherent position.
 - **Tracking and Trailing**: This class provides an introduction into track identification, sign reading, (blood) trailing, and the importance of being able to ‘put it all together’ out in the field. Participants must complete a tracking and trailing qualification to graduate.
 - We have also started annual feedback sessions with instructors to ensure we are keeping the curriculum updated and relevant.
- One Montana introduced our new online **Learning Management System, The Roundup**, which allows access to class resources, landowner contacts, and hunting opportunities. Students complete 12-15 hours of online programming through modules we have built in the system and enter their continuing education and volunteer hours. It is also a place for Master Hunters to connect with each other and continue to discuss challenging topics. **By helping us to better manage our course and learners, The Roundup makes information delivery more impactful, effective, and efficient.**
- **We offered four continuing education programs**: Beginning Archery, Wing Shooting, Cajun Cooking, and Heritage Muzzleloader. 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.
- We **grew the geographic reach of the program** by stretching further north with a class in Havre. Participants represent 53 cities and towns and 24 counties (46%) in Montana, both urban and rural.
- Roughly 350,000 acres of private land are enrolled in the program through 22 ranches.
- We engaged in several conversations with states interested in replicating the program and the MHP is being held up as an example within the state as a potential tool to help address hunter-sportsmen relations and improve hunter ethics and behavior.

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 2022 we partnered on 21 ranch projects. 80+ Master Hunters provided more than 600 combined volunteer hours** on projects including weed pulling, fence removal, wildlife friendly fence installation, chicken butchery, trail building, and more. Three examples include:



Master Hunters met at Oxbow Cattle Company to learn about regenerative agriculture and ranching practices. Oxbow raises cattle to sell beef direct-to-consumer and in Missoula-area grocery stores and restaurants. Bart and Wendy Morris take great care to steward the livestock, streams, forests and grasslands where they work and partner with local organizations on conservation projects. Despite the heat and unrelenting mosquitoes, Master Hunters hand chopped bull thistle, and put in poly wire to create a new paddock for their cows.

Community collaboration requires integrity and shared responsibility to achieve results.



Master Hunters gathered on the Anderson Ranch in Tom Miner Basin to help remove old fencing and clean up the “bone yard”. Master Hunters learned about holistic ranch management practices, low-stress livestock handling, and approaches to ranching and living in grizzly/wolf country. Malou Anderson also shared how the combination of healthy and productive rangeland, diverse wildlife populations, and sharing this wild, healthy, working landscape with the public creates a prosperous ranching business.

Working across fence lines builds a thriving landscape and high quality of life.



Master Hunters collaborated with The Nature Conservancy, NRCS, and the Montana Conservation Corps to build eight Beaver Dam Analogs, a restoration method mimicking beaver dams to help increase stream water retention with ponding and create a more drought-resilient ecosystem for diverse species. Over delicious hamburgers, Craig and Conni French shared some of the challenges of initiating "new" methods of ranching, and how conservation practices not only improve land health and resiliency, but also produce healthier cows.

Nurturing the land creates a better burger.

As an adult-onset hunter who was mainly self-taught, I was always searching for additional resources to increase my knowledge base of hunting. I found that in the Montana Master Hunter Program and more. -Joe Navone - MHP Graduate

I love the higher level of ethics required of all Master Hunters and the knowledge that if someone is a graduate, I know the dedication they put into this course. I think that anyone wanting to improve their hunting experiences, knowledge, and conservation efforts should give the Montana Master Hunter Program a very serious look. Joe Copeland, MHP Graduate

Thank you for your support!

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