

Washington

Building GoHunt: A comprehensive mapping Web site for all outdoorsmen

SUMMARY

In 2003, Washington Department of Wildlife received a \$48,867 HHP grant to build GoHunt, an online GIS mapping application. Although the original focus of the grant proposal was to increase hunters' knowledge of hunting opportunities on private lands in southeast Washington, its scope quickly grew to develop a statewide GIS for hunters to learn about all available public and private lands. The statewide product provides comprehensive access information to hunters and non-consumptive users.

KEY AGENCY	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
EXTERNAL PARTNERS	National Shooting Sports Foundation
INTERNAL PARTNERS	Washington's GIS Development Group and agency Webmaster
PROJECT DATES	December 2003-January 2005
CONTACT	Mick Cope, upland game section manager, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (360) 902-2691, copemgc@dfw.wa.gov
RESOURCES	HHP final report; Web site at www.wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/gohunt

BACKGROUND: Why this effort?

As part of the mission of managing wildlife and improving quality hunting opportunities on public and private lands, Washington identified the need to:

1. Improve hunters' awareness of hunting opportunities on public and private lands
2. Increase numbers of sportsmen who buy licenses and support the aims of the agency.

Not enough land: Of the 11 Western states, Washington is smallest in land area, yet has the second largest human population. A relatively small portion of the state's population hunts, yet demand for hunting opportunities is great. Washington has been working to improve hunting opportunities on private lands, particularly for upland gamebirds.

Not enough knowledge: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife annually surveys hunters on hunting and wildlife issues. Washington organized a Private Lands Wildlife Management Area stakeholder group in January 2003 to review existing programs. It completed studies called "Washington State Hunters' and Landowners' Opinions on the Private Lands Wildlife Management Area Program" and "Washington State's Private Lands Hunting Access Programs" to determine hunters' opinions of existing programs and to establish needs and gaps.

It became obvious that hunters lacked knowledge of private lands access, public lands access and private lands access to reach public lands. From this research, Washington's GoHunt GIS mapping system was born.

What was delivered?

Washington's objectives were to create free, interactive GIS maps of quality public and private hunting areas for the public. It also wanted to make maps and other hunting information available on the department's Web site for easy printing and download.

GIS is a computer-based approach to collecting, storing and analyzing data that have spatial characteristics. A GIS application allows a collection of electronic maps to be stored in a computer database, allowing a wide range of analysis and product generation.

Through GoHunt's Web site, hunters can find multi-layered maps displaying game management unit boundaries, deer and elk management areas, pheasant-release sites and private land hunting opportunities, as well as roads, topographical features and county lines. In addition, harvest statistics and hunting regulations are available by specific locale and species.

In addition, outdoorsmen can:

1. Find lands managed by the department and other public agencies that support outdoor recreational activities such as hiking
2. Find water access sites managed by the department that support boating activities and have ADA facilities
3. Use background images to explore the state's wide variety of landscapes and landforms. Background images include statewide, seamless U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps, aerial photography, satellite imagery and shaded relief
4. Use locator tools to find sites based on their place name, latitude and longitude or by township, range and section
5. Use the latitude/longitude readout to obtain coordinates to navigate to using a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver
6. Use Harvest Data Queries to learn about the distribution of game animals and where they are being hunted
7. Locate the mouth of a named stream
8. Find locations for department regional boundaries and get contact information for regional offices.

SUCSESSES AND OUTCOMES

In addition to the features listed above, users can print maps from their computers in different sizes and scales. They can layer their maps to include a wide variety of information. Citizens also can go to any of six regional offices and print maps there for free.

"We want to provide the best service to the public, including those who don't have computers," says Mick Cope, upland game section manager. Sportsmen also can download maps in PDF format, which commercial copiers such as Kinko's can print in sizes of 2 x 3 feet. GoHunt users have downloaded more than 67,800 PDF maps since September 2005.

In addition, the GIS system helps the department manage resources better.

"We use GoHunt for a lot of different applications," Cope adds. "It's used department wide, not just by wildlife biologists. There is information at our fingertips now that would have been a chore to get previously. We can obtain harvest statistics and hunter participation statistics for geographical areas. It's just amazing."

COMMUNICATION

The agency has spread the word about GoHunt through news releases, fairs, e-mail and snail mail lists, the agency's TV show, flyers, business cards, regulations booklets and regional offices.

EVALUATION

Evaluation for Washington's GIS GoHunt system is quantitative - measuring how many people access the system and how many maps are downloaded and in what form. Since September 2005, the Go Hunt system has been accessed more than 452,000 times, with people generating 976,000 maps. Evaluation also comes from feedback from users, who visit GoHunt, as well as internal agency users and staff.

PARTNERS

In addition to the HHP grant that served as a catalyst to get the project started, GoHunt was developed from work on a different agency GIS-based program, SalmonScape which provided a uniform user interface and common functionality. An additional \$5,000 of internal funding also was used to complete the program.

When developing the state's GIS mapping system for hunter access, a team of internal partners galvanized as word spread among agency leaders and staff about the immense possibilities of building a GIS mapping system to serve the agency. Soon, agency personnel from areas of big-game management, outdoor recreation, public access, information and computer technology and private lands management were involved.

"When people realized the benefits of this GIS system, our effort snowballed to include a much broader and excited group of people from within the agency," Cope says. "Each person brought so much to the table. We didn't realize what this HHP project was capable of doing until so many people became involved."

CURRENT STATUS

Cope would like to develop GoHunt to work as an online forum between landowners and outdoorsmen. By working with landowners to address their concerns, Washington can create a better way for landowners and hunters to communicate, which results in improved public access to private lands.

All systems are a go for GoHunt, which currently is up and running at www.wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/gohunt. GoHunt continues to be popular among hunters, non-consumptive users and agency staff.