



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION®

Ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife,
their habitat and our hunting heritage.



PHOTO: DONALD M. JONES

PHOTOGRAPHY: RUI

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MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT & CEO



Since we hit our first million acres of land conserved or enhanced in 1992, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's land conservation momentum continually gained speed. Twelve years ago, well before I had the privilege to begin leading our organization, we reached the mind-blowing milestone of 6 million acres conserved or enhanced over RMEF's lifetime. Back then, Bugle magazine quoted co-founder Charlie Decker as saying "We had no idea the Elk Foundation would ever conserve 6 million acres, let alone in this short a time. For an organization this young, it's remarkable." Imagine the surprise Charlie must have felt when five years later, we hit 7 million. Five years after that we achieved 8 million acres and then in 2024, the year marking our 40th anniversary as a conservation organization, RMEF reached 9 million acres of conserved or enhanced habitat.

Year number 40 brought with it some noteworthy highlights. Among other things, we completed a two-phase, 2,380-acre Pennsylvania land conservation and access project and a three-phase, 16,646-acre project in Oregon. While touching base with partners, we found out about a \$1.3 million funding gap linked to a 2,600-acre project in northern Utah, took advantage of our position of financial strength and stepped in to cover that gap before the window closed. Today, that prime elk and mule deer habitat is conserved and opened to public access. We also conserved and opened access to 3,384 acres of tule elk habitat in California, another 6,600 acres in Wyoming and expanded a national wildlife refuge in Idaho by nearly 2,500 acres. In all during 2024, 18 different projects conserved 25,594 acres across 12 states and opened or improved access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities to 21,816 acres of habitat.

Strong financial support provided by our volunteer programs, our donors, industry partners and other means continues to advance the mission.

We furthered our advocacy efforts by engaging our members on many fronts, visiting Capitol Hill to meet with policymakers and offered testimony and public comment to federal agencies, state legislatures and wildlife commissions, and on other fronts. And we capped nearly two years of outreach by supplying more than \$340,000 to help defeat a radical anti-hunting/anti-wildlife management Colorado ballot initiative in late 2024.

RMEF continues to expand the conservation vision established by our founders 40 years earlier. It happens thanks to our dedicated volunteers, members, sponsors, conservation partners and many sportsmen and women. For this and so much more, we express our most sincere gratitude as we go forward to do even more together.

R. Kyle Weaver
President & Chief
Executive Officer



138

Habitat Stewardship
Projects
in **22** States



65

Wildlife Management
Projects (includes research)
in **15** States



18

Land Conservation
& Access Projects
in **12** States



494
PROJECTS

273

Hunting Heritage
Projects
in **40** States



9.1 MILLION
ACRES

IN LIFETIME MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT





EAST CANYON, UTAH

A key focus of RMEF's mission is on "other wildlife" beyond just elk. In the summer of 2024, RMEF worked with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to conserve and open public access to 2,400 acres of land about 15 miles east of Salt Lake City, Utah. While the land supplies habitat for nearly 3,000 elk and some moose in the region, it also serves as a critical migration corridor for 20,000 mule deer. The acreage was under imminent threat of development. An RMEF staffer connected with DWR partners on a routine call and learned

DWR faced a funding shortfall for the project. Thanks to being in a unique position to fill such a timely need, the RMEF Board of Directors called a special meeting where it approved the project within days of learning about it. Ultimately, RMEF covered the \$1.3 million funding gap that helped push the project across the finish line. As a result, the East Canyon Wildlife Management Area grew by 2,200 acres while East Canyon State Park expanded an additional 400 acres – a benefit for hunters, anglers, hikers, campers, boaters and others.



MULE CREEK, WYOMING

Sometimes, conservation takes patience and innovation. Such is the case in Wyoming and now elk, mule deer and other wildlife are better off for it. In June 2024, RMEF announced a collaborative agreement with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) and a conservation-minded ranching family that conserves and opens public access to 6,660 acres of public and private wildlife habitat near the southern Laramie Range Mountains. It's an area with expanding elk populations but limited hunter access. RMEF owned Mule Creek Ranch for two years and used that time to assess the

best conservation and management outcome. As a result, WGFD now owns and oversees 2,660 acres on the western part of the property which it manages as a wildlife habitat management area while a ranching family owns the other 4,000 acres, which are open to hunting thanks to a voluntary conservation and public access agreement. WGFD called the project a “shining example of a public-private partnership to provide perpetual habitat conservation and public access opportunities in an area where elk populations have been difficult to manage.”



**HABITAT
STEWARDSHIP**



BIG SNOWY MOUNTAINS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA START-UP

There's always more to do to further conservation and improve public access. And RMEF did just that in central Montana. In late 2022, RMEF worked with Shodair Children's Hospital to acquire and convey 5,668 acres of wildlife habitat to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. RMEF's work gained attention and financial support from Bass Pro Shops & Cabela's Outdoor Fund and the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust. Known as the Big Snowy Mountains Wildlife Management Area, it serves as prime elk calving grounds and winter

range but is also home to mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bears and other wildlife species. Just a few months after the initial transaction, RMEF grant funding went on the ground for a series of projects including construction of a new parking area and signage to help guide the public. Crews also surveyed the property, took the first steps to implement a water system and replaced old boundary fencing with wildlife-friendly fencing to assist with grazing management while allowing elk and other wildlife to more easily move across the landscape.



YAKIMA-TIETON MAIN CANAL REHABILITATION

The Retreat Fire burned its way across more than 45,000 acres of sagebrush, grass, mixed conifer and subalpine forests in central Washington during the summer of 2024. Along the way, it triggered evacuations, highway and forest closures, burned power poles, charred wildlife habitat and caused landslides and an ever-present danger of flash flooding. It also burned the Yakima-Tieton Main Canal, a more than 115-year-old, 12-mile-long waterway that feeds agricultural lands below boasting one of the most productive apple-producing

regions in the world. The fire clogged the 8-foot-deep, open-top tube construction with debris, destroyed 31 wooden structures used by wildlife to safely cross the waterway as well as five wooden ramps placed in the canal that allow wildlife to escape when it is dry during winter months. RMEF contributed funding for crews to rebuild those life-saving escape ramps and crossings, ensuring elk and other wildlife will remain unharmed.



BIG GAME MIGRATIONS

Mapping migration corridors helps wildlife managers understand challenges, reduce landscape connectivity barriers and better conserve important migration habitat for elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope and other big game species. In 2024, RMEF funding bolstered a coalition of U.S. Geological Survey, state and tribal research partners to record 36 new big game migration routes across the West and publish them in “Ungulate Migrations of the Western United States, Volume 5.” The new edition brings the total migrations mapped in

this report series to 218, along with many more separately mapped by individual states. A longtime and staunch supporter, RMEF supplied funding throughout the entire six-year effort. Scientific findings and mapped routes also help RMEF to identify crucial landscapes for conservation projects in the coming years. One of which supports Nevada’s largest mule deer population and seeks to protect and conserve critical winter, summer and yearlong range for elk, sage grouse and other species.



WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY FENCING

Seasonal movement is critical for migrating wildlife like elk, mule deer, moose, bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope, so conserving and protecting migratory habitat is a must. In addition to habitat enhancement and research efforts, fencing can be a make-or-break or even a life-and-death issue. RMEF produced a “best practices” wildlife-friendly fencing guide to help landowners better manage their land and livestock while also looking out for migrating wildlife. Fence designs, modifications and specifications depend on species, seasonal use, habitat types, size and age class of

animals. Basic recommendations are a maximum height of 38-40 inches, a smooth top and bottom wire, a bottom wire that is 16-18 inches off the ground and avoiding using any type of woven wire fencing. Such a setup allows various species to better crawl under or jump over fencing. The guide is on RMEF's website where it is available for landowners and public land managers.

SCAN HERE TO
LEARN MORE



www.RMEF.org/how-we-serve/wildlife-fencing



**HUNTING
HERITAGE**



OUTDOOR CLASS

Since our inception in 1984, hunting and hunters have been and remain the driving force behind the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Over time, RMEF has supported archery and firearm programs, mentored hunts, conservation camps and many other hunting-related activities. And will continue that support going forward.

In 2024, RMEF assumed management of OutdoorClass, the premier streaming platform

for hunters of all levels to learn and refine their skills. OutdoorClass features best-in-class experts like Randy Newberg, Corey Jacobsen, John Barklow, Remi Warren and others who share tactical information and advice from decades of experience afield.

OutdoorClass offers new courses and content regularly and is committed to enhancing the subscribers' learning experience.

WILDLIFE LEADERSHIP AWARD SCHOLARSHIPS

In 2024, RMEF continued its longtime support of future wildlife management professionals by doling out Wildlife Leadership Award scholarships to five students studying natural resources in Montana, Nebraska and Pennsylvania. All winners receive a \$5,000 scholarship and an RMEF membership courtesy of RMEF's Torstenson Family Endowment (TFE), furthering the late Bob Torstenson's legacy of conservation education. The program began in 1991, expanded after receiving a gift from the family of Jerry L. Turpin in 2006 and received a TFE boost in 2013.

FROM TOP:

ELIZABETH BRUNNER

Whether harvesting black walnuts for her walnut-processing business, trapping furbearers, hunting, fly fishing or shooting trap and skeet, Elizabeth can be found outside 12 months of the year. Otherwise, she's probably working on her degree in Forest Ecosystem Management from Pennsylvania State University. A past RMEF volunteer, Elizabeth wants to become a forester and keep spreading the message about how forest management and wildlife conservation go hand in hand.

NORAH FREEMAN

Studying biological sciences at Montana State University, Norah looks forward to making a career out of educating others about natural resources. She's passionate about issues that impact wildlife and is open to working in any corner of conservation from wildlife rehabilitation to restoring prairie lands, with experience in the latter through volunteer work at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center near her hometown of Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

MORGAN HALQUIST

Morgan grew up with a thrill and passion for conservation and wildlife through values instilled in her from a young age. For over two decades, her family, which runs a farm near Henderson, Minnesota, has co-chaired RMEF's River Valley Chapter. Today, Morgan is pursuing her dream of career in conservation as a senior at Chadron State College in Nebraska, majoring in Rangeland Wildlife Management.

CLAIRE MCTEE

A native of Clemson, South Carolina, Claire's worked recent summers as a wrangler, trail and pack guide in Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness, running nearly 90 head of pack stock and saddle horses. When the University of Montana is in session, works on a wildlife biology degree and as a member of campus hunting and conservation clubs. After graduation she aims to pursue a career in wildlife conservation and management.

IRIS MCKEAN

Growing up in rural eastern Montana, Iris says hunting and angling have defined her life and pastimes since a young age. In high school, she served as an assistant hunter education instructor and volunteered with fish netting and endangered bat surveys. Those passions led her to University of Montana, where she's a junior in wildlife biology with a goal to become a wildlife veterinarian focused on wildlife medicine and population health.





COLORADO PROPOSITION 127 – DEFEATED

Animal rights extremists in Colorado gathered signatures for a November 2024 ballot initiative to ban the hunting of mountain lions, bobcats and lynx (even though lynx hunting was and is still illegal). Two years earlier, RMEF testified before a Colorado legislative committee to help defeat a 2022 bill to ban the hunting and trapping of mountain lions and bobcats. Hundreds of RMEF members also messaged their elected representatives.

When RMEF found out about the ballot initiative effort, it distributed multiple communications repeatedly warning about

the dangers of the ballot-box biology effort to threaten public safety and frustrate proven, science-based wildlife management overseen by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) that led to one of the strongest and abundant mountain lion populations in the country. RMEF continually gathered with Colorado partners to create and carry out a strategy, engaged its members who contacted their lawmakers, hosted a national news conference, helped organize a capitol rally in Denver and supplied more than \$340,000 to help educate the public. Ultimately, Colorado voters decisively rejected the measure.



WOLF MANAGEMENT & LITIGATION

In early 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced a “not warranted finding” related to two petitions filed by a coalition of environmental groups to return wolves in the Northern Rockies and western United States to protected status under the Endangered Species Act. One week later, the environmentalists announced their intention to force the issue by filing a lawsuit. RMEF countered by successfully filing to join an opposing lawsuit in support of science-based wildlife management, elk and other wildlife, USFWS and the North American Wildlife Conservation Model. Idaho and Montana’s 2024 wolf populations were respectively 800 and 600 percent above minimum federal recovery goals while Wyoming’s population met minimum federal recovery criteria the previous 21 consecutive years, while those in Oregon and Washington were at their highest modern-day levels.

FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

(in thousands) 2024

Support and Revenue	
Program service revenue	\$ 33,390
Contributions	17,482
Return on investments	10,060
Membership	7,935
Special events, less direct benefit to donors	26,372
Advertising, royalties, other sales (less cost of sales)	4,079
Other income, gains and losses	1,484
Total Support and Revenue	\$ 100,802
Expenses	
Program services	\$ 67,662
Fundraising	18,395
Administrative	4,436
Total Expenses	\$ 90,493
Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	\$ 10,309

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

(in thousands) 2024

Assets	
Current assets	\$ 38,269
Investments	93,453
Property and equipment, net of depreciation	14,222
Lands held for program accomplishment	2,288
Intangible assets, net	3,880
Other assets	1,602
Total Assets	\$ 153,714
Liabilities	
Current liabilities	\$ 8,688
Non-current liabilities	1,378
Total liabilities	\$ 10,066
Net Assets	
With donor restrictions	\$ 55,695
Without donor restrictions	87,953
Total net assets	\$ 143,648
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 153,714

The complete audited financial statements for RMEF can be seen at www.rmef.org/resources/rmef-financials.

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR

Fred Lekse Collbran, CO

VICE CHAIR

Tom Robinson St. Simons, GA

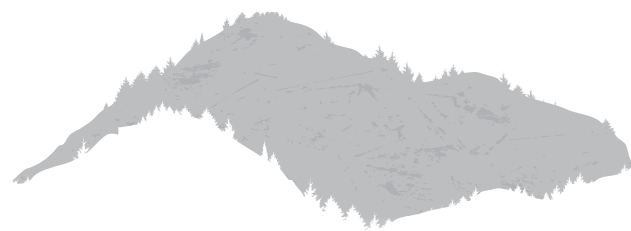
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Tobias "Toby" Buck	Prior Lake, MN
Charlie Decker	Libby, MT
Nancy Holland	Cedar Hill, MO
Maurice Hull	High Point, NC
Donna McDonald	Alder, MT
Marc Pierce	Manhattan, MT
Tom Ray	Whitefish, MT
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Dave Stephens	Nehalem, OR
AshLee Strong	Martinsdale, MT
Todd Walker	McLean, VA
Michael Wright	Canton, GA

OFFICERS

R. Kyle Weaver	President & CEO
Grant Parker	Secretary / General Counsel
Shane Cronk	Treasurer / CFO

RMEF FOUNDERS

Charlie Decker
Bob Munson
Dan Bull
Bill Munson



9.1 MILLION ACRES

IN LIFETIME MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

BOARD CHAIR MESSAGE



Hindsight brings clarity, including lessons learned and insights gained. That holds especially true for the first 40 years of our organization dedicated to ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat and our hunting heritage. Founded in 1984, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's 40th anniversary in 2024 gave us all an opportunity to briefly look back, pause and then celebrate four decades of conservation accomplishments.

Doing so as volunteers, members, industry, state and federal agency partners, sponsors and other RMEF supporters allowed each of us to recognize the massive steps taken by this conservation movement over the years and feel its contagious synergy. Our founders and their families sacrificed and struggled, yet persevered with a bold conservation vision, setting the table for us today.

Thanks to them, we now are an organization in a position of financial stability and strength, demonstrated by the dollars raised by our volunteers and multiplied by partners, then put back on the ground to help elk, mule and whitetail deer, moose, pronghorn antelope, mountain lions, bears, many other species, landscapes, hunting and conservation.

As board members, we are not involved in day-to-day decisions. Instead, we supply a higher level focus on strategic priorities, outlooks and forecasts to help guide the organization into the future. That's one reason why looking back gives us such satisfaction. Yet, each of us are also volunteers who have a longtime love for the organization and a dedication to furthering our mission. And that's why looking forward generates tremendous excitement.

Hindsight may be 20/20 but foresight is 40/40. In other words, RMEF has 'been there, done that' for elk, other wildlife, hunting and conservation. However, looking ahead, the opportunity to make a larger more significant impact is greater than ever.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fred Lekse".

Fred Lekse

2024 Chair, RMEF Board of Directors

