



(800) CALL-ELK legacy@rmef.org

NEWSLETTER *of the* HABITAT COUNCIL

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATIONAL ACTIVITIES

PBR World Finals

November 4-8, 2020
Las Vegas, Nevada

National Finals Rodeo Insiders Experience

December 3-5, 2020
Las Vegas, Nevada

Hunter & Outdoor Christmas Expo

December 3-12, 2020
Las Vegas, Nevada

Habitat Council Meeting & Retreat

Spring of 2021
Asheville, North Carolina

All events are subject to cancellation.

For more information, please call
1-800-CALL-ELK or 406-523-4500



Despite the cancellation of this year's Habitat Council events, we want to stay connected as a community. We will be in touch shortly with a special message from RMEF.

HABITAT COUNCIL A Message from your co-chairs



Kent & Cyndie Johnson, RMEF Habitat Council Co-chairs.

Welcome to 2020! We are so glad to connect with you. With what is happening in our world today, we wanted to reflect on RMEF's past, present and the future. Looking back at how RMEF was founded is a reminder that great things can happen when we believe. When Charlie Decker talks about the early days, RMEF should never have succeeded. Four men sitting around a table and using their own money and personal resources to start a conservation organization that since its creation has conserved or enhanced more than one square mile of elk country every day is truly remarkable! There were some very tough times over the years when money and spirits were low. Amazing people stepped forward because they believed in our mission of ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat and our hunting heritage. RMEF stands tougher and stronger because of our struggles.

The lessons of RMEF's past really strike a chord for today's world. Habitat Council members believe in our mission and have hope for our future. Unfortunately, our Summer Habitat Council Meeting and Retreat in Asheville, North Carolina, and RMEF's Elk Camp in Park City, Utah, have been canceled due to Covid-19 concerns, but that won't stand in our way! Now we show our true grit and determination. We may not be able to meet in person, but we will not let that stop us from moving forward with our mission.

There are many ways we can step up today for elk and elk country just like those four founders did. This is a time that reminds us of what we value, and if you would consider making a donation, your support would help maintain the work and mission that drives our passion for wildlife and wild places. Please contact your development officer or Michelle Tucker at mtucker@rmef.org or 406-523-3479. We would like to sincerely thank each one of you for the gifts of your time, talents, leadership and donations.

Staying connected is also important. We are looking at new ways to keep in contact with Habitat Council members. If you haven't already, please contact Michelle with your email address so you can be included as we move forward together. You can also visit our RMEF Habitat Council Facebook page.

The four founders sitting around the table 36 years ago had no idea what tomorrow would bring, much like the times we are now facing. But one thing is for certain, the future of RMEF is bright because of Habitat Council members like you choosing to be a part of the RMEF family.

PERMANENT LAND PROTECTION AND ACCESS

Protection of critical elk habitat has always been a cornerstone of RMEF's work. Expanding upon early successes, there is no doubt the organization has become a leader in protecting vital habitat and promoting quality hunter access.

Take recent efforts regarding landmark Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) legislation. Two lawmakers personally presented President Trump with maps, photos and detailed information about RMEF's Falls Creek, Montana project. Upon learning that \$250,000 in LWCF funding helped

Permanent Land Protection and Access continued

to close the deal, he then called on Congress to permanently fund this critical land protection and public access funding tool. Advocating for legislation is one way RMEF promotes our mission.

RMEF has a stellar track record in land protection and public access projects. Recent closings in **Michigan's Pigeon River County** are a great example. A strong relationship with the Department of Natural Resources and a financial contribution led us to complete two land protection projects in early 2020. But honestly, what gets me really excited is what is bubbling at the surface.

The more than 12,000-acre **Keystone Conservation Easement project in Colorado** is a great opportunity. This landscape will protect scenic open space,

productive private ranchlands and the state's number-one priority migratory route for elk and mule deer.

The just-completed **Grand Canyon of the Black Hills Access project in northeastern Wyoming** covers more than 4,000-acres. It improves access to nearly an additional 12,000 acres. This project creates a fantastic recreational opportunity in a unique part of elk country full of natural bridges, caves and overhangs.

The **Lower Musselshell acquisition** could solidify public lands in **Montana's Missouri River Breaks** thanks to the purchase of more than 12,000 acres that also improves access to an additional 19,000 acres.

We hope to celebrate another great

success later this year on the **Eel River Peninsula Conservation project in California's Tule elk range** thanks to a longstanding, dedicated conservation-minded landowner and staff at the Mendocino National Forest.

While working with the Forest Service in the eastern U.S., staff has identified critical forest inholdings currently owned by a private company that hold the key to both public access and the ability to actively manage **Kentucky's Daniel Boone National Forest**.

These projects, and more like them, energize me about RMEF's role in protecting elk habitat and improving public access.

—Jennifer Doherty, Director of Lands



Grand Canyon of the Black Hills, Wyoming.

PHOTO: TONI KAHNKE

ELK BY STATE Elk Population

ARIZONA

State	Subspecies	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
AZ Elk Population	Rocky Mountain	15,000	19,000	19,000	29,000	25,000	24,000	20,000	30,000	40,000
AZ Elk Hunters	Rocky Mountain	5,467	8,824	10,323	12,764	22,124	24,209	24,085	26,079	24,102
AZ Elk Harvested	Rocky Mountain	1,090	1,902	3,959	5,699	10,139	10,500	8,997	7,941	9,337

Habitat Council Members: 39
RMEF Members: 6,644



GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Anderson Smith, Director of Development



The evolution of the sportsmen is real, I've seen it, and am currently living it. We first want to pick up the rod and gun because as children, we've seen

our parents do it. Childhood days are walking the woods with a .22 and fishing farm ponds with a pole and worms. You're in the classroom thinking about being afield and astream until, you're not, and then you're on your own in a crumbly apartment that suits the single-life, and dreams of trophy hunting just fine. The next phase is about how big of a brown trout can I catch? Can I find and shoot that giant mule deer I saw just out of range last year before it slipped into the junipers? Any money made translates directly into more gear, and preference takes root as you now only fish for big fish with small dries, and only hunt with a bow.

Then life comes around, as it inevitably

does, and your bird dog is getting whapped by your toddler's plastic tee-ball bat more than she is with you walking the sage brush. The fly-tying materials are in storage because hooks that accidentally drop on the carpet and crawling babies don't mix. There is a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel because, children do grow, and like you did 30-years ago, they see their idol with rod and gun in hand and want to be the same.

That's where I am, nearly 40 and getting back out more often, but this time to be the teacher, and occasionally even catching my own fish.

Along with starting a family, my last decade was spent building a career at a wonderful conservation organization called Trout Unlimited (TU). I chose fundraising because at TU in 2010, that was what was available, and honestly would have cleaned the bathrooms if it meant working in conservation. Throughout my time at TU, I created and managed a planned giving program alongside of working with major gift donors who supported similar work to what RMEF pursues. Between then and now, I finished my master's degree in Environmental Science and Policy from

Johns Hopkins University, something that I use daily to understand and articulate the myriad issues and approaches we tackle through our conservation mission.

I'm both humbled and honored to work at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation as the Director of Development, being part of this important mission that is supported by so many incredible members and donors. My family and I will be moving from Durham, NC to Missoula later this year, and have already been shopping for a drift boat and warmer clothing.

From what I have already witnessed, RMEF supporters from our Board to the volunteers, the Habitat Council, to the Trails Society and everyone in between, are the lifeblood of the mission. Giving back to the resource is the final phase in a sportsmen's evolution, and I'm excited with the things we can accomplish together for elk and elk country. My office door and phone lines are always open if I can ever be of any service.

—Anderson Smith, Director of Development
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In upcoming issues, we'll get to know our Development Officers



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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT Elk and Roads

Wild elk are always cautious around people and their activities. Often when you hike or ride a horse into a mountain meadow where elk are, they generally move slowly toward the timber and then disappear, but may bolt depending on their perceived sense of threat. Elk have always had an aversion to roads, particularly with motorized traffic.

Since the 1960s, studies have tried to measure the sensitivity of elk to motorized activity. A lot of new logging roads had been put in place during the post-World War II era and hunters began using them to discover areas they had not visited before. In many areas, the density of roads being used was

quite high (e.g., five miles of open road per square mile in one Oregon study).

Wildlife managers soon identified a substantial increase in elk harvest by hunters since they could cover more areas than the foot hunters and horseback hunters ever did. That brought about quite a few studies (and some of the first use of radio collars on wild elk), to inform managers on how to reduce elk vulnerability to harvest. Early results typically showed that, depending on topography, elk did not use an area one half to one mile on either side of a road with motorized activity. It was not just an academic phenomenon, but hunters saw the results on the ground

as well. In some cases, the elk herd was greatly reduced due to heavy harvest levels or elk moved to areas with less human disturbance. Elk managers and public land managers worked together to see if good solutions could be derived.

Research at the time indicated that an open road density of one to two miles of open road per square mile reduced elk vulnerability to harvest. So, one of the first methods to be implemented was to close roads that were no longer needed for forest management activities. That was not popular with some hunters, but others took advantage of the opportunity to hunt those



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The Exclusive Newsletter for RMEF Habitat Council Members

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Elk and Roads continued

low disturbance areas. Another method included changing general license seasons to a limited quota (drawing) to reduce the number of hunters in an area. However, many hunters responded by shifting to other general hunting areas. Elk managers became concerned with the increasing number of hunters in the general areas due to over-harvest potential. In most situations, the compromise was to incorporate both strategies.

As time progressed, new hunters were not aware of why many roads on public land were closed. Some started advocating to open up the roads that had been closed over the past several decades. Educating the new hunters about the rationale of road closures continues to be a high priority for both wildlife managers and public land managers. Most accept the early research findings, but some did not. In addition, over the past 20 years a number of studies have expanded our understanding of elk



distribution and roads as it relates to elk nutrition, habitat disturbance (wildfire and beetle kill) and hunter distribution. In response to the new science, open road density standards were changed to distance to roads measurements. Studies have also shown the impacts of various types of recreation (hiking, mountain bikes, horseback riding, ATVs). This is a topic for a future article, but it points out that as public land outdoor recreation increases, wildlife and public land managers need to put strategies in place so that the off-road disturbances are balanced with the nutritional and other habitat needs of elk and other wildlife.

—Tom Toman
Director of Private Lands Stewardship
(recently retired)

—Karie Decker Director of
Habitat Stewardship

PHOTO: OCHOCO NATIONAL FOREST



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