It has become clear that there will be a “new” normal to our lives, both personally and professionally. We are so grateful the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has adapted to “new” ways of thinking and continuing mission. RMEF staff, board of directors, members and donors have all found a multitude of ways to adjust and embrace to a “new” normal and keep the mission to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat and our hunting heritage moving forward without skipping a beat.

We were so excited to share the "From Our Home to Yours" video with our Habitat Council members. Even though we were unable to gather in person, it is still important to remain in contact. RMEF is the organization it is today because we are a family! Our members want to share and rejoice in all of the mission work that has been accomplished in 2020. We are thankful that we could reach out to you via this "new" normal outlet. If you have not seen the video, please check it out at https://www.rmef.org/donate/habitat-council/.

The “new” normal is challenging because we do not know how the story ends. The continuous changes can be exciting and positive, but can also be disheartening and negative. The “old” normal was comforting because it felt like we were in control. We had a general understanding of what would happen each day and could accept slight deviations. The question is how to balance the “new” normal and the “old” normal, and how can we combine the best of both as we move forward? RMEF communication and events in the future are also adapting to the “new” normal. We should all be comforted knowing we are all in this together as a team. Even if it is from afar or on a screen, we can still create memories, while treasuring our past. RMEF has a strong foundation and that is what will carry the mission forward into the future, while preserving and treasuring our past.
But Dad, when are they going to bite? We’ve been here for hours.”

“Well Brian, we’ve actually been here for 20 minutes and fly fishing is a game of patience and stealth. Why don’t you cast above that overhanging bush and see how close you can float the fly to it.”

“Oh,” I said and made a surprisingly good cast that brought the fly six inches from the bush on the other side of the channel. It hit the water, floated five feet underneath the bush and slurp! My eyes turned the size of saucers. Dad yelled, “Set the hook!” And the fight was on!

When I look back at that first day of fly fishing when I was seven years old below our family home on the Bitterroot River in Montana, I now realize it was me that was hooked on that fateful day, not the 14-inch rainbow that decided my beat-up hopper fly didn’t look too terrible. From that day on, I was hooked on the great outdoors. Since then, I spent every available minute trying to catch everything that swims, hunt anything that’s legal and explore every inch of wilderness within driving distance of my home. Wild places and the pursuit of wild things were not a pastime, they were a lifestyle and still are today.

My professional career began in the banking industry with small businesses and relationship management. These days, my passion and lifestyle led me into a full-time career with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, fighting to protect the wild places we all love. In 2012, a good college friend of mine who worked for RMEF at the time let me know a role as regional director in western Washington was coming open. My response was, “Wait, someone will pay me to protect my lifestyle and the wild, free landscapes I spend every waking minute trying to tame! I’m in!”

After that, it was a downhill slide into the best career decision I’ve ever made. A wise person once said to me (while night fishing the Mekong River for catfish), “Well Brian, if you agree the majority of a person’s waking life is at work, and that person doesn’t like their work then statistically they don’t like their life. Don’t you think it’s smarter to do something you like for work and consequently like your life? Sometimes it’s the little things and the simplest statements in life that shed so much light and understanding on complex issues.

It’s funny how a recommendation from a good friend and some wise words from my brother were able to tear me away from banking to deliver me to what I’ve been meant to do all along. Four years as regional director and the incredible volunteers and experiences I was able to enjoy while working to raise money for this fine organization have changed my life. I now live back in my hometown of Missoula, Montana, and fish that same riffle where I caught my first trout on the fly. For the last three years, I have transitioned my duties and been lucky enough to dive into the role of development officer. I travel the Northwest working with some of our most dedicated supporters and raise funds to ensure we are able to continue our critical work forever. They are spectacular people with fire in their bellies to match my own, all fighting for a cause that is more important than even we know. What could be better than that?

We are all truly blessed to be a part of this critical crusade. Thanks to all of you for making this a reality and continuing to fight the good fight! I hope we have the opportunity to cross paths, either in the woods or next time I visit your state. Until then, keep the passion and spread the word.

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There’s nothing like sitting in a tree stand at the break of dawn and listening to birds and squirrels testing their first chirps of the day. The tree branches rustle gently in the fall breeze as nature shares its collective wake-up ritual all around me. It’s like someone has peeled back the curtain and let me catch a privileged glimpse into another world.

Nature is God’s greatest therapy. I love how it’s constantly changing day to day, but endures through the years. It was here before us, and hopefully will be here after we are long gone. When I need to find focus, I find it in the solitude of the outdoors, hunting, fishing and hiking.

I grew up in the Mayberry-esque town of Hominy, Oklahoma. One of my earliest memories is of quail hunting with my dad, uncles and granddad. I was that little tyke pulling up the rear, itching for the day I could shoulder my own gun. Our house backed up to open land. In the mornings, my brothers and I would throw on backpacks. Barefoot tracks led into our own little world. We stayed out until the sun set, just like Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn. We learned about nature and wildlife by experiencing it and respecting it.

I have been fortunate to follow my homegrown love for the outdoors and hunting into a career helping preserve these wonderful, sustainable opportunities for the next generations. In 1995, I began the first of 24 years with the NRA as a field representative in Oklahoma. Over the years, I built relationships with amazing people. We worked to protect hunting today to ensure the future of wildlife conservation and management. When I took an early retirement from the NRA in 2019, I asked myself what the next chapter of my life would look like. I followed my passion for the outdoors and hunting, right to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Leaving a legacy for the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat and our hunting heritage is a mission worth championing.

The other day my daughter, a senior in natural resources ecology management at Oklahoma State University, told me that when she’s hiking, she feels like she is getting a private tour of a different world—nature’s world. I’m so glad that she too has been able to experience that same feeling I get at sunrise in a tree stand. Everyone should have the chance to feel that way. I look forward to working with you and sharing your passion for nature in elk country.

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GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER (continued)

About midnight, I heard the distinct sound of helicopter blades in the ridges to the north. When I looked up, there was a helicopter with its spotlight looking for something or someone. At first, I wondered if someone else was lost. Surely, they were not looking for me. Maybe they would be nice enough to drop me some water.

It was October 2011. I was lost, tired, dangerously dehydrated and I was sure this was going to be the end of me. I was deer hunting in the Bradshaw Mountains north of Phoenix, Arizona. Trusting in the technology of my GPS had cost me dearly.

I grew up in the Midwest, as a PK; a Preacher’s Kid. My dad raised near Fargo, North Dakota, was a hunter and trapper from the time he could walk and he passed that passion on to my brother and me. He taught us to shoot and hunt; first gophers, then rabbits and an occasional pheasant. When in high school, dad took us to Colorado elk and deer hunting. That’s when I realized that these wild places and their wildlife need to be protected.

After college, I joined a major bank in Chicago and started a 43-year career as a trust officer with basically the same bank, serving trust clients from the matriarchs and patriarchs and their children and grandchildren on down. It was extremely rewarding working with those individuals and families, creating relationships that last a lifetime.

One of my most important clients was RMEF. I was fortunate to manage the relationship with RMEF for the $4 million dollar endowment that was paired with the gift of the Double H Ranch that came with a generous estate donation from Bob Torstenson. It was a joy for me to get to know the staff and volunteers of RMEF during those years. I never cease to be amazed at the transformative work they do to ensure the future of elk; an animal that I grew to love, and be challenged by, as an elk hunter in the Southwest.

After I retired from the bank, Shane Cronk, now vice president of finance and accounting for RMEF, asked me to join his staff as a development officer. For the last three plus years, I have been honored to travel extensively serving and visiting our donors who are the most passionate, relational, committed people I know. It is these generous people that are the reason RMEF exists today.

For the past 41 years, my wife, Roz, along with our two daughters, have lived in Arizona along with our six wonderful grandchildren.

Obviously, I made it off that mountain that night. Amazing! Through prayer and God’s help, that ‘copter was looking for me! Having a near-death experience changes your perspective of what’s important in life. I am grateful for every day that God gives asking us to love others as He loves us and to care for His creation including the elk and other wildlife the creator has given us to protect.

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Sitting on the pew between my grandparents, I waited my turn to deposit my two quarters into the plate as it passed by. Little did I know what that 50 cents would mean to me as I grew older. On the drive to church that morning, my Grandpa had reached over the seat and handed my sister and I each a pair of quarters for the offering.

“Why do we give away our money on Sundays?” I asked.

His reply would take me years to comprehend. “It isn’t our money, Travis. Everything on earth belongs to the Lord, and we are only giving back a portion of what He has blessed us with.”

The life lesson that has remained with me from that particular Sunday morning is still as vivid as the sound of my Grandma’s sweet voice singing, “He Lives.”

A few years later on a predawn morning at the base of a hickory large enough for three, I could hardly contain my excitement as I sat there between my Dad and Grandpa anxiously awaiting the first squirrel of the day to stir in the canopy above. After what had seemed like an eternity of tagging along on every deer and turkey hunt I could beg into and logging countless miles behind the bird dogs, it was finally my opportunity to “participate” in a hunt for the first time. That morning as the horizon gathered more light, Grandpa whispered, “God is showing off for us this morning” motioning to the sunrise. As an eight-year-old and thinking only of the moment at hand, I certainly didn’t comprehend the depth of his comment, just as I hadn’t fully understood the true value of those two quarters years before.

At the end of the morning, the pride I remember feeling in having been a part of something in a new way with the two men I looked up to most was powerful. Grandad’s final message that day would become the words I would live by. He reminded me that wildlife and wild places are a gift to enjoy and to pass on to others. “Always put back more than you take,” he said.

I turned 50 last year and like others reaching certain milestones in life, I began to reflect on the path that has ultimately led me to a development position with RMEF. For the past 27 years, I have volunteered and worked as a professional fundraiser for both state and nationally-based organizations. Throughout my professional career, I have been truly blessed by a handful of amazing mentors and by countless lifelong friendships developed through work and through hunting and outdoor pursuits across the country. Looking back, I can’t help but attribute a great deal of who I am, to those like my Grandpa and Dad who instilled the value of meaningful bonds created by time together in the outdoors and a genuine passion for seeking those outdoor memories. Today, my wife and I are raising our two girls with an understanding of what a gift time spent together in the outdoors can be.

Since joining RMEF, I am already thankful to be a part of such a tremendous staff and volunteer team. For those of you who’ve already invested in this organization, I am humbled by the tremendous work you’ve accomplished and couldn’t be more excited about the opportunity to help you continue making an impact. I’m looking forward to this new chapter and getting to know those of you whose support helps ensure RMEF’s conservation initiatives, “put back more than we take” and maintain the gift of an outdoor legacy for future generations to share.

See you down the trail,

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LANDS PROJECTS  Looking A Little Deeper (continued)

ingredient. Using these tools alongside industry best standards allows us to focus on projects that have a high likelihood for success and excite our membership.

If a project sails past initial analysis as mentioned above, it then moves on to due diligence, review and fundraising, RMEF utilizes best practices developed by the Land Trust Alliance, an umbrella land conservation association. Those best practices assist RMEF in creating procedures and challenge staff to keep them relevant. As such, various due diligence checklists and legal tools ensure RMEF’s lands program operates at a high level of competency and exhibits checks and balances.

Throughout the life of a project, there are several key stakeholders in the review process. Lands program managers stay tied to their state leadership teams made up of the regional directors and key volunteers. This way we can both get input and give updates on project portfolios. Our dedicated RMEF Board of Directors reviews and approves each individual lands project in which RMEF is taking a vesting interest. And of course, each step of the way a number of lands, legal and leadership staff engage in the evolution of the project.

The tools, analysis, due diligence and reviews are set up to flag potentially troublesome attributes to a property transaction. Even so, lands projects are dynamic and can take from a few months to several years to complete. As Senior Lands Program Manager Bill Richardson will tell you, “Projects live, die, and come back to life, sometimes with a lot of CPR and prayer. Never give up!”

Arguably, the most important step is to stop and celebrate a project closing. I will always be grateful to the conservation-minded landowners, our board of directors, our partners and all of you that support land protection for the future of elk across North America.

Jennifer Doherty, Director of Lands