



NEWSLETTER *of the* HABITAT COUNCIL

HABITAT COUNCIL TIDINGS A message from your co-chairs



Kent & Cyndie Johnson,
RMEF Habitat Council Co-chairs

Due to COVID-19 capacity restrictions at Canyons Village and the Grand Summit Hotel we are unable to hold our traditional Elk Camp event this year. While we will not gather for the Habitat Council meeting, Friends of the Foundation Breakfast, Live Auctions, the Volunteer Recognition & Celebration or the Prayer Breakfast this year, we will be hosting exhibitors, the World Elk Calling Championships (WECC), and live programming from the Canyons Village stage as part of the Mountain Festival.

The Mountain Festival portion with vendor booths and interactive experiences is going to coincide with the Total Archery event similar to 2019. The WECC will be held during the Mountain Festival. The Elk Camp auction is going to be conducted electronically, as it was last year with dozens of great items, including firearms, hunts, trips, artwork and more. It will also take place during this event. Activities are being planned for the outdoor stage area throughout the day with live podcasts and seminars from outdoor industry pros as well as an afterparty each evening.

Even though we are not able to gather as a group for the Habitat Council in July, it is essential we continue to support wildlife in wild places. By being outdoors it enables us to work

“If human beings disappeared from the planet tomorrow, wildlife would not miss us one bit. But if wildlife disappeared, the human species would miss them forever.”

– Shane Mahoney

hand-in-hand with nature to fulfill our mission. When we are outside, we see the fruits of our investments in elk country no matter where we are from coast-to-coast. Although we are doing this either by ourselves or in smaller gatherings, we are making a collective difference towards success.

Spring brings renewal and rebirth. The matte and lifeless colors of winter change to vibrant green. Bears come out of their winter slumber. Calving season begins. Red Indian paintbrush and yellow arrowleaf balsamroots begin to bloom. The hardships of winter are soon forgotten and replaced with the promise of rejuvenation. As spring continues, the anticipation of summer grows to explore elk country whether it be hiking, bird watching, fishing or scouting new areas.

Since RMEF began, we have conserved or enhanced one square mile of land per day. That is a huge impact that hunters and outdoorsmen alike are reaping the rewards. As Habitat Council members, we have made a difference and continue to do so. We want to thank all of you for sharing the gifts of your donations, talents and especially your time. Cumulatively, you make an impact!

**JOIN US IN PARK CITY, UTAH
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FOR THE RMEF MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL**

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PARTNERSHIPS, 'POWER' TOOLS IMPROVE HUNTER ACCESS

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation recently reached into its access toolbox and once again utilized a tried-and-true winning formula: partnerships + power tools = improved public access for all!

It happened in western Wyoming late in 2020, where access to a large section of the Sublette Mountains was extremely difficult. That translated into a lack of hunting opportunity and an inability for biologists to properly manage population objectives for elk and other wildlife.

So, what is an access 'power' tool and how did it come into play? This particular tool is an access agreement that creates a public roadway and parking area linked to a popular trail. Once finalized, the new entry point will allow access across private ranchlands to land overseen by the Bureau of Land Management known as the Raymond Mountain Wilderness Study Area as well as additional state and federal lands beyond that.

That tool morphed into a 'power' tool when partners such as a private landowner, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund, onX and RMEF's Torstenson Family Endowment combined their vision and funding resources to push the project across the finish line. The result is hunters, anglers and others will soon have access to more than 32,900 acres of previously difficult to reach public land.

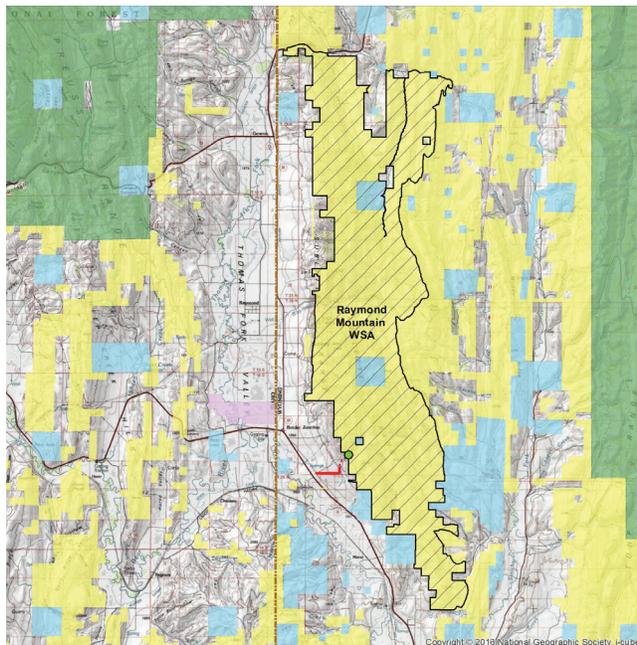
"Creating and improving public access is key to who we are as an organization and our mission," said Kyle Weaver, RMEF president and CEO. "There is currently limited access to the west side of the Sublette Range. This action will change that."

This Raymond Mountain project truly is another example of the power of partnerships, a staple of RMEF since its founding in 1984.

"We want to thank RMEF and the other partners on this project for their hard work and support to make this opportunity happen," said Sean Bibbey, WGFD lands branch chief.

"This collaborative public access project in the Sublette Range is a true win-win for conservation and all who love the outdoors," said Bob Ziehmer, Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's senior director of conservation.

"We applaud the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for working to secure improved access to public lands," said Lisa Nichols, onX access advocacy manager. "We also want to recognize the ranching family who prioritized the recreation potential on



- Access Point
- Proposed Access Route
- Non-motorized Access Trail
- Raymond Mountain Wilderness Study Area
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service
- State
- US Fish & Wildlife Service

0 4 MILES



land that is dear to their heart."

A hunt high in elk country well off the beaten path is always more fulfilling when you have a trusted partner at your side. At RMEF, we rely on the strength and wisdom of our loyal partners, whether federal and state agencies, outdoor industry associates, fellow conservation

outfits, sportsmen and women, or our volunteers and members. There is strength in numbers and power in partnerships.

And when it comes to land protection and access projects, it doesn't hurt to have some good power tools in your toolbox either.

COVID-19'S EXPANDING SILVER LINING



“But you have no silver lining without a cloud.” — Angela Carter

There is no doubt that the dark, dark cloud of COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on each of us, our families, our employment and our world as a whole. Plus, its ripple effects only continue to spread into 2021.

There is also no doubt about the silver lining it created. Generally speaking, people worldwide suffered from a disconnection to the outdoors prior to the pandemic. Instead of sunshine, waterways and landscapes, they focused on tiny screens, streaming videos and life in the concrete jungle. Once locked down, we did enjoy a greater measure of family life, but eventually felt cooped up and longed for much more.

Across the board, Americans flocked to the outdoors, soaked in the sunshine, breathed in the fresh air and developed a greater appreciation of the world around us. Parks, playgrounds, hiking trails, rivers and lakes, all became thoroughfares. Statistics back that up. Yellowstone Park had 110 percent higher visitation in October 2020 than one year earlier. Colorado had 18.3 million visitors to its state parks in

2020, marking a 23 percent increase from 2019. Visitation to Pennsylvania state parks boomed by seven million and Great Smoky National Park had 2.3 million more visits between June and December than the ten-year average for the same time period.

Indeed COVID-19 launched an outdoors-loving renaissance of sorts – walking, bird watching, mountain biking, paddle boarding, you name it and Americans did and continue to do it. Increased outdoor participation spilled over into hunting and fishing, too. From the Pacific Northwest to the Great Lakes states and across the entire United States, more people bought hunting and fishing licenses than they have in years. And that is a boon for conservation!

Not only is hunting and fishing participation up, but the excise taxes derived from that activity are too. In early March, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service disturbed more than \$1 billion to state wildlife agencies thanks to the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Nearly 70 percent of that total, or \$678,894,449,



is a result of excise taxes on guns, ammunition and archery equipment as per the Pittman-Robertson Act. And remember, all that funding directly benefits land and wildlife conservation.

While we all long for a return to normalcy, including a hope that 2021 RMEF banquets nationwide take place, let's hope connections to the outdoors remain strong and active. After all, you can't have a silver lining without a cloud.

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE TOP RIGHT: DMYTRO GILUTUK/HASHUTTERSTOCK / VOLKERPREUSSER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



ELK BY STATE WYOMING

State	Subspecies	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Elk Population	Rocky Mountain	43,178	67,465	70,352	82,128	102,439	105,868	91,555	105,000	113,300
Elk Hunters	Rocky Mountain	49,266	54,272	45,809	48,810	53,041	54,097	54,441	53,780	58,959
Elk Harvested	Rocky Mountain	20,970	17,428	13,809	20,086	17,695	23,727	19,794	25,672	24,749

Habitat Council Members: 50
RMEF Members: 8,239



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The Exclusive Newsletter for RMEF Habitat Council Members

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HOW TAXES AND ELK COUNTRY GO HAND IN HAND

Yes, taxes and elk country can go hand in hand. Lowering your tax burden can increase habitat for elk and other wildlife and open public access for us to enjoy. This two-way street can lead to more opportunities to view wildlife and explore more trails to hike.

By shifting the payment of taxes directly from Uncle Sam and letting the government decide where to direct money to public programs according to its wants/needs, you are instead allowed to choose what you would like to directly support and feel is a better priority for you and your family. This action offsets the burden of government and you get to pick what the aid will promptly and efficiently support.

Tax season is just finishing up from 2020. Some of us may have turned out alright and others may be wishing they saw a little better result. While this is still fresh in our minds, let's go over a couple of items to consider and potentially utilize during next year.

In 2021, there are two tax changes that can boost a donor's tax deductions for charitable giving, creating incentives to encourage taxpayers to donate to worthy causes such as elk and elk country. This means donors can give more to charity at a lower net cost.

FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT ITEMIZE DEDUCTIONS

Generally, you can only take a tax deduction for charitable giving if you itemize your tax deductions. The first change is an above-the-line tax deduction for gifts of cash to charities such as RMEF of up to \$300 for individuals and up to \$600 for married couples. You can also qualify for this if making a donation with a credit card or writing a check.

This is important because when the standard deduction was increased back in 2017, it resulted in fewer people

itemizing deductions, including gifts to charity. The above-the-line deduction now allows those who do not itemize take a charitable deduction too.

And the fact that it's an above-the-line deduction can also help because it reduces your adjusted gross income (AGI). Remember, deductions lower your taxable income based on your income tax bracket. That means that the higher the tax bracket, the greater the savings.

FOR THOSE WHO DO ITEMIZE DEDUCTIONS:

The second change is a charitable provision helping those who do itemize their deductions. It changes the percent of AGI limits for cash charitable deductions. For individuals, the 60 percent AGI limitation is suspended and users can deduct 100 percent of their AGI.

This provision excludes contributions to donor-advised funds (DAF). If a donor exhausts his or her 60 percent limit with cash contributions to their DAFs, they could make additional donations outside their DAF and reach the 100 percent limit.

At the end of the day, your donations help us do more for elk and other wildlife, brilliant landscapes and our passion for the outdoors. The tax incentives noted above make this a win-win situation for all involved.

Please remember RMEF does not provide tax, legal or accounting advice. This material is for information purposes only. Save this article and consult with your own advisors.



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