



NEWSLETTER *of the* HABITAT COUNCIL

HABITAT COUNCIL TIDINGS A MESSAGE FROM YOUR CO-CHAIRS

UPCOMING NATIONAL EVENTS

RMEF PBR World Finals
November 3 – 7, 2021
Las Vegas, NV

RMEF Hunter & Outdoor Christmas Expo
December 2 – 11, 2021
Las Vegas, NV

Habitat Council Meeting and Retreat
May 12 – 14, 2022
Asheville, NC

For more information, please call 1-800-CALL-ELK.



Kent & Cyndie Johnson,
RMEF Habitat Council Co-chairs

A team is made up of individuals all serving with one main goal. Each member has unique gifts and abilities allowing the team to be far greater than the sum of its parts. Each member contributes the best of their abilities, but together is where the magic happens. The same is true for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. When our members and donors come together combining all our talents and gifts, we can achieve a far greater purpose.

Speaking of coming together, we have scheduled the 2022 Habitat Council Meeting and Retreat. Mark your calendars for May 12-14, 2022 in Asheville, North Carolina. We look forward to gathering together revisiting the past, exploring the present and looking toward the future. The success of the elk restoration effort has made a positive impact in the area. We are improving habitat stewardship while providing quality nutrition and look to continue this success story during our time together in North Carolina.

Habitat Council members are a family of like-minded wildlife conservations and we are excited to enjoy a family reunion of sorts. During the business meeting, the RMEF Board of Directors and executive staff will share their vision, providing you with updates and insights into RMEF's current status. Stay tuned as more information and registration becomes available.

As you are reading this, many of us are already planning on ways to come together with friends and family during the upcoming holidays. As you consider harvest season, Thanksgiving and Christmas, we hope you include RMEF in the spirit of the seasons and continue the tradition of year-end giving as we advance our critical conservation movement together, creating even more magic around the country.

As a part of the RMEF team and family, we could not be prouder to serve alongside each and every one of you. Together, we are all working toward one common goal of conservation. Thank you for being a part of this team and for the gifts of your time, talents, leadership, fellowship and treasures.

ADVOCACY: WILDLIFE OVERPASSES AND UNDERPASSES

Every wildlife-vehicle collision is a waste, both economically and biologically.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports vehicle collisions with animals have been increasing with 200 motorist deaths per year and exponentially more animal deaths. The U.S. Department of Transportation calculates the costs associated with wildlife-vehicle collisions is around \$8 billion annually. The Oregon

Department of Transportation reports 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions every year, and State Farm ranks West Virginia as the #1 state for wildlife collisions.

As we gain a better understanding of elk migratory corridors, we are identifying the habitats, pinch points and barriers that limit elk's ability to thrive in the various seasons and life cycle stages. Often those barriers are highways.

Wildlife overpasses and underpasses are proven technologies that work. In general, these structures are engineered to look natural while wildlife fencing funnels migrating wildlife to the crossing points that enable herds of elk and other wildlife to move to new habitats safely. Near Pinedale, Wyoming, the Trappers Point structure reduced roadkill and collisions by 79%.

Most highway policy is tied to federal

MINAM RIVER PROJECT: "WE'RE DOING IT AS A TEAM"

By all accounts, it was a miniscule gathering but on a massive, wild landscape. Two Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation staffers, one biologist from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and nine or 10 RMEF donors piled into a couple of side-by-sides to experience a bold, collaborative endeavor first-hand.

RMEF, Hancock Natural Resources Group and ODFW are actively working together on the Minam River acquisition, a project to conserve 15,573 acres of wildlife habitat in northeast Oregon. The two-phase project will protect and open access to 4,610 acres of rugged elk country by December 2021 and the remaining 10,964 acres by December 2023. When completed, combined with the Eagle Cap Wilderness beyond, the project will create a block of public land larger than Yellowstone National Park.

Oregon wildlife officials targeted the importance of conserving this landscape, the Gateway to the Willamette Mountains, dating back to the 1960s, and this small group of onlookers had the opportunity to have their eyes opened to it in a big, big way.

"One of the best moments from our tour was when we were working our way out to what we call 'The Front,' a finger ridge that comes near the north end of the project, and that is visible from Highway 82," said Bill Richardson, RMEF senior conservation program manager-western. "As we dropped in elevation, I pointed out the two-track stretching out for miles ahead of us. Some folks didn't believe that was where we were going, it had to be too far! The scale of the project is immense, and that side trip really brought it home. It is too big to take in all at once, that's for sure."

"It's so massive," said Brian Anderson,



RMEF western development director. "There was a time when we'd covered maybe one third of the actual project area and we'd been covering it most of the day. People just couldn't believe it. They were blown away. We had folks drive all the way from California, Washington and from across Oregon. It isn't just locals that have a massive interest. It's because of the size and the scope and the importance of this project."

ODFW will manage the property as the Minam River Wildlife Area and as a working

landscape, utilizing grazing to improve forage condition for wildlife and active forest management in partnership with the Oregon Department of Forestry. The landscape provides critical winter range for up to 1,200 elk and important habitat for many other wildlife species including salmon, bull and steelhead trout in the 114 miles of riparian habitat within the project area.

"On any given day in the winter, you can see hundreds of elk in those open slopes. It's

ADVOCACY: WILDLIFE OVERPASSES AND UNDERPASSES

Continued

funding, so RMEF has been engaged with Congress to secure funding and authority to establish big game wildlife crossings. Earlier this year, RMEF participated in a Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation briefing to advocate for a Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program provision being debated in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and joined other hunting conservation organizations in a letter advocating for \$250 million over five years for competitive grants to states, tribes and local governments for construction.

Our efforts have shown some success

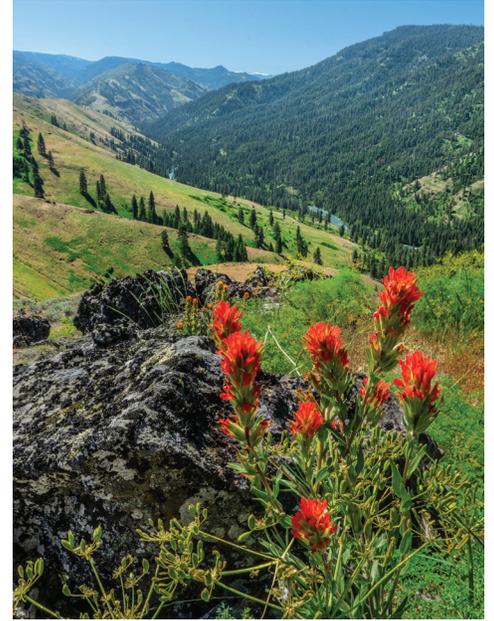
when the provision was included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Funding bill at \$350 million. The \$1 trillion bill passed the Senate 69-30 with broad bipartisan support. Similar House legislation is also progressing, but fails to focus on big game crossings and creates a burdensome and complicated bureaucracy around the program.

While RMEF continues to focus our efforts on providing the habitats that elk need year-round, eliminating the bottlenecks that limit their annual migrations is another key step to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat and our hunting heritage.



TUNNEL OF LOVE—With 7-foot roadside fencing acting as a barrier, everything from alligators to otters to elk to cross the

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DAVID JENSEN / WILLIAM GAMRAT / CHRISTIANBAGCOCK888.DREAMTIME.COM /



“I cannot think of a more iconic landscape that has all of the features that you want to see in a project: connectivity, rich habitat, public access, all within thousands of acres of land.”

**— Bill Richardson,
RMEF senior conservation
program manager – western**

got a good aspect for the sun and the winds keep it pretty open. And the elk use it like crazy,” said Richardson. “It’s a real treat to be where elk winter and look back where you get that context of civilization and being on the outside looking in.”

Everyone who participated on the project tour felt treated as well. And more than that, they stand ready to make sure it moves forward.

“One of our donors has a three-digit life member number. He’s been around RMEF

forever, all in from the beginning, becoming a life member in early 1985. He volunteers, he donates items to auctions, he gives of his money and gives in every way a person can give, and he’s been doing it since almost the beginning,” said Anderson. “He pulled me aside and said, ‘Brian, I’ve been to a lot of unique RMEF events including project tours, but this is, by far, the most moving impactful project I’ve ever seen RMEF do.”

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted enthusiastically and

unanimously in favor of the project at its meeting on August 6, 2021. Funding is nearly achieved for phase 1 with efforts continuing for phase 2. And RMEF donors remain eager to help the cause.

“I’ve been on the Minam site many times now and I’m just overwhelmed how big the project is in totality,” said Richardson. “There’s a feeling of immensity and majesty. It’s a grand and even more meaningful experience knowing we’re doing this as a team.”

CSKT/MDT/WTH/MSU / JOHANSEN KRAUSE



ing as a funnel, underpasses have proven incredibly effective at allowing busy roads unscathed.



WALK OF LIFE—One of six wildlife overpasses spanning the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park, Alberta.



RMEF
5705 Grant Creek Road
Missoula, MT 59808

First Class Mail
U.S. Postage Paid
Missoula, MT
Permit No. 536

The Exclusive Newsletter for RMEF Habitat Council Members

NEWSLETTER *of the* HABITAT COUNCIL



GIVING AT YEAR-END: BOUNTY AND GRATITUDE

Harvest season is a time of bounty and gratitude. During this time with RMEF, we want to give thanks for the generosity of our members, donors, volunteers, staff and especially the Habitat Council.

The HC continues to be a stalworth supporter from year-to-year, and this fall, we can collectively toast to helping the organization accomplish more than 8.2 million acres of conservation work since 1984, as well as countless hours stewarding the next generation of hunter-conservationists—well done.

Harvest season is also a typical time of determining what is in excess of our needs and giving what we can do to help. All of you who read this note have reached a lifetime giving level of \$10,000 or more to RMEF; I implore those who can, to continue your financial support, we can more than ensure it will be well placed.

I pen this brief note on the 17th of September, a Montana morning that started off at 36°, brisk air to walk children to school, but divine weather to enjoy a hot coffee on the porch before heading into the office. My rifle is clean and sighted for the season, the rivers have cooled off enough to bring trout back to the surface and wildlife is coming down from the high-country, bucks striping the bark off my aspens and bears leaving their huckleberry messes on pathways.

I cherish this time of year as we all do. Thank you again for your leadership and support. Happy hunting.

— Anderson Smith,
Director of Development

If you are considering a gift to support RMEF, remember there are many ways of making a greater impact with a larger donation through:



Retirement Accounts



Appreciated Stock



Donor Advised Funds

Please give me a call if you'd like to discuss,
I'd love to hear from you and thank you.

Anderson Smith
Director of Development
(406) 370-9729



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