



ANNUAL REPORT

2020



HIGHLIGHTS

*Ensuring the Conservation of Mule Deer,
Black-Tailed Deer and their Habitat*



PHOTO: SAMANDSTEPHZIERKE.COM

MDF IS COMMITTED TO:

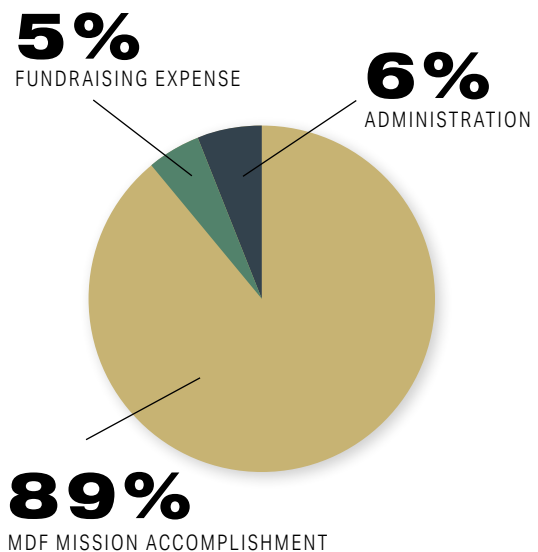
- Restoring, improving, and conserving mule deer and black-tailed deer habitat
- Encouraging and supporting responsible wildlife management
- Supporting regulated hunting as a viable component of conservation
- Promoting public education and scientific research
- Recruiting, retaining, and reactivating new hunters
- Supporting and encouraging responsible and ethical behavior and awareness of issues affecting mule deer and black-tailed deer

MULE DEER FOUNDATION 2020 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

MDF MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT: \$14,913,370

FUNDRAISING EXPENSE: \$842,128

ADMINISTRATION: \$1,082,705



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the Annual Report of the Mule Deer Foundation. MDF has worked tirelessly for 32 years to ensure the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer, and their habitat. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic threw us a curveball in the traditional ways that we have functioned. However, we were still able to raise critical funds to keep our operations going and ultimately to improve a record number of acres of habitat in 2020.

Restrictions put in place at the start of the pandemic hurt our spring 2020 fundraising events, resulting in many of the events either being rescheduled or postponed to 2021. But in true MDF spirit, alternate fundraising events were held online or in small gatherings allowed by local health department protocols. We could not have accomplished this without the support of our local chapters, members, volunteers, state, and federal partners as well our corporate sponsors.

While we have achieved a great deal over the past 32 years, we still have much to do to ensure that there are abundant mule deer and black-tailed deer populations for future generations to enjoy. Mule deer are the icon of the West, conjuring up images of a long past era when deer numbers exploded across the western landscape. Today there are many factors contributing to the decline of deer populations across the West. MDF is committed to be an organization that will do everything we can to reverse the decline of mule deer and ensure there are sustainable, huntable populations for generations to come.

How does MDF address these challenges? First, as you can see on the pie chart to the left, 89 percent of all dollars raised goes to mission accomplishment. MDF leverages each dollar raised many times over with donations from our partners and sponsors, allowing us to be the most efficient and transparent organization we can be in fulfilling our mission.

MDF is actively involved in advocacy and policy work that benefits mule deer and ensures our hunting heritage.

Top priorities we focused on in 2020 included: passage of the Great American Outdoors Act and America's Conservation Enhancement Act; implementation of categorical exclusions for mule deer habitat work on federal public lands; funding for chronic wasting disease research and monitoring; funding for wildlife crossings in the Transportation Bill; and working with the American Wildlife Conservation Partners to complete *Wildlife for the 21st Century: Volume VI*, a set of policy recommendations for the next presidential administration. Other efforts included working to ensure that any COVID-19 relief funding for natural resource projects benefits deer, as well as a continued push to make the migration corridors and winter range priorities included in the Department of the Interior Secretary's Order 3362 applicable to the U.S. Forest Service and more permanent in federal agency administration of federal lands.

The Annual Report provides a few highlights of what MDF does. I hope this gives you an idea of how diverse and complex the many issues are that impact mule deer, our hunting heritage, and public access – and that you can see how MDF is in the middle of it all. This past year has been challenging and we could not have made it without the commitment and dedication of our members and supporters. For all you have done to help MDF during this past year, we thank you! We cannot do this alone and our local chapters work tirelessly to fundraise, volunteer on projects, and get involved in local policy issues. Members and volunteers are the backbone of MDF, and we salute your efforts.

If you are not a member, please join the MDF family and help us make a difference for mule deer and black-tailed deer across the western landscape by supporting MDF today.

Yours in Conservation,



Miles Moretti
President & CEO

CONSERVATION



The Mule Deer Foundation's Conservation Program works to ensure that the projects and actions taken by MDF fulfill the mission of the organization and maximize the impact of our efforts on behalf of mule deer and black-tailed deer. Under the leadership of MDF's Director of Conservation Steve Belinda, our staff of natural resource professionals implement on-the-ground habitat improvement and restoration work in coordination with MDF regional directors and our conservation partners. MDF's conservation program is growing, allowing us to be an essential partner with state and federal agencies on important deer conservation efforts throughout the West.

Our three priority focus areas include:

HABITAT STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENTS

Led by MDF's Stewardship Coordinators and partner biologists, MDF enters into formal partnership agreements with federal or state agencies to increase the amount of work done for deer with a mutual benefit to the agency and MDF. MDF has Master Agreements with all western U.S. Forest Service Regions (USFS) and with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Colorado. A total of 30 agreements are in place with 12 active in six states, about 5,000-6,000 acres treated. Habitat projects include forest thinning, invasive conifer/juniper removal, mastication, forest clean-up of previous timber sales, meadow restoration, and general habitat work.

MIGRATION CORRIDOR AND WINTER RANGE INITIATIVE

Through a 2018 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant, MDF launched the Migration Corridor and Winter Range Initiative in 2019 to help increase our capacity to implement the Department of the Interior Secretary's Order 3362 (SO3362). We secured two subsequent NFWF grants in 2019 and 2020 for a total of more than \$1.4 million in grant funding for the Initiative in less than two years. MDF leveraged these grants for an additional \$1.8 million making a total financial impact of \$3.2 million for SO3362 implementation. MDF also received \$125,000 from the Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund for projects associated with the Initiative which has led to 20 projects in seven states. Projects are prioritized in those areas identified by the SO3362 State Action Plans or in areas known to have important migration, movement, or winter range habitats. Projects include fence removal/modification, riparian/spring protection and enhancement, invasive juniper removal, barrier fencing, prescribed burning, invasive weed treatments, road crossing structures, and data modeling.

PRIORITY HERDS AND LANDSCAPES

MDF's Priority Herds and Landscapes program is an effort to coordinate with local chapters, state project committees, and MDF conservation partners to identify and work in those areas where deer need the most help at the herd or landscape level. This approach seeks to avoid "random acts of conservation" through small disconnected projects by linking efforts and funding to complete larger, more impactful projects. This work requires coordination with MDF regional directors, agency partners, landowners, and other NGOs to ensure that adequate funding is available to address needs more completely. Priority Herds and Landscapes can also provide MDF local chapters a way of focusing their funds to work on areas important to that chapter regardless of where the chapter is located. Examples of a landscape-level project include the restoration of 30,000 acres of winter range sagebrush habitat in Idaho through planting 500,000 shrub seedlings in coordination with the BLM and Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Other efforts include juniper removal in the western slope of Colorado and private land improvements in North Dakota. 🌿



OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

This year forced changes to community-level engagement due to COVID-19, challenging MDF to find alternatives when members were unable to safely gather in person. Yet, engagement with the organization continues at a high level with increased participation on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. When opportunities arose to conduct volunteer conservation projects, our members jumped in immediately to help. We were limited in our traditional engagement methods in 2020, but our increased online interactions clearly show the dedication of our supporters and the importance of MDF's grassroots efforts.

The strong presence of the MDF social media platforms has provided innovative new ways to fundraise and has positively engaged our members, followers, and newcomers alike. We have increased the production and frequency of social media content allowing us to communicate the mission of MDF and highlight the successful use of membership dollars to achieve our goals. In addition, with each fundraising initiative MDF followers have stepped up to contribute and participate, raising much-needed funding while expanding the reach of MDF educational messaging. The full power of social media can only be achieved with a high level of follower involvement, and the engagement statistics demonstrate the commitment of our members to ensure that Conservation Continues at MDF. Using social media to increase organizational outreach ensures that MDF is relevant to newer generations of supporters and will continue to move the organization forward in coming years.

Wildfires once again ripped through important mule deer habitat across the West, requiring the need for even

more volunteer participation in the future. The dry conditions in the West exacerbate the situation—often wildfires occur in areas with the lowest water availability and damage critical improvements that provide sources of water for all wildlife. Volunteer projects have already begun to repair some of these damaged guzzlers, ensuring that they collect and store rainwater and snowmelt. In addition, seasonal habitat and migration corridors that are affected by wildfires need to be restored to provide necessary forage and cover for mule deer. Volunteer initiatives to replant serviceberry, bitterbrush, and sagebrush will be a heavy focus in upcoming years to ensure that critical summer and winter ranges continue to



provide quality nutrition and support high fawn survival. These planting initiatives will help to reduce the frequency and severity of fire damage to a landscape that is constantly under pressure from non-native invasive species like cheatgrass and medusahead.

Despite dramatically reduced numbers of fundraising banquets and events, volunteers have continued to step forward and donate their time and energy to on the ground projects. From building guzzlers to planting projects to fencing removal or installation of wildlife-friendly fencing, MDF members show their high level of personal devotion to the conservation ethic of the organization. While 2020 has presented many restrictions and limitations on how people gather, our members' strong desire to continue the ground-level mission remains strong. No matter what challenges mule deer face, MDF members have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to the protection and preservation of mule deer herds. MDF encourages members and followers to continue sharing the mission and accomplishments of our organization and asks each of you to encourage others to join in our efforts. 🌿

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking back at 2020, it is difficult to accurately put into words the challenges MDF has faced. Banquet halls and convention centers have gone silent, replaced with the restrictions we all faced through the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, we are persevering, learning valuable lessons and positioning ourselves to make 2021 a better year.

Each year MDF members, sponsors, partners, and other donors pull together to support our mission . . . ensuring the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer, and their habitat. Your commitment is the driving force enabling MDF to continue major initiatives across the organization including:

- Migration Corridor and Winter Range Initiative
- Conifer thinning, grass/forb and sage/bitterbrush restoration
- Support of ongoing chronic wasting disease (CWD) research and monitoring
- Outreach programs (R3)—growing the number of hunter conservationists

As we look forward to 2021 and beyond, MDF will continue to place itself at the forefront of the wildlife conservation dialogue through our conservation and advocacy efforts. Our outreach program will

continue to diversify and introduce—or, in many cases, reintroduce—individuals throughout the country to the hunting and outdoors lifestyle we so cherish.

Accordingly, support of the MDF mission has never been more important than it is today. While the challenges that lie ahead remain significant, the

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opportunities to strengthen our nation's great hunting and conservation heritage are even more profound. Together, we can ensure that our legacy will be one that inspires future hunter-conservationists to achieve even greater success.

Conservation continues at MDF and we are excited and focused on making a meaningful difference for mule deer and black-tailed deer. We hope you will join us. To learn about how you can become more involved with MDF, please visit us at muledeer.org/conservation-continues/ or call me at (801) 973-3940.

On behalf of everyone at MDF, I thank you for your trust and support of our organization and wish you all the best as you enjoy wildlife in wild places.

Sincerely,



Brian L. Fienhold
Chief Operating Officer



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