



**25 years of ensuring
the conservation of
mule deer,
blacktail
deer, and
their habitat.**

By Miles Moretti

Mule Deer Foundation President/CEO

Mule Deer populations peaked in the late 1960s and early 70s throughout their range. Despite

declines in the animal's numbers, there are still more mule deer hunters than any other big game species in the West. Checking current Boone and Crockett records, it's easy to see how this highly sought-after trophy species is an icon of the West with around 100 trophy mule deer entered into the records books each year.

Thanks to the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah—the only national wildlife conservation group dedicated to ensuring the conservation of mule deer, blacktail deer, and their habitat—the mule deer's future is looking brighter. The organization was founded in 1988 by Emmett Burroughs, and this year, MDF celebrates its 25th anniversary, riding a wave of unprecedented growth in 2012. An increasing number of sportsmen and sportswomen have shown they want to help battle the decline in mule deer numbers, making MDF one of the fastest-growing conservation groups in the country.

MDF's goals include restoration, improvement, and protection of mule deer and blacktail deer and their habitat. By utilizing land and easement acquisitions, MDF helps boost self-sustaining, healthy, free-ranging, and huntable deer populations by working with government agencies, private organizations, and landowners to encourage and support responsible wildlife management; it promotes public education and scientific research related to mule deer, blacktail deer and wildlife management; it supports regulated hunting as a viable component of mule deer and blacktail deer conservation and develops programs that focus on recruitment and retention of youth into the shooting sports and conservation.

The single greatest factor that has caused declines in mule deer populations is loss of mule deer habitat. Declines in mule deer numbers relate closely to the quantity and quality of habitat. Other contributing factors are predators, highway mortality, and diseases

such as CWD (chronic wasting disease). MDF is working aggressively to restore habitat, control predators, and with state and federal agencies, research disease issues.

MDF reached quite a milestone in 2012: it is proud to have exceeded its goal of restoring over a million acres of mule deer habitat throughout the West. We are aiming high and set our goal to restore another million acres in the next five years. Habitat restoration on a landscape-scale can only occur with great partnerships—state and federal agencies and private landowners are vital to our success. MDF also partners with other wildlife conservation groups to leverage members' donations on habitat enhancement projects such as water developments (guzzlers) and controlled burns. Restoring native habitat of mule deer winter range was a high priority after the record setting fire season of 2012. MDF was able to partner with Native Seed of Lehi, Utah, to contribute over \$250,000 of seed to restore native vegetation to more than 40,000 acres of winter range wiped out by wildfire near Susanville, California.

MDF has worked with transportation departments in several western states to reduce vehicle/deer collisions. Fencing highway right-of-ways and building overpass or underpass structures has become part of most highway projects in the West. MDF also partners with state wildlife agencies and universities to monitor before and after construction. Results have been impressive. Wildlife crossings and conservation easements have restored mule deer migration corridors. Thousands of deer have been documented crossing through these structures, ultimately resulting in reduced mortality and vehicle accidents. Populations of mule deer in areas of these crossing structures are responding; wildlife officials say mule deer are showing increased survival in all age classes.

MDF recognized that CWD could potentially be devastating to mule deer, so in 2002, MDF joined the Boone and Crockett Club and other wildlife conservation groups in forming the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance. This group is dedicated to providing the most up-to-date scientific information to state wildlife agencies and the public. The CWD Alliance was instrumental in getting federal

dollars to the state wildlife agencies for monitoring and testing programs.

MDF also believes that promoting our hunting heritage is a key ingredient to furthering our conservation objectives. Thanks to a continuing grant from the Brenda and Larry Potterfield Foundation, MDF has been able to expand its youth education programs, such as the MULEY (Mindful, Understanding, Legal, Ethical, Youth) Program, which is aimed at educating youth and their parents about hunting, wildlife management, and overall respect and enjoyment of our natural resources. In 2012, MDF was able to reach more than 14,000 youth through this program.

MDF is one of the highest-ranked nonprofit organizations for efficiency, which ensures the largest percentage of net revenue goes toward on-the-ground mission accomplishment. In 2012, MDF chartered its 120th

local chapter. The backbone of MDF is its local chapter network of volunteer members. The local chapters organize fundraising events and volunteer on local projects which benefit mule deer and other wildlife.

MDF has developed a unique partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in support of its Sage Grouse Initiative. Sage grouse have been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. MDF has developed a partnership with NRCS, private landowners, and other governmental agencies to leverage the strength of both organizations because mule deer habitat, especially winter range, overlaps with sage grouse habitat. Working with NRCS and its partners, MDF is contributing to improving mule deer habitat and helping to keep the sage grouse off the ESA list.

In addition to being a proud partner with the Boone and Crockett Club, MDF is an active member of the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), with MDF President/CEO Miles Moretti serving as the current AWCP chairman. AWCP works on national and regional policy issues of concern to its membership.

To support the Mule Deer Foundation's efforts to restore mule deer populations, visit its Web site at muledeer.org. ■



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