

THE MULE DEER FOUNDATION

CONSERVATION POLICY COLUMN



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The Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) was founded in 1988 in Redding, California, by Emmett Burroughs. The idea of a wildlife conservation group dedicated to mule deer and blacktails was the result of Emmett traveling the West to hunt and film mule deer. He observed that mule deer, once abundant through their range, were slowly declining in numbers. Emmett believed that after many years hunting mule deer and filming them that he needed to give something back. A small group of individuals were invited to become the first board of directors to lead this fledgling organization. The mission was simple: “to ensure the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer and their habitat.”

For many years, MDF remained a small organization dedicated to working with state and federal agencies on improving management of mule deer herds and restoring declining habitat conditions. MDF’s expertise was in habitat restoration and improvement. MDF’s members formed local chapters which raised funds through local banquets and other events. A percentage of these proceeds go to local habitat projects, guzzlers, removal of fencing which isn’t wildlife friendly and rehab after wildfires on winter range.

MDF volunteers put in hundreds of hours a year on

sweat-equity projects working closely with their state wildlife agency or federal agencies. Local companies donate equipment to be used on projects. And while these projects may be small, they have a big impact on not only mule deer but all wildlife.

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Mule Deer Working Group outlined several factors which have contributed to the decline of mule deer: loss of habitat through urban development/sprawl; predation; highway mortality; wildfires; energy development; disease (especially CWD); overgrazing; severe winters and competition with elk and whitetail deer. Some of these factors are out of our control, so the MDF has focused on habitat, CWD, wildfire restoration, migration corridors and highway mortality.

In 2007, MDF realized that to stop or reverse the decline of blacktail and mule deer, the organization had to take a landscape approach to creating and restoring healthy rangelands and forests. The Stewardship Habitat Program was created to work on BLM and National Forest lands referred to as public lands. In cooperation with state and federal partners, MDF in 2019 will have restored more than 2 million acres of habitat for mule deer and blacktail deer.

MDF, along with Boone and Crockett Club, are founding members of the Chronic

Wasting Disease Alliance, which provides up-to-date information on the spread of CWD, research, and hunter information. The Alliance is the go-to website for accurate factual information on CWD. MDF has a position on the board of the National Deer Alliance which is leading the charge on CWD at state legislatures and Congress.

In 2017, then Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke signed Secretarial Order 3356 at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo (MDF’s National Convention) in Salt Lake City, Utah. The order was created to protect big game winter ranges and migration corridors. As a result, MDF initiated its own Mule Deer Winter Range and Migration Corridor Initiative. The activity the last two years working on migration corridors issues has been hectic, and the increased emphasis is paying off. One area receiving considerable attention is highway crossings. Thousands of mule deer die each year while migrating from their summer range to their winter range and back. Mule deer may cross major highways several times during these migrations. Identifying these migration corridors and working with private landowners, state and federal agencies has become a high priority for MDF.

MDF also believes that as hunter numbers decline, we need to be proactive in the retention, recruitment and

reactivation (R3) of our youth and lapsed hunters. MDF’s youth education program, MULEY (Mindful, Understanding, Lawful, Ethical Youth) has been extremely successful in bringing youth together to learn about conservation, hunter ethics and experiencing hunting for the first time. In 2019, over 20,000 youth will have participated in a MULEY event. MDF is also reaching out to women through its women-only events. MDF’s program in New Mexico, called the DOES (Discovering the Outdoors and Encouraging Sportsmanship) is reaching out to women interested in outdoor sports like hunting, fishing and wildlife conservation.

MDF supports Boone and Crockett Club’s Fair Chase policy and believes we must all be responsible, ethical hunters. MDF’s growth and success comes from new members like you who want to do something to make a real difference for mule deer, blacktail deer and other wildlife. ■



If you are not a member of the Mule Deer Foundation, please join today at www.muledeer.org. MDF is one of the most efficient and highest-ranked nonprofit organizations in America, making sure the largest percentage possible of net revenue goes toward on-the-ground projects and mission accomplishment.

MDF President and CEO Miles Moretti is a Professional Member of the Club and serves on many councils and committees with other B&C Regular and Professional Members.