



# Rocky Mountain ELK FOUNDATION

**Hunting is conservation!** Those words ring as true today as they did 75 years ago when Congress passed the Pittman-Robertson Act—a tax that hunters embraced to benefit a struggling wildlife population.

The results of that action ring loud and clear from coast to coast. So far, that 11 percent tax on guns, ammunition, bows and arrows has generated more than \$2 billion for conservation and helped restore elk, deer, ducks, turkeys, and other ailing wildlife populations, some teetering on the verge of extinction.

“Our country’s richness of habitat and species exist, not in spite of hunters, but because of hunters,” said Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) President and CEO David Allen. “Ironically, it is the efforts of the hunter mainly responsible for predator populations to be recovered as well. There would be very little prey base for predators if our ungulate populations had not been restored over the years,” Allen added.

It doesn’t stop there. Through state licenses and fees, hunters pay \$725 million each year for conservation programs. And through donations to groups like RMEF, hunters add \$300 million a year for conservation. More than 95 percent of RMEF’s 184,000 members are passionate hunters who are the fuel behind an organization responsible for 6.1 million-plus acres of habitat conservation.

But with the title of “hunter” comes great responsibility. While we honor our legacy, we must also stand up for who we are, what we believe, and build our future. RMEF remains instrumental in elk relocation projects by restoring herds in seven states and provinces and providing funds for research to benefit all wildlife. More importantly is passing on our connection to land and wildlife to the next generation. We need to take our children and grandchildren outdoors to enjoy nature. Hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and wildlife watching are just a few of many activities that will open eyes and develop personal ties to the lakes, streams, prairies and mountains around us. But we must do even more.

Over the years, RMEF utilized its own state grant program, combined with national sponsorships and partnership dollars to the tune of more than \$3.5 million to pay for 1,900 hunting heritage projects reaching youth and adults in 49 states. For example, a rifle team from a Virginia high school recently received a \$10,000 endowment from RMEF and a fellow sponsor, Midway USA, for a shooting sports program. That endowment will generate about \$500 per year in perpetuity. The teenagers were so excited that they held a ceremony to honor the occasion and cannot wait to take part in air rifle matches organized by the Potomac High School Rifle League.

RMEF also teamed up with other partner organizations to provide grants to pay for a youth archery program in Pennsylvania. An 8-year-old female archer twice saw *Brave*, a Disney movie about a bow-toting heroine, and said it “made me want to learn how to shoot a bow.” A 10-year-old girl who recently saw *The Hunger Games* said that movie spurred her even more to take up archery. Now, they’ll both get their chance. “Conservation depends

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By Mark Holyoak

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on strong participation in hunting and shooting sports, which together generate most of the revenue for wildlife habitat, management, law enforcement and research in America,” said Allen. “We’re proud to support this heritage through endowments and grants to encourage and support students with a budding interest in sporting lifestyles.”

Hunters also must keep their crosshairs on the present. Despite millions of hunter-generated dollars, state wildlife agencies are financially treading water during these challenging economic times. They are tasked to do more with the same or shrinking amount of budgetary dollars. Just recently, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) Director Scott Talbot said, “We are at a crossroads in Wyoming. Our costs for managing Wyoming’s world-class wildlife resources continue to rise dramatically, while many of our traditional funding sources are in decline.” Talbot explained WGFD must raise an additional 8 to 10 million dollars annually to continue to provide current levels of services and programs. To deal with the shortfall, WGFD is seeking public opinion on five proposals to increase funding for wildlife management and conservation. Other state wildlife agencies face similar challenges.

There is good news for hunters and conservation. A recent report by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) shows 13.7 million people, or 6 percent of the U.S. population age 16 and older, went hunting last year. That marks a 9 percent increase over 2006, reversing a previous downward trend. Hunting is conservation, because the more hunters who take pride in that fact and

pass it on to the next generation, the more wildlife and conservation benefit.

Every dollar counts. And, just as important, every dollar must be accounted for. RMEF, already with its financial records available online, recently reiterated its long-standing policy of financial accountability by calling for transparency on state special big game permits. The goal is to make wildlife organizations accountable to the sportsmen and women whose funding they acquire and utilize. It is a matter of public trust. If we as hunters and hunter-based organizations are to thrive, we need to be accountable for what we say we will do and how we say we will do it.

With that said, RMEF calls on all wildlife conservation and environmental organizations to follow suit. It is interesting to note that during a recent news conference announcing the federal government’s return of wolf management to the state of Wyoming that two animal rights organizations posted immediate “emergency pleas” for funding on their websites. Those groups, Defenders of Wildlife (DW) and the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), use wolves as a cash cow for their organizations. Days later, they joined the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Sierra Club (SC) and other environmental organizations to announce their intent to sue the federal government.

Data obtained from the Department of Justice shows the federal government defended more than 570 Endangered Species Act-related lawsuits costing U.S. taxpayers more than \$15 million in attorneys’ fees in the past four years alone. If you break down the legal activities from 2009 to 2012, CBD

has 117 active cases, SC has 30, DW has 29 and NRDC has 19. So, as Tom Cruise famously belted out in Jerry McGuire, “Show me the money!” For the sake of transparency and responsibility, open up your books! How much money do you (environmental and animals rights groups) really bring in? What do you do with it? How much of it goes on the ground to benefit land conservation? How much of it goes on the ground to benefit wildlife conservation? Since your actions cost American taxpayers millions of dollars every year, answer the questions and be accountable.

These groups take this action in the name of the “best available science,” yet they produce scant little science themselves. All this comes even though wolf populations passed the originally agreed upon recovery threshold more than a decade ago. These groups did not cry foul when USFWS scientists and others laid out the science and parameters to reintroduce wolves as an experimental population. Now, they claim original minimum requirements of 45 or more breeding pairs and 450-plus wolves in the Northern Rockies are an “outdated and unscientific demographic recovery goal,” when there are a minimum of 1,774 wolves right now. That number does not take into account breeding this past spring which likely pushes that number well above 2,000. Those environmental groups, via their notice to sue, now demand that same region maintains a minimum population of 2,000 to 5,000. The moving of the goal line continues.

Thankfully we have hunters who provide honest conservation. As we say at RMEF, hunting is conservation. ■