MULE DEER FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT

2021



2021

HIGHLIGHTS

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



MDF IS COMMITTED TO:

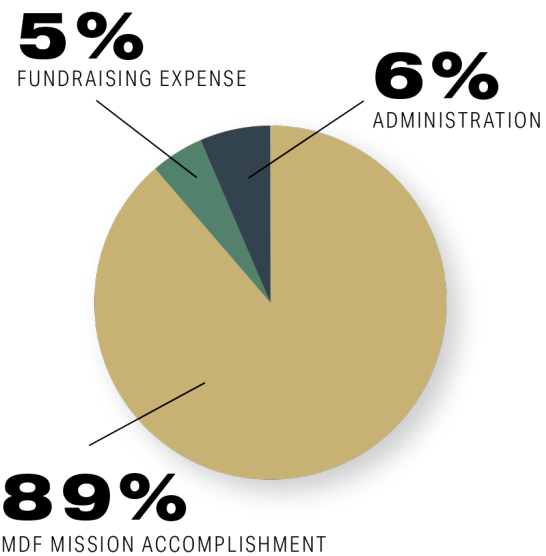
- Restoring, improving, and protecting mule deer and black-tailed deer habitat
- Encouraging and supporting responsible wildlife management
- Supporting regulated hunting as a viable component of conservation
- Promoting public education and scientific wildlife research
- Recruiting, retaining, and reactivating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

MULE DEER FOUNDATION 2021 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

MDF MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT: $ 13,841,088

FUNDRAISING EXPENSE: $ 758,249

ADMINISTRATION: $ 1,014,626



COVER PHOTO AND PHOTO ABOVE
SAMANDSTEPHZEIRKE.COM

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Mule Deer Foundation has worked for over 33 years to ensure the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer, and their habitat. While the leadership of MDF changed during 2021, our commitment to the mission remains. Those who came before me established a strong foundation for our organization, and I look forward to building upon this legacy to take the organization to new heights.

While MDF has accomplished much over the past 33 years, there is still much to do as we eye our 35th anniversary. The challenges faced by deer continue to mount. We must be smart to maximize the return on our donors' investment in our mission delivery to ensure that there are abundant, sustainable deer populations across the West for future generations to enjoy.

How does MDF address these challenges? First, as you see on the previous page, 89% of all dollars raised goes toward mission accomplishment. Our commitment to be an efficient and transparent organization is at the core of how we are working to fulfill our mission.

Despite the continued challenges posed by COVID-19 in 2021, our volunteers and staff rose to the occasion and MDF was able to continue growing for the future. We launched a new format to our membership magazine that has been well received and given us a platform to better tell our story. Similarly, our website underwent a complete makeover and we are now able to communicate to members and non-members alike in a more timely and effective manner. MDF has continued to be an active participant in Washington, DC, advocating for policies and funding that will benefit western deer and their habitats—our members have a voice at the national level that is truly making a difference. Our conservation delivery continues to grow thanks to the help of our agency partners, corporate supporters, and chapters, members, and volunteers. The work accomplished in 2021 will serve us well moving forward in 2022.

As you will see in the coming pages, MDF works to fulfill our mission in a variety of ways:

Habitat Restoration – Critical to increasing deer populations is ensuring that their shrinking habitats are well managed. As open spaces once important to deer are lost to other uses, it is essential that we conserve and enhance the remaining habitat to maximize their benefit for deer. This will always be a top priority for the organization.

Migration Corridors – MDF continues to work closely with state and federal agencies on big game migration routes, stopover areas, and key winter and summer range identified using new mapping technology. We are working closely with partners and Congress to ensure continued funding to protect and connect these key areas.

Outreach – The work of MDF benefits more than just deer and deer hunters. Through our outreach and communications efforts, we can share how hunters support good conservation that provides benefits for all of society. We are actively recruiting new people to be part of MDF and the broader hunting-conservation community.

Looking to 2022, MDF will be even more strategic in our conservation delivery—working with volunteers and partners to do the right work, in the right place, at a scale that truly makes a difference for deer populations—and will grow interest in our work through improved storytelling. MDF has much to be proud of over the last 33 years, yet there is still much more to do. We could not and cannot accomplish this without the hard work, passion, and dedication of our members and volunteers along with the support of our federal, state, and private partners and donors.

I look forward to the opportunity to lead the Mule Deer Foundation into the future, and I invite you to join me on that journey. Thank you for being part of this growing organization—your passion to make a difference is inspiring and is the true foundation of the work that we do. We appreciate your support, and we look forward to welcoming new members and supporters to the fold.

Yours in Conservation,

Joel A. Pedersen

Joel Pedersen,
MDF President & CEO

CONSERVATION



The Mule Deer Foundation's Conservation Program works to ensure that the projects and actions we undertake "maximize our impact" and support our mission on behalf of mule deer and black-tailed deer. Program staff is composed of natural resource professionals who lead conservation work in collaboration with MDF Regional Directors, other MDF staff, MDF volunteers and MDF's conservation partners. There are three priority focus areas that the Program is currently working on: Habitat Stewardship Agreements, the Migration Corridor and Winter Range Initiative, and projects for priority herds and landscapes. Under the leadership of MDF's Director of Conservation, the Program is growing and becoming an essential partner for state and federal agencies in the implementation of important deer conservation throughout the West.

One of the prominent vehicles for completing work is through Habitat Partnership Agreements. Led by MDF's Habitat Partnership 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 currently has 25 agreements in place of which 12 were active in six states. These agreements include working with all western U.S. Forest Service Regions (USFS) and with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Colorado. Habitat projects include forest thinning, invasive conifer/juniper removal, mastication, forest clean-up of previous timber sales, meadow restoration, fence removal/modification, and general habitat work. Highlights of work in 2021 include:

- 4,700 acres of habitat enhancement
- 8 miles of fencing improvements/removal
- 1,100 acres of annual invasive plant treatments
- 2 wildlife gates installed
- 500 acres of archaeological clearances for future habitat work

MDF's Migration Corridors and Winter Range Initiative was established in 2019 to help increase MDF's capacity to implement Secretarial Order 3362 (SO3362). Two additional National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grants were received in 2020 and 2021 for a total of $2 million for the Initiative in less than three years. MDF leveraged this funding for an additional $2 million making the total financial impact of $4 million for SO3362 implementation. MDF also received $250,000 in 2021 from the Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund for the Initiative, which has led to a variety of projects in six 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, restoration of landscapes burned by wildfire, invasive juniper removal, barrier fencing, invasive weed treatments, and road crossing structures. Highlights of work in 2021 include:



- 56.5 miles of fencing improvements/removal
- 23,000 acres of annual invasive plant treatments
- 2,500 acres of habitat enhancement

Working in landscapes to benefit priority herds allows MDF to coordinate with local chapters, state project committees, and our conservation partners to identify and work in those areas where deer need the most help at the herd or landscape level. This approach helps to avoid "random acts of conservation" through small, disconnected projects and instead focuses on linking numerous efforts and funding to complete larger, more impactful projects. This work requires coordination with Regional Directors within MDF states, agency partners, landowners, and other NGOs to ensure that adequate funding is available to address needs more completely. Focusing on priority herds and landscapes can also provide MDF local chapters a way of targeting their Chapter Rewards funds and work on areas important to that chapter regardless of where the chapter is located. Highlights of work in 2021 include:

- 3,000 acres of fire restoration
- 150,000 shrubs planted
- 300 acres of habitat enhancements
- 4 miles of fencing improvements/removal

Increasing MDF's capacity through Shared Biologist Positions has allowed MDF to grow scientific staff to lead conservation projects and support the work of MDF staff and our partners. MDF currently has four shared positions (two in Arizona, one in Idaho, one in Wyoming) and we are in discussion with other state and federal agencies to establish more of these positions in 2022. Shared positions increase MDF's and the partner agency's capacity to work on deer issues in their state/region and to lead implementation of habitat and research projects above and beyond what could be done alone. As an example, one of MDF's positions is leading the efforts in Arizona on movement and migration research and is part of the Corridor Mapping Team led by the U.S. Geological Survey. Shared positions also allow for increased partnership opportunities for MDF as the relationships are already in place and trust has already been established.

MDF also supports numerous research projects that often involve collaring deer to monitor movements. We are currently helping to fund collar/movement research in New Mexico, Wyoming, and Utah.

OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

The Mule Deer Foundation and its supporters, members, and volunteers are committed to making a difference—today and for the future of these animals we treasure. The commitment of the organization to expand our reach has never been as apparent as it is today.

MDF is working to generate an influx of outdoor participants into our organization, creating a high degree of involvement in conservation activities, volunteer opportunities, and leadership development for the future of wildlife habitat and conservation. The conservation work being done demonstrates broad appeal to hunters and non-consumptive users alike. Fire mitigation efforts, water quality improvements, invasive species management, and habitat restoration are important issues to a wide range of individuals that share the spaces where we all recreate. Our work enables the organization to attract a diverse membership base, introducing a larger audience of outdoor recreationists and conservationists to the organization. MDF will continue to create opportunities to recruit new hunters and engage those lapsed hunters that seek to reenter the field by better sharing the stories that define the work of MDF.



We are developing a higher level of engaging content and information on our new website. This robust platform allows MDF to share information in a streamlined format to clearly show the breadth of work we are doing across our western landscapes. These stories and videos, and easy access to membership information, will inspire more commitment to our organization's mission.

Another area of increased focus is the use of social media allowing MDF to reach a larger audience. Over the last year, the content shared on social media channels reached more than 650,000 people and our reach will continue to grow. We are taking steps to increase social media post frequency so we can share the critical work we are doing, and we are adding capacity to support those initiatives.

MDF continues to emphasize volunteer opportunities and is working to expand ways members can participate. MDF volunteers spent time teaching firearm safety and introducing youth to hunting and the shooting sports in our M.U.L.E.Y. trailers as well as mentoring new participants as they ventured out on their first hunts. Volunteers planted sagebrush/bitterbrush in critical winter ranges, removed fencing that is a barrier to wildlife movement, and helped improve water availability for wildlife. This active involvement by passionate MDF members supports prospective hunters, engages a larger number of the hunting community, and brings lapsed hunters and conservationists back to the fold. Local MDF chapters continue to serve as the forward face of the organization in their community, enabling MDF to build long-lasting relationships and ensure that participants contribute not just to singular events, but rather to the overall vision and culture of the organization.

Increased membership and engagement will enable people to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Through the efforts of all MDF constituents over the past years, MDF has positioned itself to make an even larger impact on the landscape and tackle the hard work required to ensure the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer, and their habitat. This transformation has begun, and we hope you'll join us in achieving our mission.

LOOKING AHEAD

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Last year I shared how 2020 had been a challenging year and that 2021 would be better… and it was. Yes, 2021 was a better year, but not without its own unique challenges. As most of us know by now, when life throws us challenges it also grants us opportunities. Opportunities to learn, opportunities to teach, opportunities to do good work, and opportunities to make a difference. This is where the MDF team is at its best!

In 2021, MDF members, volunteers, sponsors, partners, staff, and other supporters pulled together to again champion our mission… Ensuring the Conservation of Mule Deer, Black-Tailed Deer and their Habitat. This support ensures the sustainability of major Conservation, Advocacy, and Outreach initiatives across the organization.

The organization's success story is your story. The organization's journey ahead is your journey.

This year, the MDF team met the ongoing challenges in our world head-on with the passion and commitment to the MDF mission we have grown so accustomed to over the years. Rather than allowing today's obstacles to hinder our efforts, we seized upon the opportunities laden in this world of uncertainty to innovate, communicate, and deliver yet again on our conservation commitment. Collectively, we continued to make a difference.

Promoting the good work of MDF also took a front seat in 2021 as witnessed by a complete redesign of our magazine, a comprehensive restructuring of our website, the planned production of a handful of dynamic short films, and several other content driven initiatives. These efforts have enabled MDF to share who we are and what we do in a more effective, comprehensive, and timely manner.

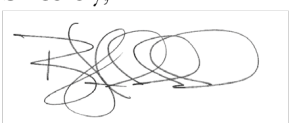
Today, MDF is actively appealing to a broader audience and we are eager to share with them the MDF success story and the journey that still awaits. As members and supporters of MDF, the organization's success story is your story. The organization's journey ahead is your journey. My ask of each of you today is to help MDF grow our audience, increase our membership, and welcome new faces to this adventure we are embarking upon.

While the sun sets on 2021 and we begin to focus on 2022, the future has never looked better for MDF. Conservation, Advocacy, and Outreach remain the time-proven and trusted pillars of our organization. MDF members, volunteers, sponsors, partners, staff, and other supporters will remain the engine that drives our success. Will 2022 have its challenges? Of course, it will. Will 2022 have its opportunities for us to make a positive difference and deliver on our mission? Yes, without a doubt, and together we will deliver yet again.

On a personal note, after almost five years at MDF I am moving on to the next chapter in my career. As I pursue this opportunity, I do so knowing that MDF's best days are yet to come. You see, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

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

Sincerely,



Brian L. Fienhold
MDF Chief Operating Officer



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