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NATIONAL DEER ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MDF is a charter member of the National Deer Alliance which was created in 2014 to be the voice of deer and the deer hunter. NDA’s mission is to ensure the future of North America’s wild deer, wildlife habitat and our hunting heritage. As a 501(c)(4) advocacy group, NDA will focus on those issues and policies at the state and federal level that impact all of us across the country who care about deer. I have the pleasure of being MDF’s representative on the NDA Board of Directors.

In December, the NDA Board selected Nick Pinizzotto as the organization’s inaugural President and CEO. Most recently, Nick was President and CEO of the U.S. Sportsmen’s Alliance and he will be a great asset to the growth of NDA. Jay McAninch, CEO of the Archery Trade Association (ATA) and Chair of the NDA Board said, “Following an exhaustive nationwide search, the NDA Board of Directors was unanimous that Nick was best suited to lead our alliance of deer organizations, state wildlife agencies and industry companies into the future. Nick’s vision and drive to take full advantage of the unique opportunity offered by the NDA is exciting. His executive management skill and proven track record made him the obvious choice.”

Nick has been a longtime whitetail hunter, but recently was bitten by the bug of chasing western mule deer. He will be attending the Western Hunting & Conservation Expo in Salt Lake City February 11-14.

I believe that NDA will be a great support and partner in helping MDF accomplish our mission, particularly with Nick at the helm. Mule deer and white-tailed deer face many of the same challenges. By joining together, we can accomplish more than separately.

To sign up for emails and current news or to learn more about the National Deer Alliance go to www.nationaldeeralliance.com. Membership in NDA is free. Members will receive two key benefits: 1) NDA members will be kept informed on key deer issues in North America on a weekly basis through email and real-time through social media and the NDA website; 2) NDA members will be able to have their voice heard by participating in NDA’s advocacy efforts.

As we begin a new year, I just wanted to take a moment to reflect back on 2015. Once again MDF grew at record levels in the number of local chapters, number of members and in funds raised for mule deer and black-tailed deer. I want to thank our many volunteers who are the backbone of MDF. From our board of directors to our state chairs and local chapter committees, MDF has the most dedicated and passionate volunteers of any wildlife conservation group. We are seeing positive results around the West in mule deer populations. The projects that MDF help fund play a big role in ensuring the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer and their habitat.

On a sad note, MDF lost a great friend and passionate conservationist when Stan Lueck, former Chairman of the MDF Board passed away in November. As Chair of the MDF Board, Stan led our organization in record-setting growth and he was instrumental in the formation of the MDF National Endowment Fund. I learned so much from Stan and appreciated his friendship. We spent many hours discussing the future direction of MDF and how to make MDF a leader among wildlife conservation groups. Stan left an outstanding legacy as a volunteer, board member and supporter of MDF – he will be missed.

MDF CEO – Miles Moretti

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Cover photo: www.samandstephzierke.com
It’s that time of year – time to get excited about coming to Salt Lake City for the Western Hunting & Conservation Expo and MDF’s Annual Convention! This is the 10th Anniversary of the Expo and this year’s event is bigger and better than ever. Sponsored once again by Ammo & More and ACI, the WHCE packs four full days – February 11 to 14 – that will be fun for the entire family. If you hadn’t planned on coming to Expo, there’s still time to make plans – this is a great opportunity to celebrate and recognize all the hard work that MDF and our volunteers do throughout the year. Here’s a preview of what you can expect.

**Expo Hall**

The Expo Hall at the 2016 Western Hunting & Conservation Expo will be the biggest yet. The Expo Hall is the centerpiece of the WHCE featuring some of the world’s finest taxidermy as well as opportunities to shop for hunting equipment and book guide services.

We added an additional 75 booths and 80,000 square feet for this year’s show, for nearly 400,000 square feet of hunting and outdoor excitement. There will be 375 vendors and attractions on the show floor with 35 new exhibitors and the majority of vendors returning from years past. Some of the top booths each year that will be back again in 2016 include Buck Knives, Cabela’s, CamoFire, Davis Tent, goHunt.com, Gunwerks, Hoyt Archery, King’s Camo and the Swift Bullet Company. In addition, the Total Archery Challenge will give attendees the chance to test out their prowess with a bow and arrow on the 3D archery course.

**Youth Wildlife Conservation Experience**

Families who bring their kids with them will have plenty of activities to keep the little ones busy. The Youth Wildlife Conservation Experience provides great opportunities for kids to learn about the outdoors and shooting sports in a controlled environment and offers many hands-on experiences for everybody. Kids get passports with a list of activities...
they can accomplish in the designated youth area and throughout the Expo Hall. Kids can explore a Sensory Safari trailer with the opportunity to touch various mounts, pelts and skulls of many different wildlife species. The Crosman tent allows kids to shoot air rifles – and to keep their targets! In addition, the M.U.L.E.Y. program and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources host many other activities and provide great information about conservation and hunting ethics. And don't forget to try your luck on the raffle to see if you can win a M.U.L.E.Y. rifle for your young hunter!

Seminars
Each day, the Western Hunting & Conservation Expo features a line-up of seminars by some of the industry’s top experts. Speakers include World Champion Elk Caller, Corey Jacobsen presenting on how to hunt rutting elk; tips for spot and stalk bowhunting for mule deer by the Heartland Bowhunters; long range shooting techniques by shooting expert Aaron Davidson; and how to slay big muleys by Muleyslayer Marc Smith. Seminars are continuing to be added and the schedule will repeat throughout Expo so make sure you head to the seminar room to pick up some ideas on how to make the 2016 hunting season your best ever!

Special Tag Drawings
The Western Hunting & Conservation Expo is well known for the high value hunting permits and special big game tags available at banquet and auction events held each day and evening – and 2016 will be no exception! 200 Utah premium, limited entry, and once-in-a-lifetime trophy hunting tags will be available by public drawing for $5 per hunt unit application fee. In addition, non-residents will have the chance to draw five once-in-a-lifetime Utah trophy tags – one each for desert bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, Shiras moose, mountain goat and bison!

Volunteer Recognition and Ladies Event
The Western Hunting & Conservation Expo is also the annual convention for MDF and we take this opportunity to recognize and appreciate all the hard work done throughout the year by our amazing volunteers. The Saturday morning Volunteer Recognition breakfast features a motivational speaker, a silent auction and awards for all the chapters and volunteers for their hours of hard work and the money that they have raised for mule deer conservation. We also partner with Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife to host a ladies' luncheon on Friday afternoon. This year's luncheon is a campfire themed "Let's Go Glamping" and this event always offers hours of fun during the silent auction, entertainment and great prizes. Ladies, wear your “glamouflage” and come glamping with us!

Evening Entertainment
After all the daytime activities on the Expo Hall floor, the real fun begins in the evenings. Each night there will be performances by top country music stars, engaging speakers and of course the fast paced auction of special tags and quality hunting and lifestyle gear – we even auction a beautiful riding and pack mule! At Thursday night's member's welcome banquet, country music star Darryl Worley will be singing for the audience. On Friday, night Taya Kyle, author, motivational speaker and wife of "American Sniper" Chris Kyle, will be welcoming the crowd before the evening auction starts and there will be a special appearance by country music icon Lee Greenwood. Finally, on Saturday night up-and-coming artist Dallas Smith will be rocking the audience. Once again, the auctions will feature a collection of Governor's hunting tags and auction permits, limited edition firearms, original artwork, and so much more – and all the money raised supports wildlife conservation!
Mule deer have long been considered an integral part of the American West – few animals better represent the freedom of the wide open spaces of western North America. The mule deer was first described in writing in a journal kept by Charles LeRaye while he was held captive in 1817 by the Sioux tribe of South Dakota. LeRaye noted that the species had remarkably large ears resembling those of a mule. Before you feel sorry for Mr. LeRaye, you should know that this entire story was later shown to be a complete and utter lie. Charles LeRaye never existed and his journal was completely fabricated using information from earlier western expeditions, including Lewis and Clark’s. Regardless of who gets credit for the first description, scientists would give it the name “Odocoileus hemionus” which means “deer that is half-mule.”

Mule deer are very adaptable as evidenced by their ability to make a living in a diversity of habitats from coastal rain forests that receive 200 inches of rain per year to the hot southwest deserts with 4 inches of annual rainfall and temperatures that exceed 100 degrees for weeks.

Oddly, black-tailed deer in the Pacific Northwest have an uncanny resemblance to hybrids between mule deer and whitetails.

Within this wide range of habitat conditions, comes a great variation in physical characteristics. The black-tailed deer living along the Pacific Coast look different than the Rocky Mountain mule deer, but are still considered merely a subspecies of mule deer.

How extinction helped North American deer
Deer were not as abundant or widespread during the early Pleistocene as they are today. The diversity and sheer abundance of other large hoofed animals at that time resulted in intense competition for food and other resources and supported a robust guild of predators. With the melting of the glaciers (8,000–11,000 years ago) mass extinctions of many large animals occurred throughout the world. Most of the large mammals that were native to North America died out in a remarkably short time period (camels, giant sloths, mastodons, saber-toothed cats, long-horned bison, and native horses). Many theories have been proposed for the cause of these extinctions but, it is most likely that the extinctions were related to large-scale habitat changes at the time. In general, forests turned
into shrublands, shrublands turned into grasslands and grasslands turned into deserts. With these landscape changes came vast changes in the distribution of the survivors. There were winners and there were losers in the game of survival. Deer were big winners because they did not come to dominate the landscape of North America until the multitude of large grazing mammals disappeared, with their predators chasing them into the abyss.

Prior to 4 million years ago, there were at least three recognizable types of deer in North America: *Navahoceros* in the mountains, *Bretzia* in the West, and the widespread, but still rare, *Odocoileus*. Only *Odocoileus* (from which mule deer, blacktails, and whitetails evolved) made it out of the Pleistocene alive and emerged as the only medium-sized member of the deer family in North America. Remarkably, fossils indistinguishable from today’s living *Odocoileus* have been found dating back nearly 4 million years. The environmental chaos of the last 2 million years had a lot to do with the incredible success of *Odocoileus*.

**Divergence and Diversification**

White-tailed deer and mule deer are closely related and come from the same *Odocoileus* stock. These two forms started to differentiate during the late Pliocene or early Pleistocene (2–6 million years ago). Several recurring glaciation events occurred during the last 2 million years and produced a complicated and poorly understood pattern of geographic barriers in the northern latitudes of North America. The most likely cause for separation and development of blacktails, mule deer and white-tailed deer was physical isolation due to Ice Age habitat changes. These large-scale changes in the distribution of forests, shrublands, and grasslands occurred through the many glacial/interglacial changes throughout the last few million years. Any one of these glacial cycles lasting 10,000 to 100,000 years could be enough to separate an eastern and western group to start them on a path of becoming two different species. The last Pleistocene glaciation (11,000−20,000 years ago) may have created the most recent separation of some deer populations to form local races we sometimes call subspecies.

By making assumptions about the rate that a species’ DNA changes due to normal random mutations, geneticists can estimate the time since two related species or subspecies separated from a common ancestor. Truthfully, there are a lot of shaky assumptions that go into estimating these times so they should be viewed with healthy skepticism. However, this does provide another way to estimate how long animals have been separated. Various attempts to estimate the time since white-tailed and mule deer split have resulted in a range of 750,000 to 3.7 million years.

The current geographic distribution of mule deer overlaps that of white-tailed deer in many places. This overlap represents what biologists call an area of “secondary contact” where the two species came back in contact after evolving in different geographical areas for a while. Along these areas of secondary contact, hybridization between white-tails and mule deer has been documented, but occurs at a low rate in local areas and currently does not represent a threat to either species.

Using fossils to unravel the complete story of deer evolution throughout the late-Pliocene/early-Pleistocene has been hampered by the rarity of deer at that time and repeated glaciations that scoured the landscape for thousands of years, destroying most evidence of early North American deer evolution. Even with fossils in hand, white-tailed deer and mule deer are difficult to distinguish without antlers from mature males, a close look at a few small specific areas of the leg bones, or by the nature of a depression in front of the eye orbits (the lacrymal fossa).
perfectly good story. With more powerful genetic analyses, scientists can tease an amazing amount of information out of the DNA contained in a deer’s cells. Each cell has a nucleus in the center that contains DNA the animal inherits from its mother (50%) and father (50%). This is called nuclear DNA (nDNA) and is the DNA we usually talk about when we think of passing traits down to the next generation. However, floating around in the cell, outside the nucleus, are little structures called “mitochondria.” Mitochondria help supply energy to the cell and they also carry a small package of DNA (mtDNA).

What is unique about mitochondrial DNA is that it is inherited only from the mother because all the mitochondria floating around in the egg produced by the female is passed on. This means the genetic information from mtDNA are passed down through generations of females like last names are usually passed down through generations of male offspring. Analyzing the nuclear DNA tells us about the parents and previous ancestors. Looking at mtDNA gives us insight into only the maternal ancestors. By analyzing both types of DNA we can learn more about the animal.

**Mitochondrial DNA**

With the lack of a strong fossil record, science has turned to genetic analysis to investigate the relationships of whitetailed and mule deer. Early genetic analyses showed that mtDNA, passed down from mother to daughter, is basically the same in mule deer and whitetails, but they are both very different from blacktails! Think about that for a minute. This odd genetic relationship was not expected because mule deer and black-tailed are the same species (different subspecies) and they are both very different in many ways from whitetails.

This early evidence spawned an alternative theory proposed by Valerius Geist that blacktails and whitetails did, indeed, split 2–3 million years ago as previously thought, but that mule deer are a relatively “new” species, resulting from the hybridization of female whitetails and male blacktails. He proposed that after the retreat of the last glaciers at the close of the Pleistocene (10,000 years ago) whitetails and blacktails again came into contact with one another and interbred. Geist acknowledged the weaknesses of this theory including the fact that hybrids are rare in nature and have a low survival rate in the wild, but perhaps the Pleistocene extinction of predators allowed more to survive.

Just as the analysis of mtDNA changed the way we thought of the mule deer’s origin, further analysis of nuclear DNA added more twists and turns in the story. In the last decade, I have collaborated with Dr. Emily Latch, now at University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee on a continent-wide genetic analysis of black-tailed and mule deer. Our work, and that of many others before us, used nuclear DNA to clearly show that mule deer and blacktails are very similar genetically and different from whitetails. This conflicts with the mtDNA analysis that grouped whitetails and mule deer together separately from blacktails. This relationship, along with their physical differences, argues against a hybrid origin of mule deer. If mule deer are hybrids of whitetails and blacktails then nDNA inherited from both parents should be intermediate, but instead mule deer and blacktails are very closely related and different than whitetails.

**Nuclear DNA**

Just looking at fossils alone caused ecologists to develop a theory that a primitive type of deer split into a western species (blacktails) and an eastern species (whitetails) 2–6 million years ago. They theorized mule deer then originated as an off-shoot of the blacktail line, becoming larger and more elaborate in antlers and body markings as they spread out into the fertile habitat left when the glaciers melted. Given the information at hand, it made for a perfectly good story.

**Molecules provide insights about the past**

More information is always good, but it doesn’t always make for a clearer picture and sometimes it even ruins a
tails were trapped along the ice-free coastal areas in Washington and Oregon. After the ice melted and glaciers receded, mule deer and blacktails expanded their ranges and met once again along their current points of contact in the Pacific Northwest. The isolation of these two types of deer during the Ice Age accounts for their physical and genetic differences.

Looking at the pattern of genetic diversity, we found very little difference among mule deer populations throughout the West because they expanded rapidly out of the Southwest after the glaciers melted. However, the mule deer populations are all very different from the western populations of blacktails that were isolated separately along the ice-free coastal areas.

Our research did not include whitetails, but they apparently didn't change much through time. Florida is well-known for its Pleistocene whitetail fossils that are indistinguishable from today's whitetail skulls and skeletons. White-tailed deer most likely spent the last Ice Age in the unglaciated areas of east-central and southeastern United States.

Deciphering mule deer origins

There is no doubt that a mule deer/blacktail form split off from whitetails early in the diversification of North American deer. What is less clear is how we arrived at the complex physical and genetic relationships we see in black-tailed deer and mule deer compared to the whitetail.

The Pacific coastal areas did serve as ice-free refuges that held populations of early western deer through many repeated glaciations and subsequent warm periods. With each new wave of glaciers, coastal deer were isolated separately from mule deer. Because of their relatively small populations, they changed more rapidly through what geneticists call genetic drift and founder effect. The mtDNA of mule deer and blacktails differ from each other at a level that most species differ (rather than the subspecies they are). This kind of repeated isolation in coastal areas could account for these large genetic differences in mtDNA.

The fact that whitetails and mule deer are running on basically the same mtDNA, so different from blacktails, is a harder one to explain. Geist's theory of a hybrid origin of mule deer is consistent with this mtDNA relationship, but it is hard to imagine the feeble hybrid offspring of blacktail bucks and whitetail does being created at a zone of contact and then spreading successfully across the entire West and not having evidence of their mothers in their nuclear genes.

Mule deer do not look like a cross between a blacktail and a whitetail. In fact, curiously enough, blacktails look very much like true whitetail X mule deer hybrids. Also, we know that most hybridization events occur from more aggressive male whitetails breeding passive female black-tailed or mule deer. Hybrid offspring of these two species usually stay in mule deer groups with their mothers and have a greater probability of later breeding with mule deer and passing on their mule deer (not whitetail) mtDNA. To be derived from blacktail fathers and whitetail mothers, the hybrid species (mule deer) would have to also be separated from breeding with both parental species for a while in order to become a new type of deer without blending back into one or the other species.

Considering these behavioral and physical relationships between these three forms of deer, the direction of hybridization, and low survival of hybrids, it is difficult to envision this scenario producing mule deer. It is well-known that hybridization can produce new species of insects and plants, but this is rare in mammals.

One distinct possibility to explain the patterns we see is called “lineage sorting” whereby not-so-closely related species end up with the same mtDNA through chance over long periods of time. In any event, despite having different mtDNA, blacktails and mule deer are genetically close to each other, and a different species from whitetails.

These are all interesting scenarios to ponder, but it doesn’t matter much from whence they came, I am just glad they are here. The importance of black-tailed and mule deer in the West goes far beyond their tiny cells or some twisted and confusing DNA molecule. The cells I am most interested in are the muscle cells where enough of them are grouped together to form a backstrap steak.
MULE DEER SHED ANTLER HUNTING

OVERVIEW
Shed antler hunting has become an increasingly popular activity as a form of recreation and a highly competitive business enterprise. Antlers are commonly used for decorative pieces, furniture, crafts, medicinal purposes, and even pet chews. Collecting antlers has even developed into a competitive sport among recreational shed antler hunters. Hunting “sheds” generally occurs during the critical winter period when mule deer are most physiologically stressed and are on a sub-optimal diet. During this period, mule deer limit physical activity and movements to reduce weight loss and increase their chances of survival until vegetation green-up in the spring.

CONSIDERATIONS
In parts of the West, antler hunting occurs on a daily basis beginning in November with photographers or people scouting big bucks and their antlers and ending in June with shed antler collection. Most “shed hunting” activities occur during winter and early spring when deer are concentrated on crucial winter ranges. Because of the popularity of mule deer antlers, increasing numbers of collectors are taking to the field earlier in the year during and immediately after antlers are shed to collect the largest antlers ahead of others. Antler hunters primarily frequent bare ridge tops and the open south facing slopes in January and February. This activity often displaces deer from preferred habitats into deep snow and lower quality habitats for the much of the winter. Survival is likely reduced by the extreme levels of disturbance associated with these activities.

Other disturbances associated with antler hunting also have an impact. Shed antler hunters often operate off-road vehicles (ORVs) and snowmobiles off established roads searching for antlers. This is usually illegal and intensifies the disturbance to wintering mule deer. In some cases, disturbance includes chasing deer over fences hoping antlers fall off as the buck jumps the fence. Recently, shed antler hunters are employing drones to scout big bucks and for antlers already shed. While others are utilizing “antler traps” that essentially lure bucks into bait sites rigged with wires, ropes or other apparatus to snag antlers and knock them off. In other instances, some shed antler hunters have been employing the use of domestic dogs trained to find and retrieve shed antlers. Some antler hunters have used dogs to chase deer and pick up antlers as they fall off while the deer is running. Studies have shown when humans are accompanied by dogs, ungulates show heightened flight (avoidance) responses, longer avoidance and flight distances, and longer periods of displacement from preferred habitats. This is likely due to mule deer associating domestic dogs with their natural canid predators.
In addition to mule deer disturbance, antler hunting and associated use of vehicles, especially ORVs, has caused significant habitat and resource damage. Most of the actual antler collection occurs in spring when snowpack is melting and spring rains or snows occur rendering the countryside very wet, muddy, and susceptible to damage by surface disturbing activities including off-road motorized vehicle use.

Shed antler hunting statutes and regulations have been implemented in some states, but have proven controversial, difficult to enforce, and ineffective. Educational campaigns may prove more valuable in the long-term so people recognize the consequences of their actions. Well designed regulations can play an important role in influencing human behavior when coupled with information on the negative effects of shed antler hunting.

**RESPONSIBLE SHED ANTLER HUNTING**

Mule deer antlers elicit a sense of admiration and curiosity for many. As a result, shed antler hunting has increased in popularity among recreationists, wildlife enthusiasts, sportsmen, and others. Collecting shed antlers may increase appreciation for mule deer and their habitats and provide a quality outdoor experience for those who ethically participate in the activity. However, shed antler hunting has the potential to stress or displace deer. The following efforts should be made while in the field to reduce the negative impact of this activity on mule deer:

- Do not chase or harass mule deer or other wildlife – winter is the most critical time for mule deer survival;
- Wait until deer have left the winter range to collect shed antlers; and
- Use all vehicles, such as ORVs, responsibly and legally and only on roads or trails open to such use.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Shed antler hunting is an engaging and rewarding outdoor recreation opportunity for many, but it can have unintended consequences on mule deer populations. Mule deer are susceptible to stress during winter because of the harsh conditions and reduced available habitat. Stress associated with movement and displacement of mule deer by shed antler hunters adds to their physiological strain and potentially reduces their survival to spring. This is particularly pronounced when motorized vehicles are used to pursue wildlife. Some states and federal agencies have statutes and regulations to protect wintering mule deer and other wildlife but have had limited success. Certainly the negative consequences of shed antler hunting can, and should, be reduced to ensure this recreation opportunity does not affect overwintering mule deer and other wildlife. Education is needed to help ensure the public engages in this activity in an ethical, safe, and compatible fashion.

More information on mule deer can be found at [www.muledeerworkinggroup.com](http://www.muledeerworkinggroup.com)
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The fire crackled and warmed our four backs as we sat at our favorite glassing spot scouring for good bucks in the desert expanse below. The sun was just rising and the sagebrush colors were slowly turning from the low gray morning light to brilliant greens, reds and browns. Prime time, as we call it, was upon us and our eyes worked the glass about a mile out for any small glimpse of a deer part.

"I got bucks," my buddy Jason said as he peered through a Nikon spotting scope.

"Where? Any size?" I replied.

"To the right about a mile out, on that scab rock flat, decent four point and a small three."

As I swung the Swarovski scope that way I picked up two more bucks on the way. "I've got a couple more bucks," I replied. "Ooo... and one is a nice, tall four point."

As we watched all the bucks, we realized they were less than 1,000 yards from each other and were slowly feeding toward each other. We kept our glass glued on them for the next hour. They ended up feeding within 400 yards of each other before bedding down on the sagebrush mahogany flat. Jason and I left our friends, Jake Seck and Dale Kessler, at our glassing spot. We quickly gathered our gear and cut the distance to a closer point to check the wind and make a game plan. Once we figured out the wind, we dropped our packs and "old manned up" as we call it, painting our faces for the stalk ahead. We learned the phrase from an old timer out hunting one year and it stuck. We gave each other a fist bump for good luck and headed out on our separate ways. That's when the fun began......

By Jon Fuller and Jason Cantrell
It was now high noon on my wrist watch and it was 70 yards to the tree I was heading towards. The sun was beating down on my face and it was hot. I felt as if I was getting sunburnt right through all of that face paint! As I watched the bucks like a hawk, I moved one inch at a time, sometimes it felt like a leap, when the wind was just right and the bucks had their heads turned. I finally made it to the second tree and ranged the small buck at 80 yards.

“What kind of hunter am I?” I thought, “I have got to get at least 20 more yards.” I spotted a badger hole and decided to go there, proceeding slowly and cautiously. I got to the hole; it almost felt like I was in a bunker for a war. I ranged the bucks at 64 yards. I felt very comfortable on this spot and with that short distance. So I waited and I looked at my watch – 1:03 p.m. When I looked up, the small buck was up! My pin was set. The big buck got restless, stood up and turned to walk the direction of Jon. I drew back knowing it was now or never. The buck quartered away and I set my pin on the last rib on his left side. My arrow was in flight, and I watched it disappear right where I sent it. The buck barely flinched, started walking toward Jon and went about 65 yards before it disappeared. I didn't see him drop but the small buck was still there.

I crouched down and got on the radio, “Dale, did you see that?”

**Jason's stalk:**
After I watched Jon disappear around the bottom of the hill, I slowly started to creep through the sagebrush. I was only about 150 yards from the three bucks I was stalking and wanted to get a better view as to exactly where they had bedded down. Jon had twice the amount of ground to cover, so I decided at that time it was going to be slow and steady if we wanted both of these bucks on the ground. Not even 65 yards into my slow stalk, I looked to the west and saw a sage grouse 25 yards away. I thought to myself, “this guy is going to ruin this.”

As I crept through the dry, crackly grass, I kept a close eye on my new friend. I ranged the tree, 50 yards. At this point I still didn't know if the bucks were on the other side of it or not, so I had to be sure and glass as often as possible. I looked to my right and the grouse was still there, I and told myself to keep going. I got to 30 yards and what do you know? Yup!!! The darn thing got up and flew right by the main tree. I sank to the ground and after two or three minutes, I looked up… No bucks!!! I hoped that maybe they were just past that tree and that I got lucky.

The next 30 yards to the tree seemed to take forever, but once I got there I glassed through the binoculars and saw antlers in the brush about 130 yards away. Yes, bedded still!!! There were two small junipers between them and I, and I had to creep 25 yards to the east if I wanted to keep the trees between us. As I rounded the big juniper to start in, I looked to the south and caught a glimpse of Jon slithering through the mahogany. Oh Man, I thought, this is awesome.

**Jon's stalk:**
As I left Jason, I dipped into a small dry creek bed to the south and skirted around the flat where all the bucks were bedded. I had to take extra time and care in checking the wind to make sure it wasn't carrying my scent to not only the bucks I was after but towards Jason's bucks as well. Due to the wind, I wasn't able to do my initial stalk that I had planned when we were a mile away at our glassing tree. I ended up having to circle way around to the south of both pairs of bucks so they wouldn't wind me. As I circled, I had to keep peeking up out of the creek bed just enough to keep both pairs of bucks located and my landmarks in place. There was a group of mahogany that extended out toward the bucks I was after and that was the point of entry I was going to use into the flat.

I entered the small mahogany patch and located the mahogany I thought the bucks had bedded under. I sat down in the shade and made a game plan for my final approach. The wind was coming...
perfect in my direction so there was no problem there. The problem was the very little amount of sagebrush cover between me and the bedded bucks. I found a small depression that would help me move into position for about a 30-yard shot, if I could make it there. I then took off my boots and put on my sneaking socks to be extremely quiet. I ranged the mahogany they were under and I was 90 yards away. I snuck forward, waiting for bursts of wind to deaden the noise as I crawled over small, dead sagebrush. I don’t know how many times I got caught halfway over a bush in an odd position on only two or three limbs just praying for another burst of wind so I could finish my move over the bush. After about 45 minutes of slow progress, I ranged the tree again – I was now 60 yards and closing. As I brought my rangefinder down, I caught movement under the tree as the small buck stood up. I froze and watched as the buck moved into the heavy shade of the tree dug a new bed and laid back down.

Perfect!!! I wasn’t 100 percent sure which tree they were under until then. I kept on my slithering, slow, painfully hot stalk. I focused on stalking for another hour or so and then found a good stopping point to rest and check the bucks. As I rose up to look over the sagebrush, I caught sight of the big buck’s antlers. I rose just enough to range the buck and slowly slunk back down below the small sage; my rangefinder read 44 yards. I slowed even more in my stalk, keeping the buck’s antler tips and my final spot in view as I crawled along.

I reached my final stalking point at 12:30 p.m. and it was hot. I slowly ranged all the shooting lanes on either side of the buck and the waiting game began. I watched as the buck flicked his head to and fro to keep flies away and occasionally reached back to scratch his hindquarter with his antlers. The mahogany the buck had chosen to bed under was shaped like an umbrella and the buck would have to clear either side of the tree for me to have a shot; except for one small hole located by the small buck. My shooting lanes were anywhere from 30 yards out to 50 depending on which way the buck went. I figured he would go back towards the smaller buck so I positioned myself accordingly.

Slowly the buck’s antlers started to soak up the sun’s hot rays, I knew it wouldn’t be long and the sun would be on him. It wasn’t a half hour later and the buck slowly stood and walked under the tree toward the smaller buck. I waited for his head to go behind the trunk of the tree and I raised up on my knees and drew my bow. As he kept slowly moving, I knew I had no shot on my knees so I slowly stood up as he entered the only shooting lane I had. He stopped broadside in the pie plate size opening 30 yards away under the mahogany tree and looked the other way. I picked a small spot on the deer with my sight and sent the arrow, swack!!! The two bucks exploded out the other side of the tree and then I caught a glimpse of only the smaller buck bounding away.

I hustled back to my boots and got on my radio, “Dale, did you see that?” Dale replied, “No, what happened?” “Big buck down!!! Have you heard from Jason?” I said.

“No way,” Jason replied, “that’s awesome!”

“Come on over and let’s find this buck,” I told him.

To which Jason replied, “Well aren’t you going to come help me find mine first???”

Two great bucks taken a half hour apart, 400 yards from one another with our bows, we just had to drag one to another for an unbelievable picture. It was a double to remember that is for sure!!! Big thanks to Dale Kessler and Jake Seck for helping us butcher and pack out our deer.

Dubbed “the Glassing Tree,” proved to be a great spot to sit, glass and pattern these bucks from a safe distance. We piled the rocks for seats and started a nice fire for those cold crisp mornings.
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Before jumping into the news on Utah, I wanted to take a minute and introduce myself. My name is Jeremy Anderson I was hired as the regional director for Utah in September. I was honored and a bit taken aback to have the chance to do my dream job. Not many of us get to earn a living, support a family, and wake up with a smile on their face about their job. I love it so much that in the last three years I have balanced a full time job and volunteered as state chair for the Mule Deer Foundation in Utah. I have been blessed to have an amazing wife who supported me giving up my free time and family time to attend fundraising banquets, conservation projects, and meeting with other volunteers to help them improve their chapters. Although I had not been a part of the organization as long as many of the great volunteers before me, I felt the need to get more involved with all of these fine people.

To be part of an organization like MDF makes a person proud of what they are doing. I love the fact that I can see the fruits of our labor with my own eyes. Starting out as a committee member of the Utah County Chapter and eventually co-chairing the chapter allowed me to see how the funds we raised are used for mule deer habitat. Being a part of such a passionate committee really kept me on my toes and wanting to do more and do it more efficiently. Our long time Chapter Chair Nate Brandon and Project Coordinator Darren West took it very seriously and wanted to do whatever we could as a chapter to improve the mule deer habitat. With that passion we were recognized by Field & Stream’s Hero for a Day program in 2014. When I was asked to be the state chair, it opened my eyes to all the other passionate committee members across the state. I just knew this is something I had to be part of for as long as the Foundation would have me.

The passion I have for mule deer is much like any of you reading this. As a little boy, I looked forward to the annual deer hunt and being able to go out with my family and friends. Before I was old enough to hunt with the big boys, I would wait and wait for them to return hoping to see a big buck sticking out from the back of a truck. I was very rarely disappointed. I remember the times when coming back with a nice four point was not that big of a surprise. I was thrilled to finally be able to take my first mule deer at the age of 14. It was an absolute trophy to me. I believe the 2 point had an outside spread of 9 ½” – obviously a young buck, but still a trophy as a first year hunter.

I also remember when the deer camps began to produce fewer and smaller bucks. I guess at that young age I didn’t realize that the mule deer were actually decreasing in numbers and that things would get significantly worse before they got better. At that point in my life, I had no idea that some 15 years later I would be part of an organization that would be doing all they could to ensure the conservation and habitat for mule deer. Will things ever be like they were so many years ago? It is a question we all hear a lot. Most of the time you will hear that things are not like they were when our grandpas were hunting. And I would tend to agree with that. Highway mortality, urbanization, and predator kills are working against the mule deer. But not doing anything about it could have a much worse result than we can imagine.
I use the word passion a lot when speaking of the Foundation. I think where I first saw it was from my good friend and mentor, Mike Laughter. Mike had been the RD for Utah for many years growing strong chapters throughout the state. I learned so many things from Mike over the years being on the High Desert Leadership Team and being his state chair. I continue to learn from him daily. When he was promoted to director of field operations and I was hired on to take his position, he then became my boss. I can only hope that people out there will have a boss that is as passionate about their trade as Mike.

I was sold on MDF before knowing Mike closely, but he definitely was the one that put me over the top. He made it so you wanted to be part of his crew, you wanted to be part of the group that was making a difference. He has left the state in great shape and is now concentrating more on a national level and it is up to me to keep the train rolling. Mike had a great saying that I think about often, "Either shovel coal, or get off the train."

I take this personally, if I am not leading correctly I will have no one to help shovel with me.

I have a very strong backing from members of the High Desert Leadership Team, chapter chairs, and committee members that humble me. Even though many of them were so involved due to Mike’s passion, they are carrying that over into my tenure. Leading the volunteers is State Chair Justin Whittier. I asked Justin to be the state chair for Utah because of his knowledge about mule deer and his commitment to keep them conserved for our youth. Justin has a knack for leading in anything he does and I feel he is a great addition to the MDF family. High Desert Leadership Team Chairman Shawn Elton has many of the same qualities as Justin, however he is a great guy to keep us all grounded and work on the task at hand. Shawn has been and will continue to be a great leader for the state and I expect nothing less. Both of these guys have been traveling with Mike and I for the last two years all over the state keeping the finances straight along with many other duties. I can’t think of two better guys to go into battle with. Katie Gourdin, chapter chair and High Desert Leadership Team member for the Bear River Chapter from Logan, has been helping Mike and I for years as well and I know she is “all in” for the upcoming season. Katie is the type of person that when you need help you don’t even need to ask for it. She gives so much of herself and she has an amazing family that backs her passion and that is always there to help as well.

I have appointed a new volunteer position to Utah that I feel will help us statewide. The conservation project coordinator will help with all chapters in planning, funding, strategizing, and getting the volunteer base to get the work done. I have had the pleasure to work with Darren West with the UCC chapter for so many years he was a no brainer for this position. He has been a true asset to UCC with his knowledge of the Utah Division of Wildlife and other organizations across the state allowing him to really pinpoint mule deer projects that will make a difference for our future. He has helped with other chapters in the last couple years going through the red tape and funding issues and I felt like he was too good to keep to one chapter. Darren will be at the Utah chapters’ disposal for help, information, and how to get a project that reflects the mission statement of MDF started and completed.

Looking forward to 2016, I am excited to see how the 14 different state chapters grow. We have chapters that are well established that are the backbone of Utah. There are too many to single out, but these folks have been around for a very long time and still continue to give up their personal time to work towards the MDF mission. Those chapters continue to keep us highly efficient and raise money for all the conservation projects they want to do. We have up-and-coming chapters with great leadership like Clark Ungerman from Price leading our San Rafael Chapter and Maryanna Zimmerman from Moab running the Canyonlands Chapter. We look for big things to come out of our southeastern chapters. They both look forward to growing their chapter and committee as well as doing projects that will benefit their geographical area.

We have new leadership in some committees and I am excited to see how they top last year. People like Chapter Chair McKennan Hansen from the Cedar Breaks Chapter in Cedar City who has really brought a new excitement about MDF to that area. Co-Chapter Chair Gabrin Ekker is getting more involved in our Richfield Monroe Chapter and he is already talking to me about conservation projects that are important to the people of that area.
In our spring/summer season here in Utah we were able to complete many projects that benefited mule deer statewide as well as local chapters doing their own projects. The West Desert Chapter took on a massive project that was funded by a local Tooele County company, Cargill, where they installed and repaired wildlife guzzlers that were damaged by the Stansbury fire; they also improved mule deer habitat in the West Desert. UCC kept rolling full steam with four guzzler projects in the Vernon area. Along with that, they did multiple other projects in and around Utah County. Perhaps the biggest is still the project they took on last year adopting the Santaquin Wildlife Management Area and helping with the seeding of plants that are crucial to the mule deer diet. During these projects, teams also helped restore fencing and gates that will close off crucial wintering areas for the deer.

One of the things I am most proud of is the collaboration between MDF chapters, other sportsmen’s groups, state employees, dedicated hunters, and mule deer enthusiasts to coordinate the Urban Deer Relocation program. Our Weber Davis chapter took a lead role in this venture. MDF purchased an enclosed urban deer transport trailer to help remove mule deer from urbanized areas and relocate them to different parts of the state that could use the increase in deer numbers. The initial counts are a success with 211 deer captured and relocated from the Bountiful area with a better than 50 percent survival rate on the collared animals. Early studies show that the survival rate will increase the more years this is done; year two will be better than year one, year three will be better than year two and so on. The alternative could have been much worse with losses through highway mortality or being euthanized. Another success from this is that at the time of the study four deer were harvested to public hunters – to me, personally, this was a successful venture.

I am hoping you all got a chance to get out in the mountains this summer, fall and winter whether it be hunting, camping or just getting yourself out of the city. I hope you all noticed the same thing that many other people have reported – more deer, more mature deer, and much more successful hunting numbers. The DWR had some great reports of success rates and deer numbers this year. Certainly weather, state agencies, mule deer working groups, other sportsmen’s groups and you the outdoorsman along with Mule Deer Foundation made a big difference in growing mule deer numbers. I think that solidifies my earlier point, to do nothing will only have catastrophic results. You the hunter, you the outdoorsman, you the MDF supporter can make the difference. It will not be overnight, but we will get there together.

I look forward to seeing many of you this year during our banquet season. Bring a friend and introduce them to the passion you and I share.
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One of the most exciting things about the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo (WHCE) and the Mule Deer Foundation’s National Convention are the auctions on Friday afternoon, Friday evening and Saturday evening. During these spectacular events, several big game tags from all over the world are auctioned off raising millions of dollars each year for wildlife conservation. These auctions would not be possible without a group of volunteer “ring men” that help the auctioneer spot the highest bidder. One of these “ring men” is a gentleman from Wyoming, and the Expo auctions would not be the same without the charisma and excitement that Jerry Galles brings.

For decades, Jerry has poured his heart and soul into supporting wildlife conservation. He has given his all to many different non-profit groups including the Mule Deer Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Foundation and the Old West Invitational Turkey Shoot. In addition, Jerry serves on the Natrona County Land Use Committee, leads the Governor’s Big Game License Coalition, and is a former Chairman of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

In November, Jerry was inducted into the Wyoming Outdoor Hall of Fame. He joins a staggering list of individuals who made significant, lasting, lifetime contributions to the conservation of Wyoming’s Outdoor Heritage. A dinner was held in Cody at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West to honor the recent inductees and I had the privilege to join Jerry and his family as he accepted this honor.

A little about Jerry – as a young child he made the outdoors, hunting, fishing and wildlife stewardship a big part of his life and he has been a lifelong learner. He has developed experience and understanding about habitat, migration, herd dynamics, the importance of hunting regulation and land use. He has been and continues to be a participant in making wildlife conservation work by seeking allies, fundraising and engaging with the general public.

Jerry’s background and abilities contributed to him playing an instrumental role in several major wildlife management efforts. For instance, he helped craft and pass a policy that led to the gray wolf being removed from the endangered species list. Similarly, he was a part of Wyoming’s leadership on sage grouse management and grizzly bear recovery.

Throughout his life, and especially as a Game and Fish Commissioner, Jerry put a special emphasis on ethical hunting practices. Above all he has made those practices part of his life and has passed it on to many others, starting with his daughters who are also passionate about the outdoors. His son-in-law Warren joins him every year in helping at the auctions. It’s a great way for them to spend a few days together without the girls and strengthen their family bond.

Jerry Galles is a protector of wildlife in Wyoming. His involvement in conservation and his enthusiasm and care for this heritage is a trait we should all strive to emulate. I know his dedication and example are instrumental in recruiting future leaders and stewards of wildlife in Wyoming; I am honored to call him my friend and look forward to learning all I can from his leadership. Congratulations to Jerry!
As the 2015 state legislative sessions wrapped up, bipartisan sportsmen-legislators from across the country gathered in Manchester, Vermont for the 12th Annual National Assembly of Sportsmen’s Caucuses (NASC) Sportsman-Legislator Summit. Guided by an Executive Council and coordinated by the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation (CSF), NASC is comprised of state legislative sportsmen’s caucuses in 48 states, and includes more than 2,000 legislators.

Throughout the year, CSF’s States Program Team collaborates with the caucuses, planning policy forums and briefings to inform and educate members of the states’ legislatures on pertinent hunting, fishing and conservation issues within their states and regions.

Toward the end of each year, hundreds of legislators and representatives from sportsmen’s conservation organizations gather to reflect on successes and challenges from throughout the year and discuss the sportsmen’s conservation agenda for the upcoming legislative sessions. The 12th Annual Summit covered: Lead Ammunition Bans; Rebranding Hunting and Angling to the Public; Wildlife Councils for Public Education; Habitat Management on Public Lands; Anti-Hunters’ New Focus; Chronic Wasting Disease; Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation; Right to Hunt and Fish Constitutional Amendments; Challenges for America’s Anglers; Wildlife Trapping Issues and much more.

NASC complements the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus (CSC) and Governors Sportsmen’s Caucus (GSC), extending the voice of sportsmen and women from Washington, DC across the country. As many policy decisions related to land access, conservation projects and hunting and fishing regulations are made at the state level, the state sportsmen’s caucuses have proven to be more important than ever in representing America’s 37.4 million hunters and anglers.

In addition to spending several days dedicated to hunting, angling, recreational shooting and trapping policy information, the NASC Executive Council was announced for the upcoming year. Elected by their peers to lead the charge for the nation’s sportsmen and women, the 2016 Council includes: President Sen. Robin Webb (KY), Vice President Rep. Brandon Phelps (IL), Secretary Rep. Mark Neuman (AK), Sen. Mike Green (MI), Sen. Bill Heath (GA), Del. Wendell Beitzel (MD), Rep. Patrick Brennan (VT), Rep. Sal Esquivel (OR), Rep. Herb Frierson (MS), Rep. Jeff Goley (NH), Rep. Bill Rehm (NM), Rep. Brian White (SC); and alternate members: Rep. Linda Black (MO) and Sen. Pam Roach (WA).

By encouraging your state legislator to join the state’s legislative sportsmen’s caucus, the NASC network can continue to grow stronger and better represent the hunting and angling community.

To learn more about sportsmen’s policies at the federal and state level, visit sportsmenslink.org, and subscribe to CSF’s newsletter.
The Mule Deer Foundation would like to thank all hunters in concluding the 2015 hunting season. Whether you filled your tag or simply enjoyed some great family time while hunting we want to thank each of you for being hunters. MDF acknowledges regulated hunting as a viable management component and is committed to recruitment and retention of youth into the shooting sports and conservation. Together we can continue to enhance habitat, stop poachers from stealing our wildlife, introduce new hunters to our outdoor heritage and stand and be proud of being a hunter.

Of all places to come across a mule deer carcass, Michigan would be near the bottom of the list. Late in November, the MI Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had several calls about a male mule deer lying dead on the side of the road. They responded and sure enough there was a male mule deer with its antlers removed and it was even field dressed lying on the side of the road.

They investigated and found that its cause of death was via a vehicle accident. Initial concerns with the possibilities of this deer being positive for CWD concerned the DWR Officers. After tests were run, the deer came back being negative for any CWD. But having a mule deer dropped in its non-native area still raises some concern with the officials trying to keep the CWD out of the native deer populations in Michigan. The DNR in Michigan reminded its resident hunters and anybody traveling to the state that there are laws in place for importation of harvested animals from CWD positive states to keep our herds safe.

As anybody is planning a hunt out of state for next year, please double check the regulations for importing and exporting wildlife harvested that come from a state that is positive for CWD or any other potential diseases. You can find this information from each State Wildlife Agency.

MDF is sad to have learned of the passing of one of our MDF family. Former chairman of the MDF Board of Directors, Stan Lueck from Colorado passed away at the end of November and will be missed by everyone in the conservation community. Stan was passionate about wildlife and took the time to work with the Mule Deer Foundation and other wildlife conservation organizations to give back to wildlife. Stan left a legacy for future generations. He helped create MDF’s Chapter Reward program and helped establish the MDF National Endowment fund.

The Mule Deer Foundation is recognized with a GoldStar rating, the highest rating, on GuideStar.com. GuideStar is a website that is dedicated to providing information to potential donors on transparency, enabling donors to make good decisions with their donations and encouraging charitable giving. A Gold Star rating is awarded to those nonprofits who adhere to the highest standards of transparency and management.
MDF announced earlier this fall that it has promoted two staff members to leadership positions within the organization. Jon Zinnel, former youth programs coordinator, has been promoted to director of operations at the MDF national headquarters in Salt Lake City. Mike Laughter, Utah regional director and assistant director of field operations has been appointed as director of field operations and will be overseeing all of the organization’s regional staff.

In his new position as director of operations, Zinnel will be overseeing day-to-day operations of the organization including membership, marketing efforts, the MDF magazine, and more. He will also be working closely with regional operations to ensure consistency between headquarters operations and field activities.

Laughter’s relationship with MDF began through volunteer leadership roles with the Ogden Chapter and later becoming the Utah regional director, a position he held for the last twelve years. As director of field operations, Laughter will work closely with regional staff on fundraising and development in their regions.

You can reach Jon Zinnel at jonz@muledeer.org or 801-973-3940 and Mike Laughter at mlaughter@muledeer.org or 801-391-0567.

The National Deer Alliance (NDA) recently announced Nick Pinizzotto as its first President and CEO. The Mule Deer Foundation is a founding member of NDA and Miles Moretti, President and CEO of MDF also sits on the board.

“We couldn’t have picked a more professional individual whose passion for deer and deer hunting will drive NDA to accomplishing great things for deer. We look forward to working closely with Nick and NDA on mule deer and black-tailed deer issues in the West,” Says Miles Moretti. MDF President and CEO

MDF congratulates Nick on his appointment to President of NDA and looks forward to working with him on deer issues.
As many of you know BUCK Knives has been a staple in the banquet package and this year is no different. As history shows us, most of the blades were made by blacksmiths over an anvil and flames. This is much the same for Buck Knives, when this passion began in 1902 with young apprentice blacksmith, Hoyt Buck. He was 13 at the time, but he felt there must be a better way to hold an edge longer, as the farmers were constantly coming back to him for sharpening.

In 1947, Hoyt convinced his son Al to quit his job and get into the knife making business. They had a 10x12 lean-to with the same equipment he purchased in Idaho. H.H. Buck & Son was formed.

The work and dedication of these two men led to the creation of one of the most famous knife companies in the world. Buck Knives is now a fourth generation family owned business that utilizes state-of-the-art technology to design and develop some of the best blades in the marketplace.

1964 was the breakthrough year, when Al created the 110 Folding Hunter. The 110's sturdy design and solid locking mechanism revolutionized the knife industry and put Buck on the map. Now located in Post Falls, Idaho, Buck Knives makes over 90 percent of their products at their one facility, carries well over 200 different types of knives in their product line and produces about 6,000 knives per day. Each knife is backed with a famous Forever Warranty and will be fixed or replaced at no charge to the customer.

The days of the anvil and flame are long gone, but much work and attention to detail is put into each knife. Even though the processes have changed over the years, the end result is the same, to bring you a blade you can rely on.

Buck Knives has a history that many of us have followed over the years and will continue to follow for many more.

2016 MDF Banquet Package

Each year the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) reaches out to our supporters and partners to get three items that will be customized for the current banquet year. We want to highlight these amazing partners and give you a look at what you can expect to see at your local banquet/fundraiser for 2016.

THE OPEN SEASON #546 FOLDER HAS BEEN CHOSEN AS THE 2016 MDF BANQUET KNIFE.

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Weatherby® is one of the hunting/shooting household names, as it should be and MDF is proud to announce that Weatherby® has been chosen to be our 2016 Gun of the Year.

The history of Weatherby® began in the mid-1940s when a young cartridge “wildcatter” named Roy Weatherby set out to change the world of firearm performance. Contrary to then-popular thinking (heavy bullets pushed at slow speeds), Roy believed that lightweight bullets traveling at super high speeds provided the best combination for one-shot kills. Based upon that philosophy, he spent the next decade developing the high-powered Weatherby Magnum cartridges for which the company is known today (.224, .240, .257, .270, 7mm, .300, .30-378, .340, .338-378, .375, .378, .416 and .460).

Throughout that period, Roy was also producing or re-chambering rifles designed specifically to accommodate his super-charged ammunition. However in 1957, Roy would again catch the attention of the shooting and hunting world with a proprietary action that is today recognized around the world as the Mark V®.

The foundation for the Mark V® was the need for a stronger, safer action, able to withstand tremendous pressure, and the possibility of blown primers and ruptured case heads (due to the unpredictability of early hand loaded and wildcat cartridges). After nearly a half century of proven performance, the Mark V® continues to be known as the world’s strongest bolt action.

The Weatherby lineage continued in 1983 when Roy’s son, Ed Weatherby, assumed the leadership mantle of the company.

The innovation and pacesetting performance associated with the Weatherby name spans 70 years. Yet, while our place in history is firmly established, it is the prospects for the future that shine brightest of all.

The Weatherby® Mark V® Deluxe chambered in 300 WBY Magnum will be the gun that all banquet attendees will be striving to add to their gun collection.

This year’s addition, as seen in the sketch above, features two of the bucks finding the remains of their fallen brother, a huge double drop horned buck. Whether the death came from old age, winter kill, or a cougar attack, the remaining two bucks are on full alert from the smell of death in the air. Also featured in the painting is a hidden porcupine who has also stumbled upon this treasured rack of antlers, full of rich calcium in the circle of life. Imagine the shed hunters finding this rack, wishing they’d beaten the porcupine to the find.

For the third and final in the series, Tom is thinking of taking the “Generations” theme a bit further to include the hunter’s part of the story. Tom said he’s thinking of having a father and son in the scene harvesting one of the remaining trophy bucks and as they approach the fallen deer, they see the remaining live buck looking back at them from a high ridge. In most hunters’ lives, hunting is a family affair.

“Hunting season was always a treasured time of year for me and my brothers,” Tom stated. “My father taught us all gun safety, proper hunter’s ethics and a respect for wildlife. My dad was taught by his father to hunt starting out in northeastern Utah and ending up in southeastern Idaho, where I was raised.”

Tom now resides in Idaho Falls, Idaho with his wife and two daughters. Tom was one of the very first MDF Artists of the Year and has contributed continuously throughout the years to the MDF cause.

When you think of fine wildlife art, how can Tom Mansanarez not be at the top of the list? Tom is a premier wildlife artist and MDF is happy to have him on an exciting three year project for us.

For the 2016 “Artist of the Year” print, Tom Mansanarez is producing the second of a three year series titled “Generations”. The series will chronicle the lives and deaths of three bucks on the mountain.

Last year’s 2015 print, “Generations, The Wannabe” featured a pair of huge trophy quality bucks being cautiously approached by a youngster wanting to join the men’s club. This first of the print series proved to be a big success at the local chapter banquet auctions.
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For those of you who may not know Darren Newsom he is the owner of Ammo & More in Stevensville, Montana and is an avid hunter. He is one of the Mule Deer Foundation’s largest donors, title sponsor of the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo and is passionate about supporting conservation through hunting.

Newsom’s two oldest daughters co-star in hunting shows with him regularly and Sheridan, at 20 years old, is the youngest female to complete her Super 10 and second youngest to get her Sheep Grand Slam. It turns out Darren’s hunting and shooting genes were passed on to his girls!

Although Newsom’s all-time favorite animal to hunt is elk, he loves a good mule deer hunt. This year, Darren and his friend had Montana general season tags and were on a mission to fill their tags with memorable muleys … and a memorable muley is exactly what Darren found.

As they headed out, they braved wind gusts of 60-70 mph and blowing snow, but they were not about to let Mother Nature deter them. By day three, they had passed up a few very nice trophy mule deer, but both of them were holding out for that one buck that just “does it” – the one that you can feel in your veins. Neither one of them had found that yet, so the search continued.

Late Friday morning, Newsom spotted a 4×5 buck that was limping. After getting a better look at him, it was clear the buck was not doing well.

The buck had a “club foot” from a previous unknown injury that was preventing him from moving around normally and he was in obvious discomfort.
In an area crawling with coyotes, there was no question in Darren’s mind that this buck was not going to last long out there.

Newsom had been hopeful he would find “the one” trophy muley that just got his blood flowing, as we all are when we are out hunting. However, as a compassionate and ethical hunter, he does not like to see any animal suffer. Rather than turning a blind eye to the situation and allowing this buck to face a far less desirable fate, Darren chose to put him out of his misery. He dropped the buck with one shot and tagged him – a management buck.

This muley was not the buck Newsom thought he was holding out for, but he has no regrets with his decision and would do it again if he was confronted with the same situation down the road.

“To be honest, this buck got my blood going, as I knew it was meant for me to kill him,” reflected Darren.

This buck most likely would not have made it through the winter and would have surely suffered. Everybody likes a good trophy buck, but it is good to see hunters in the field proceed with the animal’s best interest in mind over the size of the antlers.

Darren with his daughters Sheridan, and Samantha Newsome Reiter. Spending time enjoying another successful season.

With the amount of apex predators like lions, wolves and coyotes this “club foot” buck was sure to meet a violent end.

Darren is representative of the many ethical hunters and MDF members that are passionate about mule deer. We appreciate all you do for sportsmen and our wildlife!
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I was born a hunter. It has always been in my DNA to hunt for my survival, both physically and spiritually.

I was raised as a steward of the land – to feel the responsibility to give back more than I take...to manage the resources that I love so much...to help others learn to love these wild lands as much as I do.

I was taught to be a predator – to learn the art of stealth, concealment, hone skills of deadly accuracy...all of my life I have worked to improve my ability to take game cleanly, ethically, and with purpose. From deer to elk, moose to caribou, African plains game, high mountain goats and sheep, and ultimately dangerous game and predators. All are a challenge of their own; all have their nuances and specific traits that you must learn in order to succeed. But the ultimate challenge is hunting nature's most wary, stealthy and keen-sensed wildlife: predators.

In years of hunting, I have been charged by lions, elephants and rhinos. I have had close encounters with hippos, buffalo and other dangerous game. In the U.S., predators include coyotes, bobcats, bears and, of course, mountain lions. To me, these lions are the ultimate hunting challenge here at home: pursuing the deadliest predator in our woods. The lion is the only predator we have that is solely a meat eater, relying on its kills to survive. If you've spent time in the woods, chances are you have been near many cats and never known...they depend on stealth to exist. Because of this, they are the ultimate prey for a hunter to hone his skills as a predator of predators.

This story is about cat hunting, it's about wildlife management, it's about experiencing a different method of hunting, about making a choice. A choice to accept a new hunting strategy, a choice to take the shot or not, a choice to accept a fellow hunter for what he is and how he practices his skills, a choice to take an active role in wildlife management.

It is said the average adult cougar will take down 24 deer per year to survive. 24 tags that would go unfilled by hunters because the deer were harvested by one cat. 12 years' worth of tags in a 2-tag draw unit for trophy deer...12 years' worth of tags taken by one cougar. Managing these cougar populations can help us realize greater deer herds in healthier numbers, provide more opportunity for hunters to enjoy our wildlife and see more game.

Being a good steward of the earth means helping to balance all that we have dominion over, and to do it responsibly. Many times, nature serves her own needs; other times, it is up to us to help conditions and populations flourish, at least and until nature can maintain the balance for itself. Hunters are the greatest conservationists, the most dutiful stewards of our lands.

We are inspired to see this legacy continue for our children's children, and we take seriously the duty to take care of our world and all of its inhabitants.
I’m with my good friend, Denver. He has taken me on several cat hunts in the Okanogan Valley of British Columbia, where many large cats inhabit the over 8,000 square miles of hunting property within K9sCougar Canyon Outfitters. We know the requirements and conditions that will produce the best opportunity at a trophy tom. We prepare for the chase; the anticipation builds as we get closer to that time when we will turn loose the dogs and listen to them work. Follow them up a draw, along a ridgeline, over hills and through valleys in pursuit of the prey. Never wanting this experience to end.

The hunt starts when one significant indicator arrives…Snow. Deep snow means we can find what we are looking for, and gives us the advantage we need to pursue our quarry. When the snow falls, we move out to find the track. That one track to start the hunt.

But it must be the right track, both in size and freshness. We are looking for a mature tom. And the track must be fresh enough for the dogs to keep interest. Just one hour too old and the dogs will turn off of the track on a whim. We cover miles looking for that track to start us on our journey. Through creeks, down endless roads, through open forest and rock outcroppings. Searching for the track that will satisfy the dogs’ noses and spur them into action. The track that we long to find so that we can enjoy this extraordinary experience once again.

We need the freshest track, and we found one leading away from a fresh elk kill we happen upon. This is our starting point, our entry into an epic chase, a chase where the end is bittersweet at times. This is what a cougar dog and its owner live for: the thrill of the chase and every action that lies within that chase.

Now it’s time. Time to turn the dogs out and listen to them do what they have been bred to do. They know one purpose in life: to follow that track to its end. To find the cat in those tracks and hold it until their owner arrives. When the dogs are released, we know we may never see them again. No matter where they go, it is our duty to follow them and find them.

The dog knows its job, and they expect us to do our part. When the cat is treed, we must arrive and do our part; it is expected of us. You cannot hunt with these dogs and not learn to respect them. They are single-minded in achieving their one and only goal; they are incredibly tough and brave.

They are incredibly good at what they are bred to do, and they live to do just that. It is a pureness that makes you take pause and appreciate. It is a beautiful act to behold.

Following these trackers is an exciting, exhausting episode. We may not always keep up, but we always need to catch up when the cat is found and treed. One of the most exciting times is when we approach the tree and inspect the cougar. Making sure it is a mature tom, a fine management animal. One that will help us control not only the population of cougar, but also aid in the health of our deer herds. Knowing what animals need to be harvested helps us in making the right decisions for all wildlife in our area…all species depend on the health and status of others to survive and flourish. Knowing the population dynamics of the area helps us in making the right decisions, as well as decisions made by our management professionals. This is not just some random act, it is a well thought out, fact-based endeavor to improve our wild lands.

As I approach the cat, many thoughts run through my mind. How I have prepared for this moment. The hours I have spent practicing my skills with the bow. Knowing I will have one shot, embracing the fact that I only have one shot. It is a challenge that makes me strive for perfection in all I do.
The last time I heard something negative about hunting, it wasn’t from a vegan, an anti-hunter, or an activist. It was from a fellow hunter who didn’t agree with a method of hunting.

I’m not here to say whether hunting with dogs is ethical or not; that is a decision for each and every person to make for themselves. But it is a legal method where we practice it, and a viable tool for managing our wildlife. It is time that we as hunters unite as one voice for the betterment of our sport. We may not all agree on others’ methods for hunting, but if it is legal, it should not be judged by hunters as “fair”, “ethical”, or “not really hunting”. We need to present a unified front in the face of all the opposition facing us today, and make the right decisions for our future. We need to be good stewards of our earth, show and teach respect for our resources, and stand with one another to protect our heritage.

The final thoughts as I approach the treed cat are ones of wonder, finality and thanks. Wonder at the creature that I love to chase. Finality because we have reached an end to the pursuit, and thanks to God above for providing us this wonderful opportunity to become the predator that we were created to be. My final, silent prayer is for a true heart, steady hand and hope for the opportunity to do this all once again in the future.

For more from Jim Burnworth and a video story that relates to this article, go to www.jimburnworth.com or muledeer.org
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The 2015 hunt planning started just like all of the other years in the recent past. Networking with hunting industry friends at the Archery Trade Association show in Indianapolis and at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo (WHCE) in Salt Lake City are the norm. I discussed hunt strategy, draw odds and buck hunting opportunity and of course waited to see if I was lucky enough to draw one of the coveted Premium $5 Conservation tags from the WHCE annual big game lottery.

I also visited with the Game and Fish folks from Idaho while attending the Salt Lake show and was quite optimistic at the prospects of exploring the Idaho over-the-counter bowhunting opportunity for mule deer. After the draws were over and the dust had settled, I only had one mule deer tag in my pocket and it was a “new to me” general unit that I had decided on for several reasons.

A couple of friends and colleagues recommended it for big buck potential and low hunting pressure during the early archery season. The plan was simple, I would head out west to Utah, find a nice buck, arrow him, pack him out and then head on up to Idaho with my buddy, Corey Beckendorf, for a week of deer and elk hunting in Idaho’s backcountry. This seemed like a sure-fire simple plan that would provide great dividends, right? Reality check in order!

Fast forward to August 2015, I had several leads on hunting areas in my new unit and oddly enough all intelligence from several different trusted sources pointed to the exact same spot. Each person assured me that the hunting pressure would be low and chance of success was high. The week before leaving for Utah, a friend from social media sent me a private message with inquiries on my hunt plan and strategy.

A well-known local bowhunter and photographer, David DeAustin, proved to be a true friend and savior for getting into the area that I planned to hunt.

He knew the area well and also that there was no water on this particular mountain. Upon my arrival to the Salt Lake area, David and my friend Corey met me at the trailhead to help me pack in several days’ worth of supplies and water. After making our way up the mountain to a predetermined camp spot, we set up camp for the coming week and discussed strategy and plans. We soon said our goodbyes and my comrades descended the mountain back to the trailhead. The excitement and tension was mounting as I watched their headlamps slowly fade in the timber far below.

My alarm went off as scheduled at 5:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, the first
day of my hunt. As I sat there in my tent rubbing my eyes in the pre-dawn darkness, I saw a flicker of light and heard boot steps as someone was hiking by my tent towards the area I planned to hunt this day. I remember saying out loud “Seriously?” So much for having the mountain to myself. I got dressed, slammed some breakfast and decided to hike a different direction than previously planned to avoid the other potential hunter. As the sun crept up over the horizon, I was settled into a rocky crag and immediately glassed up several bucks below. Among the deer were two mature bucks, a nice 150 class four by four and a bigger, heavier four by three. Throughout the morning I located several smaller bucks however none bigger than the four point and four by three. As the mid-morning warmed the mountain and the shadows grew more acute, I found the bucks headed to the east canyon wall to bed for the day.

Not long after watching the bucks bed, I noticed movement above the bedded buck in the rocky crags. It was a bowhunter and he had the bucks spotted and was moving in. In my younger days I would be furiously disappointed to have another bowhunter move in on “my bucks”, however I was surprisingly calm and intrigued to see how this was going to play out. The hunter had planned the perfect route and had the mid-day thermals perfectly to his advantage. I was impressed and actually rooting for his success. Through my 15x56 Vortex Kaibab Binoculars I watched the stalk unfold. Everything seemed to be working in the bowhunter’s favor. After the hour long stalk I could tell he was in bow range of the bedded bucks. I saw the hunter draw his bow and soon the bucks exploded from their beds. The four point and four by three made it all the way across the canyon, seemingly unscathed; all of the smaller bucks escaped into the timber below.

I watched the hunter make his way to the deer beds and retrieve his arrow and his reaction told the old familiar tale of a miss. I watched as he ambled up through the boulders to the crest where he met up with his hunting companion. I felt for him, as I have been in his shoes hundreds of times.

I gathered up my gear and set out in the other hunters’ direction in hopes of talking to them about their hunt plan. Soon I ran into the pair and after introductions we discussed his failed attempt at arrowing one of the bucks. It turned out that he determined his best shot opportunity was at the heavy four by three and he took a 30-something yard shot at the bedded buck. However, the arrow’s path was not as clear as he calculated and it clipped a low hanging spruce limb half way to the deer. It turns out the bowhunting duo were only there for the day and told me they were headed into another canyon beyond where I was hunting and that I would probably have the entire area to myself.

Several days came and went and I was seeing deer every day. After about four days I had spotted a big mature four by four that was a dandy by anyone’s standards, pushing the 190-inch Boone and Crockett mark. I determined that this buck would be my targeted buck unless some other opportunity arose. Corey joined me on one of the days and I explained to him that the hunt was going a bit tougher than I had counted on and that successfully arrowing a buck in this country seemed like a stretch. It was apparent that this was going to take more time and I told him of my decision to abort the trip to Idaho. Corey understood and supported my decision of accomplishing the task at hand. He and I glassed up a nice four by four that evening that I elected not to stalk and even had a heavy antlered old three by two slip within 30 yards of us.
“my bucks” as the first. Still, I watched and waited. Just like the other hunter from the week before, this guy had a great stalk going and was moving in rally fast, keeping the wind and rain in his favor. It wasn’t very long before he was in position to shoot. I watched through my Vortex binos as the bowhunter slowly drew, settled in and released the arrow. At the shot, the bucks exploded down into the canyon and again seemed to go untouched. The body language of the bowhunter told the story of yet another miss.

Again I intercepted the archer as he ascended the crest of the canyon and again seemed to go untouched. The body language of the bowhunter told the story of yet another miss.

Sunday August 30th dawned cold and windy. I was back in my perch up in the rocky crags trying to avoid the icy winds and rain. Sometime mid-morning I again glassed up the 150 class four by four and heavy four by three in the same beds that they were in when the unlucky bowhunter missed them. I pondered the idea of attempting a stalk on the bucks. After all, I had not seen the “Booner” again since the first sighting and I had been at it 10 days already; plus, the four by three was really mature.

Amidst my bargaining with myself to hunt the bucks, I noticed movement down in the trees above them – another bowhunter. This time I was not as enthusiastic to see someone descending on "my bucks" as the first. Still, I watched and waited. Just like the other hunter from the week before, this guy had a great stalk going and was moving in really fast, keeping the wind and rain in his favor. It wasn’t very long before he was in position to shoot. I watched through my Vortex binos as the bowhunter slowly drew, settled in and released the arrow. At the shot, the bucks exploded down into the canyon and again seemed to go untouched. The body language of the bowhunter told the story of yet another miss.

Days came and went, I saw several bucks and yet none tripped that internal trigger that made me want to release an arrow. My time on the mountain was drawing to an end and I had yet to take a single shot. I woke up to a clear and calm morning on day 15, Thursday September 3rd. I made my way to the west canyon to glass back down in the east canyon where the bucks like to hang out during mid-day. Around 9:00 a.m. I spotted five bucks file into the shadows of the mature spruce to bed up for the day. Upon setting up my big glass I discovered that one of the bucks was Lucky 7. I immediately knew I was going to make a play on him as circumstances outweighed score on this day. I wanted badly to get an arrow into Lucky 7 and I paid attention to every detail as I prepared to descend the mountain to his mid-day lair. I painted up my face and back of my hands. I slipped on a leafy jacket to distort my outline, I took off my pants, only wearing my Realtree Core bottoms from Badlands to eliminate any pant leg rubbing. I slipped off my boots and put on a second pair of heavy wool socks and stashed my pack. All I carried with me down the mountain was my license, bow and arrows, rangefinder – and determination.

I zigged and I zagged, carefully picking my way down the mountain, making certain that the wind stayed in my face and not making even the slightest sound all the way down. I had covered roughly a quarter of a mile from beginning the stalk when I started making out landmarks that I memorized before starting the stalk. I knew

Walking up on Lucky 7 was one of the most rewarding feeling Marc has ever experienced in 32 years of bowhunting
I was getting close but I just couldn’t determine the exact location of where the bucks should be. I eased to a ledge to look into some dense timber just below the trail I was on when I heard the familiar sound of thundering hooves behind me. I had slipped right past two of the bucks but neither of them were Lucky 7. I was immediately deflated, however Lucky 7 wasn’t with them so that meant there was still hope of slipping in on the unsuspecting buck. After 15 long days and giving it everything I had, I knew it was time to ask for divine intervention. I said a quick prayer and continued along my path.

I was moving at the speed of molasses in December, and as I stopped under a spruce bough in the trail I glanced down the trail ahead. There they were! Lucky 7 and the other bucks were bedded just off the trail in front of me. Just when I saw them, the bucks all stood in their bed at once. The wind was in my face, my silhouette was distorted and I had not made a sound – the bucks’ keen senses alerted them that something was approaching, however I could tell they were just looking through me. There was no time to use my range finder. Avoiding eye contact and rapid movements, I slipped an arrow from the quiver, snapped it on the string and hooked up my release. As I pivoted at the waist, I drew my bow in one motion. I used my instinct to judge the distance to Lucky 7, buried the 30-yard pin in tight behind his shoulder and pulled through the release. As the shot broke, the arrow struck the buck’s side with great force, knocking the wind out of him. As he spun and bolted down the canyon I could see a river of blood spraying from Lucky 7’s right hind quarter. I went to my knees, my hands to the heavens with clenched fists and thanked God Almighty saying “Oh My God, thank you, thank you – we did it!” The blood trail was short and as I approached the fallen buck way back in a deep dark canyon of the Wasatch Mountains I grasped his antlers saying, “Well, ol’ Lucky 7, your luck finally ran out.”

I planned on a week long hunt that turned out to be a 15-day adventure that resulted in a lifetime of memories. A man can really connect with himself while alone for that many days, contemplating what life is all about and what really matters. I experienced many sights, smells and sounds while back in those mountains. Things I would have taken for granted on a much shorter hunt. I was truly blessed to have the opportunity to hunt wild mountain mule deer for 15 days and end the hunt with one perfectly placed arrow. That’s what every bowhunter dreams of. God is good, and if he’s willing I’ll be right back up there come next August!
By Mark Kayser

Have you looked at the sound choices on your new electronic predator caller? It has more options than a new Lincoln Navigator. The two decisions about options may differ like Wyoming and Rhode Island, but nonetheless you have more variety in the sounds you can throw at coyotes than ever before. Even with this assortment available at the touch of a finger it seems like many of you continue to fall back on old reliable sounds. Is it because you know coyotes primarily dine on rabbits and rodents? Is it because you are afraid a new sound may spook rather than reel in a coyote? Is it because you really don’t understand the coyote/prey relationship between Wile E. and a chukar partridge, toad or Steen buck?

Questions like these are not unique to you. The first time I took the step from squalling rabbits to bawling fawns I thought I had broken a major IRS tax code. After busting several coyotes in succession using the new sound I quickly lost the aversion to change. Rabbits to fawns isn’t a stretch in mule deer country, but there are some options you may be reluctant to use or wary about due to coyote reaction. Don’t be. New sounds can captivate coyotes just like a new Lincoln Navigator can captivate you.

As the seasons change so do your activity preferences and lifestyle. The same is true of the coyote and you can really see it in their diet. You’ve heard it before and you’ll hear it again. Coyotes are opportunistic. They eat just about everything except the hubcaps they find tossed from Toyota Prius’ along remote stretches of highway.

Numerous studies show that more than 40 percent of a coyote’s diet consists of rodents with a variety of other items rounding out the rest, depending on season. Coyotes have even been known to partake of a vegetarian diet by raiding summer melon patches and other garden delectables. In the fall, diet switches to gut piles left by big game hunters. Winter means preying on weakened big game. In the spring, coyotes lurk in the shadows of calving operations and in early summer they switch almost entirely over to a fawn buffet, up to 70 percent in some locations. Thus the reason coyote management is more important than ever in mule deer country.

Although you won’t find a button on your caller for musk melons you will see links to almost every other possible prey species a coyote may consider. The big hurdle for many is geography. Does the species being broadcast have to live in the general area of your hunting?

Foxpro pro staffer Al Morris eloquently answers “no.” He shared one story while
hunting in the desert regions of southwest Wyoming where nothing “natural” was working to bring in wary coyotes. On a mission to fill the truck bed with fur, he pushed the piglet in distress button. It pushed the button of coyotes that likely never heard a hog in their life, but they ran to the call and helped Morris turn a day of disappointment into a day of success.

NEW HOME RANGE SOUNDS
The number of predator hunters has jumped exponentially in the past decade with the addition of predator-tailored rifles, customized calibers and technologically-advanced callers. That means you need to stand out from the crowd. It’s easy to do with an electronic caller snuggled in your daypack. If you don’t want to push the button of some species you can’t even pronounce, then look at some of the animal sounds that do live in your zip code, but you never considered as a coyote enticer.

Your goal is to lure a coyote into shooting range. How you lure that coyote into range doesn’t matter. The traditional school of thought is to lure a coyote into range based on its stomach, but curiosity, territoriality and even love can strike the right cord with a coyote. A sound more and more coyote hunters utilize are coyote vocalizations. Matt Piippo, a Montana coyote hunter and head pro staff manager for Les Johnson’s Predator Quest, almost exclusively uses coyote talk to attract coyotes. He shared that fact at a recent calling seminar and the reason was clear. Too many other coyote hunters were relying on dying rabbits as their mainstay call. By employing howls, barks, yips and whines, Piippo is able to talk to coyotes – and convince them that homeland raiders have arrived and may be eating the food rations, or worse, stealing the ladies.

You won’t have a lack of buttons to push for coyote vocalizations. Many callers have 40 or more options to choose from with a variety of inflections and meanings.

If you’re shy about conversing with coyotes, consider prey. Cottontail and jackrabbit squalls aren’t the only food source in mule deer country. If you think about it, mule deer and coyotes inhabit terrain that includes alpine elevations at more than 11,000 feet all the way down to desert terrain well into Mexico. This wide range of country includes habitat to harbor various species of squirrels, gophers, songbirds and game birds, all of which represent food to a prowling coyote.

The sound doesn’t even need to be a primary food source to attract a snooping coyote. One of my favorite sounds to use in coyote country is raucous raccoons. Most hunters use the raccoon fighting or distress calls for nighttime bandit collecting, but when coyotes hear coons getting into trouble they have a natural instinct to investigate. Is it for food or curiosity? Who cares! All I know is that when I broadcast raccoon chatter coyotes perk up and respond more than not.

Another good addition to any coyote vocalization or prey distress setup is confidence. In mule deer country that is achieved by adding in the sounds of crows, ravens, magpies or gray jays. These aerial alarm systems scan from above for signs of a fresh meal, but also squall when they detect danger. Coyotes listen for this signal so if you add in scavenger vocalizations while a coyote is incoming it can relax it into thinking that the aerial security system is on hand and everything is OK.

As a precautionary note you will call in other scavenger birds. Camouflage carefully, settle in and don’t move. The arriving birds may sound the alarm if they see something out of place, but if you remain hidden the real birds are a bonus for spurring a coyote into making its final move.

EXOTIC SOUNDS
Using sounds found around home may be more comforting to you, but for coyotes it really doesn’t matter. In fact, strange sounds may have more allure, especially if your hunting buddies have been pounding your favorite BLM parcel and blaring jackrabbit in distress calls far and wide.

Some sounds, although not truly exotic in nature, but possibly not on your radar screen, include options such as the higher-pitched pronghorn fawn call or even prairie dog calls. Both of these appeal to coyotes, but you rarely hear callers discussing them as go-to sounds.

The growing presence of wetland birds in the West such as Sandhill cranes and the expanding Canada goose make these species possible candidates. What Western reservoir doesn’t have at least two or more Canada geese sitting on its banks these days?
Another cadence you may overlook is the sound of a baby porcupine. Coyotes may be apprehensive about taking on an adult quill factory, but the vulnerability of a young porcupine combined with a delicious ending may have appeal on the right day.

As mentioned earlier, pig sounds of all inflections have the ability to lure in coyotes and that opens up the pens to every livestock species at market. Many callers include the sounds of lambs, goats and even chickens clucking out a message of danger. Take that a step further, especially if you hunt coyotes near ranches or subdivisions. Add in the sounds of everyday pets.

Coyotes have an attraction to the sounds of other canines that don't represent a threat to them. The sounds of a Chihuahua yapping may attract a coyote, but the howl of a wolf will send shivers down its back and point it in the opposite direction. Domestic pups in peril, cats in a conundrum and other sounds of suburban animals may be an attraction whether calling within sight of city lights or not.

As a closing note, don’t rule anything out. Have you ever heard of Pavlov’s dog and how it responded to the ringing bell? While visiting with coyote pro Tom Austin he related a tale of using a fence to accentuate a calling sequence. His theory was simple. Mule deer have to deal with fences daily, but occasionally they don’t clear the obstacle easily and get hung up in the barbed trap. For most it is a death sentence and some, especially fawns, bawl for help. Are you seeing the rattling connection here?

As the fawns bawl and struggle to free themselves they send a vocal message across the countryside and on two channels. First, they send a prey in distress call that most predators listen to with slobbering interest. As I noted earlier, fawn bawls are one of my go-to calls in fur season for many reasons, but particularly since they represent a large-calorie meal in the winter when cupboards are bare. The second auditory channel involves the fence itself. The struggling deer send shockwaves of noise down the fence line that may carry a mile or more depending on the construction of the fence. It may not raise an eyebrow of a grazing cow a mile down the fence, but a coyote could take the fence-line jangling to be the sign of desperation from a trapped deer.

Austin put two and two together, and has used fence shaking on setups in combination with deer in distress sounds. Like many sounds it may not work on every outing, but when coyotes refuse to come to a traditional sound, out-of-the-box sounds may hold the winning ticket. Can you say “patent pending” for the sound of a Honda Civic crashing into a deer and leaving a roadkill feast?

Last winter my fawn bawls, lone howls and other favorites weren’t manufacturing coyote sightings. One afternoon I decided to forgo my preferred choices and just play the sounds of excited magpies. As suspected, it drew the attention of every magpie within hearing distance, but 15 minutes into the setup the peer- ing eyes of a coyote were staring at me through the sagebrush. My coyote hunting partner Sage (she’s my dog) picked up on the apparition, but held still as the coyote topped the ridge. There was no need to use the ballistic reticle in my Nikon riflescope and the Hornady V-Max ended the magpie reunion at the rifle’s report.

There’s no debate that most electronic callers have more sound options than you’ll need. But it’s always good to have alternatives when the status quo isn’t producing fur for the cargo space of your new Lincoln Navigator.

Mark Kayser enjoys experimenting with his electronic caller and routinely finds success with sounds that coyotes may never have heard before.
Being a transplanted New Yorker, every once and a while you have to go back to your roots. My youth was spent north of NYC just off the Hudson River. There is a reason why they call it “The BIG Apple.” Back in the early 60’s the entire Hudson Valley was littered with pristine apple orchards. Some of my earliest deer (whitetail) creations were teamed with fresh crisp autumn apples. It was a natural, local fit.

The rich nature of slowly braised shanks works very well with tart apples such as; Granny Smiths, Rome or Gravenstein’s. These varieties are much better suited for extended cooking than their sweeter cousins, like Fiji, Macintosh or Red Delicious - add a splash of French Calvados (apple brandy) or hard apple cider (unsweetened) and you have a very nice balance of rich, hearty meat and a tartness with a hint of acid - caramelized red onions for a touch of sweetness and it all comes together.

Procedure:
Season the shanks and lightly dust them with flour. In a heavy gauge pot, heat the olive oil. Brown the shanks on all sides. When all the shanks are brown, add the garlic and ginger to the pot. Sauté until fragrant then add the carrots, celery, onions and herbs. Sauté for a couple of minutes, scrapping the bottom of the pot to loosen any caramelized bits of the shanks. Then add the tomato product and the 3 oz. of the calvados or cider - reduce until dry.

Place the shanks back into the pot and add the broth/stock. At this point you can cover this pot and continue to slowly simmer on the stove top OR place it into a 325° F oven OR place all this into a crock pot.

The actual time it takes to cook to tender will vary.

325° F oven - 3 hours
Slow stove top - 2-3 hours
Crock pot on medium heat - 4-6 hours
The rule of thumb for all braised dishes is - slower is better. The slower it cooks the better the yield (less shrinkage) and it’ll retain more moisture.

When the shanks are tender remove them from the cooking liquid, hold on the side. Place a tablespoon of butter in a large sauté pan, add the diced apples and quickly sauté for a minute. Deglaze with the remaining calvados or cider. At this point strain the braising liquid into the pan with the apples and reduce by half (straining is optional). Turn off the fire and stir in the remaining cold butter. Adjust the seasoning. Pour the rich apple-studded sauce over the venison shanks. Garnish with rings of caramelized red onions and crusty bread! Cheers!

Apple Braised Venison Shanks

- 4 venison shanks
- Salt and pepper to taste or The WildEats Juniperberry & Peppercorn Rub
- Flour for dusting
- 2-3 oz. olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3-4 stalks of celery, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 2 tbsp fresh thyme leaves (or 1/2 tsp dried thyme), you can also use rosemary or sage
- 2 tbsp tomato paste or 2 chopped fresh tomatoes
- 3 cups of beef or game broth/stock
- 4 oz. Calvados OR 1 cup of hard cider
- 2 apples (tart), peeled, seeds removed, cut into 1 inch dice
- 2 tbsp cold butter
- Garnish: sautéed red onions, roasted root veggies, mashed potatoes or soft polenta.
Mule deer populations of the Southwest deserts will always be greatly influenced by precipitation patterns, as is articulated in the seminal publication by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies entitled *Habitat Guidelines for Mule Deer: Southwest Deserts Ecoregion*. However, habitat quality is also a major driver of population trends. Wildlife managers, land managers, and MDF chapters can’t make it rain but they can improve the quality of mule deer habitat in Arizona.

The Arizona Game & Fish Department (AZGFD) and its partners including MDF have a long-standing record of proactive habitat management: applying control burns to reduce woody vegetation and set back plant succession, removing juniper trees that have invaded desert grasslands, improving water distribution, and installing new grazing management systems. Arizona has invested millions in mule deer habitat conservation through its innovative Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC) Program, which is fueled by Special Big Game License-Tag revenue. In all of this great habitat work, the challenge has been doing enough of the right things in the right places to make a difference.

The consensus of the mule deer experts in Arizona was that doubling down with a highly focused approach to mule deer conservation was the best way to boost populations. The existing habitat programs would be continued across the state but the Department would identify new funding and devote it to a few units where accelerated habitat work could really make a difference.

“We selected Game Management Units to focus our mule deer work on by
looking at units that have lost the most permits in the last 20 years,” said Jim Heffelfinger, AZGFD Regional Game Specialist and a widely recognized authority on mule deer in the West. “We figured that if these units had many more deer tags – and deer – back then we should be able to do something to bring the deer herds back to that level. “

“The key was to start thinking large-scale and implementing habitat projects in a focused manner. We can’t address the issues for mule deer 500 acres at a time.” The units that had declined the most since the 1980s were the logical places to test the new model. Unit 21 was a perfect candidate for this grand experiment in landscape level habitat conservation.

WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE

In 2014, AZGFD launched the Arizona Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Initiative (WHEI) by dedicating $3 million of its Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (a.k.a. Pittman-Robertson) funds over the next three years to improving habitat for mule deer and scaled quail in three focus areas – Unit 21 near Prescott and Unit 16A near Kingman for mule deer and Units 31/32 near Tucson for scaled quail. Pittman-Robertson revenue, which is generated from an 11 percent excise tax on arms and ammunition, has increased in recent years, providing state fish and wildlife agencies with resources to implement new approaches to habitat conservation for game species.

AZGFD allocated $400,000 annually to mule deer habitat work in both Unit 21 and 16A and $200,000 to the quail work that, coincidentally, also benefits mule deer, in Units 31/32. That’s $1 million per year of new funding for habitat conservation, most of which is specifically devoted to mule deer. It’s truly a new day for mule deer habitat conservation in Arizona!

In addition, the agency is using other funds and partnerships to implement additional habitat projects and predator management practices designed to increase deer number in the focal units for mule deer. The measure of success for WHEI relative to mule deer will be increased populations resulting in an increase in mule deer permits.

Amber Munig, AZGFD Big Game Management Supervisor, explained that the new habitat initiative gives the Department the ability to greatly ratchet up its habitat investments in Unit 21 and 16A, mesh that work with some predator management funded by other partners and programs, and monitor deer populations to evaluate outcomes.

“We needed to determine what works and then apply those approaches to other areas,” said Munig. “Units 21 and 16A were great places to start because we know that the habitat in the 1980s was conducive to supporting much larger populations than we have today.”

The WHEI is into its second year and is already making an impact. The full $400,000 was committed to habitat projects in both mule deer focus areas in each of its first two years and the Department added $300,000 in license revenue to the pool of project funding. It took part of Year 1 to complete the archeology and environmental compliance clearances but the WHEI is now rolling and supporting an aggressive slate of habitat management actions in partnership with the federal land management agencies and organizations such as MDF.

The result is a super-charged conservation effort that is particularly important in enhancing habitat quality at the landscape scale, such as in the Hualapai Mountains near Kingman. This mountain range supports the majority of the mule deer habitat in Unit 16A but deer harvest has declined by 50 percent since 2007 as a result of drought and declining habitat quality.

“Fire suppression since the early 1990s has resulted in major changes in habitat quality for mule deer across Arizona,” said Munig. “For example, the chapparal brush community in the foothills of the Hualapai Mountains is old and decadent. We are implementing lots of prescribed burns to set back the plant succession and open up these habitats for mule deer and other wildlife.”

The Unit 16A work is heavily slanted toward burning but also includes water distribution and a predator management project funding though the HPC program. The burns are expected to dramatically improve nutrition for mule deer in the Hualapais, a key to restoring populations and hunting opportunities.
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trees have been removed across 5,800 acres east of Cordes Junction to expand open movement corridors for antelope. WHEI projects are now being integrated with the larger grassland work. According to Munig, the grassland restoration work has opened up the landscape and substantially increased forage available to mule deer.

Scaled quail serve as the focal species for the WHEI projects in Units 31/32. Quail numbers have declined precipitously across the West due to the drought and habitat changes. In 2010, AZGFD led development of the Western Quail Management Plan and is now leading its implementation with the WHEI quail focus. The quail habitat work, which is integrated with antelope habitat restoration, involves brush management to maintain appropriate shrub cover, grazing management systems, and reduction of invasive species, all of which can have benefits to mule deer. Units 31/32 contain more private land than the two mule deer focus areas. As such, it is likely the WHEI projects will catalyze additional project funding from NRCS through Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program – an outcome that could spur mule deer work habitat work across intermingled public and private lands.

Arizona’s joining the other western states in developing an aggressive, multi-faceted, and locally crafted mule deer initiative is a major step forward for securing the mule deer conservation and hunting heritage in Arizona.

As Munig eloquently points out, it is all about innovation and collaboration: “The State is looking at multiple tools to improve habitat for mule deer and increase populations given environmental variables. Any one tool alone likely won’t likely achieve the intended results. Collaboration is what makes these things successful. MDF has been growing and is very actively engaged with the Department in supporting mule deer conservation. The chapters are working extremely well with our local staff and we are very appreciative of MDF’s contributions.”

3 Ways for MDF Chapters to Help

MDF Chapters are uniquely poised to play a major role in helping AZGFD implement the WHEI and its larger body of mule deer work. Here’s three areas where MDF Chapters can help take it to the next level:

• Leveraging Funds: The new stream of WHEI funds creates a grand opportunity for MDF chapters to leverage substantial public funding by contributing additional funds to habitat work in the focus areas, particularly Unit 21 and Unit 16A. MDF chapter revenue expands the scope and scale of the habitat work, increasing the likelihood of success and ultimate expansion of the WHEI to other units across Arizona.

• Volunteer Habitat Work: MDF members can make a tremendous difference in successful implementation of habitat projects and building relationships with cooperating ranchers by volunteering their time. Water distribution and fencing projects, in particular, can greatly benefit from volunteers. Your time is allowable as match for the WHEI’s Pittman-Robertson funds and it’s a great way to get outside and make a lasting contribution to mule deer conservation.

• Predator Management: A key element of AZGFD’s effort is strategically applying predator management practices in the focal units in combination with the habitat work. The WHEI funds must be used for habitat due to their funding source so additional private funds from MDF, other conservation programs, or the HPC program are helpful in financing the predator management work.
In Arizona, we have been working very hard with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to increase the number of mule deer in our state. The main objective of the Mule Deer Foundation is to save our mule deer using whatever means we can to reach our objective. Let’s walk through several of the things your Mule Deer Foundation is doing in Arizona to reach our goals.

Habitat Partnership Committee (HPC)
The HPC is a group of dedicated, non-governmental, species-specific groups that meet twice each year to determine the next round of habitat improvement projects to increase populations of mule deer as well as many other wildlife species. The money for these habitat projects is generated from Commissioner Tags that are either auctioned off or used in a raffle. In 2015, the highest bidder paid $320,000 for the mule deer tag auctioned at MDF’s and Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife’s Western Hunting & Conservation Expo held in Salt Lake City, Utah. That money, plus $260,000 bid for a different mule deer tag and proceeds from another raffle in Arizona for over $100,000, generated enough funds to do some major projects throughout our state. The wildlife managers with Arizona Game and Fish along with several NGO groups developed over 100 projects just for mule deer in 2015 and that money is now being spent (100 percent of it!) on our mule deer here in Arizona. Water holes, trick tanks, fence repair and removals, wildlife crossings, cutting and clearing of non-native trees and grasses, and predator control are all part of the recipe for improvement and it is working!

Chapter Rewards
Fifteen Mule Deer Foundation Chapters in Arizona are working on fundraisers so that volunteers can generate cash (Chapter Rewards) to apply to other projects not funded through the HPC. These projects can be something that is an emergency, such as water hauling or repairing of water catchments, or other types of projects that need to be completed in a hurry. Water is essential for all wildlife and humans — consider having to walk over 8 to 10 miles a day to get the water we need to survive! This is what happens in Arizona each year during our toughest months where temperatures reach the 115° mark in the deserts and over 100° in the mountains. The drought has played a big role in the decrease of mule deer and without the help of volunteers and the Arizona Game and Fish the mule deer would suffer greatly. In 2015, the Arizona MDF chapters used all of their Chapter Rewards (over $25,000) to help our mule deer through the hard times. 2016 will bring even more
Chapter Rewards to Arizona and we will be ready with shovels in hand to use the money where it is needed.

Volunteers
We have volunteers all over Arizona and in 2015 we reached over 4,000 hours of volunteer time on the ground. It is something that is a marvel to behold and it does get the job done. Dedicated volunteers are the life blood of our organization and we grow more and more volunteers in our state each year. The future is looking very bright for the mule deer of Arizona and the future of the MDF is looking better all the time – our volunteers rock!

Conservation Partnerships
We had over $9,000 dollars in Conservation Partnership Funds in 2015 and that money was earmarked for specific projects. Donations made as an MDF Conservation Partner or Project Partner can be designated directly to a specific project and targeted to your state. If you really want to see your money used in Arizona, I would recommend you go to the Mule Deer Foundation website and become a Conservation Partner. It's all tax deductible and all of your donation will be used in your state. Now that's a win-win opportunity for you and the mule deer in your state!

Youth Deer Camps
You might ask, “How do the youth deer camps help our mule deer?” Well the answer is “HERITAGE” – without our future generations getting excited about the outdoors, how will we ever continue to keep our outdoors OUR OUTDOORS? The future is in these camps we hold in Arizona – in 2015 and early January 2016 we held six camps and we had over 250 kids participate! Along with the lucky tag holders, we had several family members attend as well. Most of these families were there to learn from our mentors and enjoy what God has given us in the outdoors. We have been holding these camps for many years and now we have some of our youth hunters turning into mentors and helping the next group of kids. In the future, these will be your volunteers, your wildlife managers and biologists, and they are your next generation of Mule Deer Foundation members. The bottom line is if we do not recruit and then retain these young hunters then we will lose all we have worked so hard for. Take a youth hunting and help save our wildlife!

Adopt A Ranch
Adopt A Ranch is a partnership program with the Arizona Game and Fish and ranchers to improve habitat or water sources on private lands, and in turn the rancher grants access to sportsmen. In 2015, the Mule Deer Foundation and its chapters adopted three more ranches for a total of six in the state and has conducted a number of volunteer activities on these ranches. It has been a huge win for all included as it helps the ranchers, and re-builds trust between the public and ranchers (in the past the trust just has not been there for either side). The MDF will also do clean ups on and around the ranches and most of the trash we accumulate isn’t even from sportsmen. The take away here is this: we must work with ranchers as they have been the stewards of the land for generations in Arizona. We must work side by side to benefit the mule deer herds in Arizona and in doing so we will help all wildlife above and below the mule deer.

Continuous Improvement isn’t just a phrase – it is a way of life for the business world. Wildlife may not be a business but it is the same philosophy as business – continue to grow the herd and watch the benefits unfold. If we cannot improve each day, each year, and each decade as we move forward in this quest to revive our mule deer herds then we will fail and the mule deer will fail with us. To sit alone and ponder what you can do is noble but to join a group of like-minded and dedicated conservationists and see what is being done and what can be done is a success story! 2016 is looking strong with two new
chapters in Arizona (Valley Verde Chapter located in Camp Verde and Cottonwood, and the Rim Country Chapter located in Payson and throughout the North Central rim country) and some new faces running some of our other chapters. We will be holding several fundraisers again this year and we will generate a lot of cash for our mule deer. This cash will be spent right here in your back yard on your mule deer herds so why in the world would you not want to be a part of the restoration of mule deer in Arizona? Join us and help us do what needs to be done. With the help of Mother Nature and the assistance from the Arizona Game and Fish with the Commissioners Tags for our Habitat Partnership Committee projects, this state will be back on track and we WILL be living in the "Good Old Days"! Remember, mule deer without "U" just won't work so please join us today! Our volunteers are the best in the state and we would like to have you who are not out there with us be a part of us as well! See you in the field!

Repairing the old tanks to retain water in our state includes $1,000 worth of material and over 300 hours of volunteer time. 2014 Arizona Youth Conservationist of the Year, Carter Lawrence, is doing his best to run over 2 miles of water pipe to several water sources for wildlife!

Jim Lawrence, Arizona State Chair, and Mike Hemovich, Bar X Ranch owner, work side by side to help our wildlife.

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After suffering through another year of unprecedented drought, everyone in California is praying that the predicted El Nino effect in the Pacific Ocean will bring us higher rain and snowfall totals than normal this winter. It’s very unlikely that the state could recover in one year, but it would sure help if a little ground could be gained in restoring our reservoirs, springs and underground aquifers. Severe drought creates more problems for deer than just the lack of drinking water. One of the major problems that deer face in a drought year is that most plant species that they depend on to survive tend to have less new growth when there is not adequate rainfall. As a result, pregnant does often do not get the nutrition they need to produce big healthy fawns, and those that are born often do not thrive. Fawn recruitment is the single largest factor in determining the size and health of a deer herd. While the wildfires that have ravaged the state in the last couple of years have had some devastating effects to both wildlife and people, in some areas they may very well be a blessing to our deer herds. Tens of thousands of acres of decadent habitat have burned and now have an opportunity to regenerate if we can only get some adequate moisture.

This last fall, our Project Review Committee held its annual meeting where it considered a number of project proposals for funding, and six very good projects were recommended for approval. They include:

**The Gobbler Fire Reseeding Project**
This project is located in Trinity County in the Six Rivers National Forest. MDF funded $7,500 to pay for reseeding areas with native forbs and grasses burned in last summer’s wildfires in the Mad River Ranger District.

**The Tule River Reservation Protection Project**
MDF funded $10,000 to pay for prescribed burning operations to open up decadent habitat and reduce fuel loads in deer summer range in the Sequoia National Forest.

**The Modoc Gulch Juniper Reduction Project**
MDF funded $8,500 towards this BLM project in Modoc County to remove encroaching juniper in sagebrush habitat in mule deer critical winter range.

**Hwy. 89 Stewardship Camera Project**
MDF funded $6,000 to replace outdated cameras along the Hwy. 89 corridor in Sierra County. This is an ongoing project to build highway underpasses for wildlife to reduce road kill along the migration route of the Truckee deer herd.

**The Guzzler Maintenance Supplies Project**
MDF funded $4,000 to purchase supplies to repair and maintain a number of wildlife guzzlers in the Bishop area in the Southern Sierras.

**The Plumas National Forest Guzzler Project**
MDF funded $25,000 to purchase five guzzlers in the Plumas National Forest surrounding Quincy. Volunteers from the Plumas County Chapter will be installing the guzzlers this coming spring and summer.

As always, our PRC is looking for good projects to spend our chapter rewards funds on. These projects can come from governmental agencies or from our membership. If you see a good project in need of doing, please contact a local chapter member, or me, the Regional Director.

This year’s banquet season is kicking off with a bang this February with three fundraisers in February, and two in March. The first one will be the Solano County Chapter banquet in Vacaville on February 6th, followed by the Plumas County Chapter banquet in Quincy on February 20th, and the Motherlode Chapter banquet in Sonora on February 27th. The March banquets will be the North Bay Blacktail Chapter banquet in Santa Rosa on March 5th and the Livermore/Pleasanton Chapter banquet in Livermore on March 18th. Anyone interested in attending or donating to one of these banquets can contact the committee chairman shown in the upcoming events list in this magazine.

All of our chapter volunteers work very hard to promote MDF and put on fun and successful annual banquets, and they all can use more help. If you care about deer, deer habitat and our hunting heritage, we invite you to offer to help out by volunteering on a local chapter committee, or if there isn’t a chapter in your area, think about starting one.
I am overwhelmed by the momentous passing of the right to hunt and fish ballot initiative in Texas, and that those words will be written into our state Constitution. One might think that this would have never been an issue in our fair state. However, when the same initiative came up in several Western states it was defeated. Well, no one can ever say that we didn’t get in front of the game! Now my grandchildren and great-grandchildren should have the ability to go afield and enjoy the experiences I have enjoyed. This is all thanks to a coalition of conservation groups under the umbrella of the Texas Outdoor Partners. I am proud to say the Mule Deer Foundation is one of those partners and our members helped to spread the word and voted in this election.

January 2016 is a time of slow days spent in front of a crackling Oakwood fire – not! January starts us off with a five-day booth at the Dallas Safari Club convention in Dallas. If you’re in the neighborhood, please stop by. After that, the first banquet of the year is in Amarillo on the 23rd. We had to move the date and the location but we have a mighty herd of mule deer enthusiasts up there that can’t wait to gather and support mule deer.

The following week on January 30 we travel to Carlsbad New Mexico, where a brand-new chapter will come to life. The doors of the local Elks Lodge open at 6 p.m. so mule deer hunters and enthusiasts can gather for the first time under the MDF banner to help the “ghosts of the desert” that live nearby. This chapter has already garnered support for a deer decoy for local law enforcement to use to prevent poaching.

February 27 finds us in Weatherford at the Parker County banquet this will be the fifth fundraiser done here. Those of you who have been with us from the beginning here in Texas remember this as the first MDF banquet in the state. Mark Worthington and Charlie Barnes again will greet everyone with enthusiasm and a cold adult beverage as we continue the legacy of the best party in town!

Last but not least – the volunteer! From the grumpy old guy who is always first to roll up his sleeves, to the well educated business professional that puts their plans on hold to raise money and awareness for mule deer. And of course those folks who drove eight to twelve hours to the Big Bend area to help install two giant permanent guzzlers in the driest part of Texas, only to be welcomed by the rains from a hurricane, resulting in nine miles of mud to get back to the main road. Talk about over and above the call of duty! Without you none of this would ever happen, and I can only wonder what the future will hold.
As many of you know, MDF received a $470,000 grant from the North Dakota Outdoor Heritage Fund in 2015. Projects will start to roll in 2016 and focus on mule deer habitat projects on lands that are enrolled in the Private Lands Open to Sportsmen (PLOTS) program. This grant requires matching funds and it is important that we run more banquets to meet this match. While 2015 was a record year for fundraising and banquet attendance, we hope you’ll attend at least one banquet in 2016 – and bring your friends! Additionally, MDF would like to add a few more chapters to North Dakota and we need your assistance. Currently North Dakota has chapters in Bismarck, Dickinson, Elgin, Fargo, Minot and Williston. If you have interest in helping MDF and habitat in western North Dakota, please contact me.

This past fall, the state’s mule deer survey showed that the overall population continues to improve with a 23 percent gain from 2014. Fawn-to-doe ratio is good, although slightly below average, at 84/100 (anything over 60/100 is growth) and there’s also a nice buck-to-doe ratio at 42/100. The largest population gains came in the prime mule deer habitat in units 4-B, C, D and E.

Fieldwork for the study on potential impacts of oil and gas energy development on mule deer in western North Dakota and eastern Montana wrapped up in December. In January, researcher Jesse Kolar will move to Columbia, Missouri to work with the University of Missouri to analyze the collected data. Radio collars will continue to collect and transmit data until deer die, or collar batteries fail. In June, 2016, all collars will be remotely programmed to drop off.

Some of the most interesting deer movements observed in the last eight months were a handful of yearling “exploratory movements” in our Montana study area. Five yearlings made movements further than 40 miles, briefly remained in new home ranges, and then returned to their original home ranges. One additional yearling collared 15 miles northeast of Glendive, Montana, made a similar movement, but never returned, dispersing to a new range near Fort Peck Dam. No similar exploratory or dispersal events were observed in the North Dakota study area.

2015 brought two new chapters to the Montana MDF family, the Prairie Ghost Chapter (Sidney) and the Badland Bruisers Chapter (Glendive). Both held very successful first banquets this past fall. The two chapters are currently working together and with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on a fencing project between Sidney and Glendive.

The Eastern Montana mule deer population also had an approximately 23 percent gain in population year over year. “Habitat conditions have been favorable and the mule deer population has seen continued growth” says John Vore, game management bureau chief. “With the exception of Region 1, populations throughout Montana are close to, at or above long term averages.”

Hunting this past season has seen better success than the past few years. “Region 7 had good results with many of the hunters we have spoken to commenting on the number of animals they saw,” Vore continued.

This is great news and things will only get better as we add funds for habitat improvement and grow new chapters in Eastern Montana. If you would like to help start a chapter in your area or have questions about MDF, please call me.

Lastly, Bruce Stillings, a big game biologist with North Dakota Game and Fish Department, alerted me to an uptick in poaching, including some collared deer within the survey area. “This past year the Watford City area has really been hit hard by poaching, which is a black eye on hunters and detrimental to our mule deer herds,” Stillings said. Poaching has been rampant including a mule deer doe and an elk cow recently shot and left to waste between Lewiston and Roundup, Montana and a buck that was spotlighted and shot in the dark near Mandaree, North Dakota (fortunately that poacher was caught right away).

Folks, as sportsmen, we have to be vigilant about our wildlife and our hunting culture and ethics. If you see anyone doing something illegal, call your local poaching hotline and turn them in.
This has been a fantastic couple of months for Western Montana. Given all the great projects that we have funded, banquets that we’ve held and the accomplishments of our tremendous group of volunteers, I will focus on two things in this write up.

Two volunteers have been appointed to new positions in addition to their involvement with their local chapters. Mike Corkish, who has been deeply involved with the Northern Rockies chapter, has been appointed the Western Montana state chair. Mike lives in Kalispell with his wife Jamie and their two kids, and he always helps out anyway he can. “I’m very humbled to be appointed the Western Montana state chair for MDF and look forward to working with the dedicated volunteers that make up this organization. Through recruitment and retention, I believe we will continue to accomplish the important mission of MDF,” says Corkish. If you have any questions for Mike you can contact him at (406) 212-8122 or email him at northerrockiesmdf@gmail.com. Also, Tracey Manning has been appointed the Western Montana Youth Events Coordinator. Tracey lives in Missoula with his wife Christine. Tracey has been involved with MDF for more than 15 years and is the co-chair of the Dark Horn chapter in Missoula. “In many conversations, I have stressed how important it is to get the youth involved – they are the future of MDF. I have many great ideas for engaging youth through MDF and look forward to the opportunity to be the new Western Montana Youth Events Coordinator,” says Manning. If you have any questions about putting on an MDF youth event in your city please contact Tracey at (406) 214-1154 or email him at youth4muleys@gmail.com.

The Sapphire Range chapter in Hamilton found a different way to help expose the community to MDF. At the end of this last summer they adopted a 2-mile stretch of Highway 93 around Stevensville. The Adopt-a-Highway program is a way for groups to help with the clean-up of litter around the massive highway system in the state. Montana is such a beautiful place that we all need to do our part to keep it clean. “This is more about getting better exposure for MDF in our community,” says Dan Lyons, chairman of the Sapphire Range chapter. “This project is 100 percent free for our chapter and it shows the community that we care about every aspect of the outdoors,” Lyons added.

With chapters in Butte, Great Falls, Helena, Bozeman, Missoula, Hamilton, Kalispell, Ennis (new) and Dillon (new) we are always looking for people who want to help the local chapters with their respective banquets and volunteer work. MDF is a fun atmosphere and a rewarding one when you get to help with projects that you helped raise the funds for. We are currently looking to start chapters in Lincoln, Havre, Shelby, Whitefish and Polson but are always willing to come to other cities as well. If you would like to start a chapter in your city or help with an existing chapter, please contact me and I will get you all the information that you need.

**Eastern Idaho**

With the ever-growing reach of MDF, Idaho was getting to be too big for one regional direction to cover, so just a few weeks ago I was assigned the new region of Eastern Idaho. Right now my chapters are in St. Anthony, Idaho Falls and Pocatello and I’m currently looking to start chapters in Salmon and Sun Valley.

I recently had the pleasure of going to Idaho with our other RD, Dan McKinley, to sit down with the chapters and talk with them about their goals and what they would like to see with MDF. I must say that I’m very excited about working with these chapters to better the habitat of the Eastern Idaho landscape for mule deer. These volunteers are enthusiastic about helping mule deer and you can see their passion when they talk about their upcoming projects and banquets. If you would like to help with one of these existing chapters or start one in Eastern Idaho, please contact me and I will get you the information needed.
News from the field
COLORADO

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

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Cherokee State Wildlife Area
Tree-Thinning Project
On August 22nd, several members of the Mile High Chapter traveled to the Cherokee State Wildlife Area (SWA) in north central Colorado for a tree-thinning project. Members met with Justin Foster, manager of the property for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) at park headquarters and then caravanned up to an aspen and fir stand in the western end of the park. The goal was to cut down small pine trees in a 6-foot circle around the largest pine in the patch in order to clear the area for single tree growth and also open the forest canopy. Chapter members worked most of the day with a break mid-day where they gathered at an old ranch house on the west end of the park for grilled elk burgers and conversation. The afternoon highlight was when member Brian Grebe felled a 60-foot beetle-killed tree that rattled the whole forest!

The Cherokee SWA is made up of a patchwork of over a dozen units interspersed with Forest Service land and private property comprising over 19,000 acres of public land. The Mile High Chapter has funded and built several guzzlers at the SWA and funded habitat planting this past year. Future MDF funding plans include more water guzzlers, hopefully to be built by Mile High members.

M.U.L.E.Y. Trailer Sighting!
The Colorado Trappers Association (CTA) held its 39th annual Rendezvous and Convention at the Fort Morgan Game and Fish Conservation Club in Fort Morgan. The CTA event, held September 4–6, featured outdoor vendors, coyote calling, fur skinning techniques and a wide variety of outdoor activities. Jim Franklin, Mile High Chapter member and Colorado volunteer coordinator for the M.U.L.E.Y. program, took our new M.U.L.E.Y. shooting trailer to the CTA event on September 5th. The trailer features a 2-gun pellet gun range where kids can learn or sharpen their marksmanship skills. Mile High Chapter chair Chuck McCammon assisted Jim at the event. About 30 kids attended and enjoyed the shooting range, winning silver MDF coins, M.U.L.E.Y. merchandise and MDF magazines for their marksmanship. Mile High Chapter chair Chuck McCammon assisted Jim at the event. About 30 kids attended and enjoyed the shooting range, winning silver MDF coins, M.U.L.E.Y. merchandise and MDF magazines for their marksmanship. One highlight of the day was a dunk tank where the local CPW wildlife officer, Cory Chick, sacrificed himself for the “Dunk the Warden” activity, raising money for local youth activities. CTA president Dan Gates also jumped on the dunk platform to raise additional money. It was a hot day in Fort Morgan so the “dunkees” were glad to go in the water, especially since it was for such a good cause!

Colorado Parks & Wildlife News

Mule Deer Highway Mortality
In 2015, a major highway improvement project began with hopes of reducing wildlife and vehicle collisions on a highly traveled road in north-central Colorado. The two-year project on State Highway 9 runs from the north edge of Summit County to just south of Kremmling. When completed, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) project will feature wider lanes, improved sightlines and seven wildlife crossings, including two overpasses – the first of their kind in Colorado. Construction will be put on hold for the winter months and resume in the spring.

Over the last twenty years, the narrow stretch of Highway 9 between Silverthorne and Kremmling has seen a significant increase in traffic and approximately 600 motor vehicle accidents. In addition, because many portions of the highway intersect wildlife migration routes, there have been at least 600 incidents of wildlife killed by vehicle collisions in the last 10 years alone. Most of the mortality has been on mule deer. Area citizens and CPW officials, concerned for human safety and wildlife mortality, worked with CDOT to make the long-sought improvements a reality. It is hoped that similar projects will occur on other high-mortality highways in the state as Colorado’s population grows and more people travel where mule deer migrations occur.

Mountain Lions and Mule Deer
CPW will be preparing a research study to assess increases in mountain lion hunting quotas and the impacts on mule deer populations. Once a study is formulated, any proposal to alter mountain lion quotas (and possibly include other predators) will then be presented to the public for comment and participation. It is well known that mountain lions take a large percentage of the mule deer population.
How time flies and the New Year is already upon us and we have a lot of activities in the first months of this year. Kicking things off in Oregon will be the P.L.A.Y. (Promoting Lifelong Activities for Youth) event in Klamath January 18th. Thirty-five groups partner to present a number of hands-on activities for kids. Last year’s event kept 1,800 youth busy for all or part of the day. From there we move to the Portland Sport Show February 10-14 where the North Oregon Chapter will man a booth. Our first MDF banquet will be February 20th in Klamath Falls. The next weekend (Feb. 26-28) the Southern Oregon Black-tail Chapter will be manning a booth at the Medford Sport Show. March brings Paulina Peak’s (La Pine) banquet on March 5th. This is followed by Linn-Benton Black-tail Chapter’s (Albany) banquet on March 12th that will again auction the Access and Habitat Statewide Deer Tag.

Moving on to Nevada, I have been in contact with Dan Snow, chairman of the Northern Nevada Chapter in the Reno area, and he is making plans for this year’s banquet. We are still working on a location and date for the event and will keep you informed when those decisions have been made. We are quite pleased to announce that we have scheduled a “Ladies Only Luncheon” in Reno for May 21st.

Something new is coming to Oregon big game hunting in 2016. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will be offering the new “Premium Hunt Series” for deer, elk and pronghorn. Most units, though not all, will have additional tags and hunters will be able to apply for these new tags. The seasons will be quite long and will allow the hunter to hunt the rut or just about whenever strikes their fancy. This is a new hunt and I do not have all the information at this time, however, I understand the estimated number of tags offered for the 2016 season will be: 67 deer, 64 elk and 27 pronghorn.

Something disturbing to bring to you in Oregon: it is reported that poaching reports rose 15 percent in the last year. Last fall and winter brought several news stories in the local papers about poaching, especially in the eastern half of the state. A recent press release by the Oregon State Police announced that they would be using surveillance cameras, beefing up patrols, and using aircraft to assist those patrols on mule deer winter ranges. I recently spoke with the local state police supervisor about the game cameras that several of our chapters have bought over the years. He reported that many of them had aged out and were no longer serviceable, but several still were working and are currently in the field, mostly on roads in mule deer winter range. As most of you know, a mature mule deer buck is most vulnerable in the rut and can use all the protection he can get. We wish the Oregon State Police well in their endeavors.

This season, I took advantage of the Mentored Youth Program and took my 9-year old grandson, Alex, on his first hunt. A sassy forked-horn gave Alex a shot opportunity at 100 yards and I am so pleased to report that he made a beautiful one-shot kill. That deer might as well have been the new state record with all the pride that was beaming out of this young man’s face. That experience is something that I will never forget. Please see the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s website for more information on the Mentored Youth Program and help introduce more young kids to our hunting heritage.
As I look forward to 2016, there are some exciting things happening for mule deer in Wyoming right now. Of course, the biggest news that you may have heard about is the Wyoming Migration Initiative. I was fortunate to attend a two-day forum in Laramie to learn more about this groundbreaking research and to talk with state and federal agencies, NGO’s, landowners and the science community.

Did you know that Wyoming is home to the longest mule deer migration corridor known to us to date? This is a 150-mile trek from the Red Desert to the Hoback, but the research has shown that along this corridor there are 10 key obstacles that the mule deer face. I am happy to report that steps are already in the works to correct these obstacles, providing many project opportunities. One of the obstacles was a bottleneck area just outside the town of Pinedale where an important part of the route was threatened with potential of further development. By identifying this as a key area along the corridor there are 10 key obstacles that the mule deer face. I am happy to report that steps are already in the works to correct these obstacles, providing many project opportunities. One of the obstacles was a bottleneck area just outside the town of Pinedale where an important part of the route was threatened with potential of further development. 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During this forum the word that was used repeatedly was “collaboration” – participants agreed that collaboration is the key to expanding conservation on all levels. It will take everyone working together across jurisdictions to accomplish all that is needed to help preserve and protect the mule deer populations. The Wyoming Migration Initiative is beginning to look at other ungulate migrations in the state and they hope to continue their research with the help of their supporters. There are also talks about studying the migration route from Dubois to the Cody area and the migration in the Platte Valley as well. We will keep you posted!

On a more exciting note, we have begun the banquet planning process for our 2016 season. The Curt Gowdy Chapter in Cheyenne has scheduled February 27th for their banquet. For tickets or more information, give Dave Lockman a call at (307) 631-3406. Another spring banquet will be held in Evanston on March 5th. This will be the Unita Chapter’s second banquet and for more information on this event call Jacquelyn Youngberg at (307) 780-7450. The Black Hills Mulies of Newcastle haven’t set a date just yet, but they are looking in late March or April for their banquet. The Thunder Basin Chapter in Gillette just held their 9th annual banquet in November and we used this as a rebuild year to get that chapter off the ground and running again. It was a great event raising some valuable funds to help with projects in the Northeast corner of the state. On an even greater note, I am in the process of resurrecting the Buffalo/Sheridan chapter as well as the Central Wyoming Chapter in Casper. Keep a close eye out for banquet dates in these areas. If you live in a part of Wyoming that doesn’t currently have an MDF chapter and you would like to help start one or coordinate a banquet, give me a shout. Let’s help protect and maintain the mule deer of Wyoming together!

**NEBRASKA**

That’s right, MDF is now in Nebraska. Our first chapter was started in Ogallala and they hosted their first event in December. We hosted a “Beers for Deers” at a local pub and spread the mission of MDF to everyone in attendance. A small silent auction raised some funds to help in the planning process for their first banquet that will be held at a later date.

Art Craker, Nebraska state chair, has helped in getting the word out about MDF and we are looking forward to the potential of helping mule deer in Nebraska. Watch for us in the North Platte area as well as Scottsbluff.
Washington and Idaho are preparing for another busy banquet season and both states are eyeing some great project work for this year. New chapters in Lake Stevens and Puyallup, Washington, as well as the Boise, Idaho area are excited to get to work for their local blacktail and mule deer herds! Wildfire rehab has still been the biggest focus in our states and it will take many years to accomplish what needs to be done. The Magic Valley Chapter out of Twin Falls, Idaho spent many hours this year working on guzzler repair and replacement in southwest Idaho, one of the best mule deer regions in the Northwest. A Conservation Partnership from Daniel Butler, owner of Spring Cove Outfitters, enabled the chapter to do a lot of good work for the guzzlers in some fire damaged areas.

The chapters in southern Idaho are looking forward to a multi-year series of projects with public agency partners for habitat rehabilitation in areas affected by large wildfires. MDF will be planting shrubs on the ground in priority habitats identified by local wildlife managers to jumpstart recovery for mule deer habitat and other wildlife. This work is being coordinated in conjunction with a high school in the Twin Falls area and local chapters and is expected to get underway later this year. There are some other projects under development in south Idaho including some potential Stewardship Projects with the Forest Service. These projects may include shrub restoration, juniper removal, aspen regeneration/protection work, and many more jobs that will help our local deer herds. Other recent projects in Idaho include purchase of equipment to aid law enforcement in wildlife crime cases, seed and shrub planting to replace fire damaged habitat, and supporting youth shooting across the state. With the addition of the new Treasure Valley Chapter near Boise, MDF is getting a good base of volunteers to help our wildlife in the state.

We have added several new chapters in Washington over the last three years and we are continuing to grow local chapters and add volunteers to our ranks. Two new chapters this year in Lake Stevens and Puyallup, Washington” are looking forward to making an impact for Western Washington’s blacktail herds. Cooperative work with Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) law enforcement and wildlife biologists will not only curb some of the poaching issues on the west wide but also help us begin to understand the secretive black-tailed deer west of the Cascade Mountains. Current projects include a study on the possible effects of herbicide use as it relates to fawn survival, and underbrush clearing to open up forest and enable increased forage production. Chapters in the central and eastern portions of the state have funded multiple projects this past year. Mediterranean sage removal, shrub augmentation, bitterbrush seeding and plug planting, canola plantings to provide food and cover, and fire rehabilitation are just a few of the jobs volunteers have been doing.

Many volunteers and chapters also took part in helping with local charities to provide essentials needed by those who have lost their homes in the expansive wildfires that hit our state for the second year in a row. In Okanogan County, for example, over 500,000 acres have been lost over the past two years. This area of the state is traditionally known as our “Mule Deer Factory” and thousands of acres of prime deer summer range have been lost. The result is the migration habits of our mule deer have changed as they search for transitional range habitat. Several projects are in the works for this year to help replace these critical food sources. As a result of the fires across the West, MDF started the Wildfire Fund to help states combat the losses we have all experienced. If you have the time, make sure and volunteer with a local chapter to help restore these wild lands.

The growth in the Pacific Northwest Region has been great these last few years, and we look forward to more new chapters and dedicated volunteers to help us spread the word and achieve the mission of MDF!
The following is a list of guides and outfitters who support MDF by purchasing a $100 Outfitter membership. MDF makes no guarantees or representation of any of these guides or outfitters listed. However, each has made a commitment to support conservation efforts with their purchase of an outfitter membership.

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<td>PO Box 9121, Windhoek, Namibia 9000</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hannesd@africaonline.com.na">hannesd@africaonline.com.na</a></td>
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<td>The Safari Connection</td>
<td>PO Box 9121, Windhoek, Namibia 9000</td>
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<td>Just For Hunting</td>
<td>67290 E. La Salle Road, Montrose, CO 81401</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hunter@justforhunting.com">hunter@justforhunting.com</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Silver Spur Outfitters, LLC</td>
<td>1831 Glenwood Road, Kamiah, ID 83536</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cayuseoutfitting@gmail.com">cayuseoutfitting@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>WinterHawk Outfitters, Inc.</td>
<td>371 Maid Marion Dr, Divide, CO 80814</td>
<td><a href="mailto:larry@winterhawk.com">larry@winterhawk.com</a></td>
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Please contact the Mule Deer Foundation National Headquarters at 1-888-375-3337 or email rachele@muledeer.org
Stepping out of a white Ford diesel truck at the Del Rio, Texas International Airport, his first words were, “Hello, I’m Buckshot!” Dressed western from his black Stetson hat to his boots, and wearing a long drover jacket, with a cigar in one corner of his mouth, he surely looked like the epitome of how a “Buckshot” would most likely appear. My kind of hombre for a hunt in old Mexico.

It was the first time I had met him, although we had previously visited on the phone working out the details for his hunt. How this hunt came about was a bit unusual. It started several months back when we first met some of the Mule Deer Foundation members. We were talking about building mule deer populations on some of our Texas properties and looking for partners in conservation projects. There was a definite need to build guzzlers in an effort to enhance mule deer habitat in the lower elevations of the Chihuahuan Desert in west Texas. Well, we did some visiting and a deal was made to donate a desert mule deer hunt on our Mexico properties while the MDF would help with funding and volunteers to build said guzzlers on the Texas conservation areas. The auction was held at the newly formed Odessa, Texas MDF chapter and Mr. Buckshot Dubose had the winning bid at the auction.

Our reason for meeting at the Del Rio Airport was so that I could fly Buckshot to the Sierra del Carmen area in Coahuila, Mexico for his mule deer hunt. We had acquired all the necessary permits for his hunt prior to his arrival and were ready to make the crossing with him, his rifle and gear. To do this we would check out of the U.S. through Del Rio and enter Mexico at Piedras Negras, Coahuila where we had personnel waiting with the proper authorities for the entry. We took off and made the short 30-minute flight, landed and started the process for the international crossing. I told Buckshot that it might take a couple of hours being as we were transporting his firearm - no problem with this, but it takes time and all the t’s have to be crossed and the i’s dotted. The weather was low cloud ceilings and I wanted to give it some time for the clouds to lift so we could clear the mountain passes. We had good luck at Piedras Negras and all the paperwork was finished in short order.
We waited about one hour longer letting the clouds lift before takeoff for El Carmen which is about an hour and a half flight. Take off was good and we flew under the low ceiling knowing that things were improving toward the mountains. During the flight Buckshot and I talked about hunting, he certainly wasn’t a novice but this was to be his first hunt in Old Mexico. We reached the mountains and as forecasted the clouds were breaking up.

“Say Billy Pat, what kind of animals live in these mountains?” At the time we were flying over the Serranias del Burro range. I replied to Buckshot that this range was famous for its black bear population, elk and Carmen Mountain white-tailed deer – and of course coyotes, mountain lions and javelina.

“No mule deer here Billy Pat?”

“No, we have to get to the drier country before we get into mule deer habitat,” I told him.

That made me think what it took several years earlier when we first began a wildlife management program on the Sierra del Carmen area to reestablish mule deer populations. The mule deer were almost totally extirpated in their historic range in northern Coahuila just ten years prior to this hunt. It took a lot of dedication and resources to trap, transport, and transplant several hundred mule deer from west Texas ranches (through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s TTT Program) – along with more political wrangling, permits and more permits than I cared to think about! These transplanted mule deer were now some of the best in Coahuila with a healthy population growing and expanding; so much so that we were offering a conservation hunt. A fitting testimonial to the folks and organizations that helped make it happen.

Soon the high peaks of the Sierra del Carmen were on the horizon. “There you go Buckshot, you are looking at the highest peaks in northern Coahuila.” Crossing the high peaks and descending, we quickly landed at Los Pilares headquarters where staff were waiting, this hunt had begun.

“Let’s make sure your rifle is sighted in,” I told Buckshot early the next morning. He assured me it was. “Humor me, my friend, as that rifle had a lot of handling while we were crossing the border and we were not always with the rifle.” True to his word, he placed his rounds center target. “Buckshot, somebody should have given you the name Deadshot!” He just smiled. Again, my kinda hombre for a hunt.

We started hunting a long valley between mountains driving in a pickup with high seats. We glassed the high points evaluating bucks we saw with the plan to stalk in when we found something interesting. Buckshot and two of our best guides, Jonas and Hugo, were up top and I was driving. These two guys had eyes like eagles and knew the game
well, we were looking for big mature bucks.

Suddenly one of the guys hollered "momento!" Knowing the game, I stopped and stepped out on the running board eager to see what they had found. Sky-lined on a hill about a 100 yards away was a good, big-framed, dark-horned muley. He had about a five inch drop tine on his left side. He was a beauty no doubt, but a little tight on spread and was about 3.5 to 4 years old.

"That's a nice buck, Billy Pat," Buckshot said.

"Yeah, he is but we can do better, let's leave him to get a little older. " Buckshot agreed and we moved on.

We hunted all day and saw several more bucks in that same age class, no more drop tines, but good bucks just needing a few more years' growth. The weather was cold and the rut was just beginning so there was plenty of movement, things were about perfect for a good hunt. Back in camp late that evening after dinner and a great time around the fire with a good glass of Canada's finest, Buckshot and I matched tall tales one for one into the shank of the night.

The next morning found us out early and looking; the muleys were moving and we glassed several good bucks. Along about midday, movement stopped and the deer were laying up so we broke for lunch and went back out about 3:30 p.m. We had been glassing areas for about an hour and one of the guys hollered out "momento" again. Listening to their conversation in Spanish, I could tell that they were a little excited. Down in a canyon with a group of does we could just make out the antlers of a good buck. Man, he was heavy and had lots of trash on both sides. He wasn't moving and apparently thought he was well hidden so we had a good look at him.

"Buckshot, you might consider taking that buck as he is an old rascal and the kind we have been hunting for," I said.

Buckshot was sure looking at him and the wheels were turning, but like I said, this wasn't his first rodeo. "Well, he is just not quite what I'm looking for as far as width but if we don't see anything better maybe we can hunt for him again."

"Ok," I agreed, "but as you know, when we leave that may be the last time we see him."

Yeah, I know how that goes but let's keep looking. " Enough said, we headed out.

The next morning found us on the side of the mountain as the sun started to rise over the high peaks. There was excitement in the air as we could all see several different mature bucks putting hares together and fighting off the young outriders. Down below us in a grass flat were four or five dark-horned bucks circling and rattling antlers, there was at least three shooters in the bunch of twenty plus mule deer. They were 800-900 yards away.

"Let's get closer – I think we can work our way in maybe 300 yards and get a better look. Some of those bigger bucks look interesting," Buckshot agreed and we worked our way within range. There was really a lot of movement so it was hard to stay with one buck as they circled in and out of the arroyos and small caprock points.

"Billy, Jonas, Hugo – you guys see that wider buck? I like him," Buckshot said.

"Okay guys, let's keep him in sight," I responded. "Buckshot, let us know when you are sure and let's see if we can squeeze in another 100 yards closer."

Buckshot replied, "I don't need much." I believed that as I had seen him shoot. We got about 50 yards closer and a couple of the does riveted their attention on us.

"Okay, let's set up and watch for him, this might be a bust if we push any closer," I said.

Two of the better bucks were sparring down in a low spot. "One of them is the buck, Billy Pat," said both Jonas and Hugo in Spanish.

"You understand that Buckshot?"

"Yeah," he replied. Like most folks along the border, he knew a little Spanish.

Hugo spoke up, "He is the one stepping out into the clearing."

"I got him" says Buckshot.

"Make sure," I warned.

"I am going hot," whispered Buckshot.

"Take the shot," I whispered back. The buck crumpled in his tracks, a textbook clean and well placed shot.

There is nothing like the camaraderie found on a hunt. It has been that way since humans first climbed down out of the trees and started their trek of evolving into a first class predator providing food for their family. Along the way we developed a deep respect for our prey and recognized the need to keep it sustainable.

The proceeds from the demise of this grand old buck went toward building two guzzlers providing water for potentially hundreds of mule deer as well as all wildlife and birds – a statement of value and true conservation.
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Drawing will occur August 1, 2016 at the Mule Deer Foundation National Headquarters.
Winner will be notified immediately either by phone or email.

NEED NOT BE PRESENT TO WIN • STATE AND LOCAL DRAWING LAWS WILL APPLY • MDF HAS THE RIGHT TO SUBSTITUTE ANY PRODUCTS OF THE WINNING PACKAGES PENDING ANY ISSUES WITH FULFILMENT SEE WEBSITE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS
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**Feb 11th - 14th, 2016** Salt Lake City, UT  
WHCE – MDF NATIONAL CONVENTION

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