

March 30, 2010

Attention: David Allen
President and CEO
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
5705 Grant Creek Rd
Missoula, MT 59808

Dear Mr. Allen,

We are writing to respond to multiple erroneous and misleading statements you recently made to the news media regarding our organizations and our positions on wolves and elk. We would like to clarify our position and intent so as to avoid further confusion and dispute.

It is surprising and disappointing that you chose to air this misinformation without contacting us beforehand. Doing so has only served to further polarize this important conservation issue.

We are not misrepresenting data compiled by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). The data we have referenced from the RMEF are undeniable: region wide, elk continue to thrive in the presence of wolves. We celebrate that fact as fellow wildlife conservation organizations and highlight this wildlife success to counter misinformation on elk numbers that threatens another wildlife success, wolf restoration. We have provided links to some of the RMEF sources we relied upon, as well as a fact sheet on wolf-elk relationships.

The impact wolves have on specific elk herds certainly varies from case to case and depends on numerous environmental factors. Those impacts may also be exacerbated in human-dominated landscapes. Basic wildlife biology, however, teaches us that predators and prey coexist over the long term and across the landscape and have been doing so for centuries. There are approximately 1,700 wolves in the region, compared to over 360,000 elk in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, and many hundreds of thousands of deer. Habitat loss and fragmentation pose far greater threats to elk, as does disease spread by artificial feeding.

More fundamentally, wolves are native wildlife, and both the states and the federal government are obligated to maintain healthy populations. The first principle of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model (featured on your website) is “fish and wildlife belong to all North American citizens,” recognizing the legitimate federal role in ensuring that states manage wildlife in the best interests of all Americans. The other basic principle states that wildlife “are to be managed in such a way that their populations will be sustained forever,” understating how important it is that state plans are in place that guarantee the long term viability of wolves.

You may disagree with our application of these principles to wolves, but you should not mischaracterize it. We fully support wolf delisting and state management so long as the terms ensure a healthy and sustainable regional wolf population over the long term. The current federal requirement of 100 to 150 wolves per state does not meet this threshold, particularly given the real possibility that states could try to manage wolves down to those numbers over time. There is much hostility voiced by a select few toward wolves in the Northern Rockies states including in state legislatures, by some governors’ offices, and even apparently from other conservation

groups. Strong, balanced, science-based federal and state plans are necessary to overcome this opposition to wolf recovery.

We recognize that public hunting may eventually be a regular component of state wolf management. However, until plans ensuring regional wolf sustainability are in place public hunts could force populations down before they are secure.

Our position is not one of opposition to sustainable hunting practices or to the important role that hunting plays in conservation. Responsible hunters are some of the most knowledgeable wildlife conservationists and we seek and find common ground with them regularly. It is unfortunate we have not been able to do so with RMEF recently but would like to work together in the future.

Through your publicity campaign against us, RMEF appears to be trying to benefit from increasing the conflict over wolves, even as you accuse us of the same. Our proposed solution, however, is not more conflict but more collaboration. We have called for a scientific review of wolf recovery criteria to incorporate the best available science, followed by a regional stakeholder process to guide development of state plans that meet wolves' biological needs while addressing the legitimate concerns of affected people and communities. Polarization of the conflict has only resulted in more frustration and wasted resources for us all. Working together is preferable and we would hope RMEF would lend its considerable expertise to this process.

Wildlife conservation includes recovering all wildlife. Wolf recovery is the natural continuation of North American wildlife traditions developed with great leadership by hunters. Our groups share a vested interest in conserving wildlife in the West – both predator and prey. Some of us are avid elk hunters and it has been disappointing to be attacked by RMEF for attempting to extend America's wildlife conservation know-how and tools to wolves.

We would like to meet with you to discuss these issues. We can – and we must – have healthy populations of both elk and wolves and we look forward to your response. Please contact Mike Leahy or Kirk Robinson at the below contact information if you would like to talk.

Sincerely,

Mike Leahy
Director, Rocky Mountain Region
Defenders of Wildlife
Bozeman, MT
406-539-9899

Kirk Robinson, PhD, JD
Executive Director
Western Wildlife Conservancy
Salt Lake City, UT
801-468-1535

Cc: RMEF Board of Directors

Enclosures

1. **2009 ELK HUNTING FORECAST**
Have wolves eaten all the elk in Idaho? Not even close, according to Idaho Fish & Game by JACK BALLARD, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
“Have wolves eaten all the elk in Idaho? Not even close, says Brad Compton of Idaho Fish and Game. “We still have some good elk hunting. Wolves have had an impact on our herds in some parts of the state, but they’ve not been decimated like it’s been publicized.”
2. www.rmef.org/NewsandMedia/NewsReleases/2009/ElkPopulations.htm :
“Wild elk populations in 23 states are higher now than 25 years ago when the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) was launched to help conserve habitat for elk and other wildlife.” “Population highlights among top elk states: . . . Colorado, Montana and Utah herds are 50-70 percent larger. Oregon and Wyoming are up 20-40 percent.”
3. [Elk Population Soaring: Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation celebrates success on its 25th anniversary](http://www.newwest.net/topic/article/elk_populations_soaring/C41/L41/)
www.newwest.net/topic/article/elk_populations_soaring/C41/L41/
4. “Wolves By The Numbers” from RMEF’s Sept/Oct 2009 Bugle Magazine comparing elk numbers and elk hunter success to wolf numbers (enclosed).