

Testimony for the Record of

**Miles Moretti  
President and CEO  
Mule Deer Foundation**

Before the

**Committee on Environment and Public Works  
United States Senate**

Regarding

*Committee Draft of the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017*

October 25, 2017

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper and Members of the Committee:

My name is Miles Moretti, and I am the President and CEO of the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), the only wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the conservation of mule deer, black-tailed deer and their habitat. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of the draft *Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017* (WPMA). The WPMA seeks to address the existing forest health crisis on National Forest System land, and expedite and prioritize forest management activities to achieve wildlife habitat and ecosystem restoration objectives. In particular, MDF appreciates the inclusion of Title II and its provisions on Sage Grouse and Mule Deer Habitat Conservation and Restoration on Public Lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

I have served as the President and CEO of MDF since October 2006 and in that time MDF has been one of the fastest growing wildlife conservation groups in the United States. I am also a professional member of the Boone and Crockett Club. Founded by Theodore Roosevelt, the Boone and Crockett Club is America's founding sportsmen-conservation organization and I am proud to offer the Club's shared support of the important legislation being considered here today. Finally, I am also the past chair and a current Board Member of the Intermountain West Joint Venture. The Mule Deer Foundation is an active partner on many of the Joint Venture's Sage Habitat Initiative which unites a diverse cross section of partners from federal and state government agencies, non-profit organizations and industry behind a shared goal of achieving healthy populations of sage grouse and sage dependent species through on the ground projects.

Previously, I served thirty years for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, retiring as Deputy Director. Additionally, I have served on several committees such as the California Outdoor Heritage Alliance, Pacific Flyway, the Colorado Fish & Wildlife Council, and the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Federal Budget & Legislative Committee. While I currently reside in Utah, I am a native of the Chairman's great state of Wyoming. I have a B.S. in Wildlife Management from Utah State University and an M.S. in Range/Wildlife Resources from Brigham Young University.

I've been involved in forest health, wildlife and land management projects and related policy efforts my entire career, and I can say without question that I have never seen a time when bipartisan and bicameral collaboration to enact natural

resources legislation was more urgently needed than the draft bill the Committee is considering here today. I state this conclusion for the following reasons:

The devastation resulting from catastrophic wildfires still burning in California and other states is making it clear to all Americans that “forest health” policy has far reaching impacts beyond just wildlife habitat, the forest products industry and outdoor recreation. Addressing the health of our forests is also vital to the very existence of countless businesses that drive local and regional economies, the protection of homes and, most importantly, addressing threats to human health and safety.

### Forest Management

MDF supports the adoption of policy changes proposed in this draft legislation that seek to remove unnecessary impediments to deploying the active management practices needed to improve the health of our forests while also ending the vicious cycle that continues to erode funding available for forest health projects as a result of “fire borrowing.” Together, these bipartisan provisions will improve forest health, save lives, protect communities, enhance fish and wildlife habitat and improve the rural economy.

MDF is also encouraged that the draft bill focuses on wildlife habitat benefits and other ecological results. We support providing federal land management agencies tools to accelerate the pace of restoration projects by improving the efficiency of environmental review processes, such as action/no action alternatives for collaborative projects, a minor fix to the highly-regarded Good Neighbor Authority, and improvements to restoration-based categorical exclusions.

Additionally, MDF supports meaningful litigation reforms that ensure that the time, money, and effort expended in the courts is focused on substantial issues and informed by substantial evidence. Today the courts can be used to delay projects in protest utilizing claims later to be found inconsequential. We support provisions that will take steps on this issue.

### Title II—Sage Grouse and Mule Deer Habitat Conservation and Restoration

MDF strongly supports Title II of the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act on Sage-Grouse and Mule Deer Habitat Conservation and Restoration. This Title will allow conservation partners to move quickly on landscape habitat restoration projects that have a tremendous benefits for reversing declines in the populations

of mule deer, sage-grouse and other species dependent on sagebrush rangelands. MDF greatly appreciates Senator Hatch and Senator Heinrich for working together and with a broad cross section of stakeholders including sportsmen conservation organizations and the oil and gas industry to craft this important provision which has also been introduced as stand-alone legislation.

According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, Piñon and Juniper forests have been encroaching on key sagebrush habitat at a rapid rate. This invasion erodes and fragments sagebrush habitat and provides artificial roosting and nesting sites for sage-grouse predators. Wildlife managers in the West have long worked to convert Piñon and Juniper stands to sagebrush because doing so increases forage and soil water availability, which benefits big game populations, particularly mule deer.

Sage-grouse and mule deer populations are suffering from the encroachment of invasive Piñon and Juniper trees into their primary habitat. To help safeguard and reinvigorate sagebrush habitats, we need to cut down the lengthy, cumbersome review process for vegetation management projects that use proven practices to restore sage habitat through Piñon and Juniper removal. This draft legislation would allow the Bureau of Land Management, wildlife organizations and the private sector to more effectively partner together to restore sagebrush habitat as a means to ensure healthy populations of these iconic Western species into the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. The Mule Deer Foundation greatly appreciates the Committee for working together to craft this important legislation and we look forward to working with you to move the bill through the Senate.

## **Background**

### *Mule Deer Foundation*

Since 1988, MDF has been dedicated to restoring, improving and protecting mule deer habitat (including land and easement acquisitions) resulting in self-sustaining, healthy, free ranging and huntable deer populations. The Mule Deer Foundation is the only conservation group in North America dedicated to restoring, improving and protecting mule deer and black-tailed deer and their habitat, with a focus on science and program efficiency. MDF is a strong voice for hunters in access, wildlife management and conservation policy issues. MDF acknowledges regulated hunting as a viable management component and is committed to

recruitment and retention of youth into the shooting sports and conservation. We encourage and support responsible wildlife management with government agencies, private organizations and landowners and encourages responsible and ethical behavior and awareness of issues among those whose actions affect mule deer.

### *Boone and Crockett Club*

As the oldest wildlife conservation organization in North America, it is the mission of the Boone and Crockett Club to promote the conservation and management of wildlife, especially big game, and its habitat, to preserve and encourage hunting and to maintain the highest ethical standards of fair chase and sportsmanship in North America. Founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, the Boone and Crockett Club was the champion of the earliest science-based wildlife management efforts and legislation and the first legislations funding wildlife conservation, including the Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson), and the Federal Duck Stamp Act. The Club was also an initiator and champion of the first National Parks, including Yellowstone, Glacier, Denali, and Grand Canyon as well as the first legislation for wildlife, including the Timberland Reserve Bill, Yellowstone Protection Act, Lacey Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and Alaskan Game Laws

### *Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV)*

As the largest of the U.S. Habitat Joint Ventures, the IWJV was established in 1994 to catalyze bird habitat conservation through the collaborative power of diverse public-private partnerships. My fellow Board members and I share a common passion for bird and other wildlife habitat, as well as a strong desire to nurture and grow partnerships with other entities in order to accomplish significant and meaningful conservation work in the Intermountain West.

The IWJV operates across all or parts of 11 western states and encompasses some of the most diverse and intact landscapes in the West. Important habitats in this region include wetlands, sagebrush-steppe, cottonwood-lined riparian galleries, grasslands, aspen woodlands, and Ponderosa pine woodlands and savannahs.