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Windermere Hills, NV Conservation Easement

Application Date	5/31/2024		
Applying Organization	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	Grant Type	Member Directed
Requested Amount	\$50,000.00	Project Name	Windermere Hills, NV Conservation Easement
Contact Name	Jennifer Stewart	Project Location (State or Territory)	NV
Contact Title	Grant Specialist	Project State/Province	NV
Contact Email Address	jstewart@rmef.org	Project Multiple Locations	
Notes		Status	Submitted
		Created By	Brandee Sperry, 5/31/2024, 10:24 AM

Organization Details

Organization Name	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation - Missoula, MT	Annual Operating Budget	\$82,500,000.00
Applying Contact	Brandee Sperry	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	142	Main Phone	1 800 CALL ELK
Total Membership	225,000	Website Address	http://http:\\rmef.org
BIPOC-led	No	Address	5705 Grant Creek Rd Missoula, Montana 59808 United States
C-Suite Staff			

Proposal Questions

1. Purpose/History Of Organization	The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) was founded in 1984 in Troy, Montana. After pushing through humble and challenging beginnings, RMEF stands as the preeminent organization focused on ensuring the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat, and our hunting heritage. Our mission programs are driven by more than 225,000 members and more than 12,000 volunteers working through more than 500 chapters. With these and other	2. Final Success	The Windermere Hills Conservation Easement (CE) and public Access Easement (AE) will protect 21,449 acres of land and add the same acreage of new public access to the adjacent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) checkerboard area; in total, the project will open up new public access to 42,072 acres; the property is part of a 188-mile migration route for the Area 7 (Pequop) mule deer herd, encompassing both part of the migration corridor and a significant
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partners, RMEF has been able to complete more than 14,000 conservation and hunting heritage outreach projects, opened or improved public access to more than 1.59 million acres, and conserved nearly 9 million acres. Today, RMEF is one of the most effective and efficient conservation organizations in the United States. Working together with members, volunteers, and conservation partners, RMEF is a strong advocate for elk, elk country, hunters, and public access, as well as science-based resource and wildlife management and conservation issues.

3. Location Details

RMEF and a private landowner are working to complete the Windermere Hills CE and AE Project. The Project will protect approximately 21,449 acres of sagebrush steppe, wet meadow, and native grassland habitat for greater sage-grouse, mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, and a myriad of non-game species, and open the property for public recreation via a permanent recreational AE for the enjoyment of public hunters, anglers, backpackers, horse packers, wildlife watchers, and other recreationists. The property consists of multiple parcels surrounded by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered lands in the historic checkerboard pattern. The area's ownership pattern creates access challenges for recreationists and the wildlife administrators for habitat and wildlife management purposes. The AE will improve access to approx. 20,623 acres of surrounding BLM lands, totaling over 42,072 additional acres of access. Together, with BLM land, the project creates a 73,322-acre contiguous conservation area.

The property falls directly within the migration corridor and critical summer range for Nevada's Area 7 mule deer herd, the 2nd largest mule deer herd in the state and 1 of 3 priority herds. The Area 7 herd (approx. 11,000 animals) faces habitat loss due to energy and mining development, competition with feral horse and burro populations, conversion to annual invasive grasses after fire in lower elevations, and pinyon/juniper encroachment in upper elevations. The Area 7 corridor is the state's longest migration corridor, spanning 188 miles and containing some of the region's largest areas of connected sagebrush steppe habitats, with outstanding ecological diversity and resiliency to climate change. Maintaining healthy and resilient sagebrush steppe habitat in the Great Basin will be instrumental in preserving this critical wildlife migration corridor, which spans from the Pequop Mountain Range to the Jarbidge Mountain Range. See

stopover area for the herd; the project will protect three perennial streams, five named springs, and protect one of the region's largest areas of connected sagebrush steppe habitats providing important habitat for various game and non-game species, birds, migratory waterfowl, pollinators, and other animals by protecting the intact habitat from subdivision and allowing state wildlife agencies access in perpetuity for habitat and public land management needs.

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Final success for the Windermere Hills CE is to protect, in perpetuity, this property via the sale of a conservation easement and public access easement. The CE will be stewarded by RMEF. The CE will provide better access for wildlife habitat management professionals, limit development and subdivision, and require high standards of habitat management. A perpetual AE will be deeded to the state, held by the Nevada Department of State Lands (NDSL), and managed by NDOW for the benefit of public recreation and wildlife. The Landowner and NDOW will continue to partner on riparian habitat improvements that are already occurring, including wildlife-friendly spring fencing and spring developments, as well as improving current infrastructure to make it wildlife-friendly, which would include greater sage-grouse markers. The CE will also conserve the following habitat: 21,449 acres of pronghorn habitat, 21,449 acres of mule deer habitat, 20,200 acres of elk habitat, and 21,000 acres of sage grouse habitat.

Timeline: March 2022: early negotiations with the landowners began, December 2023: Purchase Option (PO) with Landowners signed, 2024 - 2025: strategy conversations with NDOW, NFWF, TNC, and other sources for fundraising for the purchase of the CE, and continued efforts by RMEF and the State of Nevada to secure funding for the sale, 2025: due diligence, with anticipated closing is on or before December 2026. Currently, a Yellowbook Appraisal of the CE is in process and pending completion in the Fall of 2024. The estimated CE value is \$4,000,000 based on a market analysis. Due diligence costs, estimated at \$51,500, will include appraisals, minerals potential report, baseline, title commitment, and closing costs. The due diligence costs will be shared between Landowner, RMEF, and TNC. Total project costs are estimated at \$4,051,500.

The CE will protect traditional working ranch lands for the benefit of the

migrations map.

The CE will also protect critical water resources from diversion or change of use, including three perennial streams and several springs that benefit livestock and a host of wildlife species. These habitat types and features provide vital ecosystem, including carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling, which benefit wildlife and society. Protecting intact landscapes such as the Project area is especially prescient today as it pertains to climate change and the loss of natural systems that regulate atmospheric conditions.

community's rural culture and local economy. The property supports a full-scale ranch, with the landowners running a cow/calf operation throughout the property. Depending on the season, the ranch landowners typically hire between 4 and 10 local employees. The purchase of the CE will assist this agricultural family in maintaining their livelihood, the future of the ranch, and their ability to provide jobs for the local economy.

The Project's permanent public AE will benefit the local economy, as it will increase public access to both private and public lands for recreation. Local and out-of-state visitors are attracted to this stunning landscape, and increased public access to the landscape directly increases capital in the local economy through hotels, restaurants, guide services, and other amenities. A 2010 report on the economic impact of recreation in Elko County by George F. Leaming, PhD, of Western Economics Analysis Center, stated that outdoor recreation accounted for 20% of the local economy and that 2/3 of the tourism base of the county's economy came from outdoor recreation primarily on public lands. At the time, Elko County outdoor recreation generated an average of \$165 million annually in outdoor recreational uses through retail sales, services, lodging, and personal income, and outdoor tourism is a growing economy across the state. More recently, according to Travel Nevada, tourism in Elko County continues to increase annually. In 2022, travelers spent approximately \$625 million on lodging, food, recreation, and other services in Elko County alone. Approximately \$58.4 million (27%) of this revenue was spent by travelers partaking in recreation activities. This is an increase of 27% from 2021, and an increase of 10.3% from 2019. Securing legal public access and habitat protection has been a priority for NDOW, a goal that is widely supported by the landowner and public constituents who see outdoor recreation as a driving economic force in the state of Nevada. According to the Nevada Department of Transportation, 6,700 vehicles travel along I-80 and 3,100 travel along U.S. Route 93 by the Windermere Hills property daily. The Project will protect the extraordinary viewshed of the vast open space of the property, which is visible to residents and nonresidents from these highways. Permanent protection of the Property will ensure that a wild landscape remains intact.

The Project is part of a greater conservation collaboration between RMEF, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and NDOW. In total, the landowner owns

approximately 35,833 acres of crucial wildlife habitat that is being conserved with two separate but complementary CEs. RMEF will hold and steward this 21,449-acre Windermere Hills CE, while TNC will hold and steward the smaller 13,500-acre Clover Valley CE to the south. The TNC CE shares a border with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and will connect approximately 439,569 acres including Pole Canyon and Gennette Creek, two other RMEF projects.

5. Key Decision Makers

Committed funding: TNC: \$25,000 for due diligence, landowners have a PO and sharing due diligence costs: \$22,000, RMEF: \$4,500 for due diligence. Applied: NFWF Acres for America (decision to be made in 08/2024): \$750,000. Intend to apply: NDOW Heritage: \$1,000,000. Other state/federal programs: Dream Tag, Conserve Nevada, Wildlife for Sport Fish Restoration and Pittman-Robertson. Other private foundations: Knobloch Family Foundation and Nevada Bighorns Unlimited. RMEF, in coordination with TNC, may apply for NRCS funding in the 2025 cycle.

The Project is a high priority for NDOW due to the property's strategic location and diverse natural resource values. It lies within key habitats identified in NDOW's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), including low and high elevation sagebrush dominated shrubland and riparian and wetland/meadow habitat. Under Objective 2 of the SWAP, the plan supports using CEs on private property as a successful tool for addressing threats to species and habitats while providing significant benefits to adjacent public lands. The property contains multiple species considered "of greatest conservation need," including greater sage-grouse and mule deer. It lies within the Area 7 (Pequop) mule deer migration corridor (herd of approx. 11,000). Which is the 2nd largest deer herd in Nevada, 1 of the 3 priority herds identified in the NDOW SO3362 Nevada Action Plan, "Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors." While the migration corridor predominantly supports mule deer, it also benefits migratory species such as elk and pronghorn antelope.

We are working in close coordination with NDOW to close on this project, and as it meets all the high priority standards for the state, we have their full backing and support. We intend to reach out to the other funding sources mentioned above this year and rely on our existing relationships to help steward the project to completion.

6. Elevate Voices

RMEF's work in areas that border diverse and lower socioeconomic communities provides economic, aesthetic, and natural resource conservation and stewardship values. Land conservation benefits public access, outdoor-related jobs and income opportunities, water quality, carbon sequestration, and climate change. Habitat, management, and research projects support diverse, healthy communities through wildfire prevention, wildfire restoration, elk restoration (a substantial economic return), and jobs associated with habitat work. Hunting heritage and conservation outreach projects benefit hunters (a relatively small group) and provide opportunities to learn about wildlife, conservation, hunting, and other outdoor recreation for veterans, women, at-risk youth, disabled persons, and others. The Project will positively impact rural economies resulting from outdoor recreation spending and economic contributions from agriculture on the property.

RMEF is a membership-based organization, where we rely on our members and volunteers to fundraise and contribute to local projects. Habitat stewardship, wildlife management, and hunting heritage projects are proposed from local partners and selected via a committee of statewide RMEF volunteers and conservation partners, often resulting in volunteer opportunities for habitat improvement, wildlife management, or educational opportunities hunting heritage that are often open to the greater public. This process puts the money raised in each state directly back on the ground in that state for elk and elk country.

7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Permanently conserve 21,449 acres of crucial habitat for greater sage-grouse, mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, and other wildlife. 2. Increase landscape habitat connectivity for Nevada's second largest mule deer herd by permanently protecting a large portion of a crucial migration corridor and creating a connected conservation area exceeding 73,000 acres of private and federal lands. 3. Establish a permanent recreational AE on 21,449 private acres, greatly improving access to the approximately 20,623 acres of checkerboard pattern BLM-administered surrounding the property's parcels. 4. Maintain and improve habitat stewardship efforts, including protection of critical water resources, to benefit wildlife and livestock operations in the entire Project area. 5. Benefit the community's economy by protecting the future of working ranch lands and extending the network of protected public land in northeastern Nevada to benefit local residents, recreationists, and visitors to the area. 	8. Evaluate Your Progress	<p>Success in this project provides wildlife managers with the ability to do resource management that focuses on improving, maintaining, and restoring valuable habitat. This location boasts some of Nevada's most breathtaking views of the iconic East Humboldt Mountain Range. It is at risk of development if a conservation outcome is not achieved due to an existing road network and energy and mining development. With declining populations of mule deer and greater sage-grouse statewide, permanent land protection projects play a critical role in supporting species recovery. The Project area borders 2 greater sage-grouse management units and is a priority habitat management area with several active leks in the vicinity. Establishing a CE allows for increased stewardship to maintain and improve habitat for wildlife. This CE will ensure the natural resources are protected in perpetuity. Progress will be evaluated based on the timeline and the amount of funding secured.</p>
9. TCA Funding Plan	<p>If awarded, funding from The Conservation Alliance will be used for the purchase price of the conservation easement only and will help achieve non-federal match requirements.</p>	10. JEDI Efforts and Impact	<p>RMEF addresses discrimination, sexual harassment, and preventing all forms of discrimination and harassment in our Personnel Policies. In 2023, RMEF required all employees to complete anti-harassment training. The training increased awareness and understanding of diversity in the workplace. RMEF leadership reviews salaries on an annual basis to confirm there are no pay disparity issues and actively mentors and coaches potential future leaders. According to USFWS service, in 2022 only 16% of hunters were female and given this minority these programs provide equal opportunity for women to be successful in higher level roles within the organization. Over the last four years, RMEF has hired more female Regional Directors and hired/promoted women to higher level leadership roles with women directors and managing directors in almost every department within the organization.</p>
11. Confidential Items	<p>The CE and AE terms are under negotiation with the landowner and are not official. We share them with the intention of full transparency. The intention of the CE is to protect the conservation values of the property by the following means. Limit the subdivision of the Property to three five-acre building envelopes, which will be strategically located to protect the Property's conservation values. State of Nevada wildlife-friendly fencing guidelines must be followed. Landowners may graze the Property, provided it is consistent with the</p>	Other Relevant Application Details	

conservation purposes of the CE. The owner may not sell, encumber, transfer, or otherwise sever the water rights from the Property. The owner may only convey the Property as a single tract.

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