Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

DECEMBER 2020

Unified Regions 5/7 Priority Projects

Species Conservation & Management

With additional safety measures in place due to COVID-19, Melissa Whittingslow and Brian Mihlbachler coordinated the 2020 US Air Force Academy (USAFA) Deer Hunt in December. This hunt helps manage the deer population on the academy and lower animal vehicle accidents. Several members of the COFWCO staff as well as Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff, Air Force staff, and volunteers guided hunters on the base to ensure safety and security. Twenty eight hunters participated and 22 bucks and 4 does were harvested during the hunt. Lymph node samples were collected from all animals and tested for Chronic Wasting Disease by CPW.

A hunter with her buck harvested during the USAFA deer hunt in December.

Chris Kennedy collected deceased fish samples from the Big Thompson River in Rocky Mountain National Park following a fish kill caused by the East Troublesome Wildfire the burned this fall. The samples will be analyzed for toxic substances to ascertain causes of death.

McConnell Air Force Base (AFB) participated in the Wichita Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for the first time in several years. Dave Pettus, Tina Seymayer, and Mike Jungen spent the day counting birds and provided data to the Wichita CBC data compiler. Organizers were very pleased to have access to McConnell AFB bird data for this important annual survey designed to assess long-term trends in bird populations.

Left: Dana Shellhorn uses telemetry to locate mule deer on the Washoe Indian reservation in Wyoming. Photo by Cole Brittain. Right: Volunteer Bill Miller collecting fish samples on the Big Thompson River in RMNP. Photo by Chris Kennedy.

Dana Shellhorn and Cole Brittain travelled to Lander, WY to assist the Lander FWCO with mule deer surveys. They located radio collared mule deer does throughout the Washoe Indian reservation using telemetry, GPS collar locations, and spotting scopes. After identifying collar numbers they observed herds for fawn to doe ratios to compare behavior and breeding success between migratory and non-migratory individuals in their winter ranges.

Who We Are/ Where We Are

Lakewood, CO
Pam Sponholtz,
Project Leader
JoAnn Wise,
Budget Admin

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora, CO
Dustin Casady,
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Peterson, Schriever, Cheyenne Mtn Air Force Bases, Colorado Springs, CO
Katy Fitzgerald
Wildlife Biologist

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO
Brian Mihlbachler,
Biological Scientist
Melissa Whittingslow,
Wildlife Biologist
R. Joe Murphy III,
Forester
Bryan Wilfong,
Forestry Technician

Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park, CO
Chris Kennedy,
Fish Biologist

F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY
Alex Schubert,
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, KS
Mike Jungen,
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo, CO
Rickey Jones,
Wildlife Biologist

Fort Collins, CO
Cole Brittain,
Aquatic Biotechnician

Gunnison, CO
Dana Shellhorn,
Aquatic Biotechnician

Partnerships and Accountability

- Brian Mihlbachler attended weekly on-site meetings for the Monument Branch channel stabilization and habitat restoration project. As part of the storm water mitigation for the Powers Interchange at Interstate 25 project, Copper Ridge Metro District is rehabilitating the lower 2300-feet of Monument Branch on USAFA. Grade control structures, floodplain grading, and revegetation will help stabilize the creek and restore habitat damaged by earlier storm water events.
- Chris Kennedy coordinated with the USFWS Ecological Services for the upcoming Greenback Cutthroat Trout Species Status Assessment (SSA) as a core team member. He conducted literature searches to assemble research related to cutthroat trout, met with members of the Greenback Recovery Team to brief them on the SSA process, and prepared for upcoming technical workshops. He also met with Dr. James Roberts of the U. S. Geological Survey to discuss a model of long term persistence that he is preparing for the SSA.
- Joe Murphy participated in a field tour with the Colorado State Forest Service and the US Forest Service. This tour reviewed a wildfire in Bear Creek Park and various fuels projects in Pikes Peak National Forest. Along with touring these sites, participants discussed their individual projects and how best to collaborate between organizations. Quarterly field tours are planned for 2021.
- Dustin Casady and Alex Schubert applied for Tree City USA permits at their respective bases; Buckley AFB and FE Warren AFB.

Top: Initial clearing and grading of Monument Branch channel in Dec 2020. Photo by Brian Mihlbachler. Bottom: Federally threatened Greenback Cutthroat trout in a stream. Photo by USFWS.

Leadership in Science and Technology

- Alex Schubert reviewed the pronghorn population analysis and presentation prepared by SCA intern Keegan Delurey for FE Warren AFB. The well prepared research will greatly aid in the pronghorn population management at the base in the future.
- Mike Jungen participated in the Midwest Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need designations as a taxa expert in herpetofauna.

Left: Pronghorn buck captured at FE Warren AFB. There were 274 pronghorns counted during the monthly survey in Dec. Photo by Keegan Delurey.

Habitat Conservation & Management

Burn pile at the prescribed burn site on Schriever AFB. Photo by Katy Fitzgerald.

- Katy Fitzgerald and the Wildland Fire staff at Schriever AFB reviewed a prescribed burn site with new staff and determined the next steps in the plan. An outreach meeting is set for early January where staff will discuss reaching out to neighbors of the base and local fire districts as well as assuring the plan will be signed by Air Force officials.
- Bryan Wilfong installed three exclusions identified by the USAFA Cultural Resources Dept. within a 90 hectare forest parcel the at USAFA for an overstory thinning operation that will be conducted by a contractor. He redacted marks on trees for culling within cultural exclusions using paint and hatchets and continued marking new trees to cull outside of the exclusions.