

## WHO/WHERE WE ARE

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

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

Peterson, Schriever, Cheyenne Mtn Air Force Bases, Colorado Springs, CO: Max Canestorp, Wildlife Biologist

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO: Brian Mhlbachler, Biological Scientist; Melissa Whittingslow, Wildlife Biologist; R. Joe Murphy III, Forester

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

Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY: Alex Schubert, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, KS: Laura Mendenhall, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo, CO: Clark Jones, Wildlife Biologist

Gunnison, CO: Cole Brittain, Aquatic Biotechnician

# Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



APRIL 2017

## Habitat Conservation & Management



**The Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office team stands with engineer, Wayne Stancill, above a finished fish passage project at Baca NWR.**

*Fish Passage at Baca National Wildlife Refuge* The COFWCO team had the opportunity to assist USFWS Engineer, Wayne Stancill, in the construction of 2 projects to restore the movement of Rio Grande sucker and Rio Grande chub along Crestone Creek at Baca National Wildlife Refuge. (NWR) The team moved rock, shoveled dirt, and installed geotextile to stabilize the streambanks upstream and downstream of 2 newly-installed and improved culverts. These structures replaced old road culverts that were acting as height barriers during the fall of 2016. Bank stabilization needed to be completed before seasonal runoff occurs in order to reduce erosion. Baca NWR will monitor the hydrological effects of these structures in preparation for the installation of two additional fish passage structures scheduled for the fall of this year.

*Invasive Species Control* Alex Schubert coordinated with F. E. Warren Air

Force Base pesticide applicator, Galen Frahm, about some areas on base that Mr. Frahm will soon be treating to control the spread of invasive Dalmatian toadflax. Alex and Mr. Frahm inspected the site via UTV to ensure that the spray area would be outside of the occupied habitats of both the federally listed Colorado butterfly plant, and the Preble's meadow jumping mouse. Mr. Frahm will follow pesticide applicator rules that restrict the use of the herbicides during windy conditions. The chemical to be used is 2-4-d. This selective herbicide kills most broadleaf plants by causing uncontrolled growth in them, but leaves most grasses relatively unaffected.

*Stream Stabilization Project* Brian Mhlbachler conducted a bid walk with contractors interested in the Black Forest Creek (Middle Tributary) stream stabilization project. The project will control channel erosion on a tributary to Monument Creek and restore and improve wetland and

riparian habitat, especially for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

*Culvert removal on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge* Erin Ryan (USFWS Engineer) and Cole Brittain completed a successful removal of an obsolete culvert on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Old culverts are responsible for stream degradation and fish passage issues. Removing these structures will help Crestone Creek return to a more natural hydrological system benefitting the precious native species it contains. Habitat structures were implanted afterwards to promote bank stabilization and fish habitat.

*Habitat Assessment* Chris Kennedy completed the final report on Cascade Creek and Mirror Lake project within Rocky Mountain National Park. This project was to assess the area for the potential of converting it to native cutthroat trout. Data collected during the course of the project included: pH readings, water flows, mapping of backwaters, macroinvertebrate sampling, lake depth readings, extent of fish, location of fish migration barriers, time of water travel, fish sampling, and temperature monitoring. Data and maps will be used in this report so that a chemical treatment plan can be developed if it is decided to go forward with a reclamation project. Several sections of the report were written, tables and maps were updated during the month.

*Defensible Space* Joe Murphy has begun work on the USAFA Senior Officer's Quarters Defensible Space Project. Select houses in Douglass Valley will be receiving this treatment to reduce their risk of wildfire by removing excessive and ladder fuels around their homes.

# More Habitat Conservation...

*Arbor Day and Earth Day* For the past twelve years Arbor Day and Earth Day events have been held on Buckley AFB. This year COFWCO employees Dustin Casady and Krystal Phillips and Student Conservation Association intern, Taylor Cassidy, facilitated the Arbor Day tree planting ceremony. At the ceremony Colonel Miller received BAFB's twelfth Tree City USA award. They also hosted an Arbor Day and Earth Day informational booth and

activities at the base Child Development Centers where they planted wildflowers with children and gave them live lady bugs.

*Ips Beetle Infestation* Max Canestorp collected beetles from obviously infested ponderosa pines and identified them as Ips beetles. Canestorp then cut/limbed/bucked affected trees. Canestorp also deployed traps to lure beetles away from healthy trees.



**Ips Beetle under a microscope.**

## Species Conservation & Management

*Pollinator Gardens* Nicole Brown, SCA intern, has taken charge of maintaining the McConnell AFB pollinator gardens and documenting the invertebrates using the gardens. Brown has seen numerous native ladybug larvae crawling throughout the substrate. In addition to observing invertebrates, Brown is documenting nonnative plant growth so that she and Laura Mendenhall can draft a long-term maintenance and weeding plan for use in instructing volunteer gardeners.

*Burrowing Owls* A pair of burrowing owls was found using a prairie dog burrow on Buckley AFB. Taylor Cassidy spotted the burrowing owls during a routine survey used to document burrowing owl activity on base. The pair likely has already started nesting or will very soon. They nest early so their fledglings have time to develop, learn to survive, and prepare for the long fall migration before winter comes. The area the owls were spotted in is not being used currently and is closed to all personnel due to land use restrictions. The owls will be monitored throughout the season until they move on. Krystal Phillips facilitated and authored a draft email to be distributed as a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) for the burrowing owl nesting site. She explained Migratory Bird Treaty Act requirements and established Colorado Parks and Wildlife protocols to avert nest disturbance for installation members and leadership.

*Nuisance Coyote Report.* Max Canestorp responded to a report from an outdoor recreationist about a coyote that did not appear to be afraid of runners on remote trails. Canestorp advised Command that unless coyotes appear too habituated to people and/or actually threaten people, coyotes should be left alone.



**Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) at FE Warren AFB.**

*Black-footed Ferrets* Alex Schubert coordinated with Tyler Tretten of the USFWS Black-footed ferret conservation center in Wellington, Colorado. Tyler brought up 10 prairie dogs this month to populate the Base's F. E. Warren AFB's ferret pre-conditioning pens. The prairie dogs are currently excavating burrows in the pens. These burrows will be used by the black-footed ferrets when they arrive in July 2017. Alex has provided basic care to the prairie dogs, such as filling waterers, and dispersing alfalfa cubes and hay in the pens.



**Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*) at Buckley AFB.**

**"Canestorp advised Command that unless coyotes appear too habituated to people and/or actually threaten people, coyotes should be left alone"**



**This Purple Poppy Mallow (*Callirhoe involucrata*) at McConnell AFB is the host plant for the Gray Hairstreak butterfly (*Strymon melinus*).**

# Partnerships & Accountability

An article on the USAFA Arbor Day event is featured here:

<http://www.usafa.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1157173/academy-to-celebrate-arbor-day-april-26/>

**Staff Meeting** The COFWCO team spent a few days at Baca NWR for a staff meeting which featured presentations and discussions on military etiquette, the SCA internship program, natural resources management at Pueblo Chemical Depot, the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, and a staff satisfaction survey. Ron Garcia, Baca NWR Manager, was kind enough to take staff on a tour of the refuge. The team celebrated its FY16 successes with a pot luck dinner on the Refuge, while Pam Sponholtz serenaded the group with her fiddle-playing!

**Outreach** USAFA had its 2017 Arbor Day Celebration on April 26 with about 60 Kindergarteners from Douglass Valley Elementary School. It was a great day where the kids learned about trees, met Smokey, and planted six Ponderosa Pines behind their playground.

**Front Range Tribal Conference** Clark Jones and Brian Mihlbachler attended the Front Range Tribal Relations Meeting in April in Colorado Springs. This meeting was a coordinated effort by several Air Force installations from across the Front Range of Colorado and Wyoming to initiate a dialogue and strengthen relationships with many tribes that are consulted on matters related to cultural resource management on AF lands.

**Air Force Management Internal Control Toolkit (MICT)**. The Air Force MICT program aids program managers with self-inspection checklists on numerous federal and state laws and is utilized to ensure installation compliance within each program in order to avert inspection write-ups for environmental compliance discrepancies. Krystal Phillips accomplished bi-annual question responses for Air Force natural resources, ahead of the established deadline. She also provided MICT oversight and guidance to Dustin Casady, FWS Biologist assigned to Buckley Air Force Base, for the explo-

sive and weapons safety management response submission.

**Safety, Health, and Environment** Melissa Wittingslow and Brian Mihlbachler met with Region 6 Division Chief of Safety and Occupational Health for a comprehensive safety, health, and environmental assessment of the Natural Resource facilities on the US Air Force Academy.



**Gunnison Sage Grouse lek site.**

**Partnership with Colorado Parks & Wildlife for Gunnison Sage Grouse Monitoring** Cole Brittain assisted Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) with the annual Gunnison sage grouse lek monitoring program. The Gunnison sage grouse is a federally threatened species and is closely monitored to determine population fluctuations. Nate Steward (CPW) and Rachel Jones (Gunnison sage-grouse lek coordinator) organize multiple counts during the spring in order to document lekking activities. Cole Brittain participated in coordinated counts in order to help document active leks and assess their level of activity.

**Presentation at Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center** Clark Jones gave a presentation at the Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center entitled "Prehistory, history, and future of the Pueblo Chemical Depot". His talk gave a historical (and prehistorical) overview of the archaeology and historic role that Pueblo Chemical Depot has played in the region over

the years. Pueblo Chemical Depot was created during World War II and has served a role in nearly every conflict since that time. It now holds the distinction of destroying one of the last stockpiles of chemical weapons in the United States.



**Clark Jones presenting at the Southeastern CO Heritage Center.**

**Tinker AFB Visit** Laura Mendenhall spent a day touring the natural resources infrastructure at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City, OK. The DoD Natural Resources Manager and Biologist toured Mendenhall through their trail system, green infrastructure, and Texas horned lizard habitat area. The tour was an excellent opportunity to share ideas and to learn from a program that's been in place for 20+ years. Tinker AFB has an excellent model for natural resources management to sustain the Military Mission. Mendenhall shared a report on the visit with CE and the community planner at McConnell AFB.



**Restoration site at Tinker AFB.**

# Leadership in Science & Technology

**“We now have almost 2,000 images and 8.5 GB of aerial photographs [from UAV monitoring] that Natural Resources is assessing[...]”**

**UAV Monitoring Program** Early in April, USAFA’s contract foresters and Colorado Unmanned sat down with Natural Resources to further discuss the UAV monitoring program. We now have almost 2,000 images and 8.5 GB of aerial photographs that Natural Resources is assessing then sending the location of possible beetle infested trees to our Silvicultural Foresters for further investigation.

**Newspaper Article** Alex prepared an article for the F. E. Warren AFB newspaper. The article is titled - *On the Wild Side - Spring Time and Baby Animals*. The article describes nature’s use of camouflage, the importance of not touching or capturing young wildlife, as well as the need to keep pets, such as dogs and cats, under control at all times.

**Kansas GIS Meeting** Laura Mendenhall and Nicole Brown attended the annual Kansas Technical GIS meeting in Salina, KS. The meeting was an opportunity to learn about geospatial analyses occurring throughout the state, including novel techniques, and new data layers, and to meet other natural resources and GIS professionals. Highlights included a presentation on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles for restoration monitoring and the mapping of playa lakes in western Kansas.

**Drill Seeders** Alex Schubert coordinated on researching the potential types of grass drills that may be purchased by the base program. One type is called a Dewdrop drill. It is 5 feet wide in total and plants seed in a 3 foot swath. This may be purchased by the base in the future to accomplish seedings in areas that require it. The current cost of the seeder is approximately \$7500-\$8000. The drill is small enough that it can be pulled behind a UTV or side-by-side.

**Pesticide Certification** Cole Brittain passed the General Pesticide and

Aquatic Pesticide test becoming a certified operator in the State of Colorado.

**Student Research Support** Clark Jones remotely attended the thesis defense for Betsy-Kurimo Beechuk, M.S. (University of Georgia, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources) and served as a committee member for her master’s thesis examining variables affecting the abundance and distribution of marsh birds in the National Park Service’s Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. The Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve is made up of over 45,000 acres of wetlands, waterways, and other habitats in Jacksonville, Florida. The preserve is managed by the National Park Service in cooperation with the City of Jacksonville and Florida State Parks.

**Aquatic Algae and Weed Control** Brian coordinated with a contractor hired to provide aquatic weed and algae control services in the Academy’s fishing lakes and non-potable reservoirs. Goals and objectives for appropriate types and levels of weed and algae control, focused primarily on protecting fish and providing a desirable fishing experience, were discussed. Non-chemical approaches for algae control (e.g. Phoslock) may be tested in some of the lakes and reservoirs.

**Chainsaw Refresher** On April 18<sup>th</sup> Dustin Casady and Melissa Whittingslow attended a chainsaw refresher course at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal.

**River Restoration Findings** Chris Kennedy assembled information related to an U. S. Army Corps of Engineers ecosystem restoration project on the South Platte River through Denver. The section of river to be restored is highly degraded and channelized and information was gathered on which native fish species would have a tolerance for such conditions. The habitat requirements of the tolerant species were compiled to guide the restoration efforts.



**To the delight of the other birders in the group, Clark Jones spotted this elusive Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) on a tour of Baca NWR.**

## Welcome New Intern!



**Nicole Brown with a duckling she transported to a rehabilitation facility.**

Nicole Brown started her internship at McConnell AFB on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Brown graduated from Wichita State University in 2016 with a degree in biology. Prior to signing on with SCA, she worked as a stream technician for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism. Brown will utilize her bird, herpetile, invertebrate, and fish ID skills for several ongoing projects at McConnell AFB.