

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



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Partnerships & Accountability

National Award The F. E. Warren AFB Natural Resources Program won the 2017 General Thomas D. White Natural Resources Conservation Small Installation Award at the Wing, MAJCOM, and Air Force levels. In addition, the F. E. Warren AFB Natural Resources Program is now currently competing for both the 2018 Secretary of Defense Environmental Award and the 2018 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Military Partner Award.

report to Whiteman AFB natural resource team and Region 3 field level Ecological Services staff.

Sikes Act Meeting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists working on military lands across the country had the opportunity to meet with DoD staff to discuss projects and share ideas to the betterment of natural resources management on military lands. Topics included: bird/wildlife air strike hazard risk man-

Grand Junction. The meeting included a symposium on Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions presented by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies which included a training session on exploring the use of the Rocky Mountain Avian Data Center for querying and visualizing bird data for the state of Colorado and other regions in the western U.S. The plenary session focused on issues surrounding road ecology and approaches being used to minimize animal-vehicle collisions while maintaining corridors for seasonal wildlife movement.



F. E. Warren AFB Environmental Element Natural Resources Task Force Alex Schubert, Andy McKinley, Tommy Gonzalez, Bobby Johnson, Travis Beckwith, and Brent Croft received the 2017 Air Force Global Strike Command Level General Thomas D. White Natural Resources Award.

Forest Health Inventory Project Management: Whiteman AFB, MO. Krystal led the Air Force Natural Resource Program project execution to completion for a Forest Health Inventory and Recommended Management Plan on Whiteman AFB in Missouri. Specifically, she facilitated meetings between stakeholders and collaborated with subject matter experts within the Air Force and USFWS to review and finalize the deliverable

agement; incorporating pollinator-friendly plantings into landscape design; utilizing the Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit to accomplish projects; and how to establish a hunting program on a military base.

Wildlife Society Meeting Clark Jones and Max Canestorp attended the 2018 Meeting of the Colorado Chapter of the Wildlife Society in

“Part of the defense job is protecting the lands, waters, timber, and wildlife -- the priceless natural resources that make this great nation of ours worth defending.”

-General Thomas D. White

Deer Hunt Brian met with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to finalize proposed changes to the way the Air Force Academy administers the annual deer hunt. The FWS proposed changing from three-day to one-day hunts to reduce buck hunter selectivity and the trophy hunting nature of a government sponsored and escorted hunt that should be focused on population management. CPW felt that one-day hunts would not provide a suitable recreational hunting opportunity on a state license and, therefore, did not support the proposed change. With further discussion it was agreed that two-day hunts would provide a good hunting experience and help USAFA limit the selectivity of hunters desiring to trophy buck hunt.

Species Conservation & Management

“The take of bucks has limited effect on pronghorn herd reduction, as it does not reduce the population’s reproductive capacity. The harvest of does, on the other hand, would have this effect.”

BASH Management Dustin Casady met with Brian Mihlbachler, U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) Natural Resource Manager, and Jason Gilsdorf, USAFA U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, to discuss possible habitat modifications aimed to reduce the attractiveness of the base fishing ponds to cormorants. The fishing ponds are stocked by USAFA Natural Resource Program and removing perch points within and around the lake may reduce the number of cormorants that eat the stocked fish. This project will also reduce risk to flight safety since the ponds are adjacent to the airfield. A plan was developed and the project will be completed in late spring or early summer.

American Fisheries Society Chris Kennedy and Cole Brittain attended the annual American Fisheries Society (AFS) Meeting in Laramie, WY. This meeting is a unique occasion for Aquatic Biologists from Colorado and Wyoming to emerge from their local rivers and discuss current fisheries projects. This collaboration serves as a great opportunity to have individual evaluations on the relative success and problems associated with new and potential management strategies.



Region 6 Priority: Cutthroat Trout Recovery

RMNP Report Chris Kennedy completed updating a report with work conducted in 2017 on Cascade Creek and Mirror Lake project within Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). 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

were used in this report so that a chemical treatment plan can be developed if it is decided to go forward with a reclamation project.

Prioritization Plan Chris Kennedy incorporated comments from reviewers into the draft Prioritization of Waters for Native Cutthroat Trout Restoration in RMNP report. The report compiled data on a number of variables for each body of water within RMNP which currently contain fish. Each waterbody, sub-drainage and drainage was then ranked as a potential candidate for restoration projects.

BASH Management Brian Mihlbachler and Melissa Whittingslow met with biologists from Colorado State University Center for Environmental Management of Military Lands, (CEMML) to discuss eagle sightings and activity on USAFA. CEMML has a contract to help the Air Force

develop a Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act compliance strategy, especially with regard to BASH. Natural Resources shared data and other information on our Migratory Bird Treaty Act permitting, avian electrocution risk assessment of above-ground utilities, anecdotal bird observations, Christmas bird count surveys, and habitat modification project to reduce bird activity near the airfield.

Pronghorn Hunt Alex Schubert and Andy McKinley (DoD) met with Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) representatives to discuss 2017 F. E. Warren AFB Natural Resource Management Projects. The group discussed increasing the doe pronghorn harvest rate at F. E. Warren AFB. All reported harvests of pronghorn on the installation during the 2017 season were bucks. The take of bucks has limited effect on pronghorn herd reduction, as it does not reduce the population’s reproductive capacity. The harvest of does, on the other hand, would have this effect. However, hunters generally prefer to harvest bucks because they are larger, provide more game meat, and they are a more desirable trophy. Discussion included a few methods of either requiring hunters to harvest does, or having incentives for the harvests of does. After concluding discussions, the final say on this topic was that we will leave this aspect of the pronghorn hunting program as it is right now, but this topic could, and will likely, be re-visited in the future.



Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) at Pueblo Chemical Depot.

Habitat Conservation & Management

“Thanks to the important and timely fish passage structures installed over the past two years, connectivity will be maintained in the perennial sections of the creek even with extremely reduced flows.”

SCA intern, Nicole Brown spent her last month at McConnell AFB retrieving game cameras and prepping gear for the 2018 field season. Nicole will be sorely missed given the huge quantify of survey and outreach work she was able to accomplish in her year at the base.

Forest Thinning Work has begun on the new 2018 thinning unit north of the golf course at USAFA. Approximately 85 acres will be targeted with a new prescription. Joe Murphy will focus on thinning the forest to mimic natural conditions historically found in Ponderosas Pine forests in the ecotype in the Front Range. Joe Murphy and the USAFA contract Silviculturists spent a day in the field fine tuning the specifications for the stand. The prescription will focus on three main areas, creating openings by following natural conditions and removing the underperforming trees, creating clumps of trees based on the best pines, and leaving a “beauty strip” 50-100 feet from roads and trails where there will be little to no thinning to protect the view shed of the forest. These natural conditions will provide for increased forest health and reduce the risk of crown driven wildfire.

Trail Maintenance Melissa Whittingslow completed trail maintenance along the Falcon Trail, including removing hazard trees and old fencing and replacing signs. The Falcon Trail is a 13.1 mile recreational trail on USAFA.



Black Forest Creek (Middle Tributary) channel stabilization and habitat restoration project



New Fish Passage Structure on Crestone Creek designed to continuously allow fish passage during both high and low flow events.

Riparian Habitat Restoration Brian Muhlbachler conducted a final site walk of the Black Forest Creek (Middle Tributary) channel stabilization and habitat restoration project to review the grading and grade control improvements. Revegetation of the site with native shrubs, trees, grasses, and sedges will begin in the next few weeks and continue through the spring.

Pest Management Alex Schubert coordinated with F. E. Warren AFB herbicide applicator Galen Frahm regarding which areas of base will need invasive plant herbicide treatment in 2018. Another topic of discussion was the possible removal of small mammals from the helicopter launch pad that pose human safety concerns due to

their habit of digging holes throughout the area as well as attracting raptors that pose a bird/wildlife aircraft strike hazard (BASH).

Native Grass Seeding A work request was submitted by Dustin Casady at Buckley Air Force Base to seed approximately 17 acres with native grass. The area to be seeded is adjacent to a recently completed Environmental Restoration Program (ERP) site. The ERP site is an old landfill that was capped and revegetated. Requirements are in place to maintain the landfill cap and keep burrowing animals from penetrating it. Encroaching prairie dogs have been removed by base Pest Management and it is now necessary to revegetate the adjacent areas to help reduce the attractiveness of the site to prairie dogs.

Tree City USAFA submitted its annual Tree City USA application for the 25th year. USAFA has achieved Tree City USA status by meeting four core standards of sound urban forestry management: maintaining a tree board or department, having a community tree ordinance, spending at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry and celebrating Arbor Day.

Fish Passage at Baca NWR With a low water year looming, it will be crucial to create passage and refuge with only incremental flows on Crestone Creek. Thanks to the important and timely fish passage structures installed over the past two years, connectivity will be maintained in the perennial sections of the creek even with extremely reduced flows. The importance of this passage has become evident as fish use their mobility to access low flow refugia and large pools. Efforts will be made this year to expand connectivity and provide low water refuge in the ephemeral reaches of Crestone Creek in order to increase the biomass and resilience of this important population.