

## 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 Mihlbachler, 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



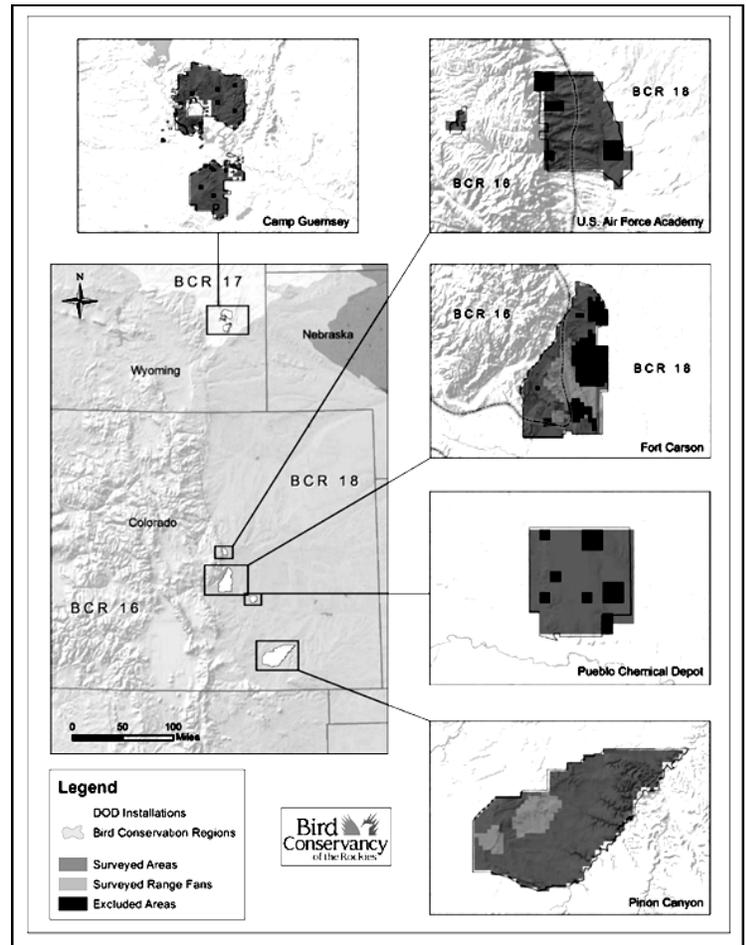
JANUARY 2018

## Partnerships & Accountability

**IPartners Meeting** Clark Jones presented at the 2018 partners meeting with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in Fort Collins. The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies conducts bird monitoring activities on several Army and Air Force installations along the Front Range of Colorado as part of their protocol for Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions. One output of the monitoring effort was the creation of species distribution maps specific to several military installations which allows wildlife biologists working on these installations to better understand where species of conservation concern are located on the installations. Clark's presentation outlined how he uses the monitoring output to inform management decisions on Pueblo Chemical Depot.

**INRMP Review** Brian Mihlbachler organized the annual INRMP review and Sikes Act Coordination meeting with USFWS, U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff. Joe Murphy and Brian provided information on the 2017 projects and activities concerning forest health and diseases, fuels management, fish and wildlife management, trails, watershed restoration, and noxious weed control. Projects and activities planned for 2018 were also discussed.

**Wildfire Prevention** The monthly Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners meeting was held on January 18<sup>th</sup>. Plans were discussed for the Defensible Space Workshop in May and upcoming meetings. USAFA will host a meeting in April and a possible field tour of wildfire mitigation efforts in November.



**Riparian Bird Study Site Visit** Laura Mendenhall, Nicole Brown, and Tina Seemayer (DoD) led a tour with an Oklahoma State University zoology professor and graduate student to begin a study of how birds are utilizing the newly restored riparian buffer areas versus mowed stream banks on McConnell AFB. The study was funded through the Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) and will result in habitat management guidance in the context of Bird Airstrike risk.

### Extent of bird monitoring on military bases by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

**Military Award** Alex Schubert worked with Andy McKinley, Bobby Johnson, and Mike Woods to gather Bird/Aircraft Strike Hazard and other natural resources information for the Secretary of Defense Award submittal package. The information was submitted for inclusion in the Award Application Package. Good luck F.E. Warren!!!

# Species Conservation & Management

*Deer/Elk Survey* Melissa Whittingslow coordinated with Brian Muhlbachler and Colorado Parks and Wildlife Biologist, Julie Stiver, to hold the 2017 U.S. Air Force Deer/Elk Survey on January 18<sup>th</sup>. During



## Region 6 Priority: Recover the Black-footed Ferret

*Pre-Conditioning Pens* Alex Schubert coordinated with John Hughes of the National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center regarding the potential to continue to pre-condition black-footed ferrets at the F. E. Warren AFB ferret pens in 2018. John indicated that he has secured the appropriate permits from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to continue this activity for the 2018 year.

the survey USAFA is split into 11 different units, each unit is surveyed and all deer and elk are counted, sexed, and aged. The CPW Wildlife Biologist then analyzes the data to estimate the deer

and elk population on USAFA. This information helps determine the number of hunting permits that will be issued to manage the deer and elk population on USAFA.

*Rio Grande Sucker and Chub Meeting* Pam Sponholtz and Cole Brittain attended the annual Rio Grande sucker and chub fisheries meeting in Santa Fe, NM. Pam Sponholtz presented on the progress U.S. Fish & Wildlife has made on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Her presentation outlined the successful installation of two new fish passage struc-

tures in 2017 and also detailed the ongoing monitoring of these native species. This meeting serves as a multi-agency collaboration to protect these native species in both Colorado and New Mexico

*Raptor Surveys* Six raptor surveys have been conducted by Student Conservation Association intern, Taylor Cassidy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Dustin Casady, on Buckley AFB. The survey data will be used to develop the 2018 Buckley AFB Raptor Survey Report. This report will be used to inform leadership on raptor related issues and also to help direct the Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard working group in mitigating hazards that raptors pose to the mission of Buckley AFB.

*Pronghorn Hunt* Alex interviewed hunters that participated in the new archery pronghorn hunting program at F. E. Warren AFB in 2017. A few hunters offered suggestions for the upcoming season such as the addition of strategically-placed semi-permanent hunting blinds on base and the opening of additional hunting areas on base. All suggestions will be considered when establishing any future hunting season on base. The new 2017 archery season was a success with 50 hunters participating and a 24 percent harvest success rate.



**Bald eagle perching on a power pole that is used by the BAFB electrical shop for training purposes.**

*BASH Permitting* Brian submitted the 2017 Bird Depredation Permit and Bird Salvage Permit annual reports to the USFWS Migratory Bird Permitting Office. One Canada Goose was depredated on the airfield last year. In coordination with the Airfield and USDA-Wildlife Services, Brian also submitted the application for a 2018 depredation permit, which includes many more bird species than previously requested. The more extensive permit request will aid the USDA-Wildlife Services staff contracted by USAFA to support the Bird-Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) program. USDA will also conduct a Wildlife Hazard Assessment throughout 2018 to further evaluate the BASH hazard on the installation's two airfields.

# Leadership in Science & Technology

*Water Treatment* Brian and Melissa met with Solitude Lake Management to discuss algae and aquatic weed control in the Academy's eight fishing lakes and four non-potable reservoirs. In 2018, Solitude plans to make greater use of biological treatments, and follow-up with chemical treatments as necessary using compounds better suited to the local water chemistry and rainbow trout stocked in the ponds.



**Dense mats of milfoil prior to weed treatment at Farish Recreation Area.**

*Forestry Accomplishments* 2017 highlights for USAFA forest and fire management include: UAV imagery for 1,445 acres; 2,230 plots surveyed by silviculturists; 607 beetle infested trees removed; 1,126 trees pruned for mistletoe; removed 81 hazard trees in the urban forests; thinned 72.3 acres in Jack's Valley; planted 400 Ponderosa Pine Seedlings; sold 66.45 tons of firewood; and 24<sup>th</sup> year recognized by Tree City USA.

# Habitat Conservation & Management



## Region 6 Priority: Cutthroat Trout Recovery

**Restoration Priorities** Chris Kennedy completed a draft of Prioritization of Waters for Native Cutthroat Trout Restoration in Rocky Mountain National Park 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 will then be ranked on their potential as candidates for restoration projects.

**Tissue Samples** Chris Kennedy collected tissue samples from the 2016 year class of greenback

cutthroat trout at the Leadville National Fish Hatchery. These tissues will be genetically analyzed by Dr. Sierra Love Stowell of the University of Wyoming to employ genetic matrixing whereby the relatedness of each possible male-female pairing will be determined and the most distant related fish will be spawned. This will help to maximize the limited genetic diversity present in the current broodstock and produce offspring which are stronger and better adapted to stochastic changes in the wild.

**Forest Management** Two contracts are currently being developed to ensure the health of USAFA's forests. The UAV monitoring contract is almost fully approved by the varying groups that control and coordinate Unmanned Aerial Systems. Once implemented, this project will greatly increase the effectiveness and range of our monitoring program.

**Student Conservation Association Intern, Taylor Cassidy, planting milkweed seeds at Buckley AFB. We will miss you, Taylor! Good luck in graduate school!**



**Seed Preparation** Laura Mendenhall and Nicole Brown prepared 47 species of native prairie and wetland wildflower and grass seed for planting at McConnell AFB in the spring. Many native seeds need to be cold stratified before they will germinate. Acting on the advice of the Dyck Arboretum of the Great Plains, Mendenhall and Brown mixed seed with moist soil and then divided the seed among bags which were then placed in a refrigerator. Mendenhall and Brown collected the seeds in the fall from local sources on and off base and ordered some seed from a local supplier. Some seeds will be sown indoors under grow lights, while others will be placed directly in the ground. Seeds will help increase plant diversity in the prairie restoration plot, pollinator gardens, and riparian buffers.

**Elk Season** January 31<sup>st</sup> was the end of the elk season on the Academy. Melissa Whittingslow escorted cow elk hunters throughout

January. One cow elk was harvested in January and a total of 3 cow elk were harvested off the Academy for the season. The escorted cow elk hunt allows Natural Resources to effectively manage the elk population, protect habitat, and minimize elk-vehicle accidents.

**Mapping Effort** Dustin Casady worked with the Buckley Air Force Base GIS Specialist to develop a map that depicts future development plans on Buckley Air Force Base. The map will be used to plan out future native grass seeding projects to ensure that the seed is used in areas that will remain undeveloped in the foreseeable future.

**Vegetation Monitoring** Alex Schubert coordinated with Tracy Trujillo of Colorado State University regarding the contracting of vegetation monitoring staff to inventory and map invasive plants at F. E. Warren AFB.

**A hunter pictured with an elk he harvested at the U.S. Air Force Academy.**



Taylor Cassidy, Student Conservation Association intern, concluded her internship with the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (CO FWCO). She helped on many different projects, across four states, amongst partners such as the U.S. Air Force; U.S. Army; U.S. Forest Service; National Park Service; and the Refuge System of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Taylor leaves to pursue a master's degree at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Taylor was an asset to Buckley AFB and the CO FWCO team and will be missed.

**“Seeds will help increase plant diversity in the prairie restoration plot, pollinator gardens, bee tree display, and riparian buffers [at McConnell AFB]”**