

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



MAY 2017

Species Conservation & Management

Migratory Bird Surveys Dustin Casady performed spring migratory bird surveys on Buckley AFB. These surveys document the species and numbers of birds from fixed survey points and also area searches. The information that is collected is used to give a general view of what types of birds are using Buckley AFB habitat and also to document hazards the birds may pose to the flying Mission on base. Once the hazards are realized, a decision can be made on what needs to be done to address the issue in order to ensure safety of flight personnel and birds alike.

Small Mammal Surveys Laura Mendenhall and SCA Intern, Nicole Brown, surveyed small mammals in a woodland habitat at McConnell AFB. This effort is part of a study that began in 2016 to document small mammal species and abundance in 4 different habitats on the base. Once a species and abundance baseline is established, the team will be able to monitor trends following habitat management changes, e.g. mowing, burning, or planting. Small mammal abundance is important to monitor as changes could affect the density of BASH species, such as hawks or owls, utilizing an area.

BASH Alex Schubert and SCA Intern, Taylor Hackemack, met with the FE Warren AFB helicopter BASH group. Dan Sullivan, biologist assigned to the pentagon was also in attendance. Mr. Sullivan critiqued the BASH situation at F. E. Warren AFB and performed numerous surveys of birds, and other wildlife on the base during his visit. He assessed the airfield and will be compiling a report with recommendations for minimizing the potential BASH hazards at F. E. Warren AFB Taylor participated in the night-time wildlife surveys with the BASH group during the evaluations.



Nicole Brown, SCA Intern, sets a live trap for small mammal surveys on McConnell AFB.

Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse Brian Mihlbachler reviewed the 35% design plans for the Kettle Creek Dry Dam Modification Project. Modification of the dam may create opportunities for the upstream and downstream resto-

ration of the Kettle Creek riparian area to benefit Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) and water quality. USAFA is continuing to explore options with the State Engineer and Colorado Department of Transportation.

Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) In accordance with the approved Buckley AFB INRMP 2017 work plans, Krystal met Colorado Natural Heritage Program staff to provide technical assistance for the accomplishment of a baseline sensitive species survey of Buckley AFB. The project supports Endangered Species Act compliance by the Air Force.

BASH Melissa Whittingslow, Brian Mihlbachler, and SCA Intern, Cabel Patterson, attended a BASH meeting at the USAFA Air Field to discuss wildlife issues.



Region 6 Priority: Cutthroat Trout Recovery

Cutthroat Trout Restoration Chris Kennedy completed an outline for a strategy to restore cutthroat trout within RMNP. The outline was prepared for the Washington, D.C. Office of the National Park Service and contained the variables that are most likely to be included in a more detailed strategy. Once the outline was completed the detailed strategy which will rank waterbodies and drainages on their potential as candidates for restoration projects was begun. The strategy will contain

a more detailed description and rankings of each waterbody.

Trout Database Chris Kennedy summarized data from Rocky Mountain National Park and inputted data into the Colorado River Cutthroat Trout (CRCT) database. The database contains information on all CRCT population within Colorado, Wyoming and Utah and is updated annually to provide the most up to date information of the status of the sub-species within its entire range.

Partnerships & Accountability

“This activity taught kids about the importance of water and gave them an understanding of the difficulty in treating contaminated water.”

Children’s Water Festival Clark Jones and several members of the Pueblo Chemical Depot Environmental Office (PCD EMO) presented at the 2017 Children’s Water Festival held at Colorado State University – Pueblo in May. The PCD EMO used interactive demonstrations to illustrate the various methods used at PCD to remediate contaminated groundwater. The demonstration was presented to more than 100 students in the fifth grade from various schools near Pueblo. This activity taught kids about the importance of water and gave them an understanding of the difficulty in treating contaminated water. The



Clark Jones speaking at the Children’s Water Festival.

annual event is sponsored by the Bureau of Reclamation, the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District, the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, the Pueblo Board of Water Works, Pueblo West, the St. Charles Mesa Water Conservancy District and CSU-Pueblo.

Defensible Space Workshop The USA-FA Forester is continuing to work with the Pikes Peak Wildfire Partners Prevention group. The group is planning for an upcoming landowner education workshop which will focus on defensible space.



Region 6 Priority: Collaboration with State Agencies, Tribes, & Private Landowners

Hunter Management Area Agreement Alex Schubert coordinated with Wyoming Game and Fish Department Hunt Management Coordinator Jason Sherwood about getting an Hunter Management Area agreement completed for FE Warren AFB. Drafts of the agreement have been reviewed by the base’s legal office, as well as the State of Wyoming Attorney General’s office. Currently, the agreement is en route to the base commander for finalization and signature.

Deer Hunt Management Brian Mihlbachler and Melissa Whittingslow met with Colorado Parks and Wildlife managers to continue a discussion of alternatives for licensing and administering the USAFA deer hunt in a manner that does not promote “trophy” buck hunting. CPW is preparing an Issue Paper for consideration by the Regional Manager and Wildlife Commission.

Recovery Team Participation Chris Kennedy prepared for and attended Greenback Cutthroat Trout Recovery Team meeting. The team is made up of representatives from each agency which manages greenbacks. Talks were given on different activities related to greenback recovery. An update was given on a potential greenback cutthroat trout restoration project in Rock Creek, upstream of the Leadville National Fish Hatchery.

Fish Passage Project Pam Sponholtz, Cole Brittain and several SCA interns Taylor Cassidy, Taylor Hackemack, Cabel Patterson and Nicole Brown sampled Crestone Creek for Rio Grande suckers and chubs to look at growth and movement after several culverts were replaced last fall. Fish captures were high despite the onset of the spring runoff season and over 1,000 passive integrated transponder tags were inserted into larger fish so that movements can be tracked throughout the system.

Burrowing Owl Nest A Cross Functional Team (CFT) meeting was held in early May at Buckley Air Force Base. These meetings are used to give each program and shop a chance inform leadership and members about issues they are dealing with and needs for their program. Dustin Casady informed CFT members of an active burrowing owl nest that was found on base and gave information about the State of Colorado regulations that work to reduce disturbance to the nesting site.

VA Fishing Day Alex participated in the F. E. Warren AFB Healing Waters VA Fishing Day. Participants were highly encouraged to stop by to swap stories, cast a line, bait a hook, or assist VA members during this annual event at the base lakes. Burgers and hot dogs were also served for volunteers and VA members during the event. There was a good turnout with 15-20 VA fishermen in attendance and several volunteers participating, as well. Many of the fish captured were 16-18”



Participants gathered for the FE Warren AFB Healing Waters VA Fishing Day.

brown trout that originated from the November fish stocking from the Saratoga National Fish Hatchery. As most of the fishermen participating in the event were “catch-and-release” fly-fishing enthusiasts, most of the fish captured that day were released back into the water unharmed.

Habitat Conservation & Management

Prairie Dog Control Dustin Casady and Taylor Cassidy used a small tractor and cultivator to fill a large number of prairie dog holes on Buckley Air Force Base. This prairie dog colony has been identified as a concern for the BASH working group because it attracts a large number of falcons to an area near the runway. Filling the prairie dog holes keeps prairie dogs that have been removed from recolonizing the area and also eliminates the visual cue of a prairie dog hole that raptors use to locate prey items. This effort, combined with a wildlife barrier that has been installed around the perimeter to prevent prairie dogs from entering, has proved to be very effective. When this area is free of

prairie dogs, seeding efforts will take place to revegetate it with a low diversity native seed mix. This will further reduce the area's attractiveness to migratory birds.



Forest Pathogens Review Max Canestorp met with U.S. Forest Service entomologist Sky Stephens to better understand the level of threat to Cheyenne Mountain AFS forests from forest pests, specifically Douglas-fir

tussock moth and western spruce budworm.

Grassland Restoration Monitoring Nicole Brown, SCA Intern, is monitoring grassland species diversity in several plots along 4 transects established in the newly-restored urban prairie at McConnell AFB. Laura Mendenhall designed the study to use plant species diversity, or simply the number of different native plant species found in an average square meter, as a proxy for overall prairie health and functioning. This method is an easy and cheap way to assess how well the natural resources team is meeting the objective of establishing a functioning and resilient prairie ecosystem.



Region 6 Priority: Reverse the Declining Trend for Monarch Butterflies and other Endemic Pollinators



Part of the McConnell AFB School Age Program 4-H Club Monarch Waystation.

Milkweed for Schools Grant Laura Mendenhall and the McConnell AFB School Age Program 4-H club were awarded 32 milkweed plugs from Monarch Watch to establish a milkweed garden on base to benefit Monarch butterflies. Mendenhall assisted School Age Program staff with digging out the gardens and planting the milkweeds. Mendenhall hopes to share some wildflower seeds from the nearby pollinator demonstration gardens to provide additional nectar sources in the milkweed gardens. McConnell AFB is situated

under a mile from Interstate 35, the "Monarch Highway." Mendenhall has prioritized identifying opportunities to plant and maintain milkweed and educate airmen and their families on McConnell AFB.

Wildflower Seeding Experiment Given that it has been a very wet spring, and too wet so far at F. E. Warren to use the native grass drill that was borrowed from USFWS at Buckley AFB, Alex Schubert and Taylor Hackemack have been experimentally seeding native prairie wildflowers (including showy

milkweed) and grasses into appropriate areas of the base "by-hand" to determine optimal seeding times and methods. The experimental test areas, will continue to be monitored throughout the 2017 growing season to determine the seedlings' efficacy rates.



Dalmatian Toadflax Removal Alex Schubert and Taylor Hackemack coordinated with F. E. Warren AFB pesticide applicator Gaylen Frahm about herbicide application of Dalmatian toadflax along Crow Creek. Mr. Frahm expressed an interest performing this operation and inquired as to whether or not it would be consistent with the objectives of the base's natural resources program. Alex then prepared

a map for Mr. Frahm to use to guide his herbicide application activities. In addition, to the map, Alex and Taylor also placed pin flags along the border of the spray area that is closest to the Colorado butterfly plant populations on base. The flags are placed so that the spray will not be closer than at least 100 feet from any Colorado butterfly plants so that there will be no effect to the plants as a result of

the Dalmatian toadflax treatment.

Riparian Habitat Restoration Brian Mihlbachler and SCA Intern, Cabel Patterson, planted cottonwood poles around the Monument Creek channel stabilization project to further restore and enhance the riparian habitat disturbed by creek erosion and construction of the sheetpile grade control structures.

“Grassland birds are in steep decline across much of their range and the relatively intact habitat of Pueblo Chemical Depot provides a unique opportunity to study various aspects of grassland bird demography.”

Leadership in Science & Technology

Bird Banding Clark Jones and Dr. Claire Varian-Ramos (including several undergraduates) from Colorado State University – Pueblo conducted bird banding activities on Pueblo Chemical Depot during May. These bird banding operations are designed to monitor both breeding and migratory bird populations using constant-effort netting techniques as well as target netting of territorial individuals. Grassland birds are in steep decline across much of their range and the relatively intact habitat of Pueblo Chemical Depot provides a unique opportunity to study various aspects of grassland bird demography.

UAV Monitoring Project The UAV monitoring project, which takes pictures of USAFA's forests to de-

tect beetle infestation, is currently under revision to ensure that the contractor has full permission to fly on Academy Grounds. Once agreement has been reached from all informed USAFA agencies, the monitoring program will resume.

Advanced Leadership Pam Sponholtz completed Phase II of her Advanced Leadership Development Program training that included a week in Washington D.C. learning about Congressional Affairs and then two weeks at the National Conservation Training Center. She also found out the location for her 60 day detail. Pam will be the Chief for the Division of Realty and Refuge Information in Portland OR and will be headed there in mid July.



Western Meadowlark captured during banding operations at Pueblo Chemical Depot.

...More Partnerships

Midwest Regional Support Team (RST) and Installation Support Team (IST) In May, Krystal led the Air Force Natural Resource Program project execution for a Forest Health Inventory and Recommended Management Plan on Whiteman Air Force Base (WAFB) in Missouri. Specifically, she facilitated the project discussion conference call and delivered a final statement of work for review and coordination by WAFB stakeholders with next steps to submit to FWS contracting for contractor proposal requests. In her role to aid the Midwest RST, Krystal participated in one (1) Midwest RST monthly teleconference and one (1) FWS National Sikes Act call. At the request of the Midwest RST, she initiated contact with all Midwest ISTs to offer technical assistance in the review of any installation statement of work.

Project Review Max Canestorp reviewed a water system renovation project on Cheyenne Mountain AFS to assess potential impacts to natural resources, especially T&E species. (There are no known T&E species on Cheyenne Mountain, therefore no anticipated adverse effects.)

Welcome New Interns!



Hailing from Texas, Taylor Hackemack is a 2016 wildlife science graduate from Mississippi State. She likes to adventure and explore, and has a love for field work, which she has primarily completed in the southeast. She hopes to one day visit all the National Parks in America, and is slowly checking them off of her life list. Taylor will be assisting Alex Schubert with Natural Resources management at FE Warren AFB.



Cabel Patterson is a natural resources management intern at the United States Air Force Academy. He is from Chapel Hill, North Carolina and has a degree in biology from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He previously completed a range technician internship at Arapaho NWR in Walden, CO and a wildlife management internship at Haleakala National Park in Maui, HI. He has always been fascinated by nature and science and wants to continue to work in the field of natural resources management and conservation.