

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

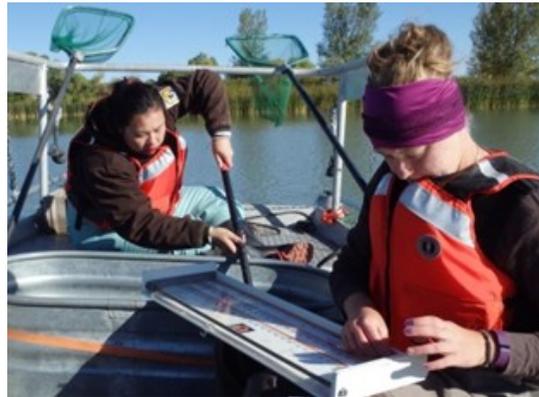
Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



SEPTEMBER 2017

Species Conservation & Management

Fish Survey Alex Schubert, Taylor Hackemack (SCA), and Nicole Ng (DoD) surveyed fish populations in North and South Pearson lakes with a newly acquired electrofishing boat. The survey revealed large populations of small yellow perch and pumpkinseed sunfish in both lakes. Other species of interest were young-of-the-year largemouth bass present in North Pearson Lake, and a few remaining catchable size rainbow trout left from previous stockings.



Electrofishing crew Nicole Ng and Taylor Hackemack working up fish on South Pearson Lake at F. E. Warren AFB

Services and provides survey data results and recommendations to reduce Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazards. Including the Wildlife Hazard Assessment into WMP is critical to properly manage BAFB wildlife in ways that also support the base mission.

Migratory Bird Surveys Clark Jones conducted migratory bird surveys on Pueblo Chemical Depot last month as part of an effort to document species that use Pueblo Chemical Depot as a stopover site. The Pueblo Chemical Depot contains several landscape-scale areas of biological significance that have been recognized as potential conservation areas (PCAs) by the Colorado Natural Heritage program. These areas include Chico Creek, Haynes Creek, the Chico Basin Shortgrass Prairie, and the Signal Rock Sandhills PCA. These PCAs are host to numerous migratory

bird species during both spring and fall migration. This year, sparrow diversity has been particularly high with over a dozen species documented since August.

Burrowing Owl Survey SCA Intern, Taylor Cassidy, completed the 2017 Burrowing Owl report for Buckley AFB under the supervision of Dustin Casady and Krystal Phillips. The data was collected on the installation between April and July, analyzed, and summarized in an annual report. Only one pair was spotted on base this year, but no juveniles observed. This may be due in part to the great efforts being put forth by COFWCO personnel, USDA personnel, and Buckley Pest Management to remove prairie dog colonies on base in order to lessen BASH risks.

Wildlife Management Plan Updates The Buckley Air Force Base Wildlife Management Plan (WMP) was updated by Dustin Casady to be included as supplemental plan to the Integrated Natural Resource Plan. Most of the updates made to the WMP involved the incorporation of the recently released Wildlife Hazard Assessment for BAFB. The Wildlife Hazard Assessment is conducted and written by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife



Region 6 Priority: Cutthroat Trout Recovery

Gill Net Surveys Chris Kennedy conducted gill net surveys at Thunder and Mills Lakes within Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). A good population of cutthroat trout was observed at both lakes. Fish specimens were collected in cooperatively with personnel from the FWS Bozeman Fish Health Center from Mills Lake for disease testing.



Bozeman Fish Health Center employees Rick Cordes and Tammy Weiss collect samples from fish for disease testing at Mills Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park.

...more Species Conservation & Management

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Hunting Program Brian Mhlbachler briefed the new 10th Mission Support Group and 10th Air Base Wing commanders on the upcoming deer, elk, and turkey hunting seasons on the Academy and the safety and security measures in-place. Changes to the deer hunting program beginning in 2018, pending Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission approval, were also discussed. These changes include extending the hunting season to October through December, and limiting hunters to one-day hunts to reduce the “trophy” nature of the escorted hunts. Retaining more high-quality deer will help improve overall herd genetics and encourage exciting wildlife viewing opportunities.

Infested Tree Removal Natural Resources responded to an outbreak of beetle infested trees on the Carlton House property. Eleven infected Limber and Ponderosa Pines were removed to prevent the spread of the Ips Beetle to surrounding trees. A bug trap was also installed to help draw the beetles away from the healthy trees. After investigation, it was concluded that the outbreak was likely due to forest debris that was cut and discarded outside the fence of the Carlton House. Ips Beetles can fly 2-4 miles and can produce 2-4 generations per year, exponentially infecting surrounding trees. There is no treatment besides removal after a tree has been infected.



Beetle-infested hazard tree removed from housing area at USAFA.



Region 6 Priority: Recover the Black-Footed Ferret

Taylor Hackemack (SCA) and Alex Schubert continued to care for black-footed ferrets since their arrival at the F. E. Warren AFB preconditioning facility. The ferrets were live-trapped and returned to the National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center following the conclusion of the pre-conditioning. They will soon be released at one of the Ted Turner ranches in South Dakota to start a new breeding population as part of a re-introduction program to recover this endangered species.



Pre-conditioned black-footed ferret named "Valrhona" awaiting a prairie dog

Fish Population Assessment Chris Kennedy conducted electrofishing surveys on the Colorado River at two sites to evaluate the effectiveness of re-routing the river in 2015 on fish populations. An abundance of fish were found at both sites. Fish specimens were collected in cooperation with personnel from the FWS Bozeman Fish Health Center from one of the sites for disease testing.

Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP). Per the federal Sikes Act, Krystal led the FY18 Buckley AFB (BAFB) INRMP annual review meeting with triparty stakeholders – Air Force, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Colorado Parks and Wildlife; and finalized the FY18 INRMP annual review letter with the 460th Civil Engineering Squadron commander. Prior to the BAFB

INRMP annual review meeting, she coordinated the BAFB INRMP document review with key stakeholders – USFWS Ecological Services and Migratory Birds; and BAFB Judge Advocate; compiled requests for edits and provided written responses to comments submitted by BAFB INRMP reviewers; updated the BAFB INRMP and distributed; coordinated with stakeholders the BAFB INRMP supplemental plans for annual review – Wildlife Management Plan and Wildland Fire Management Plan; and updated the Wildlife Management Plan according to accepted comments received during document review.

Small Mammal Surveys Laura Mendenhall and Nicole Brown (SCA) continued surveying for small mammals in the riparian buffer areas around McConnell AFB.

Fish Stocking In September, Alex Schubert coordinated the stocking of rainbow trout into North and South Pearson lakes at F. E. Warren AFB. The stocking of these fish (ranging for 10-16" in length) will greatly enhance recreational fisheries at the base. This fishery supports a major recreational fishing program on the base as well as special events such as Free Fishing Days for youth and VA free fishing days for PTSD veterans.

Habitat Conservation & Management

“The removal of the trees will enhance Buckley AFB short grass prairie, reduce use by large raptors, reduce Bird Aircraft Strike Hazards, as well as reduce the need to take migratory birds as part airfield management.”

Chainsaw Training Student Conservation Association Interns Taylor Hackemack and Taylor Cassidy, along with COFWCO personnel, Alex Schubert, participated in a two day Power saw Operations and Maintenance class at the United States Air Force Academy. The purpose of the class was to certify personnel to operate chainsaws properly and safely at their respective field sites with the Fish and Wildlife Service. This certification will help field sites more efficiently control and manage invasive species, cut down dead trees, or trees causing BASH issues.

Arbor Day Celebration Alex, Taylor H., and Nicole Ng prepared for the Arbor Day celebration at the F. E. Warren AFB. Alex was one of the featured speakers and presented a speech to the crowd on the importance of trees to the base, as well as the benefits trees have to our own personal well-being.



Planting Arbor Day tree at F. E. Warren AFB

Short Grass Prairie Restoration Dustin Casady submitted two work requests to remove large dead or dying trees within Buckley Air Force Base short grass prairie. Short grass prairie is in decline along with many grassland birds. The trees that need to be removed are introduced species and are

not native to the landscape. The removal of the trees will enhance Buckley AFB short grass prairie, reduce use by large raptors, reduce Bird Aircraft Strike Hazards, as well as reduce the need to take migratory birds as part airfield management.

Wildland Fire Defensible Space The Defensible Space project in Senior Officers Quarters at USAFA has now completed eight houses total with fourteen left to be completed. The work will slow down in the winter as the chemicals used to prevent the Gambel Oak from sprouting will not be effective after leaf fall as the trees have prepared for winter by drawing their reserves into the roots.

Tree Thinning The USAFA Western Spruce Budworm Thinning Project was awarded in late September. This project is aimed at reducing the effects of the budworm defoliation at Farish. The understory will be removed and piled to be burned at a later date.

Partnerships & Accountability

Coordination with Local Non-Profit Brian identified one active homeless camp and numerous abandoned camps of Academy property. Though coordination with Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful, a non-profit specializing in cleaning up homeless camps, the accumulated trash was mitigated. Awareness of the problem and recognition of the need for more frequent Security Forces patrols in the area was discussed at the Installation Encroachment Management Team meeting.

Fish Translocation Alex Schubert and Taylor Hackemack (SCA Intern) met Steve Gale (WGFD) and crew to assist with a fish collection effort on Crow Creek on F. E. Warren AFB. The fish collected were to be transplanted to repopulate an area downstream that did not currently contain those species. The fish relocated included 343 central stonerollers, 178



Johnny Darter at FE Warren AFB.

common shiners, and 219 johnny darters. One other benefit of the effort was the capture and documentation of two plains killifish on base. This species had not previously been documented to exist at F. E. Warren AFB.

WSU Ecology Days Laura Mendenhall delivered a presentation to 140 6th grade students at Wichita State University's "Ecology Days" STEM program. The presentation covered tall grass prairie ecosystem services in an urban context. Mendenhall used real

world management examples and engaged the audience to think about how they could enhance ecosystem services in their backyards. SCA Intern, Nicole Brown, prepped 140 wildflower seed packets to hand out to the kids after encouraging them to plant native.

*Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) Activities. The next BASH stakeholder meeting is TBD. In support of the Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) BASH Program, Krystal reviewed and commented on the draft 460th Space Wing BASH audit report while supplying key documentation to support her recommendations. The request is still pending for a copy of the final BASH Plan for incorporation into the BAFB Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan in accordance with Air Force Instruction 32-7064, *Integrated Natural Resources Management*.*

Leadership in Science & Technology

INRMP Brian Mihlbachler and Joe Murphy finalized a draft 2018-2022 Air Force Academy Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) to comply with Air Force and DoD guidance. Significant changes include new information on pollinators, conservation law enforcement, noxious weeds, special status species, forestry, and wildland fire. The document is currently undergoing a 30-day internal review, with approval by USFWS, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Academy expected by fall 2017.

Trail Mapping Brian Mihlbachler and Cabel Patterson mapped the active and inactive ATV and UTV trails in the Jacks Valley Training Area for the Cadet Training Wing. In consultation with the military trainers, unnecessary trails will be identified for closure and rehabilitation to protect vegetation, soils, and wildlife, as well as to promote a sustainable, realistic training environment.

GIS Management Clark Jones updated Pueblo Chemical Depot GIS to reflect recent natural resource surveys that took place over the course

of this past summer including Burrowing Owl nest locations, prairie dog colony mapping, Lark Bunting nest and territory locations, and noxious weed locations along Chico Creek. Additionally, infrastructure updates to the geodatabase were also conducted to assist environmental remediation contractors with navigating to remediation sites and accessing gates.

“The data indicate that bats are using the bat condo [on FE Warren AFB]...”

Stressed Tree Care Early in the year, one of the Ponderosa Pines in the USAFA NR front yard was starting to show signs of declining health. It was determined that the tree was stressed because of salt contamination from the Magnesium Chloride that is used to clear the roads in winter. This can be seen by the black bands on the needles. NR spent the summer caring for the tree by watering frequently. This tree has almost fully rebounded from its dam-

age and is showing reduced ill effects from the salt contamination.

USAFA Grassland Burn Plans Work continues on developing burn plans for four grassland units. This planning is being done in conjunction with the Wildland Fire Center and USAFA Emergency Management who will assist in conducting the burns. These should take place in the winter of '17-'18.

Bat Logger Alex coordinated with Amanda Thimmayya (Wyoming Army National Guard Natural Resources Manager). Amanda volunteered the use of a bat data logger that was then placed in front of the bat condo to record bat activity use around the structure near Pearson Lakes at F. E. Warren AFB. The bat logger was retrieved and the data was downloaded to the computer. The data indicate that bats are using the bat condo. Amanda ran the data through a species identification program found that the likely species using the condo is the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*).



Region 6 Priority: Reverse the Declining Trend of Monarch Butterflies & Other Endemic Pollinators

Bee Houses Laura Mendenhall constructed three mason bee block houses and one bamboo shoot house to revamp the bee tree area as part of the creation of a pollinator education complex on McConnell AFB. These houses are designed to provide nesting habitat for native bees and are co-located with the 3 pollinator gardens in the Fam Camp. The bee tree area was formerly home to a honeybee hive that colonized 3 Cottonwood tree

trunks. The hive left several years ago while the bee signage and fencing remained. The addition of the native bee houses will hopefully educate passersby on native bee life history. Mendenhall is coordinating with a local Boy Scout Troop to construct and install more houses this winter.

Monarch Mania Nicole Brown worked at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge's "Monarch Mania" program. Brown interacted with numerous families

helping in the Monarch tagging effort. With her newfound butterfly tagging skills, Brown was able to capture and tag one Monarch butterfly at McConnell AFB and will continue to capture and tag migrating Monarchs during early October.