



## April 2013 Accomplishment Report

### Leadership in Science and Technology

#### *Living with Wildfire Educational Conference:*

Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm participated in the first “Living with Wildfire” workshop in Colorado Springs, hosted by the Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners (PPWPP). Diane served on the event planning team, and as group photographer, she compiled posters of fuel mitigation demonstration projects conducted by PPWPP for display. The workshop included presentations on the Waldo Canyon fire, structure ignitability, home ignition zones, defensible space and partnering.



Waldo Canyon Fire burn area

#### *Prescribed burn to enhance rare plant species:*

Steve Wallace is taking the lead in preparing for an upcoming half-acre prescribed burn designed to promote the rare Plains Ironweed (*Vernonia marginata*) forb by targeting invasive smooth brome on the US Air Force Academy (USAFA). Steve prepared the comprehensive prescribed fire burn plan, and will serve as Prescribed Fire Burn Boss. He made initial notifications to nearby facility managers, and worked with a local contractor to reduce

woody and grassy fuels near the burn site. Diane coordinated with the Academy Spirit to post an article and briefed senior USAFA leadership on the planned burn. Project timing will depend on plant phenology, weather conditions and fuel moisture, but should occur in early May. The Academy is coordinating closely with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Region Six Fire staff in planning and implementation.

*Upper Monument Creek Landscape Restoration Initiative:* Diane Strohm continues to participate on the Upper Monument Creek (UMC) Restoration project. The objective of the group is to collaboratively develop science-based forest restoration and management recommendations for the 67,000-ac area on the Pike National Forest directly west of the USAFA. A recent meeting focused on a spatial review of potential fuels and ecosystem restoration treatments across the landscape. Diane will evaluate treatments in close proximity to the Academy, recommend additional management as necessary, and tailor complimentary projects on base.

*Western Division American Fisheries Society Meeting:* Pam Sponholtz attended the Western Division AFS meeting in Boise, Idaho and participated in the Executive Committee Meeting.

## **Partnerships and Accountability**

### *Phase II Stormwater Taskforce meeting:*

Brian Mihlbachler attended a Phase II Stormwater Taskforce meeting with El Paso County and the City of Colorado Springs to discuss regional stormwater management and infrastructure needs. He is also serving on an engineering subteam to develop ranking criteria for prioritizing an estimated \$900M in regional stormwater infrastructure projects.

*Warren Air Force Base:* Pam Sponholtz continued to work with Warren Air Force Base on refining a cooperative agreement for natural resource support on the base. Natural resource issues include pronghorn management, protection of threatened and endangered species, and bird airstrike hazard issues.

*Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) review:* Diane Strohm and Brian Mihlbachler presented a slide show of 2012 Academy accomplishments to representatives from the USFWS, the USAFA, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. This annual evaluation provides an opportunity to discuss natural resource management challenges, issues, and areas of concern; and to showcase natural resource projects being accomplished at the Academy. Required annually under The Sikes Act, this formal agency collaboration ensures continued effective implementation of the Academy INRMP.

*Fuel hazard mitigation along boundary with private residences:* Diane Strohm met with several landowners and a Colorado Springs Fuels Mitigation Specialist along the southeastern boundary of the USAFA to discuss wildfire concerns. Residents have performed fuels reduction on their side of the fence, and are concerned about a fire heading their direction across the Academy. Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm have already completed a significant amount of brush removal along the USAFA boundary, but this area of prairie with flashy

grass fuels has yet to be treated. Plans are being made to cut brush and mow this stretch, possibly in partnership with the Colorado Springs Fire Department.



*Trout Unlimited Colorado Rendezvous:* Pam Sponholtz was an invited speaker at the annual Trout Unlimited rendezvous held in Redstone, CO. Pam, along with her co-authors Scott Roth (Fish Passage Coordinator for Region 6), Robin Knox (Western Native Trout Coordinator), and Bill Noonan (Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator), presented information on Service funding programs.

*Society of American Foresters tour of the Waldo Canyon Fire area:* Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm joined with numerous other agency representatives to tour the Waldo Canyon Fire burn area. Led by the U.S. Forest Service Pikes Peak Ranger District, the tour focused on restoration activities, post-fire insect infestation, flood potential, recreation issues, and future management implications.

*Colorado Fish Health Board:* Pam Sponholtz attended the Colorado Fish Health Board meeting. Topics discussed included development of commercial salvage and collection permits, revision of whirling disease regulations, and the use of Hofer (whirling disease resistant rainbow trout) strains for testing facility susceptibility.

**Species Conservation and Management**

*Fisheries conservation in Rocky Mountain National Park:* Chris Kennedy worked on an update of the 2001 Rocky Mountain National Park Fisheries and Aquatic Management Report. This report encompasses almost all fisheries and aquatic work conducted in the park. Chris completed drafts of 13 cutthroat trout population sections.

*Bat house at Kettle Lakes*

Greg Speights installed a bat house at Kettle Lakes to promote the biological control of mosquitoes at the recreational fishing lakes.



Bathouse on the Kettle Lakes pavilion

*Migratory bird surveys:* Laura Scieszka continued observing migratory birds in five locations on Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) and generating reports based on finds including location, wind speed, birds observed, duration of survey, and type of environment.



American avocet and black-necked stilt

*Burrowing owl surveys:* Laura Scieszka shadowed Max Canestorp on proper burrowing owl survey and wildlife caller techniques and reviewed important calling locations on the base.

*Eagle nest report:* Max Canestorp responded to a report of an eagle nesting on a structure on Pueblo Chemical Depot (PCD). It turned out to be a great horned owl nest with one nestling.



Baby owl snacking on a kangaroo rat

*Nest surveys:* Max Canestorp conducted raptor nest surveys on PCD. Four active redbill hawk and great horned owl nests were identified.

**Habitat Conservation and Management**

*I-25 Widening Project:* Brian Mihlbachler attended weekly meetings with Colorado Department of Transportation’s (CDOT’s) I-25 Widening Project Team to address potential impacts to USAFA natural resources, including Preble’s meadow jumping mouse, raptors, Gunnison’s prairie dogs, wetlands, and noxious weeds. Brian is also facilitating a City/CDOT/USAFA project to utilize CDOT’s mitigation requirements to address sediment and Preble’s habitat restoration needs on Middle Tributary Creek.

*Boy Scout projects:* Greg Speights supervised a Boy Scout project in which several hundred coyote willow stakes were planted along a restored reach of Middle Tributary to help create riparian habitat and promote channel stability.



Boy Scouts harvesting coyote willow stakes for the Middle Tributary habitat restoration project.

*Noxious weed monitoring reports:* Brian Mihlbachler reviewed the 2012 monitoring reports from Texas A&M AgriLife and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program for noxious weed biological control activities and a noxious weed inventory. Twenty-two noxious weed species are currently managed on USAFA property using an Integrated Weed Management approach.

*Noxious weed work on Buckley Air Force Base:* Laura Scieszka shadowed experts from Texas AgriLife on biological control of noxious weeds and assisted with the installation and upkeep of pitfall traps.

*Arbor Day:* Laura Scieszka helped with logistics, execution of tree planting, and proclamation of Arbor Day for April 2013 on BAFB. The Child Development Center participated in the



ceremonial planting and received certificates and Earth Week giveaways. The State Forester, Commander Dant, and Commander Morris were featured speakers. The events were covered by the BAFB Public Affairs Office.



Col. Dant, State Forester, Krystal Phillips

*Earth Day:* Krystal Phillips and Laura Scieszka prepped a display, assisted with logistics, and handed out reusable bags at the Commissary to celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day.



Laura Scieszka and Krystal Phillips handing out reusable bags at the Commissary at BAFB

*Base Cleanup on BAFB:* In support of Earth Week, 30 volunteers participated in an hour-long cleanup of three target areas on BAFB resulting in significant trash reduction on base grounds.



*Birds of Prey Foundation:* Laura Scieszka donated 64 rabbits to injured raptors and toured the facility which houses various raptors and vultures, including incredibly adorable saw whet owls.

*Otis House Forest Thinning Project:* Operations are completed on a 10-acre thinning project in Pine Valley. Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm prepared and administered this contract to improve forest health and reduce wildfire hazard by thinning trees and removing most understory brush.



*Arbor Day Celebration and tree planting:* Diane Strohm hosted several activities in honor of Arbor Day on the USAFA. Kindergarteners participated in a tree poster contest, with six contest winners awarded prizes and the opportunity to show off their posters with Smokey Bear and Sparky. Academy Civil Engineer Commander Colonel Patrick Carley received USAFA's 20-Year Tree City USA Award from Andy Schlosberg of the CO State Forest Service. Diane held an additional tree planting event with a Girl Scout troop, through which the enthusiastic girls earned their Bronze Star award. Overall, 1,000 ponderosa pine and Douglas fir seedlings were planted on the USAFA in April. Seedlings were grown in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and Bessey Nursery from seed collected on the Academy.



Girl Scouts plant trees to help restore a burned area

*Roadside tree removal:* Steve Wallace mapped 70 dead and dying roadside trees and administered a contract to have these trees removed before USAFA Graduation. Many had been weakened from extreme drought conditions, while some had been infested with Ips and twig beetles. Beetle-infested tree boles and limbs were peeled or chipped to minimize future infestation.

*Fireline safety refresher:* Steve Wallace, Diane Strohm, Greg Speights, and Brian Mihlbachler attended the annual required Fire Safety Refresher Course. The workshop focused on situational awareness and lessons learned from past fires, and concluded with a fire shelter deployment.

### **Public Use and Recreation**

*Stocking rainbow trout:* Greg Speights stocked 1450 pounds of 9-11" rainbow trout in the USAFA lakes.

*Waldo Canyon Fire closure order:* Brian Mihlbachler is coordinating with the U.S. Forest Service on trail access affected by the Waldo Canyon Fire closure order. Some trails may be accessible in the less hazardous areas of the watershed by Memorial Day.

*Spring turkey season on USAFA:* Greg Speights coordinated access and guided hunters participating in the spring turkey season.

### **Cultural Resources**

*Curation agreement:* Max Canestorp drafted a Memorandum of Understanding between PCD and Fort Carson relative to curating PCD's archaeological artifact collection in Fort Carson's curation facility.