

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



Lakewood: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora: Krystal Phillips, Wildlife Biologist

Peterson, Schriever, Cheyenne Mtn Air Force Bases, Colorado Springs: Max Canestorp, Wildlife Biologist

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs: Brian Mihlbachler, Biological Scientist, Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist, Greg Speights, Biological Technician, Steve Wallace, Forestry Technician

Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park: Chris Kennedy, Fish Biologist

Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY: Timothy Grosch, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

April 2014 Accomplishment Report

Species Conservation and Management

Avian Rehabilitation and Relocation: During winter raptor mating season Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) can become home to active nests. In April, a young owl became disoriented due to windy evening environmental conditions and was trapped inside the building walkway while learning to fly in the early morning. In order to keep the juvenile owl and building pedestrians safe, the owl was captured and transported to the Birds of Prey Foundation in order to be rehabilitated and release once able to independently hunt and fly.



A Great Horned Owllet was Rescued by Entomology staff and transported to the Birds of Prey Foundation

Elk hunting at the Air Force Academy: Brian coordinated the annual sign-up and random drawing for cow elk hunting vouchers on the Air Force Academy (USAFA). Colorado Parks and Wildlife provides up to 30 elk vouchers each year for the base to issue as necessary to maintain the elk population at 30-40 animals. Generally, fewer than 6 elk are harvested each year to maintain the management target.



*Elk around Cathedral Rock, USAFA
(Brian Mihlbachler, Feb. 2014)*

Western Burrowing Owl Surveys: Historically, Western burrowing owl nests have been present on BAFB during the migration season. Krystal Phillip conducted annual surveys throughout the installation for burrowing owl presence during April and confirmed one active nest.

Raptor Electrocution and Prevention: During a groundwater monitoring outdoor survey one magpie and two red tailed hawk carcasses at the base of an overhead electrical pole on BAFB. Krystal Phillips investigated the report, properly disposed of the carcasses and recommended to the AF that avian preventative structures be placed on the pole in order to mitigate any future incidents. Per Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Krystal was required to report the incident to Aurora Colorado Parks and Wildlife Officer, Travis Harris.

Fisheries work in Rocky Mountain National Park: Chris Kennedy completed the Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) Fisheries and Aquatic Management final report. This report is a compilation of almost all of the fisheries work that has taken place within RMNP. A draft was completed in spring of 2013 and comments from reviewers and an editor was incorporated to complete the report.

Fisheries surveys on Baca National Wildlife Refuge: Pam Sponholtz, Scott Miller, Corinna Hanson participated on fisheries surveys on the Baca NWR with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Refuge streams are amongst the last strongholds for Rio Grande sucker and chub in Colorado.



Corinna Hanson, LE Officer electroshocking in Creststone Creek for fish

Cutthroat Trout in Rocky Mountain National Park: Chris Kennedy reviewed a manuscript written by University of Colorado-Boulder geneticists for which he is a co-author. This project looks at the genetic make-up of cutthroat trout within Rocky Mountain National Park and compares it to stocking records and known sources of the cutthroat trout stocked.

Cormorants vs. Rainbow Trout: Brian monitored the fishing lakes at the Academy for double-breasted cormorants, which, if necessary, can be depredated under a MBTA permit if they are excessively foraging on the stocked rainbow trout.

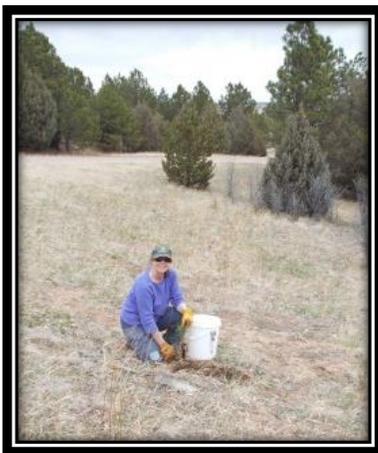
Pronghorn and Goose Depredation: Pronghorn have become more active at FEW resulting in numerous reports of nuisance or injured animals. Several days were spent investigating reports confirming only minor non-life threatening wounds. Pronghorn were monitored for several days with no lethal action required.



Pronghorn visit the Golf Course at FEW (Tim Grosch, Nov. 2013)

Black-footed Ferret Conservation: Tim Grosch met with John Hughes Wildlife Biologist for the National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center for a tour of their facility. We discussed life history and the story of how the program began. All parties are eager for the opportunity to bring ferrets back to FE Warren (FEW). This partnership will provide the Conservation Center the opportunity to expand their operations with resource conservation. This will be a great opportunity for FEW to show their support of conservation and rehabilitation on base.

Goose depredation: Tim Grosch and Jacob Borchin began Canada goose depredation at FEW as requested by base leadership. The need for this action stems from aircraft safety issues on base. Over several days of trial and error utilizing different methods we accomplished to remove 10 adult geese in and around sensitive areas. We began addling Canada goose eggs around Centennial Lake. A total of 13 eggs have been added to date.



Habitat Conservation and Management

Bark beetle surveys and treatment: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm performed field surveys on USAFA for bark beetle infestation, since beetles are beginning to

emerge from trees that were attacked last autumn. Since the first flight of the year is typically the most damaging, field inventory to locate these trees will continue to be a strong focus over the next several months. Infested trees are cut and de-barked with limbs chipped or finely lopped and scattered to kill the developing brood.

Fish Passage: Pam Sponholtz met with partners to discuss fish passage improvements to ditches on the South St. Vrain River near Lyons, CO.

Preventative Spraying for Bark Beetles: Work has begun on a contract to spray 250 trees to prevent bark beetle attack on USAFA. Diane Strohm and Steve Wallace identified high-risk trees to be protected, many of which were recently transplanted, stressed due to root damage from construction activities, or within high profile areas recently favored by the Ips beetle. Trees that are under environmental stress are attractive targets for the Ips pine engraver beetle.

Tree Planting: Diane Strohm worked with a local contractor to have nearly 900 seedlings planted across USAFA. Planting areas included the recent Waldo burn area and several other burn scars; pockets cleared due to heavy mistletoe infection; and in proximity to gates to supplement efforts to preclude vehicular access.

Revegetation at the Air Force Academy: Brian coordinated with USAFA environmental staff and the Contracting Office to revise the Academy's Erosion Control, Revegetation, and Tree Care specification. Substantive changes to the site preparation and topsoil requirements were made to promote post-construction revegetation success.

Future Plant Surveys with Native American tribes: Brian Mihlbachler met with researchers from the Denver Botanic Gardens to discuss possible partnership projects addressing rare plant ecology and conservation. Depending on future Native American interest, DBG may be able to assist with surveys for plants that have cultural significance to various tribes.

Wildlife Barrier Fence Project: The installation of a metal wildlife barrier skirt on existing

perimeter fence is one wildlife management strategy BAFB employs to ensure wildlife species such as black-tailed prairie dogs, coyotes, and rabbits, are effectively managed in unimproved areas per the BAFB Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan. Krystal continued to collaborate with the Center for Environmental Management on Military Lands (CEMML) staff to accomplish and execute the wildlife barrier fence project.

Wetlands Study: Wetlands are present on BAFB and must be surveyed periodically. Krystal assisted FWS staff by responding to vendor project questions and continued to coordinate efforts to accomplish a base wide study of wetlands set to kick off in June 2014.

Invasive Species Management: Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) employs the use of biocontrols to control targeted invasive plant species. Historically, TX AgriLife conducts site surveys and releases insect's targeted for the invasive plants on BAFB. Krystal assisted TX AgriLife field staff with the process for the coordination of a new five (5) year cooperative agreement with the Service in order to continue their future efforts on BAFB and other sites within the purview of the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.

Leadership in Science and Technology

Aerial Reconnaissance Monitoring for Bark Beetle Infestation: Steve and Diane met with Academy Biology professor Lt. Col. Steve Hasstedt and several cadets to look for beetle-infested trees in the Jacks Valley area to serve as samples for visual and sensor calibration. Remotely-piloted vehicle flights started late this month, although data has not yet been analyzed. This course is expected to continue for the next several years. It could provide valuable, timely intelligence in support of forest health protection, since prompt identification and treatment of Ips-infested trees is critical.

Senior Leadership Briefing: Diane Strohm briefed senior USAFA leadership on natural resource issues including forest health, wild land fuels reduction projects, prescribed fire, and plans for defensible space clearing within housing areas.

Presentation to the Leadership at Warren AFB (FEW): Tim Grosch gave a presentation to FEW's Wing Commander Colonel Hayes and other members of leadership to educate them on Canada goose egg addling process and procedures. Tim explained life history of Canada geese, egg and embryo development, reasons why egg addling is important, and demonstrated the action of egg addling.

Cultural Resources Management

Tribal Resources Cathedral Rock: Brian assessed possible revegetation and erosion control projects that could be implemented near Cathedral Rock, an important geologic feature and Native American spiritual site located in the USAFA training area. Previous consultation with several Native American tribes has identified several concerns, including excessive vehicle access, erosion, vegetation damage, and disturbance of sacred sites. Further consultation with the tribes will be initiated by the USAFA Cultural Resource Manager before any mitigation work is implemented to make sure that sensitive tribal resources are not impacted.



Cathedral Rock: A Native American cultural site composed of feldspar-rich sandstone of the Dawson Arkose Formation (Brian Mihlbachler, Spring 2014).

Partnerships and Accountability

Air Force Recreational Trails Project: The Air Force Community Partnership Initiative is a framework through which installation and community leaders can develop creative ways to leverage their capabilities and resources to focus on achieving reduced costs by finding shared value. Krystal participated in internal and external stakeholder meetings to prioritize efforts to accomplish this initiative within established federal Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) project/program timelines.

Fish and Wildlife Service Coordination: Krystal conducted a site visit to assist Great Plains Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office to help establish a relationship with Air Force Natural Resource Manager at Ellsworth AFB. Key points addressed during visit included: the installation Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) reviews and ePlan upload, identified natural resource projects on military lands, project expectations, and educating FWS employees on AF specific natural resource protocol.

Environmental Outreach: Public outreach is an essential part of any natural resources program and has a federal priority within the Air Force and US Fish and Wildlife Service. BAFB celebrated Arbor Day with a ceremonial tree planting and Arbor Day Proclamation reading by the acting 460th Space Wing installation commander, Colonel Darren Buck. Additionally, BAFB received their 9th year Tree City USA award from Colorado State Forester, Keith Wood.

Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners (PPWPP): Diane Strohm planned and participated in the second annual educational conference on wildfire mitigation. "Surviving Wildfire - It Takes a Community" was held near Larkspur, CO. The PPWPP mission is to help reduce the

threat of wildfire to life and property through education, cooperation and coordination of resources. Approximately 55 people from surrounding communities attended the event.



BAFB received their 9th year Tree City USA award from Colorado State Forester, Keith Wood.

Arbor Day Assembly and Environmental Outreach: Diane Strohm hosted the annual Academy Arbor Day assembly at Douglas Valley Elementary School. Kindergarteners participated in a tree poster contest, with prizes awarded by Smokey Bear. They planted pine seedlings near the school, where they can nurture and watch them grow. Diane accepted the Academy's 21st Tree City USA award from a CO State Forest Service (CSFS) representative.



Andy Schlosberg (CSFS) presents the Tree City USA flag to Smokey Bear and Diane Strohm at Douglas Valley Elementary School

Public Use and Recreation

Arbor Day 2014 Proclamation: Diane Strohm prepared the AFA's 2014 Arbor Day Proclamation, formalizing its commitment to planting and preserving trees. Diane is starting to make plans for planting nearly 1,000 seedlings and celebrating Arbor Day at Douglass Valley Elementary School this April.

Stocking of Rainbow Trout at the Air Force Academy: Brian stocked 1450 pounds of rainbow trout into the five Academy fishing lakes. Stocking will start at Farish Recreation Area in May as the ice opens up on the three lakes.

Stocking to initiate FEW's Fishing Program: Saratoga National Fish Hatchery employee Pat Malone delivered 450 Brown trout weighing 304 pounds and averaging 11.5". 1906 rainbow trout weighing 304 pounds averaging 7.4" were stocked into S. Pearson Lake. This is the second fish stocking in the last six months in hopes to revamp the fish program on base.



Stocking of S. Pearson Lake with Brown Trout by the Saratoga National Fish Hatchery

Tim Grosch met with Donna Woitaszewski Recreation Assistant for Warren's Outdoor Recreation. We discussed FEW's recreational fishing program and brain stormed ideas on how to streamline the licensing process. We also discussed revision of base rules of current

regulations and determined changes needed to be made. Several people on base were observed not following current rules and enforcement has become an issue.

Other

Human Resources: To support the natural resource program management efforts on the installation, the USFWS solicited a job announcement for a Biological Science Technician for Buckley Air Force Base. Krystal accomplished the following during the month of April 2014: coordinated common access card access for new hire; scheduled fingerprinting; and provided site contact information.

Pam Sponholtz, Max Canestorp and Chris Pulscamp (Environmental Manager for Pueblo Chemical Depot) conducted interviews for the new Wildlife Biologist position at Pueblo Chemical Depot.

Brian made arrangements for Greg Speights' retirement party. Greg had a 40-year career on the Air Force Academy, including employment at the Cadet dining hall and Grounds Maintenance shop; and 33-years in the Natural Resources office as a sawyer, forestry technician, wildlife law enforcement officer, and wildlife technician. Along with the other USAFA staff, Greg's position transitioned from the Air Force to USFWS in July 2003 through a Sikes Act Cooperative Agreement. Greg will be missed for his dedication, experience, and wealth of natural resources knowledge.

Conferences, Presentations, Training and Meetings:

- Chris Kennedy prepared and gave a presentation on Rocky Mountain National Park fish monitoring at the RMNP Stream Monitoring Workshop. This workshop was hosted by the Rocky Mountain I&M network. They are planning to initiate long-term Stream Ecological Integrity monitoring in RMNP beginning in 2014. This protocol

aims to document the status and trend in ecological condition, help in the understanding of the likely causes of change in condition, and assist in the application of this data to park stream management of streams across the park.

- *USAF Wildland Fire Center Symposium:* Diane Strohm gave a presentation on the Academy fuels management program at a Wildland Fire conference at Peterson Air Force Base. The symposium was attended by the staff of the USAF Wildland Fire Center, in addition to senior leadership and Fire Chiefs from Colorado Front Range military installations. Diane provided information on past, current and upcoming fuels reduction projects, including fuel mitigation efforts that opened up a road in the southwest corner of the Academy, allowing for safe access and successful firefighting against the recent Waldo Canyon fire.
- *2014 Colorado Wildland Fire Conference:* Diane Strohm attended a two-day conference in Glenwood Springs. "The True Cost of Wildfire" presented an excellent opportunity to learn how other agencies are preparing for and dealing with wildfire suppression and damage.
- *Search and Rescue Preparation.* Diane Strohm worked with a retired Green Beret and backcountry survival expert to map potentially hazardous locations and identify strategic points for search and rescue operations.
- *Climate Change Vulnerability Class:* Max attended the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) class "Climate Change Vulnerability Assessments" for training on Climate Change in Jackson, Wyoming.
- *Stakeholders Meeting for the Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) Activities:* Krystal prepared and submitted Power Point slides on nesting avian locations, AF process for

environmental project development, and current locations of wildlife barrier fence on the airfield fence in anticipation of the May 1st meeting. Krystal also participated in AF ePlans training webinar.

- Steve Wallace and Brian Mihlbachler completed their annual wildfire refresher training and pack test through the Pike National Forest program.
- Tim Grosch completed a FWS required course No Fear Act Training.