

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



APRIL 2015

- **Lakewood:**
Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader, JoAnn Wise, Budget Admin
- **Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora:** Krystal Phillips, Wildlife Biologist, Dustin Casady, Bio Tech
- **Peterson, Schriever, Cheyenne Mtn Air Force Bases, Colorado Springs:** Max Canestorp, Wildlife Biologist
- **US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs:** Brian Mhlbachler, Biological Scientist, Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist, Steve Wallace, Forestry Technician, Melissa Whittingslow, Wildlife Biologist
- **Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park:** Chris Kennedy, Fish Biologist
- **Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY:** Timothy Grosch, Fish and Wildlife Biologist
- **McConnell Air Force Base:** Laura Mendenhall, Fish and Wildlife Biologist
- **Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo, CO:** Clark Jones, Wildlife Biologist

Leadership in Science and Technology

Black-tailed prairie dog. As part of a continuing effort to document historical changes in black-tailed prairie dog on Pueblo Chemical Depot, Clark Jones used recently acquired aerial imagery from the National Agriculture Imagery Program to map the 2013 extent of prairie dog colonies on Pueblo Chemical Depot. Results indicate that the extent of prairie dog populations was relatively stable between 2007 and 2013. Ground-level surveys for 2015 are ongoing and results thus far indicate slight increases in the extent of prairie dog colonies since 2013



Reptile and Amphibian Surveys. Laura Mendenhall coordinated with biologists from Copperhead to survey for reptiles and amphibians on McConnell Air Force Base. Methods used included setting wire turtle traps and minnow traps in ponds and placing drift fences and cover boards in unimproved terrestrial habitat. Species observed on the first day included Graham's

crayfish snakes (*Regina grahamii*), red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), and a Woodhouse's toad (*Anaxyrus woodhousii*).

Techniques for Invasive Plant Management. Tim Grosch and Dustin Casady attended training at the National Conservation Training Center and got to meet people from as far away as Japan. They learned field techniques to aid in managing noxious weed infestations including mechanical, biological and pesticide type methods.



Partnerships and Accountability

Environmental Outreach. Public outreach is an essential part of any natural resources program and is a priority within the Air Force and US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Air Force encourages all installations to establish an ongoing natural resources public relations program by sponsoring public events associated with commemorative days such as Earth Day and National Arbor Day. Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) celebrated Earth

Day with a clean-up and beautification project of the Family RV Camping area. Krystal and Student Conservation Association crew member, Jacob Antley, participated in laying river rock



at each camping site to stabilize soil.

Arbor Day. BAFB also 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 10th year Tree City USA award from Colorado State Forester, Keith Wood.

Partnerships and Accountability con't

Honeybees. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture honeybees pollinate 80 percent of flowering crops in the United States. In addition, honeybees aid in plant cross-pollination and many plants are solely dependent on specific honeybees for their reproduction.



Krystal helped facilitate safe removal and relocation of a honeybee hive thriving in a building located on BAFB

Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. Tim Grosch met with Bonnie Heidel and Ian Abernethy from Wyoming Natural Diversity Database in Laramie, Wyoming to talk logistics for summer 2015 field season. Bonnie and Ian lead Colorado butterfly plant and Preble's meadow jumping mouse monitoring efforts. The partnership is ongoing between USFWS, University of Wyoming and the DoD and is essential for conservation of these species within military lands.

Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Tim Grosch and Pam Spohnoltz met with Baca National Wildlife Refuge staff and USGS personnel to discuss a temperature monitoring program for the watershed located on the refuge.



Region 6 Sikes Act Meeting. COFWCO staff as well as Project Leaders from South and North Dakota and Utah met in Denver for two days with representatives from the Air Force Civil Engineer Center to learn about the Air Force environmental budget, what the natural resources responsibilities of each base, and how to accomplish biological surveys using SCA interns, the Service's IDIQ agreement, and the CESU network.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Tree Planting. Diane Strohm worked with a local contractor to plant 900 seedlings across the Academy. 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. Seedlings were grown from seed

collected at various elevations across the base, to ensure genetic acclimatization.

Bark beetle surveys and treatment. Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm started field surveys for bark beetle infestation, as beetles have begun 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 be high priority 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, which develops within two months. Ips and twig beetle populations are expected to remain high as long as trees are suffering from drought stress.

Wildlife Monitoring. Clark Jones at Pueblo Chemical Depot, obtained a master bird banding permit from the U.S. Geological Survey in order to capture and monitor multiple species of conservation concern on Pueblo Chemical Depot. Initial efforts will focus on Lark Buntings and Cassin's Sparrows to determine how land management activities may influence annual survival and site fidelity.

Prescribed Burn to Enhance Rare Plant Species. Steve Wallace partnered with Rich Sterry of Region 2 Fire to implement a broadcast burn to benefit the rare Plains Ironweed (*Vernonia marginata*).



This was the second prescribed burn on the Academy to inhibit the smooth brome that is competing with this rare forb, found in only three locations in CO. Rich Sterry served as Prescribed Fire Burn Boss, overseeing NR staff and USAFA firefighters in this one-acre burn. This burn will be implemented annually for several years to effectively set back the invasive smooth brome, as long as weather conditions cooperate.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Noxious Weeds. Brian is reviewing the draft Year 10 noxious weed monitoring report prepared by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. The Academy currently supports 26 noxious weed species ranked by Colorado Department of Agriculture as A-B-C list weeds. Contracted herbicide spraying will cover 450 acres of weed infestation between spring and fall 2015.

Brian hand-removed 156 myrtle spurge (Colorado "A list" noxious weed) from 23 known locations on the Academy. Persistent hand removal is effective control technique for small to medium populations if seed production can be minimized.

Baca Wildlife Refuge. Baca Wildlife Refuge is located in the northeastern part of the San Luis Valley of Colorado and has a diverse habitat consisting of shrublands, grasslands, wet meadows, playa wetlands, and riparian corridors. The COFWCO partnered with SWCA Environmental Consultants to conduct fish passage evaluations on over twenty riparian structures



Dustin Casady assisted the Rocky Mountain Arsenal with prescribed fire operations. 75 acres total were burned and objectives set for the burn were met. Objectives were to consume greater than 50% of the 1 hour fuels and greater than 30% of the 10 hour fuels while protecting infrastructure and ensuring containment of the fire. Using prescribed fire in the spring can help to reduce undesirable species such as smooth brome and free up space by removing litter which helps encourage more desirable warm season grasses and forbs to grow.

Species Conservation and Management

Canada goose removal. Tim Grosch and Dustin Casady began the 2015 Canada goose removal activities on F. E. Warren AFB. 7 adult geese were removed from the resident population located on Warren. They also were able to locate several nesting birds and added 51 eggs. Additional nests were found but because of their location access was limited.

Green Lineage of Cutthroat Trout. Chris Kennedy attended Species Status Assessment (SSA) workshop in Lakewood, Colorado. An SSA will be prepared for the green lineage of cutthroat trout which will incorporate the known life history and its habitat needs, its current status and projections for the future resiliency. The completed SSA will be used as base of information to make formal Fish and Wildlife Service decisions on the lineage. This will be incorporated into a status assessment for the green lineage of cutthroat trout which will be submitted to Transac-

tions of the American Fisheries Society for publication.

Audubon Society. Melissa Whittingslow has been in contact with the local Audubon Society to collect past bird counts conducted on the Academy and to try and get a Christmas bird count facilitated.