

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



AUG / SEPT 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
- **Peterson AFB, Colorado Springs:** Shelly Crook, Assistant Fire Management Officer
- **US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs:** Brian Mihlbachler, 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

American Fisheries Society meeting: Pam Sponholtz attended the National meeting in Portland, OR and presented a paper on how U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service partnered with other agencies and nontraditional partners to restore aquatic habitats after the Colorado flooding events in September 2013.

Kansas State Fair: Laura Mendenhall worked alongside Quivira National Wildlife Refuge staff to educate visitors at the 2015 Kansas State Fair. Mendenhall talked with kids and adults about efforts to manage the grassland ecosystem and conserve native wildlife.

Detail at Baca National Wildlife Refuge: Tim Grosch began his detail at Baca National Wildlife Refuge located in San Luis Valley of Southern Colorado. This was an exceptional opportunity for him to learn

the skills it takes to run an efficient Wildlife Refuge. During the month of September, Tim learned valuable skills conducting three pass depletion fish surveys on the numerous waterways found throughout the refuge. He also accompanied Ron Garcia refuge manager on a site visit with BOR representatives to discuss ongoing issues with raptor electrocutions along the power line that transects the refuge. A big thanks goes out to allowing this career developing opportunity as well as the refuge staff that shared a wealth of knowledge. They were great! Thanks Ron, Corinna and Eric!



Monarch caterpillar

Fish movement study: In cooperation with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Baca National Wildlife Refuge, Pam Sponholtz, Melissa Whittingslow, Dustin Casady and Tim Grosch collected Rio Grande suckers and chubs from Crestone Creek near the Sangria De Cristo Mountains. The purpose of this study is to monitor movement upstream after several culverts are fixed under the National Fish Passage Program

Salvage sign-up at US Air Force Academy: Melissa Whittingslow and Brian Mihlbachler developed a salvage list sign-up for wildlife strikes on the US Air force Academy. This program is a great way to recover salvageable meat from car accidents involving game animals.

Record of environmental consideration: Clark Jones reviewed an Army Record of Environmental Consideration for a proposed easement to allow Black Hills Energy access to a substation on Pueblo Chemical Depot (PCD). It was determined that the proposed easement was in and



Tributary to Herman Gulch

Fish renovation in Herman Gulch: Pam Sponholtz assisted Colorado Parks and Wildlife on a stream renovation in Herman Gulch. This project removed nonnative Colorado cutthroat trout so that native Greenback cutthroat trout can hopefully be stocked and re-established next year.



Partnerships and Accountability

would not affect any endangered species or their habitats.

Wildland Fire Planning. Max Canestorp participated in wildland fire planning meetings on Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station (CMAFS) and Schriever Air Force Base (SAFB).

Partnerships and Accountability con't



Cultural Resource Protection: Diane Strohm met with a group from a local historical society to evaluate several trees that may have been culturally modified by Native Americans. The Utes bent, twisted, and peeled trees for a variety of reasons, including trail marking, spiritual observance, grave marking and medicinal uses. Two culturally-modified trees (CMT) are located in close proximity to an upcoming utility line project. Diane is coordinating with planners to ensure protection of these and other CMTs.

Open House: Melissa Whittingslow manned a booth at the US Air Force Academy fire open house. Melissa described the importance in creating defensible space to home owners living in an interurban or wooded environment, where wildfires could be a threat to their homes. The open house was well attended by families living both on and off base. There were a verity of booths at the open house and plenty of activities to keep the kids entertained.

Visit to Arapahoe NWR: Pam Sponholtz visited Arapahoe NWR to discuss aquatic restoration opportunities with the Refuge Manager. Over 33 miles of the Illinois River goes right through the Refuge providing essential waterfowl and native fish habitat.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Falcon Trail Restoration: The Student Conservation Association Interns worked with the Melissa Whittingslow to fix bridges on the Falcon Trail by replacing old boards and reinforcing supports. The SCA Interns also redirected a small part of the Falcon Trail that was washed out during high rains

Burrowing owl surveys: Student Conservation intern Jacquie Tom conducted burrowing owl surveys to try and count the number of juvenile burrowing owls present on Buckley Air Force Base.

Ponderosa Pine Cone Reconnaissance. Diane evaluated a developing ponderosa pine cone crop for collection opportunities upon maturity in September. Ponderosa "bumper" crops average every five years, and this year promises an excellent yield in higher elevations of the Academy where seed has been in short supply. Cones will be collected and sent to a USFS nursery for seed extraction and

cold storage, where seed will remain viable for many years. The Academy has established a seed-bank from a variety of elevations to produce well-acclimated seedlings for future reforestation needs.

Monument Creek Watershed Restoration Plan team: Brian reviewed contractor proposals to study the watershed, identify projects, and prioritize future actions to address regional flooding and stormwater management problems affecting the watershed, and especially the Air Force Academy. A \$600K cost-share grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs is funding the work through the Fountain Creek Watershed and Greenway District. Other partners include the City of Colorado Springs, El Paso County, and Colorado Springs Utilities. The Plan will be completed by December 2016.

Tallgrass prairie conservation: Max Canestrop met with Animal and



SCA interns reinforcing a bridge on the Falcon Trail, which was damaged during the high rainfall.

Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) personnel regarding Bird/wildlife Airstrike Hazard (BASH) concerns as they relate to tallgrass prairie management.

Prairie dog surveys: Max Canestrop conducted prairie dog surveys on SAFB and GPS'ed the colonies. Two burrowing owl nest sites active earlier this year were identified during the prairie dog surveys, bringing the known number of burrowing owl nests on SAFB in 2015 to three.



Species Conservation and Management

New COFWCO employee: Shelly Crook joined the FWS staff as the new Assistant Fire Management Officer. Shelly is currently stationed out of the Air Force Academy and is responsible for an extensive area of the country, including the midwest and part of the Rocky Mountains. Shelly will coordinate wild-fire and fuel mitigation programs across 21 states and 28 Air Force bases. She brings a wealth of fire experience from her years with the U.S. Forest Service. Welcome Shelly!

Pawnee Montane Skipper Surveys at Buckley AFB: Endangered Species Act (ESA) - Pawnee Montane Skipper Surveys. Pawnee Montane Skippers are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act and are found in South Platte Canyon River drainage system in Colorado. In partnership with the USFWS, Ecological Services, Colorado Field Office, Krystal, Dustin, and Student Conservation Association interns volunteered one field day to survey known skipper transects within the Pike National Forest in Deckers, CO managed by the US Forest Service.



Bear Awareness at US Air Force Academy: Brian Mihlbachler distributed Bear Aware information to base residents and staff in preparation for the upcoming season of bears preparing for hibernation. A lack of mast and fruit production on trees and shrubs may cause higher than normal bear activity and more trash management conflicts this fall.

Cutthroat trout populations at Lawn & Spruce Lakes: Chris Kennedy conducted mark-recapture population estimates on cutthroat trout populations at Lawn and Spruce Lakes within Rocky Mountain National Park. Fish in both lakes were found to be abundant with several year classes present.



Cutthroat trout from Lawn Lake.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Air Force Natural Resource Funded Field Surveys. Several Buckley Air Force Base natural resource projects to include: Wildlife Barrier Fence; Invasive Spp. Mgmt; and Mgmt Habitat Shortgrass Prairie, were awarded to the Fish and Wildlife Service in FY15. In order to assure project completion, Krystal spent time in the field visiting project site footprints and evaluating project efficacy. Specifically, Krystal evaluated wildlife barrier fence installation and re-

moval areas; ensured native seed was broadcast in ground disturbed areas along fence lines; confirmed invasive vegetation in identified areas were



Before Moving

After Moving

Douglas fir tussock moth. Diane met with representatives from the Academy, Cheyenne Mountain AFS (CMAFS) and Peterson AFB to discuss the current situation and potential management options in response to growing Douglas fir tussock moth and western spruce budworm populations. The tussock moth has caused significant damage to Douglas and white fir on CMAFS. Managers from CMAFS and the Academy are working closely with US Forest Service entomologists on this issue. Larval samples collected in August showed presence of the nucleopolyhedrosis (NPV) virus, predicting a likely collapse of the tussock moth population in 2016. Western spruce budworm activity was detected at Farish and along the western Academy boundary this summer, although defoliation to date has been minimal.

Brian and Melissa unsuccessfully attempted to prevent sediment in the Black Forest Creek channel from re-directing flow through a population of the state rare Southern Rocky Mountain Cinquefoil (*Potentilla ambigens*). Channel erosion and sediment from east of Interstate 25, due to excessive stormwater runoff, is creating an aggraded and braided stream. Preliminary estimates indicate over 90% of the cinquefoil, in one of the largest populations (1000+) removed effectively; and surveyed new areas for invasive species removal.



Sedimentation of the Black Squirrel Creek channel is re-directing flow through an important rare plant site.



Area along Academy boundary cleared

Species Conservation and Management

The Rio Grande sucker and Rio Grande chub runs through Crestone Creek within BACA National Wildlife Refuge. Old culverts inhibit these fish and others from traveling upstream. The Colorado Fish & Wildlife Office developed plans to install new culverts that will enable fish passage. Prior to the installation of the culverts, fish populations and movements needed to be documented to track the successfulness of the culvert installation in improving fish movements. Dustin Casady aided Pamela Sponholtz with sampling pool sites along this creek. Fish were captured using electrofishing and seining equipment. Pit tags, a device that is

attached to the fish, was used to electronically capture fish movements as they move through scanning devices. Fish movements and population estimates, before and after the culvert installation, will be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the project.

Scaled Quail Trapping: Clark Jones coordinated with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to trap Scaled Quail at Pueblo Chemical Depot in September. As part of an introduction effort in the state of Utah, Scaled Quail are trapped at several sites in Pueblo County, CO (including the depot) and

released in Utah. A small population of Scaled Quail was discovered in southeastern Utah in 2007 and was supplemented with 200 birds from Colorado in 2014. The project is in its second year with another 200 birds captured in September planned for release this month. Each bird is screened for disease prior to being transported to Utah.



Habitat Conservation and Management

Pinecone Collections: Melissa Whittingslow assisted Diane Strohm with pinecone collection using a bucket truck on September 25th. The pine cones will allow the US Air Force Academy to have a cash of seeds that are suitable to grow on the US Air force academy. These seeds will be used if there is any disturbance, in which new pine trees are needed to rehabilitate an area.

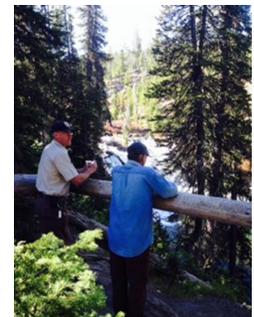


Melissa Whittingslow collects pine cones from the top of a healthy, high elevation ponderosa pine on the Academy

Cheyenne Mountain AFS & Air Force Wildland Fire Center Coordination: Shelly Crook attended a meeting with the Peterson AFB Media Manager, FWS Natural Resource Specialist, and CMAFS staff to discuss the coordination of CMAFS wildland program with the Air Force Wildland Fire Center. Topics discussed were: CMAFS Wildland Fire Management Plan; Tussock Moth Infestation; Treatment of over 1000 small hand piles as a result of thinning for hazardous fuels mitigation; Off-site/ Interagency Wildland Fire Deployments



Yellowstone National Park Lake Trout: Melissa Whittingslow, Greg, and Brian Mihlbachler assisted the Lander office capture lake trout from Lewis Lake in Yellowstone National Park using gill nets and electro fishing. Lewis Lake brook trout where collecting and males and females were separating. The last day the eggs where collected and fertilized, ovarian fluid was also collected at this time. Over 60 breeding pairs where collected during this survey, which was above the target of 50 breeding pairs. The eggs will allow Saratoga NFH to replenish their broodstock and infuse some wild genes from a specific shallow water spawning strain of lake trout.



Together again Brian and Greg enjoying the many amazing sights at Yellowstone