

# Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



OCTOBER 2015

## WHO/WHERE WE ARE:

**Lakewood:** Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader, JoAnn Wise, Budget Admin

**Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora:** Krystal Phillips, Wildlife Biologist, Dustin Casady, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

**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

## Species Conservation and Management

**Golden eagle release:** Two golden eagles (one adult and one juvenile) were released at Pueblo Chemical Depot October after being rehabilitated at the Pueblo Nature and Raptor Center. Both eagles sustained injury after being struck by vehicles at nearby locations in Colorado. Pueblo Chemical Depot was selected as the release site due to its abundance of prey items, particularly black-tailed prairie dogs.



**Electrofishing surveys:** Electrofishing surveys were conducted at five locations within RMNP, the Big Thompson River, the Roaring River, and Glacier Creek. The Big Thompson surveys were conducted to assess the effects of a fire and flooding in the drainage and fish were found to be more abundant than the last time it was surveyed. The Roaring River survey was to assess the recovery of the fish population at the site following flooding and fish were more abundant than the last time it was surveyed, but



it is not fully recovered. The Glacier Creek survey was a standard trend survey with fish being sampled for disease testing by the USFWS Bozeman Fish Health Center. Fish were abundant in the creek with brown trout being the dominant species.

## Leadership in Science and Technology

**Burrowing owl migration:** Two burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*) that were fitted with satellite transmitters in June at Pueblo Chemical Depot began their southward migration in October. Burrowing owl #120430 left Pueblo

Chemical Depot on September 29 and arrived in Chihuahua State, Mexico near Las Animas as of October 21. Burrowing owl #120431 left Pueblo Chemical Depot around October 6th and has been near Lubbock, TX since

October 13. This project is part of a partnership with the University of Idaho USGS Cooperative Research Unit lead by Dr. Courtney Conway to better understand why burrowing owl populations are in such steep decline.

# Habitat Conservation and Management



Aspen with a dead top and stem rot on the Academy

*Forest thinning along west Academy boundary:* Forest thinning has been progressing in a ten-acre unit along the west Academy boundary adjacent to the Pike National Forest. This heavily forested area has a dense understory of fir and Gambel oak which could easily result in a crown fire, quickly spreading up the adjacent slope of the National Forest. Its position

at the lower edge of the steep slope of the adjacent Pike National Forest renders it an especially important location to mitigate potential wildfire behavior.

*Farish hazard tree assessment and removal:* Diane Strohm coordinated with a USFS Forest Pathologist to examine potentially hazardous trees at Farish Recreation Area. Approximately thirty trees were identified,

primarily in the vicinity of Sapphire Campground. Diane coordinated with a contractor to remove these trees, and will perform another sweep for hazard trees next spring, before Farish reopens.

*Scouting for the upcoming elk hunt at the Academy has officially begun!*

# Partnerships and Accountability

*Threatened and endangered species management:* Brian Mihlbachler participated in a Preble's meadow jumping mouse Recovery Team conference call to address Wyoming Game and Fish Department's comments before finalizing the draft Recovery Plan.

*Stormwater management:* Brian toured Councilman Larry Bagley, City of Colorado Springs, around the

eastern tributaries to Monument Creek to see the erosion and riparian habitat damage caused by poorly managed off-base stormwater. The City Council is currently debating the FY16 budget for stormwater repairs and infrastructure projects.

*Rainbow trout stocking:* Melissa Whittingslow stocked Fairish Recreational Area on the Academy

with 1,000 Lbs. of Rainbow trout in October.

*Gypsy moth traps:* Diane Strohm gathered twelve Gypsy moth pheromone traps placed across the Academy to monitor populations of this potentially destructive insect. No gypsy moths were found. She coordinated with the USFS FHP office to examine the traps, and prepared maps identifying trap locations.

*"Blonde" the black bear feasting on improperly secured trash*



*Bear management:* Brian Mihlbachler and Melissa Whittingslow participated in a Colorado Parks and Wildlife stakeholders meeting to discuss bear problems and management in the Colorado Springs area. Representatives from CPW, trash companies, and local

Code Enforcement provided input on bear-resistant trash containers, public and customer concerns, regulatory options, etc. The Academy's efforts to protect bears from garbage are recognized by CPW as being relatively aggressive in comparison to the City and County.

# More Partnerships...



**Arapaho NWR pre-scribed burn (photo by M. Nelson)**

*Arapaho NWR fire:* Shelly Crook joined with over 20 other FWS and NPS personnel at the Arapaho NWR in northern Colorado,

just south of the town of Walden to conduct a 350 acre pre-scribed burn along the west edge of the Illinois River. At 1630, about 4 hours after ignitions began, under the influence of west/northwest winds that had not been forecasted, the prescribe fire escaped the unit boundary and was officially declared a wildfire. The fire

burned actively until about 1800, spreading to the east/southeast onto private lands, damaging some private property. On 10/17/15 the fire's spread was halted with no additional acres burned and officially declared as contained.

*INRMP review:* Krystal Phillips organized and facilitated the INRMP annual review meeting with tri-party stakeholders (Air Force, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife), per the Sikes Act.

## Battle against invasive species

*Russian olive removal:* Melissa Whittingslow and Dustin Casady surveyed many of the drainages on the US Academy for invasive Russian olives during the month of October. Russian olive trees are a large deciduous shrub or small tree, up to 25' tall. These highly invasive plants quickly take over stream banks, lake shores

and prairies, choking out native vegetation in riparian habitat. Performing the treatments during fall is more effective, as the plants are drawing nutrients down into the root system along with the herbicide that was applied to the cambium layer of the trunk.



## Fish Passage

*Fish Passage evaluation:* Pam Sponholtz met with U.S. Forest Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Steamboat Springs to evaluate a possible fish passage project for Colorado cutthroat trout. This site is on the Steamboat Springs Ski resort (stream runs right underneath a ski lift!) and is a series of steep culverts that are impassible by fish. If these are made "fish

friendly", fish would have an additional 2 miles to move upstream.



*Baca NWR:* Pam Sponholtz met with Baca NWR and Colorado Parks and Wildlife to discuss progress on replacing several culverts and road crossings for Rio Grande chub and sucker. These projects are some of the highest priority areas on the refuge.





**The Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office said goodbye to Tim Grosch this month as he heads to Pinetop, AZ in Region 2 to work for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. We'll miss you Tim!!!**