

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



DECEMBER 2015

WHO/WHERE WE ARE

Lakewood, CO: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader; JoAnn Wise, Budget Admin

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

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

Peterson AFB, Colorado Springs, CO: Shelly Crook, Assistant Fire Management Officer

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO: Brian Mihlbachler, Biological Scientist; Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist; James Donahey, Forester; Melissa Whittingslow, Wildlife Biologist

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

Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY: Vacant

McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, KS: Laura Mendenhall, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo, CO: Clark Jones, Wildlife Biologist

Species Conservation and Management

US Air Force Academy Deer Hunt.

Brian Mihlbachler and Melissa Whittingslow conducted the 2015 Air Force Academy deer hunt with 15 bucks and 13 does harvested; and 100% hunter success. Dustin Casady and Max Canestorp helped several hunters successfully fill tags at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Hunters ranged from those with little experience to avid hunters who were guides themselves. One of the hunters Casady escorted on base was only 12 years old and was very excited to shoot his first deer with his father's gun. The Academy maintains a deer hunting program to meet environmental management objectives. The program has been very successful over the years in reducing the deer population and giving hunters a great experience. Thanks to all the USFWS, CPW, and USAFA staff and volunteers that assisted with guiding the 28 hunters.



Dustin Casady with a deer hunter at the US Air Force Academy.

Meadow/South Ledge Ditch Diversion and Fish Passage Project Vegetation Report. Clark Jones submitted an annual report on vegetation monitoring for the Meadow/South Ledge Ditch Diversion and Fish Passage Project on the South St. Vrain River in Boulder County, Colorado. In

September 2013, a large flood destroyed two ditch diversion structures and headgates on the South St. Vrain River < 1 mile west of Lyons, CO. A project was initiated to rebuild and combine the original two ditches into a single structure in a manner facilitating passage of native fish species in the area while continuing to provide irrigation water. The project corridor is also considered habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), so vegetation monitoring was necessary to comply with the biological opinion issued in March 2015. Revegetation efforts within the project corridor will be evaluated annually for two more growing seasons.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR Bison Roundup. Dustin Casady assisted other USFWS staff with the round up which allows staff to take biological samples to assess herd health.

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Training

All-Staff Training. COFWCO staff met in Denver, Colorado for two days with the Aquatic Invasive Species lead at Region 6 to learn about Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP). HACCP is risk management to reduce the risk of spreading invasive species and other non-targets via human based pathways. It helps identify the most effective

opportunities during an activity to reduce the risk and the specific control measures that are needed. The COFWCO manages natural resources on multiple bases throughout three states. Staff and equipment are sometimes shared across bases and the National Park or National Wildlife Refuge systems, therefore it is critical to identify and control for

potential vectors in the spread of invasive species such as zebra mussels, Canada thistle, or Johnson grass across areas where land managers are trying to control for these species. During this training, staff had the opportunity to draft real world HACCP plans with professionals from a variety of backgrounds.

Habitat Conservation and Management



Before Treatment



After Treatment

Forest Thinning Follow Up. James Donahey visited a recently thinned area along the west Academy boundary to capture post-treatment photos. An unnaturally dense understory of brush and overtopped trees presented an extremely high wildfire hazard. This area is especially critical due to its position at the base of the steep east slope of the Rampart Range that forms the backdrop of the Academy. Reducing wildfire fuel hazard in strategic locations minimizes the risk of a catastrophic fast-spreading wildfire on both the Academy and the adjacent Pike National Forest. Re-

moving dense understory fir also reduces burgeoning populations of the western spruce budworm (*Choristoneura occidentalis*) which threaten Douglas and white fir in this area.

Forest Thinning Proposal. Diane Strohm prepared a proposal for upcoming forest thinning needs to be reviewed through the environmental analysis process, and presented this at a monthly environmental planning meeting. She plans to compose a three-five year Forest Management plan in the near future.

Grassland and Riparian Bird Monitoring: Laura Mendenhall began drafting a McConnell AFB bird monitoring plan using the USGS guide to coordinated bird monitoring for military lands (USGS 2012). The primary objectives for monitoring bird activity on base are determining whether the implementation of riparian buffers along base wetlands is impacting bird species composition and abundance and establishing pre-restoration bird species composition and abundance baselines for areas with the potential for grassland restoration. Bird monitoring will commence in January 2016.

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Partnerships and Accountability

US Fish and Wildlife Service Military Conservation Partner Award Application. This annual award given by the US Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes a military installation that has conducted conservation work in cooperation with the Service and other partners. Krystal Phillips, in cooperation with various stakeholders, prepared and submitted Buckley Air Force Base as a potential recipient for the 2016 award, which will be announced 29 Jan. Krystal and

others highlighted Buckley AFB for their partnerships and efforts with the Student Conservation Association and AmeriCorps; Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Compatible Use Buffer Team; environmental outreach and avian rehabilitation; and for their installation of 18,000 linear feet of wildlife barrier fence as a benefit to natural resources wildlife.

Stream and Riparian Habitat Tour. Brian Mihlbachler provided a tour of the US Air Force Academy’s streams and riparian habitat damaged by off-base stormwater to Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments staff working on a Joint Land Use Study (JLUS). The JLUS is examining the impacts of existing and future land uses and missions of three military installations in the Pikes Peak region: the Air Force Academy, Fort Carson, and Peterson Air Force Base (including Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station).

Pronghorn at Pueblo Chemical Depot.



Pronghorn Monitoring. Clark Jones met with Julie Stiver and Quentin Springer from Colorado Parks and Wildlife in December to discuss including Pueblo Chemical Depot as an additional study site for tracking pronghorn movement (*Antilocapra Americana*) in El Paso and Pueblo County, Colorado. Pueblo Chemical Depot has a robust herd of pronghorn, but like many herds of pronghorn in eastern Colorado, it is suspected that fences and roads may be a barrier to movement. This study will help reveal patterns in move-

ment of pronghorn to determine how man-made features may be restricting movement of pronghorn in the region.

Colorado River Cutthroat (CRC) Trout. Chris Kennedy attended the Coordination Team Meeting this year. The team is made up of representatives from each agency which manages CRC. Talks were given on different activities related to CRC recovery and activities from the previous year.

More Partnerships...

Firewise Community Planning. Diane Strohm and James Donahey met with Dave Root, Assistant District Forester for the Colorado State Forest Service to discuss applying for recognition as a Firewise Community. Dave Root visited the Academy to tour past fuels reduction treatments and assess defensible space around housing areas. Dave developed a Wildfire Risk Report using the CO Wildfire Rapid Assessment Planning (COWRAP) program, and James submitted an application for Firewise recognition for the Academy.

Ips Engraver Beetle Public Affairs. Air Force Civil Engineering Public Affairs visited Diane Strohm and James Donahey to record video for a story about Pine Ips engraver beetles, how they impact the Academy, and how the base is managing populations. AFCEC Public Affairs wrote up a story for press release (<http://www.afcec.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123466222>), posted a video to their Facebook page, and is editing video for a film about the Academy's efforts to minimize mortality from this insect.

Douglas-fir Tussock Moth. James Donahey called neighboring land managers, Colorado State Forest Service, State Parks, the City of Colorado Springs and private foresters to discuss their response to growing Douglas-fir Tussock Moth populations in the region. He learned that there are plans to spray Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) on properties adjacent to the Academy, and that the group will be hosting a meeting to discuss the greater regional response. No action is planned at this time for the US Air Force Academy since initial egg

mass counts revealed no immediate threat to the base, but James will participate in further discussions to evaluate possible treatment. Any spraying would entail environmental analysis, and would take place in late May to early June.

See the first installment in a film about the US Air Force Academy's efforts to minimize mortality from Ips Engraver Beetle here!

<https://www.facebook.com/AirForceCE/videos/1090214021011626/>.

Conservation Law Enforcement

Conservation Law Enforcement Officer (CLEO) Vulnerability Assessment Review. Max Canestorp completed a review of a draft CLEO Vulnerability Assessment prepared by the Center for Military Management of Military Lands (CEMML). The portion reviewed addressed law enforcement needs of Peterson and Schriever AFBs and Cheyenne Mountain AFS. There is not an

urgent and prevailing need for conservation law enforcement on these bases.

Krystal Phillips reviewed and commented on the Draft Conservation Law Enforcement Officer Vulnerability Assessment for Buckley AFB, while providing thoughtful recommendations for improvements to the document.



A Douglas-fir infested with tussock moth at Cheyenne Mountain AFS

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Cascade Creek and Mirror Lake. Chris Kennedy began summarizing and analyzing data on Cascade Creek and Mirror Lake project within Rocky Mountain National Park. This project was to assess the area for the potential of converting it to native cutthroat trout. Data collected included: pH readings, water flows, mapping of backwaters, location of macroinvertebrate collections, lake depth readings, extent of fish, locations of fish migration barriers,

time of water travel, fish survey locations, and locations of temperature loggers. Data and maps will be used in this report so that a chemical treatment plan can be developed if it is decided to go forward with a reclamation project. Several sections of the report were written, tables were created and several maps were created during the month.

Rocky Mountain National Park. Chris Kennedy inputted and analyzed Rocky

Mountain National Park data collected in 2014. This data includes fish survey data, water temperature data, disease testing results, visitor use and creel survey data. All data is inputted into a database which can be linked to the RMNP GIS.

Monument Creek. Brian Mihlbachler attended a Monument Creek Watershed Restoration Master Plan stakeholder meeting where criteria for rank-

ing stormwater project priorities was discussed. Key core values and ranking criteria include public safety, environmental benefits, system resiliency, constructability/cost, and community needs/desires.