

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



Lakewood: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader

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

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora: Krystal Phillips, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Laura Scieszka, Biotech

US Army Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo: Max Canestorp, Natural and Cultural Resources Manager

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

Leadership in Science and Technology

Prescribed burn to enhance rare plant species: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm are firming up plans for a half-acre prescribed burn designed to promote the rare plains ironweed (*Vernonia marginata*) forb by targeting the invasive smooth brome grass on the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). Plains ironweed is a State Species of Concern, with only two known populations in Colorado. Project implementation will depend on plant phenology, but will likely occur between late April and early May. The USAFA is coordinating closely with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fire staff in planning and implementing this project.

Upper Monument Creek Landscape Restoration Initiative: Diane Strohm continues to participate on the Upper Monument Creek (UMC) Restoration Project. The objective of this multi-agency consortium is to collaboratively develop science-based forest restoration and management recommendations for the 67,000-acre UMC area on the Pike National Forest (NF), directly west of the USAFA. The group will provide information for consideration in the upcoming U.S. Forest Service Proposed Action.



Forest types in the Upper Monument Creek analysis area

Partnerships and Accountability

Wildlife rescue: Max Canestorp rescued an injured great-horned owl on Pueblo Chemical Depot (PCD). The owl was taken to the Raptor Rehab Center for treatment.



Western Native Trout Initiative: Pam Sponholtz worked with Trout Unlimited personnel to develop agreements in anticipation of Western Native Trout Initiative funding becoming available in a few weeks.

Living with Wildfire Educational Conference: Diane Strohm has been participating on a Pikes Peak Wildfire Prevention Partners (PPWPP) subcommittee to plan an educational conference to be held in Colorado Springs in April. Steve Wallace and Diane are both active members of PPWPP, a consortium of wildfire professionals, wildfire mitigation contractors, agency representatives, and homeowners dedicated to reduce the threat of wildfire to life and property through education, cooperation, and coordination of resources.

Arbor Day celebration: Diane Strohm is planning several activities in honor of Arbor Day. The annual Arbor Day proclamation was signed by the USAFA Civil Engineer, who will join in this

year's assembly at Douglass Valley Elementary School. Diane is planning a Tree City USA award presentation, and is working with Steve Wallace to identify planting locations for 1,000 seedlings.

Research Permit: Pam Sponholtz worked to develop a research permit request to cover trout sampling activities in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Stormwater Taskforce meeting: Brian Mihlbachler attended a Phase II Stormwater Taskforce meeting with El Paso County to continue discussions on regional stormwater management and infrastructure needs. Brian will represent USAFA on the Engineering SubTeam that will develop criteria to prioritize regional stormwater infrastructure projects.

Prospective Eagle Scout: Greg Speights worked with prospective Eagle Scout candidates to develop projects for willow planting along restored stream channels and realigning and rebuilding recreational hiking and biking trails.



Greg Speights passing on his wisdom to a future Eagle Scout

Wildlife Management Plan mediation: Krystal Phillips reviewed a final deliverable of the Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) Wildlife Management Plan and coordinated a period of performance extension for the mediation team with contracting office.

Phase I Soil and Vegetative Study: Krystal Phillips provided on-site access and assistance with site surveys for Dr. Calvin Pearson and Laura Sciezka on March 28-29. Krystal, in a cooperative effort, discussed project research questions outlined in a statement of work; collected soil samples; photo documented sites;

provided information on current soil associations and a previous soil sample study, installation herbicide usage, and a current grounds maintenance map; and created five site maps with acreage measurements.

Monthly Bird Airstrike Hazards (BASH) meeting: Krystal Phillips attended the BAFB BASH Quarterly meeting with higher leadership that was held on March 8, 2013. Provided wildlife barrier fencing responses to questions asked during the meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for April 17, 2013.

Installation Support Team (IST): Krystal Phillips conducted a one day Program Management Review of BAFB's Natural Resources Program on March 5 with Dave Richie. Krystal provided project updates, justification for projects, funding status, preferred execution methods, and responses to general questions.

Grounds maintenance contract at BAFB: Krystal Phillips reviewed performance work statements prior to a 5-year contract solicitation. Krystal coordinated with the Contracting Officer's Representative and Entomology to establish FY13 invasive species control in semi- and unimproved areas of the installation.

Warren Air Force Base Cooperative Agreement: Max Canestorp and Pam Sponholtz reviewed a draft Cooperative Agreement being developed between Warren Air Force Base and the Colorado Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office (CFWCO).

Species Conservation and Management

Consequences of climate driven changes:

Chris Kennedy supplied water temperature data for a U.S. Geological Survey research project entitled "Consequences of Climate Driven Changes in Water Quality to Native Trout Habitat."

Prairie dog management: Laura Scieszka collaborated with the Entomology Department on BAFB to treat prairie dog colonies and collapse burrows to prevent return. Prairie dogs are considered a hazard near the airfield. 6,375 burrows were treated.

Rio Grande cutthroat trout conservation: Pam Sponholtz participated in a conference call to review the database updates from data collected in 2012-2013 and to review conservation strategy actions.

Fish data to Colorado State University-Pueblo research project: Chris Kennedy supplied fish data for a Colorado State University-Pueblo research project entitled "Baseline Concentrations of Total Mercury in Eleven Tissues in Three Subspecies of Colorado Cutthroat Trout From Montane and Subalpine Lakes."

Black bear management: Brian Mihlbachler prepared informational material for USAFA residents and personnel concerning black bears emerging from hibernation and proper trash management.

Chytrid fungus samples from amphibians: Greg Speights and Brian Mihlbachler participated in online training on the collection of chytrid fungus samples from amphibians as part of a Department of Defense (DoD) national study the USAFA will participate in this spring and summer.



Woodhouse toads, tiger salamanders, and northern leopard frogs will be tested for chytrid fungus.

Migratory bird surveys: Krystal Phillips created and provided a migratory bird survey protocol binder for Laura Scieszka to begin conducting weekly surveys for focal avian species – Cassin's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, McCown's longspur, and lark bunting. Krystal conducted migratory bird surveys at opportunistic times when in the field.

Burrowing owl surveys: Krystal Phillips reviewed and finalized the 2012 Burrowing Owl Annual Survey Report and performed site visit(s) of known nesting habitat.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Otis House Forest Thinning Project: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm are administering tree thinning and brush removal on ten acres in Pine Valley on USAFA. This forest has been experiencing significant health problems in the past several years due to heavy tree stocking, drought stress and bark beetle activity. Heavy fuel loadings bolster the need for management. Intensive coordination with the General Officer's staffs, Air Academy High School and Pine Valley Equestrian stables is necessary to ensure safety and minimize adverse impacts. Logging operations are expected to be completed by late April 2013.



Forest thinning in the Otis House area

Forest health surveys: Steve Wallace and a local contractor have been conducting field surveys to seek out trees infested with Ips pine engraver, twig beetles, dwarf mistletoe and other forest health pests. Ips beetles have been particularly challenging over the past several years due to the drought. Numerous annual Ips generations greatly complicate effective suppression of these insects. Brood trees are promptly removed and treated (chipped or

debarked or hauled to a safe place) to preclude further tree mortality.

Fuelbreak enhancement along west Academy border: An extensive fuel hazard reduction project along the USAFA's northwest border is nearing completion. This area will serve as a strategic fuelbreak between the Academy Cadet area and the steeply rising slope to the west that provides the scenic backdrop to the Academy. Diane Strohm will be coordinating plans with the Pike NF for complementary fuels reduction activities that will greatly enhance the effectiveness of fuelbreaks along the agencies' joint boundaries.

Forest and fuel hazard reduction: Diane Strohm is partnering with Fort Carson to add potential contractors to a multi-year contract, administered through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This contract would include an array of forestry and fuels management activities, affording considerable flexibility and expediting task orders for this work.

Roadside tree removal: Steve Wallace has completed field reconnaissance and compiled a contract to remove 65 dead and dying trees from along USAFA roadsides, in preparation for cadet graduation in May.

Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) I-25 Widening Project: Brian Mihlbachler attended weekly meetings with CDOT's I-25 Widening Project Team to address potential impacts to USAFA natural resources, including Preble's meadow jumping mouse (PMJM), raptors, Gunnison's prairie dogs, wetlands, and noxious weeds. Brian identified a red-tailed hawk attempting to re-nest in the construction corridor, and worked with CDOT biologists to have the partial nest removed.

West Monument Creek channel: Brian supervised the removal of woody debris from the West Monument Creek channel that could block critical road crossing culverts during significant

runoff from the Waldo Canyon Fire burn scar. Debris removal in PMJM habitat is limited to the immediate vicinity of the road culverts so the activity can be covered as repair and maintenance actions within the guidelines of the PMJM Conservation Agreement.



Debris and live trees to be cleared upstream of a road culvert at West Monument Creek Road.

Site 3 wildlife barrier: Krystal Phillips assisted the BAFB Restoration Manager with finalization of wildlife barrier locations within the Site 3 Landfill Cap. Special considerations were warranted in riparian areas (i.e. no permanent barrier) and identified stormwater areas of concern along an installation perimeter road.

Public Use and Recreation

Stocked rainbow trout: Greg Speights and Brian Mihlbachler stocked 4000 pounds of 9-11" rainbow trout in the USAFA and Farish lakes.



Stocking rainbow trout through the ice at Farish Recreation Area

Spring turkey hunting season: Greg Speights organized the March 2013 on-base application process for the upcoming spring turkey hunting season. 106 individuals signed up for the April hunt drawing.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources management: Krystal Phillips provided feedback and planning suggestions for BAFB Cultural Resources during the meeting that was held on March 21. Krystal coordinated project planning in out years and requested meeting(s) to ensure BAFB assigns a permanent government employee to be the installation Tribal Liaison for present and future Native American consultations.

Native American correspondence: Max Canestorp forwarded letters from Department of Army Headquarters to Native American Tribes claiming cultural affiliation to the PCD area, inviting them to participate in a consultation on redeveloping Army rules governing consultations with tribes.

Project site visit: Max Canestorp conducted an inspection of an area in which a ground-disturbing construction project will take place, to determine if monitoring for cultural resources would be required during the operation. It was determined that the area had already been significantly disturbed and no monitoring would be required.