

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



DECEMBER 2016

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

US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO: Brian Mihlbachler, 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: Alex Schubert, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

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

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

Gunnison, CO: Cole Brittain, Aquatic Biotechnician

Species Conservation & Management

Deer Hunt. The 2016 deer hunt on the U.S Air Force Academy (USAFA) was a success! These hunts are used as an effective tool to manage the deer population on base by significantly reducing the number of vehicle accidents on base and providing hunting opportunities to many hunters over the years. Cole Brittain, Clark Jones, Dustin Casady, Max Canestorp, and James Donahey with the COFWCO participated as escorts. Student Conservation Association intern, Taylor Cassidy, assisted Dustin with escorting the deer hunters and learned about deer behavior, movements, and habits along with an anatomy lesson when dressing the animals.



Successful USAFA Deer Hunt.

Fish Tissue Sampling. Chris Kennedy collected tissue samples from the 2014 year class of greenback cutthroat trout at the Leadville National Fish Hatchery. These tissues will be genetically analyzed by Dr. Sierra Love Stowell of the University of Wyoming. Dr. Stowell is using genetic matrixing to test the relatedness of each possible male-female pairing which will determine and the most distantly related fish will be spawned. This will help to maximize the limited genetic diversity present in the current broodstock and produce offspring which are stronger and better adapted to stochastic changes in the wild.



Collecting tissue samples from greenback cutthroat trout at the Leadville National Fish Hatchery.

Inaugural Christmas Bird Count. Melissa Whittingslow put on the first US Air Force Academy Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in December. Brian Mihlbachler, Clark Jones, and Max Canestorp from the COFWCO assisted along with volunteers from Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Audubon Society. There were a total of 14 counters for this year's USAFA Christmas Bird Count. Individuals who are interested in participating in the CBC can

sign up through the Audubon website. The data collected by all the CBC across North America allow researchers, biologists, and wildlife agencies to study the long-term health and status of bird populations.

Fish Passage Site Visit: Pam Sponholtz and Bill Rice (Region 6 Fish Passage Coordinator) visited several diversions on the Big Thompson River outside Longmont, CO. These diversions are the subject of a feasibility study that was funded in 2015.

...more Species Conservation & Management

Implementing Preventative Measures at the Jones Hole Native Fish Hatchery. Cole Brittain and Taylor Cassidy assisted in implementing preventative measures for the encroachment of the New Zealand Mudsnail (NZMS) around the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Native Fish Hatchery in Jones Hole, Utah. The NZMS is an extremely prolific invasive species that has recently threatened to enter the Jones Hole Fish Hatchery. Their recent encroachment is attributed to their ability to move upstream while simultaneously acting as passengers on both waterfowl and fishermen. Many preventative measures are being constructed to keep contamination out of the raceways: installing electrical barriers around any outflow, fencing to isolate raceways from fishermen and cover to prevent waterfowl from landing within the hatchery boundary. The Jones Hole NFH has stocked native cutthroat in three separate states making their mission to preserve the



Taylor Cassidy installing fencing around a raceway.

integrity of their hatchery of great importance.

Endangered Species Recovery Team. Brian participated in a Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse Recovery Team conference call to discuss and resolve public and peer-review comments received on the draft plan submitted to USFWS.

Pronghorn Survey: Alex Schubert and Cole Brittain conducted their monthly survey to estimate Pronghorn density

on FE Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The population has not fluctuated with the onset of winter and survivability has been high thus far. They will be closely monitored throughout winter.

National Environmental Policy Act. During the month of November, Krystal reviewed and provided biological comments on Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process 813 forms assessing environmental impacts to biological resources for future projects on Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB). The review included a tenant units request to stand-up in an existing building on BAFB.

Waterfowl Count. Alex Schubert began periodically counting and recording the numbers of geese and ducks present at the F. E. Warren AFB lakes. Several hundred geese and ducks can typically be found at the lakes daily. The lake aerators provide open water habitat during the winter.

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Leadership in Science & Technology

Colorado River Cutthroat Trout Meeting. Chris Kennedy and Cole Brittain attended the Colorado River Cutthroat Trout Conservation Team Meeting in Grand Junction Colorado. The meeting was a collaboration of agencies (Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife, Ute Indian Tribe and Colorado Parks and Wildlife) helping each other restore the Colorado River Cutthroat throughout the Rock Mountain Region.

Conference Presentation. Alex Schubert prepared and submitted an abstract for an oral presentation to be given at the Wildlife Society - Colorado Chapter annual meeting to be held in February in Fort Collins. The talk will cover pronghorn management issues

at F. E. Warren AFB. In addition, to submission of the abstract, Alex has also been working on preparing the presentation.

Climate Change Project Proposal. Max Canestorp assisted in preparing a proposal to implement a Climate Change Assessment and Monitoring Project on DoD installations.

USAFA Airfield. Brian participated in the annual airfield review and certification process by assessing wildlife and vegetation issues at the USAFA airfield and Bullseye Auxiliary Airfield. A short mowing height – below the 7-14” Air Force standard - continues to attract grassland birds (especially horned larks) that cause a potential BASH problem. Swift fox, badger, kangaroo rat, and pocket gopher are a

persistent problem at Bullseye. Fencing and improved vegetation management was recommended to help mitigate some BASH risks.

Pre-emptive Measures for Emerald Ash Borer. Alex Schubert coordinated with Mark Ellison (Assistant Director Cheyenne Urban Forestry) regarding prevention of an invasive forest pest (the emerald ash borer) in Wyoming. This species has not yet been documented in the state, but has been documented in Colorado and appears to be spreading ever closer to Wyoming. Time-permitting, Alex will assist Mr. Ellison and participate in the emerald ash borer stakeholder group for southeast Wyoming. The group is expected to ultimately produce an Emerald Ash Borer Management Response Plan.

“A number of anglers planned to spend a few hours ice fishing prior to the holiday break, so Alex Schubert coordinated a data gathering effort with willing anglers.”

Partnerships & Accountability

INRMP Meeting. Clark Jones hosted the annual Sikes Act coordination and Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) review at Pueblo Chemical Depot in December. This annual meeting is intended to update the Army and Colorado Parks and Wildlife on natural resource management activities that occurred over the past year at Pueblo Chemical Depot. Several recommendations were received for changes to the INRMP as well as recommendations to facilitate further coordination with Colorado Parks and Wildlife with respect to hunting and injured wildlife.

BASH & Airfield Management. Laura Mendenhall and Tina Seemayer toured the Wichita Eisenhower Airport Airfield to learn about their USDA-run BASH program. Bird species using the airfield and surrounding areas are very similar to those found on McConnell AFB. Habitat on and around the Eisenhower airfield is exceptionally different in that a major stream runs through part of the airfield and several fields surrounding the airfield have been restored to grassland. The group also toured a forested area adjacent to the airfield that has

been designated critical habitat for the state-listed spotted skunk.

Federal Sikes Act Reporting. The Sikes Act requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to submit a report of the previous fiscal year's annual expenditures to Congress. The report describes expenditures by the Department of Interior and the State fish and wildlife agencies in support of the development, review, and implementation of Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMP) for Department of Defense (DoD) installations. In order to meet the 27 January 2017 national suspense, Krystal initiated and coordinated with Region 6 Service offices working with DoD installations on INRMPs. She compiled and input over fifty FY16 records into the Service's Tracking and Integrated Logging System (TAILS) for the national Sikes Act annual report expenditure to Congress.

Citizen Science. A number of anglers planned to spend a few hours ice fishing prior to the holiday break, so Alex Schubert coordinated a data gathering effort with willing anglers. Alex took length measurements of

the fish caught during a 3 hour period and derived an overall mean hourly rate for each fish species caught. Although catch rate seemed to vary substantially between anglers, the combined fishing effort produced one brown trout (mean length of 15.2") for every 4.3 angler hours. In contrast, catch of yellow perch was one yellow perch (mean length of 4.75") for every 2.9 angler hours. Water temperature measurements were also taken at various lake depths through the ice auger holes.



Ice-fishing at North Pearson Lake on FE Warren AFB.

Habitat Conservation & Management

Bark Beetle Management. James Donahey coordinated removal of a bark beetle infested tree from within the I-25 right of way with the area CDOT maintenance manager. Divide Timber's Mike Isle performed the tree removal. Additionally, James provided Mike with several other bark beetle infested trees in housing for removal.

Wood Reduction Projects. Max Canestorp chipped slash and coordinated firewood sales on Cheyenne Mountain AFS.

BASH Habitat Management. The water level of Lake Williams dropped, decreasing the size of the lake by 40%

since shutting off water to the Family Camp RV sites on Buckley Air Force Base. Broken water lines were leaching water into the lake causing it to rise. Now that the water levels have dropped and the ground has frozen, Dustin Casady with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was able to mow the basin. Bird aircraft strike hazards are higher in this area when the vegetation is not maintained and when higher water levels are present. These conditions provide excellent habitat for water birds in an area near the runway flight path.

FY17 Project Planning. Krystal coordinated with John Sovell, biologist with

Colorado Natural Heritage Program, to establish availability and need to accomplish installation wide sensitive species survey on Buckley AFB.

Habitat Restoration. Brian continues to coordinate with the Center for Environmental Management of Military Lands and Matrix Design Group on stream stabilization and habitat restoration designs for Black Forest Creek and Black Forest Creek (Middle Tributary). Construction of the Middle Tributary project is planned for winter 2017, with the initial native re-seeding and tree/shrub planting occurring in spring/summer 2017.