

## 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; 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:** 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

# Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



JULY 2016

## Partnerships & Accountability

**Stream Buffer Signs.** Laura Mendenhall worked with Eagle Scout candidate, Nathan Quinton and Troop 363 out of Derby, Kansas, to install 33 stream buffer marker signs throughout McConnell AFB. Quinton gave a presentation to his troop on how stream buffers help prevent erosion before leading 6 scouts to pre-determined locations to install the signs. In the process, the boys learned how to navigate using a GPS, observed first hand the differences between streams with and without vegetation buffers, and got some exercise while carrying the signs and a heavy post pounder all over base. Nathan demonstrated excellent leadership and organizational skills. The final portion of his Eagle Scout project involved research on the benefits of buffers and the development of some text for display on an educational sign at the McConnell AFB Outdoor Recreation center. Mendenhall enjoys working with local scout troops on projects where they can learn about ecosystem management and also get out in the environment to practice a new skill.

**Watershed Management.** Brian Mihlbachler met with El Paso County stormwater engineers to discuss a proposed County detention basin near Smith Creek and Interstate 25 on Air Force Academy property. Downstream reaches of Smith Creek are unstable, so Brian is working with the County to have them include channel stabilization in the project to

mitigate potential impacts to riparian/wetland areas and Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse habitat.

**Wildland Fire Center.** James Donahey and Diane Strohm met with staff from the USAF Wildland Fire Center (WFC), FWS, and USAF to discuss logistics, operational priorities and protocol. The current WFC fire module crew of two employees is expected to grow to six over the next year.



**Laura Mendenhall and Troop 363 Eagle Scout Candidate, Nathan Quinton, review how to use a GPS before installing stream buffer zone signs throughout McConnell AFB.**

**Collaborative Conservation.** Alex Schubert and Andy McKinley (F. E. Warren AFB) met with Brent Lathrop (The Nature Conservancy) to discuss possible coordination on weed control or prairie and wetland restoration projects. The Nature Conservancy has considerable expertise and experience in these areas and their involvement in future projects would likely prove highly beneficial.

**U.S. Air Force Academy site visit:** Brian Mihlbachler provided a site visit to stream restoration sites on the U.S. Air Force Academy to Doug Frugé, Fisheries



Program Supervisor and Greg Gerlich, Region 6 Fisheries Assistant Regional Director. Brian showed the group some of the challenges in managing stream habitat in the middle of a watershed surrounded by development.

**St. Vrain vegetation monitoring.** Clark Jones and technicians from the Boulder County Parks and Open Space conducted a second year of vegetation monitoring along the South St. Vrain River near Lyons, Colorado. The monitoring is designed to document revegetation success following restoration activities to repair damage as a result of the devastating 2013 floods along the St. Vrain River. This project was initiated as part of a biological opinion requiring revegetation because of the site's proximity to existing Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) populations.

**Stream Restoration Conference:** Pam Sponholtz attended the Rocky Mountain Stream Restoration Conference in Breckenridge. Lots of new techniques and projects were shared during the three day conference.

## More Partnerships...



**Aiken Audubon Society birders at the US Air Force Academy.**

*Bird Survey.* Melissa Whittingslow sponsored thirteen Audubon birders to help conduct a bird survey at Ice Lake and the Kettle Lakes Located on the US Air Force Academy. Fifty species of birds were identified during the count. Melissa hopes to have another bird survey in the fall.

*Wildland Fire.* The final draft of the Buckley AFB Wildland Fire Management Plan (WFMP) has been submitted to the Shelly Crook, the Assistant Fire Management Officer for the Midwest Region of the Air Force Wildland Fire Center. Dustin Casady has worked with Buckley AFB Fire and Emergency Services and Buckley AFB GIS Specialists to complete revisions and incor-

porate maps, respectively. Taylor Cassidy also reviewed portions of the document and provided valuable insight and tedious edits to the finished document. The goal is to get the final document signed off next month by Shelly Crook so that it can be staffed within the INRMP in September.

*Child Development Center Presentations.* Laura Mendenhall delivered 2 interactive presentations to the pre-K classes at the McConnell AFB child development center. The presentations focused on backyard bird calls, bees, freshwater mussels, and what it's like to be a wildlife biolo-

gist. Mendenhall brought some wildlife monitoring equipment and her macroinvertebrates collection. The Carolina Wren's easy-to-recognize "cheeseburger" call was wildly popular with the kids. They also enjoyed touching the teeth of a coyote skull and seeing a real leech.

## Leadership in Science & Technology

*Sylvatic plague vaccine study at Pueblo Chemical Depot.* The USGS National Wildlife Health Center continued their study of sylvatic plague at Pueblo Chemical Depot in July. Dr. Katie Richgels was on site to distribute plague vaccine baits within black-tailed prairie dog colonies to examine their effectiveness at preventing the prairie dogs from succumbing to the disease. This is a multi-year project funded through the Department of Defense Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program.



**Black-tailed Prairie Dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*).**

*Training.* Dustin Casady attended a critical writing and critical thinking class and considered the training invaluable. Largely, the lessons taught by the NCTC

staff will be directly applicable to tasks assigned to his position. The course has helped further develop his skills in writing clear, well organized, persuasive, and logical documents and reports.

*Recovery Team.* Alex Schubert (FWS) became a member of the newly-formed recovery team for the threatened Colorado butterfly plant. The team met to discuss a path forward for the production of a draft Recovery Plan. The draft is currently scheduled to be completed by the completion of fiscal year 2017.

# Species Conservation & Management

*Southern redbelly dace sampling.* Clark Jones conducted tissue and voucher sampling for southern redbelly dace (*Chrosomus erythrogaster*) at Pueblo Chemical Depot last month. The sampling occurred at the Pueblo Chemical Depot AVS Pond which, at one time, was the only known population of southern redbelly dace in Colorado. There are now several populations in Colorado as a result of reintroduction and the discovery of additional populations. The goal of this study is to quantify genetic diversity within and across these populations to determine if additional introductions between existing populations are warranted to increase genetic diversity.



**Southern redbelly dace tissue samples.**

*Burrowing owl surveys.* Max Canestorp conducted burrowing owl surveys on Peterson AFB East Extension and Schriever AFB. Three owl nest burrows were found on Pete East Extension and six were found on Schriever.

*Canada Goose Management.* Dustin Casady and Alex Schubert finished rounding up Canada geese at F.E. Warren Air Force Base. Ninety-nine geese in total were removed along with 100 individuals from last year. Generic surveys show that resident geese numbers are way down and there are noticeably less geese than in years past. A single goose can defecate approximately 1.5 pounds per day and among many other issues, can cause public health concerns due to the pathogens the fecal matter contains. The reduction in the number of geese will alleviate pub-

lic health concerns around recreational lakes and also reduce fecal matter inputs into the lake water.

*Fish Surveys.* Chris Kennedy conducted gill net surveys at Arrowhead Lake within Rocky Mountain National Park. Cutthroat trout were found to be more numerous than previous surveys and at least three year classes of fish were surveyed which is a bit of a surprise since this lake has limited spawning habitat.

*Air Force Pollinator Conservation Initiative.* The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Fish and Aquatic Conservation program (FAC), funded through the Sikes Act and working in cooperation with the Air Force Civil Engineer Center (AFCEC), is developing a national Air Force pollinator conservation strategy, to include guidance and training components. A portion of these funds will be used to implement pollinator conservation projects on Air Force installations. Krystal with the assistance of Taylor Cassidy, SCA AmeriCorps Intern, drafted and submitted a project for designing and creating a pollinator garden in a high visibility area on the installation in support of the collaborative USFWS and Air Force pollinator conservation initiative.

Laura Mendenhall also submitted a proposal to fund a pollinator project on McConnell AFB. The project is designed to pave the way for future and perhaps more extensive projects to benefit local pollinators. Mendenhall recognizes that native species are often perceived as "weedy" and therefore a cultural shift away from what we traditionally see as well-maintained and attractive, e.g. mowed lawns and trimmed bushes, towards the natural beauty and unmatched function of native species is desperately needed to benefit declining pollinators.

*Egg Collection.* Chris Kennedy collected 31,752 Colorado River cutthroat trout eggs from Lake Nanita within Rocky

Mountain National Park with Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists. These eggs were shipped to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Glenwood Springs Hatchery to develop a captive broodstock.



**Colorado River cutthroat trout eggs collected from Lake Nanita.**

*Antelope Survey.* Dustin Casady and Alex Schubert conducted an antelope survey on F.E. Warren Air Force Base. July fawn counts recorded approximately 65 individuals, after correcting for error in detection. The fawn counts have pushed the base antelope population to over 300 individuals, which is still considerably lower than this time last year. Future surveys along with this survey will give information needed to plan future population management efforts.



**Pronghorn antelope fawn at FE Warren AFB.**

**“Generic surveys show that resident geese numbers are way down At F.E. Warren and there are noticeably less geese than years past.”**

# Habitat Conservation & Management

*Aspen Regeneration.* Diane Strohm met with woodworkers looking for aspen saplings to make walking sticks and canes, including canes to donate to Wounded Warriors. The group paid a small firewood fee to remove 70 aspen stems from an extremely dense aspen regeneration unit at Farish. The removal will accelerate forest vigor and development in a small area, with future thinning planned to treat the entire area. James Donahey walked the enclosure fence boundaries and found two areas that had been breached. He then returned and removed the fallen trees and repaired the fences.

*McConnell AFB Habitat Tour.* Laura Mendenhall assisted with showing AFCEC/CZOM Natural Resources Manager, Jim Bergmann, the natural resources on McConnell AFB. The group visited some established stream buffer areas, several fields in need of invasive species control, some eroded streams, and areas around McConnell AFB that have potential for prairie restoration. Despite extensive poison ivy growth, aggressive mosquitos, and pervasive ticks, Bergmann was willing to hike down to a secluded woodland stream site to help deploy a dissolved oxygen sensor.

*Williams Lake Eagle Scout Project.* In July, Krystal was approached by a local Eagle Scout, Mark Aston, who proposed his merit project to improve and repair a section of the Williams Lake natural trail to provide recreational opportunities for installation recreation enthusiasts and FamCamp RV patrons. After a review of the project proposal, Krystal agreed to assist in his efforts and was able to provide some materials and manpower for the project scheduled to kick off on 27-28 August. Dually, the project supports the approved Buckley

AFB Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan Project 13.1.1 to maintain and improve the Lake Williams nature trail for recreational opportunities – update information at kiosk, repair holes in trail, control invasive species within the trail, and update interpretive signage.



**Jim Bergmann sets a dissolved oxygen sensor to help monitor stream health at McConnell AFB**

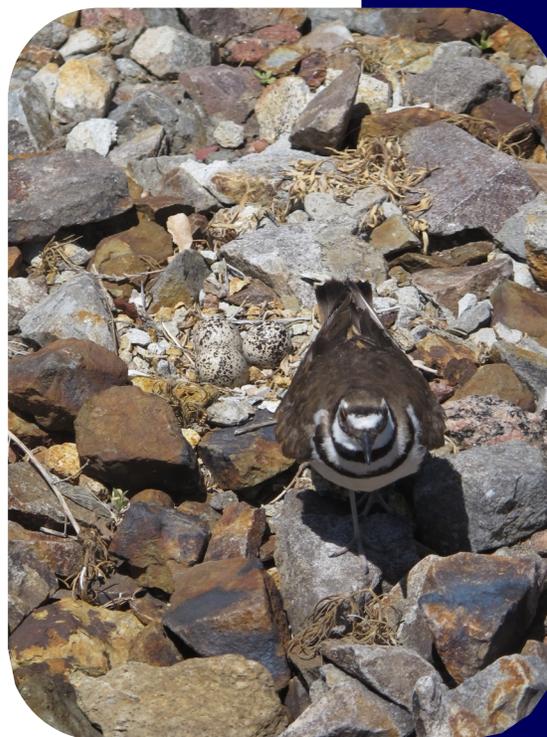
*Biocontrol Methods.* Alex Schubert checked into possibilities for the use of goats, and/or acquiring biocontrol insects for release at F. E. Warren AFB to control weeds such as Canada thistle, leafy spurge, and Dalmatian toadflax. These activities may be pursued if sufficient funding becomes available. Alex discussed the insects with staff at weedbustersbiocontrol.com. Alex also discussed the activity with staff from the City of Cheyenne.

*Noxious weed surveys and management.* Max Canestorp coordinated noxious weed surveys for Cheyenne Mountain AFS and Schriever AFB. Surveys for all Colorado list B species will be conducted in August; however, Canada thistle surveys were undertaken on Schriever AFB because control efforts may be initiated prior to the August comprehensive weed surveys. Finally, musk thistle control was conducted on Cheyenne Mountain AFS and

Schriever AFB. This was implemented by simply removing the plants.

*Long-Term Fuels/Habitat Planning.* James Donahey, Samuel Urffer, and Bob Ayotte have begun field reviewing a long-term fuels plan. The first of the projects is a multi-year prescribed burning effort to improve elk habitat. All of the areas have been thinned and the burning will improve understory forage production by removing the accumulations of duff and litter and regenerating woody understory shrubs.

*Invasive Plant Removal.* Dustin Casady and Alex Schubert continued efforts to remove common teasel from the F. E. Warren AFB. The teasel will likely need to be checked on a weekly basis during the growing season to insure that no plants survive to set seed this summer.



**Killdeer attending a nest of three eggs in a rock island in the middle of a parking lot on Schriever AFB.**

*“Diane Strohm met with woodworkers looking for aspen saplings to make walking sticks and canes, including canes to donate to Wounded Warriors”*