

## 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 Mhlbachler, Biological Scientist; Melissa Whittingslow, Wildlife Biologist; Joe Murphy, Forester

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

**Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY:** Alex Schubert, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

**McCConnell 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

# Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



MARCH 2017

## Habitat Conservation & Management

*Stream Survey for Culvert Removal on Baca National Wildlife Refuge* Bill Rice, Erin Ryan and Cole Brittain completed a stream survey to prepare for a culvert removal on Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Fish passage issues on the Baca continuously stem from old road culverts blocking upstream migration of native fish. The refuge has gone to great lengths to remove these barriers and promote historical migration of aboriginal fish species. The removal project is scheduled for early spring and will be one of several barriers extracted this year. The refuge continues to be at the forefront of restoring native fish habitat by breaking barriers.

*Greenback Cutthroat Trout Habitat* Chris Kennedy completed the final report on the West Creek habitat project in Rocky Mountain National Park. The project assessed habitat within this greenback cutthroat trout population to determine changes following wildfire and flooding. The most notable habitat changes observed were a reduction in large woody debris and undercut banks.

*Tree Management* Dustin Casady and Max Canestorp treated spruce trees at the Cheyenne Mountain AFS entry point for white pine weevil infestation. The team also cut, limbed, and bucked a wind-thrown tree, in addition to removing the branches for chipping. Finally, they investigated pines that appeared unhealthy and found them to be infested with Ips beetles.

*Stream and Wetland Habitat* Accompanying Shain Wright (DoD), Alex Schubert attended a stakeholder meeting held at the Cheyenne Board of Public Utilities office. The meeting brought



**Dustin Casady treats spruce trees at the entry point to Cheyenne Mountain AFS for white pine weevil.**

together numerous parties to discuss options for enhancing the stream and wetlands along Crow Creek downstream from F. E. Warren AFB, through the City of Cheyenne and surrounding areas. The plan of action is to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding with many partnering agencies to ensure adequate and appropriate planning and coordination, and then seek grant/funding opportunities once proposed plans are developed.

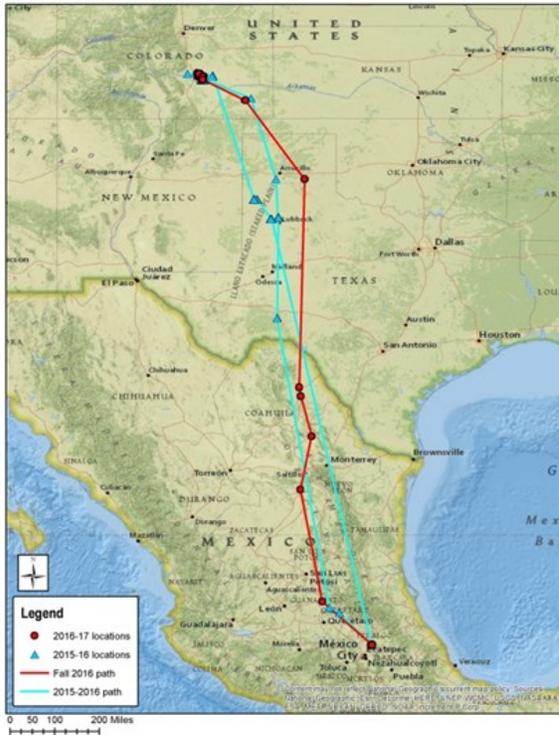
*Fuels Treatment at USAFA* Joe Murphy facilitated two fuels treatment projects in March in Jack's Valley totaling approximately 100 acres. Thinning these thick understories allows for improved forest health and reduced wildfire risk. These treatments also assist the cadets and USAFA personnel in their work and training by opening up the forest, thus allowing for better access into the forested grounds.

*River Restoration* Chris Kennedy assembled information related to a U. S. Army Corps of Engineers ecosystem restoration project on the South Platte River through Denver. The section of river slated for restoration is highly degraded and channelized, and information was gathered on which native fish species would have a tolerance for such conditions. The habitat requirements of the tolerant species were compiled to guide the restoration efforts.

*Seeding* Dustin Casady assisted SCA intern, Taylor Cassidy, with setup and calibration of a drill seeder at Buckley AFB. Taylor and Dustin drilled seed on approximately 8 acres on the base. The seeded area recently had a wildlife barrier installed that prevents prairie dogs from encroaching on areas near the airfield. This area is also in the flight path of single engine jets. The approved seed mix aims to deter wildlife species in order to prevent bird aircraft strikes on BAFB.

# Leadership in Science & Technology

Burrowing Owl PTT 120431 Migrations 2015-2017



Burrowing Owl Fall Migrations 2013-2016



Maps Courtesy of C. Conway, University of Idaho/USGS

**Burrowing Owl Migration** Burrowing owls returned to the Pueblo Chemical Depot (PCD) region at the end of March, including one individual fitted with a satellite transmitter in the summer of 2015. This female has wintered in the same location near Mexico City two consecutive years, but nested in two different areas in 2015 and 2016. As of this writing, this female (nicknamed “Thelma”) does not appear to have settled on a breeding territory, but was located just east of the depot in a location she has used in previous years prior to settling on a territory. Outbreaks of plague in prairie dog colonies throughout the region may be influencing where burrowing owls choose to breed. This project is part of a larger effort involving several partners in the western United States and Canada to gather full-annual cycle data on burrowing owls. Additional transmitters are scheduled for deployment on PCD this summer.

**Entomology Course** Alex Schubert attended the University of Wyoming Extension Entomology Short Course. As part of the course Alex earned 12 credit hours toward maintaining his Wyoming pesticide applicator license. During the course, Alex was instructed in insect identification, life history traits, and control methods.

**Cliff Swallow Nesting** Brian Mihlbachler met with a Fort Carson biologist to review mitigation measures used on USAFA buildings to prevent cliff swallow nesting. Fort Carson has issues with swallows at Butts Army Airfield, and a Plexiglas apron similar to what is installed at USAFA could meet the Army’s needs.

**UAV Monitoring** The UAV monitoring project for beetle infested trees on USAFA is now in operation. Colorado Unmanned will be collecting pictures and locations of these trees. This data will be utilized by the Academy’s foresters, including Joe Murphy, to more effectively respond to the threat of beetle infestation in the forests. They will fly approximately 9,000

acres of the forests twice per year. This allows foresters to pinpoint any problem trees in the growing season (spring, early summer) when the beetles are becoming active and at the close of the season (late summer, early fall) when the beetles have impacted new trees. The program has already proven a success as they have identified areas of infestation that were previously undetected by surveys on foot. USAFA will continue to work with Colorado Unmanned and foresters to revise the program and make it more efficient.

**Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Meeting** Joanne Grady (USFWS Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator) led a HACCP meeting in Grand Junction, CO in order to inform employees how to prevent the spread of invasive species. Krystal Phillips and Cole Brittain were in attendance and will help generate additional HACCP protocols for Region 6. Controlling the spread of invasive species is the largest obstacle encountered in protecting native species. The Rocky Mountain Region contains headwaters for all major rivers in both the eastern and western United States making the effort to prevent the spread of harmful aquatic invasive species of the highest importance.

**NMFWA Conference** Pam Sponholtz, Clark Jones, Max Canestorp, Dustin Cassidy, and Laura Mendenhall attended the National Military Fish and Wildlife Association conference in Spokane, Washington. The conference was an excellent opportunity to network with other military natural resources staff. Highlights included the debut of an informative snake handling instructional video, discussions on mosquito control, learning about endangered species successes on Fort Hood and Eglin AFB, and attending the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference plenary session which featured inspiring talks on how to best engage a variety of conservation stakeholders in an ever changing landscape.

## More Leadership...

*NMFWA Collaborative Conservation Session* This session highlighted stories of collaboration between natural resources agencies and military installations across the United States. Max Canestorp presented on the successful partnership between the Colorado Natural Heritage Program and several Colorado military bases. Laura Mendenhall presented on how USFWS played a role in the successful restoration of riparian buffer vegetation on McConnell AFB. Both presentations generated a number of thoughtful questions and comments.

*NMFWA Pollinator Workshop* Laura Mendenhall attended this workshop to learn more about native pollinator species, seed sources, planting techniques, and general tips. Mendenhall

also delivered a presentation on the implementation of 3 pollinator gardens on McConnell AFB. The presentation generated a number of helpful comments, including where to source volunteer labor and native seeds.

*FWS Migratory Bird Strategic Planning Region 6* hosted a meeting teleconference for migratory bird stakeholders to begin the Service's strategic planning to answer, "What are your organization's migratory bird priorities for the next decade?" Krystal Phillips participated in the meeting; took notes/distributed to other CO FWCO staff participating in the call; and accomplished the national stakeholder survey as a post meeting tasker to identify and address stakeholder concerns during the planning process.



**Laura Mendenhall presenting on the pollinator garden efforts at McConnell AFB.**

**“What are your organization’s migratory bird priorities for the next decade?”**

## Species Conservation & Management

*Burrowing Owl Surveys* Taylor Cassidy conducted burrowing owl surveys using a wildlife caller that mimics burrowing owl calls. Using a wildlife caller draws burrowing owls out of their burrows or entices them to call back so that they can be seen or heard and documented. Every spring burrowing owl surveys are conducted on Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) in order to document nesting activity. This year no burrowing owl activity has been documented on BAFB, though it is still early in the nesting season. The goal at BAFB is to minimize burrowing owl activity near the airfield in order to provide a safe operating environment for military personnel and reduce burrowing owl mortality.

*Colorado Butterfly Plant* Alex Schubert attended a meeting at the USFWS Ecological Services office to discuss a draft species report for the Colorado butterfly plant. Other topics included post-delisting monitoring requirements of the plant, if the plant is proposed for de-listing.

*Cliff Swallow Nest Removal* Brian Mihalbachler met with the contractor re-constructing the Tri-Intersection bridge at the U.S. Air Force Academy to discuss the pre-construction removal of old cliff swallow nests to prevent breeding and nesting in the work area. Other mitigation measures, including hanging effigies, netting, and an acoustic bird alarm system will also be deployed to help prevent nesting attempts. Daily surveys for new nests, and rapid removal of any unoccupied nests, will be conducted to prevent bird conflicts. Similar measures were very effective



during the re-construction of the Northgate bridge in 2015.

*Pronghorn Survey* Alex Schubert and Cole Brittain surveyed pronghorn on FE Warren AFB in March 2017. They counted a total of 290 live pronghorn (121 bucks/159 does), and one mortality was observed in the field. The March 2017 count was 37 individuals higher than a year ago.

*Pollinator Garden Update* Laura Mendenhall completed 3 pollinator gardens on McConnell AFB. As backup, Mendenhall planted extra plugs indoors in case some seeds fail to germinate in the beds or are accidentally removed during weeding. The gardens will feature over 300 individual native plants, representing 19 different species. Mendenhall left some bare ground patches and used no more than 2" of mulch coverage surrounding plants to accommodate ground-nesting pollinators. Pollinator surveys are scheduled to begin this summer.

# Partnerships & Accountability

**“These trees may offer benefits to some wildlife species, but in the long run they ... reduce species diversity.”**

*Invasive Tree Removal on Partner Installations* Dustin Casady with the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office and Taylor Cassidy with the Student Conservation Association traveled to “Big Sky” Montana to partner up with the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (MOFWCO) to remove Russian olive trees on Malmstrom Air Force Base. Elin Pierce and Josh Melton with the MOFWCO made the operation run smoothly which allowed for more than twice the planned work to get accomplished. These trees may offer benefits to some wildlife species, but in the long run they choke out native plant communities and create monocultures that reduce species diversity. After cutting, removing, and treating with herbicide more than 400 trees, the crew accomplished their goals.

*Colorado Springs EA* Brian Mihlbachler met with Colorado Springs stormwater engineers and environmental staff to discuss an Environmental Assessment the City will need to prepare for their project to stabilize Monument Branch on USAFA. The City will also be responsible for 404 permitting, Endangered Species Act compliance, and cultural resource protection.

*Recreation Area Maintenance* As the opening of the Farish Recreation area is right around the corner (Monday May 8<sup>th</sup>), Divide Timber and USAFA foresters have been focused on ensuring the sound condition of our forest there. We have completed a hazard tree sweep and have removed some of the understory surrounding the lakes. This will provide guests with improved access and views of the lakes from the campsites.

*Air Force Protocols Resource* Krystal Phillips initiated and continued to foster relationships with Service RST staff in Hawaii, in order to offer technical support and answer questions about Air Force protocols.

*Cheyenne Mountain AFS Site Tour* Max Canestorp coordinated a site tour of Cheyenne Mountain AFS with the Project Leader of the COFWCO.

*Wildlife Permitting* Alex Schubert completed permitting requirements to ensure that wildlife and fisheries-related activities will be authorized in 2017. The permit types included: Canada goose depredation, cottontail rabbit depredation, pronghorn depredation, other nuisance wildlife depredation, as well as two fishing preserve permits in support of the F. E. Warren AFB’s fishing program.

*Installation Natural Resources Management.* The Buckley AFB, 460th Space Wing, cooperative agreement for Natural Resources program support expires on 30 September 2017. During March, Krystal Phillips authored and coordinated a draft statement of work (SOW) with Air Force and Service stakeholders to ensure the appropriate level of Natural Resources program support is captured for BAFB in fiscal year 2018 and beyond. Once finalized, the SOW will be integrated nationally to support other Air Force installations with crafting their own versions of Natural Resource program support SOWs with the Service.

*Squadron Updates* Alex Schubert attended a monthly squadron staff meeting at FE Warren AFB. Alex



**Russian Olive removal on partner installations.**

updated the squadron on recent antelope counts on base, the plans for preconditioning black-footed ferrets on the base beginning in summer 2017, restoring native prairie plant species on the base to increase diversity and enhance pollinator habitat, and the public announcement for the planned pronghorn archery hunt on the base in 2017. Other topics included the departure of the present Base and Wing Commanders and the arrival of their replacements.

## Student Conservation Association



**Esteemed SCA intern, Taylor Cassidy, assists with a beaver project on FE Warren AFB.**

Several COFWCO biologists spent time in March advertising for internships and selecting interns through the Student Conservation Association (SCA). USFWS is excited to continue to partner with this organization and looks forward to working with a new round of interns in 2017.