

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; 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, Fisheries Biotechnician

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



NOVEMBER 2016

Species Conservation & Management

Pronghorn Survey. Alex Schubert and Cole Brittain completed the monthly Pronghorn Survey in November to calculate an accurate population estimate for Pronghorn Antelope on FE Warren AFB. The large herds of antelope observed during the survey will warrant efforts to reduce this population in the future. The majority of the animals this month were found on the base golf course grazing on the irrigated green grass portions of the fairways. A total of 256 antelope were counted this month. This was 3 fewer animals counted than the previous month.

Invasive Plant Species Management. Dustin Casady, Taylor Cassidy, and Clark Jones treated Canada thistle and Russian knapweed infestations along Chico Creek at Pueblo Chemical Depot last month. While previous surveys have found Pueblo Chemical Depot to be relatively weed free, Chico Creek is a particularly challenging area to management as it is a corridor for new noxious weed infestations from upstream sources.

Sheep Survey. Melissa Whittingslow and James Donahey participated in the annual Colorado Parks and Wildlife survey for bighorn sheep along the Rampart Range. Melissa and James hiked up into West Monument Creek, on the lookout for white rumps of the sheep, but came back nearly empty handed. No sheep were found, but James pulled a healthy specimen of Myrtle Spurge and found an unidentified raptor nests. Melissa was rewarded with finding two adult Golden

Eagles putting on an aggressive display for a Red-tailed Hawk

and conserve migratory bird resources by utilizing non-depredation techniques.



Pronghorn gathered at FE Warren AFB.

Greenback Cutthroat Trout Recovery. Chris Kennedy prepared for and attended the Greenback Cutthroat Trout Recovery Team meeting. The team is made up of representatives from each agency which manages greenbacks. Talks were given on different activities related to greenback recovery. Kennedy gave an update on work that had been conducted in 2016 on progress to conduct a chemical reclamation project on Rock Creek at the Leadville National Fish Hatchery for the introduction of greenback cutthroat trout.

National Environmental Policy Act. During the month of November, Krystal authored and initiated an Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process 813 to environmentally assess trapping and relocating raptors, such as bald and golden eagles, from the active airfield in an effort to improve human health and safety risks associated with the military flying mission

BFF Survey. Laura Mendenhall assisted the Kansas ES office and Prairie Wildlife Research with their fall black-footed ferret survey in western Kansas. The purpose of the survey was to document survival of the captive-bred ferrets released in October. The survey was a great opportunity to experience the short grass prairie ecosystem on a working ranch and master spotlighting survey techniques. Surveyors included zoo technicians from all over Kansas in addition to USFWS staff. Swift foxes, horned larks, barn owls, coyotes, and kangaroo rats were some of the species observed in addition to black-footed ferrets.

Bird Electrocution. A starling was electrocuted by a power pole on Buckley Air AFB and caught fire. The bird fell to the ground and started a wildfire. The smoke was spotted by Student Conservation Intern, Taylor Cassidy and USFWS employee, Dustin Casady who reacted quickly to extinguish the fire before it spread. This species is not protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), but caused a risk to safety and mission activities due to the fire. USFWS staff assigned to Buckley AFB recommend an investigative study be accomplished on the power lines to find the underlying problem for the bird electrocutions because this power pole has electrocuted birds in the past and mitigating actions have not resolved the issue.

“Brian Mihlbachler and James Donahey provided a presentation on Natural Resource Management on the Air Force Academy to two classes of biology majors in late November.”

Partnerships & Accountability

Unexploded Ordinances ID Training. Dustin Casady and Taylor Cassidy completed Unexploded Ordinances (UXO) Identification Training on Buckley AFB. The training focused on identifying the various types of UXO's that are found on Buckley AFB and gave instructions on what to do if a UXO is encountered. The UXO training was necessary to allow prairie dog removal and burrow collapsing within an area known to have UXO's present.



Taylor Cassidy with an example UXO.

Wildfire Management Plan Revisions. The Air Force Wildland Fire Center contracted with Chloeta, a private fire management company, to revise the USAFA Wildfire Management Plan. In November, James provided Chloeta with chapters 1-4 that he had written before the plans were contracted, and provided them with a list of additional information they would need to complete the plan. Chloeta employees David Atkins and Roman Watkins came to the USAFA for a three-day site visit along with Wildland Fire Center Fire Ecologist Kelly Anderson. During the site visit, James took David and Roman on a tour of the Academy and Farish and provided them with maps of all past treatment areas.

Airfield Management Meeting. McConnell AFB Natural Resources hosted a meeting to decide upon one or more species of grass to be planted on the airfield following new construction. The group, which included stakeholders from Civil Engineering, Airfield Management, BASH, Flight Safety, and Law Enforcement, decided on switchgrass as an ideal grass given

its relatively high seed height, its tolerance of both xeric and mesic conditions, and its ability to spread using rhizomes. Importantly, this species is native to Kansas. The proposed alternative was at one point reed canary grass, an invasive species.

Midwest Regional Support Team (RST) and Installation Support Team (IST) Support. Pam Sponholtz and Krystal Phillips attended and participated in the 3rd Annual Joint USFWS-USAF Sikes Act Meeting. Discussions and topics included: Respective Air Force and USFWS Program Introductions, Overview, and Updates; Air Force Pollinator Strategy; Strategic Planning Case Study and Discussion: The Florida Strategic Plan for Sustaining Military Readiness Through Conservation Partnerships; Air Force Wildland Fire Center: Update on National Vision; INRMP Updates and Reviews at installations with T&E species; and General Sikes Act Information. During the open session, Krystal formally presented Readiness Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) efforts accomplished and underway on Buckley AFB as a case study and provided the group with information on the opportunity to participate in a Sentinel Landscape training webinar in December.

Climate Change Assessment and Monitoring Project Proposal. Max Canestorp prepared a proposal to assess and monitor resources on military installations nation-wide, to address climate change concerns as they relate to military readiness.

Fishing Satisfaction Survey. During a fishermen satisfaction survey, Alex Schubert and Cole Brittain interviewed fly fisherman Joseph Gallagher. Mr. Gallagher is one of the coordinators for the Project Healing Waters Program. This program is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities including education and outings. Mr. Gallagher inquired about

the possibility of partnering with the FE Warren AFB to stock additional fish into Pearson Lakes on base to aid in the rehabilitation of the military personnel and veterans in distress. Further coordination will be needed to find out if this a viability alternative for the future.

Natural Resources Presentation to USAFA Ecology Class. Brian Mihlbachler and James Donahey provided a presentation on Natural Resource Management on the Air Force Academy to two classes of biology majors in late November. The invitation was extended to provide students with management applications of their ecology lessons.



Molding future leaders, Brian discusses the Sikes Act with a class of Biology majors.

Species Distribution. Cole Brittain worked with Colorado Parks & Wildlife's Native Species Biologist, Paul Jones, in order to document native species distribution in the Rio Grande Drainage. Electroshocking efforts were conducted to map Rio Grande Chub and Rio Grande Sucker distribution during lower water on Rio San Antonio and the Lower Conejos River. Both native species have been stocked within proximity of these locations and sampling efforts revealed successful distribution of the Rio Grande Chub. These streams are intermittent this time of year until spring runoff, therefore documenting preferable winter refuge is essential to understanding the survival of these native species.

Habitat Conservation & Management

“Mendenhall hopes to elucidate the ecological and financial benefits of restoring grassland and dispel myths about native annuals and harmful wildlife.”

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 on the Middle Tributary project is planned for winter 2017, with the initial native reseeding and tree/shrub planting occurring in spring/summer 2017.

Beaver Mitigation. Beaver activity on Crow Creek at F. E. Warren AFB has increased recently, so there has been some brainstorming about potential course of actions. One idea was the use of a beaver deceiver device. This device would consist of a PVC pipe placed through the beaver dam in such a way that the water level of the creek would lower and the beavers would be unable to raise the water level back up with increased dam building activity. Alex checked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and they stated that no permit would be needed to place beaver deceiver devices in the dams as long as no sand or rock would be placed around the device.

Invasive Tree Removal. Russian olive trees were removed from the Buckley AFB lodging's front lawn. Krystal Phillips worked with the lodging staff

to gain permission to remove the relatively small trees before they became large seed producing trees. Taylor Cassidy and Dustin Casady used glyphosate herbicide to perform cut stump treatments on several dozen Russian olive trees. These trees were not planted and were likely spread by wildlife from nearby seed sources.

More Invasive Tree Removal. Dustin Casady, Melissa Whittingslow, and Taylor Cassidy used a glyphosate herbicide to perform cut stump treatments on Russian olive trees at USAFA. The treatments focused on the base housing area which was coordinated by Melissa Whittingslow to gain permission from the housing office and make sure that tenants were aware treatments were being made near their homes. All of the known Russian olive trees were removed from the housing area.

Noxious Weed Management Plan. Max Canestorp reviewed and provided comments on a Noxious Weed Management Plan for Cheyenne Mountain AFS. The plan was finalized by the end of the month.

FY17 Project Planning. Krystal received/replied to probing questions by a Buckley AFB retiree for educating the community about pollinators and requested bee hives/bee keeping

as an option on the installation. She responded to the retiree and asked the retiree to develop a project description addressing – how, who, what, why, when, and where – to formally coordinate and vet with Air Force installation leadership and the environmental section. Krystal emphasized – if bee keeping is part of the proposal – this effort must be “for personal use and not for profit” and established a firm deadline of end of January 2017 for the delivery of the project proposal to allow for timely coordination and possible project execution during the 2017 field season.

Grassland Restoration Prescription. Laura Mendenhall continued development of a grassland restoration prescription for sections of land on McConnell AFB that may benefit from native landscaping. Much of the cantonment area and Kruger Recreation Area is mowed and leadership at the base has expressed interest in converting some of this area to unmowed, native grassland. Included in the prescription is a timeline for seeding, re-seeding, and mowing as well as long-term monitoring and invasive species management. In writing this document, Mendenhall hopes to elucidate the ecological and financial benefits of restoring grassland and dispel myths about native annuals and harmful wildlife.



Grassland Restoration at McConnell AFB.

Leadership in Science & Technology

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 head-gates 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. This is the second year of monitoring for this project and all criteria for success outlined in the biological opinion are being met. Additional monitoring is scheduled for July 2017.



Temperature Monitoring. Chris Kennedy replaced water temperature loggers at six locations (Fern, Spruce, Bear, Ypsilon and Caddis Lakes and Ouzel Creek) within RMNP. These loggers are deployed in cutthroat trout populations to assess temperatures for recruitment and detect changes associated with climate change, wildfire and beetle kill.

Dalmatian Toadflax Project. Alex Schubert and Pam Sponholtz participated in a conference call with University of Wyoming personnel Brian Mealar, Beth Fowers, and Dan Tekiela to discuss the results of the sheep grazing/Dalmatian toadflax control research project at F. E. Warren AFB. The 2016 field season served as the pilot study for the project and the study plots showed approximately 80 percent utilization of the toadflax by the sheep. The sheep consumed the succulent leaves, as well as the stems of the toadflax. The project is designed to study the effectiveness of integrating grazing and herbicide use

for controlling the invasive Dalmatian toadflax weed. Some areas of the study plots will be reseeded with native forbs to enhance pollinator species. The team is looking forward to the 2017 field season to conduct the second phase of the experiment. Also, a field day is being planned for the coming year to help educate the base populace regarding the use of sheep to control weeds on base.

SCA AmeriCorps Natural Resource Internships. The national agreement between the USFWS and Student Conservation Association serves to support America's conservation corps by providing college and high school-aged members with hands-on conservation service opportunities. Through coordination with other COFWCO natural resource managers, Krystal effectively integrated several habitat conservation and management military projects on Air Force installations. As

a result, she was successfully able to support and offer one (1) year-long natural resource internship to accomplish avian surveys/monitoring, invasive plant species management, and trail maintenance and two (2) six-month natural resource internships in Colorado Springs, CO and Cheyenne, WY.

Sagebrush Ecosystem meeting. Pam Sponholtz attended the Sagebrush Ecosystem meeting that involves three regions of the FWS. Topics discussed included science needs, timeframe to develop an operation plan and how to better Collaborate with partners to develop pilot management plans that will allow ranchers to integrate grazing management plans across all ownerships.

Meadow/South Ledge
Ditch Diversion and Fish
Passage Project Photo
Documentation

2015

2016