

## 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, Fisheries Bio-Tech

# Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



OCTOBER 2016

## Species Conservation & Management

**Burrowing Owl Migration Update.** Two female Burrowing Owls (nicknamed Thelma and Louise) fitted with satellite transmitters in June of 2015, began their southern migration to warmer climes last month. Thelma departed Pueblo Chemical on October 11, stopped over briefly in the Texas Panhandle, and then continued to the Mexican state of Coahila (a 780 mile journey). Louise has begun migratory staging along the Arkansas River, but should be heading toward Texas (and ultimately Mexico) very soon. Both birds appear to have delayed their migration departure dates this year by over a week, presumably in response to the mild weather we have been experiencing. This is consistent with other observations around the continent that have reported later departure dates for many migratory bird species.

**Fish Sampling.** Pam Sponholtz, Cole Brittain, Laura Mendenhall, and folks from McConnell AFB and the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism (KDWP), electrofished approximately 1.5 miles of streams on McConnell AFB. The objective was to catalogue fish species composition and abundance following a fish kill that occurred in May of 2016. Data will be compared with the results of a similar survey conducted in September of 2014. Highlights included catching a common snapping turtle and finding live Pondhorn mussels in several locations in the main stream channel.

**Elk Hunt.** October 1st was the opening day for the guided elk hunt on the US Air Force Academy. Melissa Whittingslow and Brain Mihlbachler have been escorting hunters around the Academy to try and fill their cow elk tags. Two cows were harvested off the Academy during the month of

October. The hunt will go until January 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Deer Hunting Regulations.** Brian is working with Colorado Parks and Wildlife on a proposal to change the Academy's buck deer hunting licenses to either sex licenses. The hope is that by changing the type of license, the Academy hunt will become less of a "trophy" hunt and more of a population management hunt, which is the INRMP objective. The change must be approved by the Colorado Wildlife Commission.

**Pronghorn Hunting.** Alex Schubert spoke with Jason Sherwood, a Hunter Management Area Coordinator for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). They discussed the seemingly high likelihood that the base will have an archery only pronghorn hunter management area in the north-

ern portion of F. E. Warren AFB in the fall of 2017. Jason proposed that they resume discussion in early 2017 when the WGFD starts discussing the big game seasons for that year. Alex is now planning to send Jason a copy of the F. E. Warren AFB Pronghorn Hunting Instructional Memorandum as soon as it is signed by the base commander. Alex also mentioned to Jason that he will keep exploring the possibilities of having small game and goose hunting seasons at F. E. Warren AFB, as well.

**Fish Survey.** Chris Kennedy conducted gill net surveys at Bear Lake within Rocky Mountain National Park to assess the greenback cutthroat trout population in the lake. Seven nets sets captured only four fish in 6.3 hours of netting. All fish captured were large adults which would indicate that recruitment is not occurring in the lake.



Cole Brittain finishes weighing a fish while Nicole Brown (KDWP) and Ryan Waters (KDWP) sort and measure fish and Laura Mendenhall records data.

# Habitat Conservation & Management

**“These loggers are deployed in cutthroat trout populations to assess temperatures for recruitment and detect changes associated with climate change, wildfire and beetle kill.”**

*Aquatic Habitat Monitoring.* Chris Kennedy replaced water temperature loggers at eighteen locations (Fern, Spruce, Dream, Bear and Poudre Lakes, Big Thompson and Little South Fork Cache la Poudre Rivers and Hidden Valley (2), West (2), Columbine (2), Tonahutu (3), Chaos and Baker Creeks) 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.

*Improving Fish Passage at Baca NWR.* Each spring and sometimes in the fall, two native fish species, Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker found in the clear and flowing Crestone and Willow

Creeks on Baca National Wildlife Refuge, try and fulfill their evolutionary legacy and move upstream to spawn. Their success is hampered by having to jump nearly 3 feet in some cases to get past road and irrigation culverts that have long since been elevated out of the stream channel. This distance is equivalent to a typical human having to jump 54 feet (4 story building) into the air! Needless to say most of these fish don't complete their journey. In a collaborative project involving Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Baca National Wildlife Refuge and the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, funding through the National Fish Passage program has been secured to replace some of the largest fish passage issues with structures that allow fish to freely move upstream. Thanks in particular to Wayne Stancill, the Re-

gion 6 Fish Passage Engineer; without his vision and design on these projects, the fish would still be jumping but getting nowhere. Even though spring is months away, this next year will provide many miles of unimpeded habitat for these unique and special fish to move upstream.

*Pest Management.* James Donahey walked through and mapped impacted



**Paul Jones (CPW) and Cole Brittain stand above an example of a recently replaced culvert that by design, maintains important pool habitat downstream but also allows fish to move into upstream areas.**

stands from western spruce budworm at Farish Recreation Area. James submitted an 813 for removing the understory of suitable host species on 53 acres, and developed a contract to be awarded in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the FY. He also presented the 813 for environmental review at the October EIAP meeting. James also performed several roadside bark beetle tree inspections and spent a morning at the Colorado National Guard facility marking 15 beetle-killed trees that died after the facility manager disabled the irrigation system last summer.

*Noxious weed control.* Max Canestorp reviewed the draft Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan for Cheyenne Mountain AFS. He also, chemically treated Canada thistle on the base, and GPS'ed the treatment efforts.

*Grassland Restoration.* Laura Mendenhall discussed grassland restoration progress in the old building #1090 lot as well as future plans for restoration in areas around base that are currently mowed with various contracts in CE. Mendenhall is doing research to determine mowing regimen and other long-term maintenance needs to create a “grassland prescription” that can be applied to any patch the base is willing to stop mowing.

*FY17 Project Planning.* Krystal proposed and organized the Buckley AFB sensitive species surveys tentatively scheduled for spring/summer of 2017 with Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) – CSU.

*Antenna Arrays.* Cole Brittain moved five portable antenna arrays on the Baca NWR. These antennas are used to monitor fish movement. The

antenna arrays were relocated in order to capture fish movement along the recently constructed fish passage structures on Ditch 12. Also one antenna was placed below the constructed pool, directly below the new fish passage structure, in order to document possible winter habitation. The remaining two antenna arrays located on Ditch 9 are currently above and below the new fish passage structure.

*Ips beetle control.* Max Canestorp cut three ponderosa pine that had become infested with Ips beetles on Cheyenne Mountain AFS. Once the trees were down we bucked them up and covered them with plastic to facilitate killing the beetles beneath the bark by solar radiation, and we chipped the branches.

# Electrofishing Training



Clark Jones, Cole Brittain, Dustin Casady, Alex Schubert, Melissa Whittingslow and Taylor Cassidy attended an electrofishing course held by the National Conservation Training Center in Fort Collins, CO last month. This course is designed to equip students with the necessary training and understanding to lead an electrofishing crew in a safe and scientifically robust manner

The course focused on understanding the physics of electrofishing in order to standardize data collection across a variety of equipment types, water conditions, and habitats. The course included a combination of in-class learning experiences coupled with in-stream equipment standardization and data collection training.

**Clockwise from top left: The class practices newly-learned methods in a stream. Melissa Whittingslow demonstrates proper electrofishing gear. The classroom setting.**

# Leadership in Science & Technology

*“Cassin’s Sparrow is a rapidly declining songbird that inhabits arid grasslands across the southwestern United States.”*

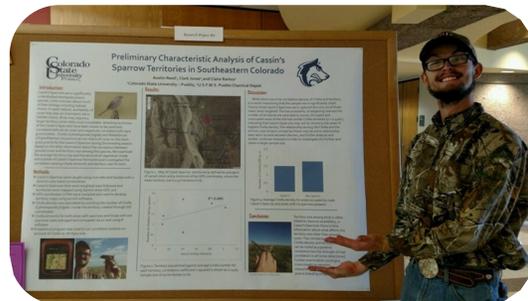
**Biology Lesson.** Alex Schubert (USFWS) and Shain Wright (DoD) joined other educators in Cheyenne by spending two days at one of the junior high schools educating youth over stream health and monitoring issues. Alex focused on teaching about macroinvertebrates while Shain taught about water quality monitoring. The trip was originally planned to be outside along a stream in a field setting. However, inclement weather necessitated the classes being held indoors. Alex collected macroinvertebrates on base and the young people were (mostly) fascinated by the creatures.

**SERDP Funded Habitat Restoration Study.** Krystal responded to an invitation to participate in a short survey to assist in a DoD-funded study that is developing spatially-explicit, individual-based simulation models (SEIBMs) for habitat restoration. Specifically, she reviewed the project proposal determining Buckley AFB would not be a good fit for the project. However, Krystal was able to provide project

proponents with other site location contacts within the Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (COFWCO) on military lands which would benefit from the study.

**Research Presentation.** Austin Reed, a Colorado State University-Pueblo undergraduate majoring in Environmental Bioscience, presented results from his undergraduate field research on Cassin’s Sparrow territory characterization at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Science and Mathematics Research Symposium at CSU-Pueblo. Cassin’s Sparrow is a rapidly declining songbird that inhabits arid grasslands across the southwestern United States. Austin’s poster presentation, *Preliminary characteristic analysis of Cassin’s Sparrow territories in southeast-*

*ern Colorado*, reported on research he conducted at Pueblo Chemical Depot this past summer as part of a broader study of prairie songbird site fidelity, migration and breeding density. His study is one of the only investigations quantifying vegetation differences in relation to territory size for Cassin’s Sparrow.



**Austin Reed (CSU-Pueblo) with his poster.**

# Partnerships & Accountability

*Joint Land Use Study.* Brian Mhlbachler is participating in a Joint Land Use Study by the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG) addressing access to the County's New Santa Fe Trail through USAFA during periods of heightened base security. Closure of the trail creates conflict with recreationists and non-motorized commuters that rely on the trail access.

*Pronghorn Season.* Alex Schubert coordinated with other squadron members and the base's public affairs office regarding the preparation of a public communication plan for the expected 2017 archery only pronghorn hunting season at F. E. Warren AFB.

*Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) update.* Max Canestorp updated the INRMPs for Cheyenne Mountain AFS, Schriever AFB, and Peterson AFB. A Sikes Act review meeting of the natural resource programs for the three bases is scheduled with cooperators in early December.

*Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) Activities.* A monthly stakeholders meeting was not held during this month. However,

Krystal actively supported BASH efforts on Buckley AFB through her coordination with USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services, an Air Force Judge Advocate, and the Region 6 USFWS Migratory Bird Permit Office on the migratory bird permits. In addition, she sufficiently garnered information to initiate an 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 and conserve migratory bird resources by utilizing non-depredation techniques. To reduce the amount of prey base for large raptors frequenting areas near the active runway, Krystal arranged for the approved chemical treatment of wildlife management area #2 on Buckley AFB in winter 2017.

*Volunteer Appreciation.* Chris Kennedy prepared for and hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Lunch to thank volunteers who contributed 900 hours to the Rocky Mountain National Park fisheries program during the summer. Fourteen volunteers attended the

lunch which was held at the Rock Cut Brewery in Estes Park.



*Forest Inventory and Analysis.* Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) is a nation-wide program within the Forest Service that establishes and monitors long-term study plots across all forest types. The measurement data provides a snapshot of the conditions of the nation's forested ecosystems and by revisiting established plots every 10 years, trends in management, growth, and mortality can be extrapolated. In late-October, James Donahey shadowed an FIA crew as they re-measured a long-term plot located on the Academy. The plot had been established over 30 years ago. Within the last 10 years, the trees on the plot have grown over an inch and a half in diameter (exceptional for our high and dry climate). While the measurement data from this single plot isn't useful for managing the Academy, when combined with the thousands of plots from across the state, policy-makers and managers will have a better idea of what's happening to Colorado's forests.

**Bobcat and cub spotted at Pueblo Chemical Depot.**



**FIA Forestry Technician at USAFA.**