

Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

Lakewood: Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader



US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs: Brian Mhlbachler, Biological Scientist, Diane Strohm, Biological Scientist, Greg Speights, Biological Technician, Steve Wallace, Forestry Technician

Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora: Krystal Phillips, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

US Army Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo: Max Canestorp, Natural and Cultural Resources Manager

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

Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY: Timothy Grosch, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

September 2013 Accomplishment Report

Leadership in Science and Technology

US Forest Service biological evaluation site visit: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm met with U.S. Forest Service (USFS) forest pathologists and entomologists to examine trees weakened by drought, disease, and insects on the Air Force Academy. The USFS Forest Health Protection staff in Denver partners with the Academy by providing technical assistance and funding in support of forest insect and disease projects and collaborates on forest health issues, and has provided funding annually over the past decade to help combat insect and disease agents such as bark beetles and dwarf mistletoe.



Steve Wallace looks on as a USFS specialist examines a dying Douglas fir for evidence of insects or root disease

Partnerships and Accountability

Upper Monument Creek (UMC) Landscape Restoration Initiative: Diane Strohm participated in a Fire Risk Assessment workshop as part of the UMC planning process. This analysis will help prioritize areas in highest need of treatment due to risks associated with Wildland Urban Interface location; potential fire behavior due to fuel types, prevailing winds, etc.; utilities and other infrastructure; wildlife habitat; etc. This multi-agency planning process is expected to be complete by early winter.

Support to National Firefighting Program: Diane Strohm spent the first week of September completing her second assignment this season as an infrared interpreter. She mapped several fire complexes in southern Montana and Yellowstone National Park.

Bird Airstrike Hazard (BASH) participation: Air Force level flight safety compliance directs each installation with a flying mission to establish a Bird Hazard Working Group. Krystal Phillips participated in the monthly meeting held in September at Buckley Air Force Base (BAFB) and served as technical point of contact, contracting officer representative, and coordinator for the airfield wildlife barrier fence. This fencing effort is to prevent wildlife and avian conflicts by discouraging black-tail prairie dogs, rabbits, and coyotes access to the airfield.

Native American consultations with Jicarilla Apache and Northern Ute tribes: Diane Strohm and Max Canestorp participated in ethnobotanical field consultations with the Jicarilla Apache and Northern Ute tribes at the Academy. Site visits focused on locating plants of significance to these tribes.



Ligusticum porteri, a medicinal plant used by Native Americans

Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP): Krystal Phillips revised a draft of the guidance for each installation INRMP as well as finalized the BAFB Work Plans for FY14-FY18, while matching all projects in the AF Automated Civil Engineering System Project Management [Plan?] to ensure all work plans were properly programmed. Additionally, Krystal began the functional level annual review of the signed BAFB INRMP and coordinated efforts with Air Force Contracting, USFWS, and Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) to host the tri-party meeting at the end of October, in accordance with the Sikes Act.

Sikes Act coordination: Pam Sponholtz became the Sikes Act Coordinator for Region 6 and will help facilitate getting additional Natural Resource Programs up and running on newly added Air Force Bases in Region 6.

Species Conservation and Management

Colorado cutthroat trout restoration: Chris Kennedy gathered information in Rocky Mountain National Park on Boundary Lake, Adams Lake, and Paradise Creek for purposes of conducting native cutthroat trout restoration projects. Aquatic invertebrate sampling was conducted at Boundary and Adams Lakes. Activities on Paradise Creek included time of travel studies and installation of three thermographs.



Packers packing gear from Paradise Creek project at Rocky Mountain National Park

Colorado State University (CSU) avian baseline survey: Through a cooperative effort with CSU, Krystal Phillips began a raptor and migratory bird baseline survey on BAFB. The full season of avian surveys within the BAFB installation boundaries will allow the installation to make decisions on natural resource management while supporting the military mission and fulfill avian species data gaps and record keeping addressed in the BAFB INRMP. We expect the final report to be completed in October.

Southern redbelly dace (SRD) surveys: Max Canestorp, Pam Sponholtz and Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff finished southern redbelly dace (SRD) surveys on Pueblo Chemical Depot (PCD) using mark/recapture techniques. Results suggest that the SRD population is doing well, despite sharing the pond with an abundance of black bullheads and bullfrogs.

Habitat Conservation and Management

Beetles, beetles and more beetles: Steve Wallace, Diane Strohm and several contractors are focusing on field surveys to locate beetle-infested trees, which are immediately cut and chipped or de-barked to minimize insect spread on the Academy. Drought conditions have stressed trees and greatly increased mortality from the Ips pine engraver beetle and twig beetles this year, with over 800 trees removed this year. There are eleven species of Ips engraver beetles in Colorado, targeting pines, spruce, and fir.



Ponderosa pines killed by Ips beetle

Post-flood response: Pam Sponholtz participated on a call with Scott Roth to discuss the USFWS response to the recent flooding and what expertise and funding FWS could offer to help restoration activities.

Privatized housing coordination: Steve Wallace and Diane Strohm coordinated with the Forest City staff on site evaluations of dying trees within privatized areas, and arranged for removal of beetle-infested trees within the Douglass Valley and General Officers Quarters areas on the Academy.

Knapweed and Canada thistle: Brian Mihlbachler directed the spraying of knapweed and Canada thistle sites prior to close-out of the noxious weed spraying contract on the Academy. Under a new FY14 contract, fall treatment of Russian olive and knapweed and thistle rosettes is planned until the end of the season.



Review of the Air Force Academy Natural Resources program: Brian Mihlbachler performed a review of the Academy Natural Resources Program during an internal Air Force Environmental, Safety, and Occupational Health Compliance Assessment and Management Program audit. Improvement in how the base implements the revegetation and erosion control specifications, especially through construction contracts, was identified as an area needing attention.

Jacks Valley forest thinning: Steve Wallace finished preparation of a 15-acre area of forest along Northgate Boulevard in south Jacks Valley to be thinned early this autumn. This area has seen high beetle mortality due to densely overstocked conditions and dwarf mistletoe infection.

Forest Management Contracts: Diane Strohm prepared technical specifications for FY14 forest management and fuel hazard reduction treatment contracts on the Academy. These will be awarded and administered through the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Noxious weed surveys and control: Surveys were conducted for noxious weeds on PCD by Max Canestorp, and follow up control measures using herbicides were implemented. Target species were Canada thistle, Russian olive, and tamarisk. Approximately 40 acres of surface area were treated.

Erosion control and revegetation: Brian Mihlbachler directed the implementation of several erosion control and revegetation projects to mitigate damage caused by the heavy late-summer rainfall.



Example of poor implementation of the Academy's revegetation specification.

Public Use and Recreation

Maintenance and repairs on Falcon Trail: Greg Speights and Brian Mihlbachler surveyed the Falcon Trail on the Academy for maintenance and repair needs following the heavy September rains and flooding. Volunteer projects and a FY14 Trails Management contract will be used to perform the required trails work.



Damage to the Falcon Trail on the Academy from heavy September rainfall

Stocking rainbow trout: Greg Speights stocked 9-11" rainbow trout in the Academy and Farish Recreation Area lakes.

Cow elk hunt: Greg Speights mailed out letters to the top 10 applicants for the 2013-2014 cow elk hunt in preparation for the October 1 - January 31 hunting season on the Academy.

Newsletter article: Max Canestorp prepared an article on Native Americans claiming cultural affiliation to the PCD area, and the development of agreements with those tribes, for the PCD newsletter, *The Environmental Monitor*.

Workforce Management

Budget management and data calls: Krystal Phillips regularly engaged in discussions regarding Air Force level funding with USFWS Region 6 staff in order to effectively plan execution of funds by the USFWS in FY14. Krystal led a meeting between 460th Civil Engineering Squadron leadership and USFWS Colorado Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office (COFWCO) to discuss funding issues and project status and updates. Krystal routinely responded to Air Force level data calls, such as Endangered Species Act, and requests for additional information regarding natural resource projects, such as future wildlife barriers, and out-year funding.

Edited by: Emily R. Fausch

New employee at Warren Air Force Base: The COFWCO gained a new fish and wildlife biologist this month. Tim Grosch has gained valuable experience in his work with Arizona Game and Fish Department as a native fish biologist and most recently working on greater sage grouse in Wyoming. Tim will be stationed at Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, WY and will be helping the base in implementing their natural resource goals. Welcome Tim!!!

Cultural Resources

Project support: Max Canestorp provided input into natural and cultural resources requirements to support establishing a parking lot on PCD. Monitoring for cultural resources will be required during the ground breaking process.

National Historic District implications: Max Canestorp provided guidance to decision-makers on the proper course of action and the ramifications of dismantling Hi PARdner Park, a site on PCD eligible for the National Register as a Historic District.