

Viktor Takes on Colorado Parks and Wildlife

by Penny Randell

It's fall and that means hunting season again, which is an excellent opportunity for me to get involved (and I don't mean hands on), and perhaps offer a little information concerning Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). I say little, and in reality, it would take more than a few readings to understand the many facets of this agency. Some of my senior colleagues objected and started bugling at me, but Mom said, "Viktor, go right ahead and tell your story."

When considering our outdoors, be it for recreation, conservation of habitat, or the wildlife that lives there, it is necessary to include all three of these functioning divisions of CPW. First and foremost, the agency works to maintain and sustain the wildlife resources of the state. Biologists and division officers alike cooperate to see that all species stay as healthy as possible and that the numbers are kept in proportion. It's about people, too, for the second sector concerns quality of the parks systems. That's a big one, for there are 42 state parks in total. Too, CPW enforces laws and labors to provide engaging and continued outdoor recreation and understanding of the land. In doing so, the agency educates and inspires citizens, including future generations, to serve as caretakers of the recreation areas and all natural resources.

In total, the agency manages over 300 wildlife areas, not including parks. Because the districts are so vast, workers scramble constantly to get their job done. And too, wildlife managers, once called game wardens, visit schools, the boy scouts and fire stations where the community is invited to attend and investigate occurrences. Recently the sorrowful death of a bear that was shot and killed by a citizen stunned the residents here in Evergreen. Less than a month later CPW wildlife managers were on the job with a proper presentation on bears and the answers to pertinent questions. They encouraged the community to gather and instigate programs that effectively deal with garbage, thus helping to tackle the problem of man meets bear.

Beyond this, it's no easy job to ascertain needed information that reveals just how many critters are sharing an area of land and determine if that land can support that many critters. The professional effort it takes is tremendous and inspiring, as well. For example: In the early 1970's a biologist rappelled off cliffs that measured well over 500 feet to discover why the American Peregrine Falcon was in danger. His intrusion was certainly unwanted and the birds made swoops at him to discourage his entrance. Bravely, he hung from a thin rope while retrieving their eggs. After securing the eggs on his person, he drove all night across the state to artificially incubate and eventually hatch the eggs. DDT had thinned the shells and it was concluded to be a cause of the decline in their numbers.

In recent years 13 elk were tranquilized and collared to monitor their chosen habitat. The question was: did the elk migrate to higher pastures in summer, returning to lower lands in the winter? Well, for Evergreen, the elk pretty much stuck around town year round. And why not? Who wants to forage for food when there is an abundance of tender

morsels right beneath your noses here in town? Not long ago Georgetown was run over by sheep. Eventually division managers baited the sheep, caught them all and moved them to a safer area. Barbed wire is often strung across bear habitat only to snag a section of hair. Wildlife managers gather the specimen, hand it over to the biologists and information regarding disease and territory choice is discovered through DNA. In all, it's a huge operation.

When it comes to evidence that reveals a decline in numbers of species and sub-species, it takes a biologist and science-based decisions to tackle the problem. Various Data Analysis Units are formed to study each specific species and feedback from the public is crucial. Because urbanization heavily affects natural habitats, surveys are often conducted to evaluate the mindset of hunters, basic citizens and landowners. After all things are considered, measures are taken to either increase or decrease the numbers. Taxonomy advances and molecular biology, among many other scientific disciplines, influence this kind of wildlife management.

When deliberating on numbers, it's the perfect time to take in account fishing and hunting licesencing. For some it's not a pretty thought, but population is controlled through hunting and fishing, too. To begin, applying for a license means you must have a current and valid photo ID, proof of hunter education, proof of residency if you are a resident, a current Habitat Stamp and a Social Security Number for new customers age 12 and older. The stamp is something new, costs \$10 and is required if you want to buy a license. There are exemptions. Anyone with a lifetime fishing license, a veteran's lifetime combination small-game hunting and fishing license, or those approved for the Big Game Mobility Impaired Hunting Program are exempt.

All this talk of hunting makes me nervous, but at least in Colorado all big game hunters have to be educated. Scheduled courses that get the job done and secure the hunter education card can be found online at cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/HE-InternetBasedCourses.aspx. I prefer that folks consider small game hunting. Those licenses can be purchased, as well, and must be registered in the Harvest Information Program (HIP). Small game, furbearer and migratory bird hunters, including falconers, must sign up with HIP each year before their license is valid.

Interesting enough, coyotes can be hunted without any license during big game season.

Seemingly, there's rule for everyone. You can't even hunt for a common snapping turtle without a small game or fishing license. What about waterfowl, you ask? There, too, you must have a small game hunting permit. And, if you are over 16, you need a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp, and Colorado small game credentials.

Personally speaking, it's the big game licensing that's got me all a fritter. Nonetheless, when it does come to us big guys, you know: moose, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, bears and we elk there are three categories of licensing. Over the counter sales for both resident and nonresident can be found at any licensed agent, online, phone or walk up to the CPW counter in person. The other two groupings have to do with the annual drawing. The deadline is every April, with summer bringing the long awaited

results. But all this information and more can be found in the easily accessed brochures published by CPW, or online at cpw@state.co.us.

Moving on, it would seem appropriate to mention the agencies and departments that are working with CPW on a disease called, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD).

This is of grave interest to me because it attacks both deer and **elk** (gulp). As of yet the cause is not known, but the infection attacks our brains and we become confused, unable to function and eventually die. Sadly, Bolder has the highest infestation and yet not much hunting, to boot. The Colorado Wildlife Federation has begun a campaign to help fund the research needed. This federation was founded in 1953 and is the oldest most effective wildlife conservation organization in Colorado. Besides them, the Colorado State University and Colorado Department of Agriculture are on board in the project, as well.

Considering an agency that has this many responsibilities, you might imagine a plethora of employees. This is not true at CPW. In fact, there are actually a few people who expertly handle an enormous amount of work. Jennifer Churchill, the public information officer says this agency, meaning the northeast region of Colorado, has five aquatic biologists, four terrestrial and two conservational. There are only seven wildlife managers for all four counties: Park, Clear Creek, Gilpin and Jefferson. Wow! That's a load. The managers graduate from the police academy after acquiring their biology degree and are good at enforcing law. They, too, are dedicated and work extreme hours, saying, "It's a way of life and has nothing to do with money."

With such committed folks it's not hard to see why our state remains in pretty good wildlife balance. These people work endlessly and it shows. Just remember, nonetheless, that I am out here and doing what I can to keep you abreast of the doings in your neck of the woods. In the mean time my mates and I plan to hang here in Evergreen. Trust me, we look better than we taste...no matter what you think.