Coop Catch-up
Cooperative Research Units
September 2019, Issue 79

from the Acting Chief

I hope that by the time you read this you will be experiencing some cooler temps and can see some nice fall weather in your future. I sure hope I do, it is 94°F here today.

We are wrapping up another fiscal year here at headquarters, and the past several months have been, well, interesting. If you track the Federal budget at all, you have noted that just like in FY 2019, the President’s budget (PB) request has suggested the elimination of the CRU program. This was not unexpected as most PBs build off the previous years. Fortunately, as reported in the last Catch-up, Congress doesn’t pay a great deal of attention to the PB so we are confident that Congress will again reject our elimination as they did for 2019. In fact, signs are very good in that the House Appropriations Committee approved the draft FY 2020 funding bill for Interior. The bill not only rejected the program elimination but has suggested a $5.6M increase for the program. Now, we still have a long way to go before we will know if we actually see any increase in our appropriations, as the Senate has yet to complete their mark-up of a funding bill and everything will still have to go through the joint committee and ultimately be approved by the full congress and signed by the President, but this is an excellent start. As always, we thank our outstanding non-federal cooperators including the National Cooperators Coalition, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, The National Association of University Fish and Wildlife Programs, The Wildlife Society, the American Fisheries Society, the Association of Public Land Grant Universities, the Boone and Crockett Club, and many individuals for their Herculean efforts working behind the scenes to generate support for this program.

As I am in my 8th month as Acting Chief I have fielded a lot of questions about the Chief position, and when we might have a permanent Chief. I am pleased to say that we are getting much closer. The position announcement was held up for over a year by USGS Director Reilly as he was considering where he might want the duty station of the job and also how the CRU program fits into a larger reorganization of the USGS. Anyway, the Director did approve the recruitment package in July and it is currently with the DOI Executive Resources Board (ERB) for approval. Once approved by the ERB, the job will be announced shortly after that for both Merit Promotion and Delegated Examining Unit (non-Fed) applicants. We will let you know when the announcements are open.

In other staffing news, the program is still carrying 38 vacancies in our scientific staff in addition to 1 administrative vacancy at HQ. While congress did provide us a $1M increase in our budget this past year, with the majority of those funds identified for filling positions, we have not been able to submit any new hiring waivers since March pending the USGS Director’s approval of a staffing plan for the Ecosystems Mission Area. We do have 3 positions (AL, AK, WIW) currently in various stages of recruitment, all of which had been approved for hiring prior to the request for the staffing plan. Six other positions have been identified for filling and we will submit those hiring requests just as soon as the staffing plan is approved.

A few words about conferences. As you have likely heard, the USGS Director has set a policy that states that employees may only attend one large scientific conference per calendar year. A large conference is any meeting that is expected to reach or exceed $100K in costs during the calendar year. The conferences identified as large for 2019 are the Seismological Society of America, the Joint American Fisheries Society
One upside of not being able to fill the vacancies we anticipated this past fiscal year, is that we had some extra funds available that we used to purchase vehicles. This is welcome relief for many of our units as our vehicle fleet is seriously ageing. In fact, the average age of our 265-vehicle fleet is 11.36 years and almost ¼ of our fleet is over 15 years old. Over half of our units were recently approved to purchase a new vehicle and while this is only a small portion of what is needed, it is a start. So how do we make decision as to who gets a new vehicle? The CRU management team looks not only at the justifications sent in by the units (they are generally excellent, and often creative), but we also consider things like number of field projects, student/technician load, the age of your current fleet, and the availability of state or university vehicles.

Finally, some thanks. I would like to thank Dr.’s Sammy King and Don Dennerline for their service as acting Deputy Chief over the past 5 months. Both have done an outstanding job of not only absorbing most of the Deputy duties, but also maintaining their regular jobs, Sammy as the Leader of the Louisiana Unit, and Don as Senior Program Biologist for the CRU program. As always, our outstanding administrative staff have seemingly effortlessly guided us through another fiscal year. I can guarantee you, with the myriad of constantly changing federal requirements related to everything we do, this is in no way easy.

Wising you all a good end of your summer and a great fall (its coming, I promise) where hopefully you can get out and crunch some leaves.

–John Thompson

from the Acting Deputy Chief

(We decided to give the new Acting Deputy Chief, Dana Winkelman, a chance to get his feet wet before asking him to write for the Coop Catchup newsletter. We welcome Dana! Below is the email John Thompson sent to all the Coop Units announcing our new acting deputy chief.)
Beginning Monday August 19, Dr. Dana Winkelman will serve as the acting Deputy Chief for the Cooperative Research Units. Dana has a long history with the CRU as the Leader of the Colorado Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Dana will only be in Reston about one week a month and will sit in the CRU Chief office so stop by and say hi. When in Reston he can be reached at 703-648-4261 (no voicemail however) or anytime at 970-430-9102 (Voice or Text). Be sure to ID yourself in any message. His email is dana.winkelman@colostate.edu or danaw@usgs.gov (either or both will work).

Finally, A huge shout out to Don Dennerline for his service as acting deputy these past four months. It was a very intense four months but Don handled it with his usual fantastic attitude and outstanding work quality.

**AO’s Corner**

FY’19 is quickly coming to an end and it has been a whirlwind of a year if I’ve ever seen one! We’ve had a busy summer processing all the RWOs that came in and I want to thank all the units and the HQ staff for their hard work getting RWOs in by the deadlines despite the late allocations and clearance requirements.

You all should have received my “Year-End Accrual Closeout Guidance and Deadlines” email on July 24th, 2019. All your efforts to meet those deadlines help us here in HQ successfully close out. If you have any questions about the accrual process or deadlines please give us a call. Final non-travel related bankcard purchases should be completed by Friday, September 6th.

Hopefully everyone is getting used to the new Citibank charge cards. If you did not receive your travel and/or purchase cards earlier this year please reach out to your admin tech. Statements can be found online at Citi Manager and they should start to be mailed as well. If you don’t receive a hard copy via mail please pull your statement from Citi Manager to send to HQ.

We are awaiting approval of our 2020 Program Announcement which will assign our 2020 Funding Opportunity Number. Keep your eyes out for a memo from HQ announcing that number. With that number, and approved clearances, you can start submitting FY’20 RWOs come October 1st. Please remember to get your clearances in for RWOs as soon as you know about a project.

We hope the remainder of your summer is enjoyable and look forward to a successful 2019 close!

—Shana Coulby

**Outreach Spot**

The USGS Instagram Team is looking for high-quality photos!

This summer the USGS Instagram team (205k followers) kicked off a weekly photo theme. Photographers have only 7 days to take and submit photos related to that theme. The USGS Communications team will highlight their favorite images throughout the following week on the USGS Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/usgs/).

Rules are below. Please forward this email to your colleagues, staff, and more and get them involved!

**Submission**

Dawn will forward the weekly theme to a small subset of Units. Submit photos to Dawn Childs dchilds@usgs.gov.

**Rules**

*Provide a title* (e.g. Aerial View of the Shenandoah Mountains)

*Provide a detailed description.* The USGS Communications team will not use your photo no matter how amazing it is if you don't provide a detailed description. Specifically, explain in your description these things:
What is being shown in the photo and/or what is the location?

Talk about the science work that's taking place, or that's related to, the photo.

Explain why this kind of science work matters to society or people.

**Photos must be taken by USGS employees, Unit students, contractors, volunteers.** If photos are taken outside of your work duties, they must be made for "Public Domain" use by uploading a Copyright Dedication Agreement with the photo in the CMS. Photos taken for the purposes of work/during the course of your duties are Public Domain automatically.

**Tips**

- Use your smartphone. Use a DSLR. Just make sure your photo is of high quality.
- Look at photos online for how others have approached the shot. Can you do the same? Can you change the perspective? Shoot at a different time of day? Use a different lens?
- Think about elements of photography that add dimension to your photos: use of shadows, leading lines, reflections, light, etc.
- It's OK to do minor edits to your photo (post-processing) like color balance, exposure, shadows, clarity, removal of dust/spots, etc to clean up your photo and make them pop.

**Personnel potpourri**

**Staffing News:**

**Additions:**

Federal
- Mark Scheuerell, WA AUL
Univ. Admin
- Kristi Malley, LA Unit
- Tara Dreher, KS Unit

**Losses:**

Federal
- Craig Allen, NE UL

Univ. Admin
- Maiah Diel, KS Unit
- Eric Everett, ID Unit
- Melody Trapani, FL Unit
- Leslie Farrar, CA Unit
- Ashleigh Grogan, AZ Unit
- Kendra Lee, IA Unit

**Recent Awards**

**Kansas**

David Haukos, unit leader, was awarded the 2019 TWS Caesar Kleberg Award for Excellence in Applied Wildlife Research.
The Kleberg Award will be presented at the TWS meeting in Reno at the end of September 2019. Haukos was nominated for the award by colleagues and former students.

The Caesar Kleberg Award recognizes those who have distinguished themselves in applied wildlife research and is focused on those whose body of work, in both inquiry and discovery, has resulted in application of management and conservation “on the ground.”

Pennsylvania

2019 Alumni Association Dissertation Award

Shannon White, PhD student in the Wagner Lab, was the recipient of the 2019 Alumni Association Dissertation Award - considered to be among the most prestigious of the awards given to Penn State graduate students. Shannon also received the Distinguished Doctoral Scholar Medal from Penn State President Eric Barron.

Cooperative Research Unit Recognition Awards

Iowa - Safety

The Iowa Unit, led by Dr. Robert Klaver, has shown a long-term commitment of staff and students at all levels to the safety program at the Unit. The emphasis on safety has transcended previous and current administrative staff including Jessica Bell and Kendra Lee, who did outstanding jobs and took active roles in the Iowa Unit Safety program.

The Iowa Unit also has fully embraced the CRU PHA system and has done an outstanding job of ensuring all staff and students actively participate in the PHA process, maintaining safety training records and documentation, and tracking compliance with training requirements. The extremely high compliance statistics for the Iowa Unit exemplify the commitment and dedication of the staff and students to the Iowa Unit's Safety program and warrants recognition of their collective efforts.

Wisconsin - Excellence in Science

The Wisconsin Wildlife Unit, led by the sole USGS scientist at the unit, Dr. Christine Ribic is recognized for scientific productivity, respect and appreciation from peers and clients, and dedication to providing scientific solutions to management issues.

Dr. Ribic is a highly recognized expert in her scientific arena that includes management and conservation of vertebrates in grassland and forested landscapes, global climate change, and large-scale monitoring of marine debris.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Unit has a stellar record of scientific productivity and therefore, CRU is happy to recognize the Unit and congratulates them on being the recipient of the 2018 Excellence in Science award.

Wisconsin - Excellence in Management

The Wisconsin Fishery Unit consistently demonstrates an excellence in addressing all administrative tasks. The Unit consists of Dr. Daniel Isermann as Unit Leader and Dr. Wesley Larson as Assistant Unit Leader, and Ms. Andrea Musch as the Unit Administrative Support.

Dr. Isermann is a very capable administrator, but the administrative success of the Wisconsin
Fishery Unit is largely due to the capabilities of Andrea Musch. She has a great relationship with the graduate students at the unit, works with them to make sure vehicles are taken care of responsibly, and that all necessary training and payroll paperwork is complete. Andrea's responsibility in managing all aspects of Unit administration is large and she handles tasks professionally and completely. Feedback from CRU HQ reflects, year after year, that the Unit handles administrative tasks appropriately and on-time. CRU appreciates the efforts of the Unit in all administrative matters.

MISSISSIPPI – ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE

We are proud to announce that our own, Nicole Medeiros, Administrative Assistant for the Mississippi Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, was awarded the Wildlife Management Institute Administrative Excellence Award. One of the many things we appreciate about Nicole is that we don’t even know all that she does—she just gets it done. Correctly. On time. All the time. Nicole has been with the Unit for nearly 6 years and we hope to keep her.

Kudos to Our Students and Postdocs

NEBRASKA

Mendenhall Research Fellowship Awarded

Nebraska Unit student Jessica Burnett was awarded the USGS Mendenhall Postdoctoral Fellowship for this upcoming fall. The Mendenhall Fellowship Program honors Walter C. Mendenhall, the fifth director of the USGS. Now in its second year, this post-doctoral research program provides the opportunity for the selected fellow to conduct concentrated research.

On Saturday, Aug. 17, 2019, Burnett graduated with a doctorate in philosophy, ending a relentless pursuit of a dream. At the end of the month, she’ll start her career as a research ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey in Colorado, where she’ll work to develop a web-based, interactive decision support tool that incorporates land forms, habitat features, and population modelling to inform on-the-ground management decisions by practitioners.

In an interview at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s School of Natural Resources, Burnett commented that “we’re living in a time of unprecedented rate of global change…The scientific community is attempting to predict what will happen, and prediction is the Holy Grail of ecology.”

While in Nebraska, Burnett embodied the spirit of the Cooperative Research Unit tripartite...
mission: to earn a graduate education while she also mentored others; to conduct useful research that for Jessica seeks to change; and to provide technical assistance, which Jessica did through partnering with other young scientists and providing federal agencies assistance on global environmental issues. She is brilliantly redoubtable. We wish her the best in all her future endeavors, optimistic that she one day returns to the CRU organization to lead her own unit.

PENNSYLVANIA

Wagner Lab research on the eastern brook trout, led by PhD student Shannon White, made its debut in the IMAX film “Expedition Chesapeake, A Journey of Discovery,” a film developed by the Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts. Emmy-award-winning naturalist Jeff Corwin is the guide on this journey - encouraging audiences to be active members of their communities in an effort to conserve and restore the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

TEXAS

Texas Unit students did well at the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society. Clint Boal said, “There were 52 research posters from multiple universities. My students brought home 1st and 2nd place in the graduate student category, and 1st place in the undergraduate category.”

From left: Jonathon Bentley, 1st place undergraduate poster; Jennifer Harris, 2nd place graduate poster; Caroline Skidmore, 1st place graduate poster; and Clint Boal, assistant unit leader, TX Unit.

Poster titles below:

Jonathon Bentley, "Effect of Weather Conditions on Population Variance and Abundance of Cassin's Sparrow, Horned Lark, Mourning Dove, and Western Meadowlark Populations in a West Texas Shortgrass Prairie."

Jenny Harris, "Seasonal and Annual Variation in Raptor Species Presence and Abundance in the Southern Great Plains of Texas."
Caroline Skidmore, "Distribution and Comparative Nesting Habitat of Riparian Raptors in the Trans-Pecos Region of Texas.”

All three posters were co-authored by Boal.

International Activities

ALASKA
Pacific Salmon in Norwegian Waters
Mark Wipfli

Last fall I got a call from a group of Norwegian government and university scientists to work with them on getting funding to study the ecological effects of ‘invasive’ Pacific Salmon on Norwegian ecosystems. It sounded like an excellent opportunity to apply the knowledge we’ve gained here in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest on the effects of marine-derived nutrients from salmon runs on riverine ecosystems and their food webs. And who wouldn’t want to travel to northern Norway (in summer!) to see the countryside and visit their rivers?! So, we quickly wrote and submitted a proposal to a federal granting agency in Norway, and learned early this spring that we were funded! Fieldwork started this summer and runs through fall this first year.

The adult Pink Salmon spawners are very stout, and healthy looking fish.

More specifically we’ll be looking into how Pink Salmon are affecting aquatic and riparian consumers, and are especially keen to learn how they are affecting (both positively and negatively) native fishes, including char, trout, and Atlantic Salmon.

The Pink Salmon were released by the Russians into Russia’s streams decades ago, and took hold and are now naturally spawning and reproducing, and have subsequently spread, including into Norwegian rivers. They are now achieving alarmingly high numbers. Scientists and managers in Norway are concerned about disease spreading to other species from the adult Pink Salmon, over-fertilization (from nitrogen and phosphorus leaching from the decaying carcasses), and native species impacts and interactions.

The Norwegians are keen to learn how native species/ecosystems are responding to these ‘foreigners’ with an eye towards native species conservation, fisheries, and ecosystem management. They’re also very interested in possible Pink Salmon harvest opportunities.

Gastric lavage works well for sampling the diet of these fish, and releasing them live.

I’m the lead scientist from the U.S., overseeing the food web, stable isotope, foraging ecology, and native fish foraging ecology portions of the project. They invited me to get involved because of my decades of work on salmon runs (including Pink Salmon) and their effects on...
ecosystems and native species in Alaska and the Columbia River Basin in Washington and Idaho.

We've learned a lot about how Pink Salmon affect native riparian and aquatic species in the U.S., and developed methods/analytical techniques for studying those effects, and will be applying those approaches to understanding the potential problems (and benefits) associated with these ‘invasive’ Pacific Salmon. This work will help us better understand how salmon runs affect freshwater productivity, riparian ecosystems, and juvenile salmon populations in a region of the world where pink salmon historically never occurred, comparing back to what we've discovered over the last couple of decades about natural runs of Pink Salmon here in the U.S.

We expect we’ll see many of the native species, both fish and wildlife, taking advantage of this relatively new and abundant resource, provided the salmon runs aren’t so strong that they lead to die-offs of native fishes from an overabundance of decaying salmon. Too many salmon can reduce stream oxygen levels to near zero, killing fish in some streams, like we’ve occasionally seen here in Alaska during hot and dry summers, and during years of high Pink Salmon returns.

Research Briefs

NEBRASKA
North America Bat Monitoring Program

The Nebraska Cooperative Research Unit in collaboration with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and state and federal natural resource managers in the Midwest has joined U.S. Geological Service North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat). Our unit is focused on developing a strategic approach to bat conservation across Wyoming and Nebraska by monitoring impacts, and by providing decision makers with decision-support tools and a conservation plan.

Coordinating the efforts is former unit student and recent M.S. graduate Baxter Seguin. For more information visit the NABat website at www.nabatmonitoring.org.

One of our study streams where Pink Salmon spawners are achieving high numbers.

Baxter Seguin, Program Coordinator, North American Bat Monitoring, 2019 NECFWRU Graduate
**Extras**

**Kansas**
New Administrative Assistant

Tara Dreher is the new Unit Administrative Assistant and Office Manager for the Kansas Unit.

A Kansas native, Tara graduated from Kansas State University with a B.S. in Social Work. She joined the Unit in June of 2019 with the interest of providing administrative support to fish and wildlife research. Tara enjoys spending time outdoors, learning new things, connecting with people, and taking in diverse perspectives.

**Nebraska**
A NECFWRU Stalwart

Craig Allen, first NECFWRU Unit Leader

Vision and political savoy...that is what Craig Allen used to propel the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to a productive and respected unit in the Cooperative Research Unit program.

Prior to coming to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in July 2004, to start NECFWRU from the ground up, Allen was the unit leader at the South Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Clemson University from 2002 to 2004. He was assistant leader from 1998 to 2001.

Before the Cooperative Research Unit Program was on Allen’s radar, he completed a Wildlife Ecology, PhD from the University of Florida in 1997 where he conducted research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture thus beginning a 20-year career with the federal government.

In Nebraska, Allen found a state with dedicated collaborators with whom he developed partnerships benefiting the collective. Under his 15-year tenure the unit grew from a staff of two to a staff of eight, with 25+ graduate students, and hundreds of temporary summer workers. Craig retired from USGS on March 31 heading for a well-earned vacation to Portugal with his son Reece. Thankfully, Craig will continue to be a staunch advocate of NECFWRU and CRU program.

**In Memory**

**Dan Speake**

Dr. Dan Speake, 92, former leader of the Alabama Unit, passed quietly away in Huntsville, AL on May 7, 2019. Dan was
known throughout the wildlife fraternity as an extraordinary naturalist and researcher. He was passionate about his work. His teaching and research spanned over 40 years, with major contributions on bobwhite quail, Eastern wild turkey and Eastern indigo snake.

Dan was born in Decatur, AL in 1926 where he grew up roaming the woods hunting and "catching snakes and turtles"; passions that were developed young and stayed with him throughout his life.

He served in the Navy during the WW II years, and went to Auburn on the GI bill, eventually earning a PhD working on bobwhite quail in the Alabama piedmont. Dan became the Assistant Leader and later, the Unit Leader for the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at Auburn from 1967 to 1995. In Dan's words, there was a "technology explosion" in the 1970s with the advent of radio telemetry. He was a pioneer in many ways, but certainly in the use of radio transmitters on wild turkeys. His cutting-edge research allowed monitoring of wildlife populations as never before, leading to better management practices and resulting in the recovery of the wild turkey in Alabama, as well as other states.

His research with nongame and endangered species in the 1970s was at a time when very little research was supported for nongame wildlife. He established the first Eastern indigo snake captive breeding program in the United States and continued this research into the 1980s with reintroductions throughout south Alabama and other states in efforts to re-establish a viable population of the endangered species. He developed and used one of the first underground cameras to be put down gopher tortoise burrows, revealing for the first time the long list of animals that were dependent on this environment. He was known far and wide for his collection of live snakes, most notably "Bubba", who was a huge Eastern diamondback he donated to the Montgomery Zoo when he retired. Those of us fortunate enough to have spent time with him roaming the woods of the South remember how he always travelled with a pillowcase in the event he needed a way to carry some "ready" species of snake back to Auburn.

Dan was the recipient of 19 wildlife awards, including the Special Recognition Service Award from The Wildlife Society for his leadership on wild turkey research. He received the coveted Henry S. Mosby Award in 1991, presented by the National Wild Turkey Federation, for his extraordinary accomplishments in wild turkey research. At the time of this award, he was only the fifth recipient to receive this special recognition. He served on the Board of Trustees of Tall Timbers from 1990 to 1993 and along with Dr. Lee Stribling, was co-founder of the Albany Quail Project in 1992.

Dr. Speake was a colorful character who enjoyed his life and life's work. When you were with him, it was impossible not to go along for the ride. He had many sayings but some of the best remembered are that he "knew a lot more about turkeys than he could prove" and "if you don't know what your data is telling you before you analyze it, it don't mean nothing."

The twinkle in his eye never faltered and his wonderful sense of humor never left. The many wonderful stories will linger on and he will be remembered fondly by the many students and wildlife workers that he trained for the wildlife profession. They truly broke the mold when they made Dr. Speake

In Memory

Michael “Mike” Ray Vaughan

Longtime Assistant Unit Leader- Wildlife for the Virginia Unit, Michael “Mike” Ray Vaughan, passed away peacefully on Dec. 26, 2018 at a hospice facility in Raleigh, NC due to complications from mesothelioma. He was 74.
Mike was a professor emeritus at Virginia Tech and served as the Assistant Leader of the Virginia Cooperative Fisheries and Wildlife Research Unit, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences. During his 30 years at the Coop Unit, he contributed to more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and book chapters, and mentored and advised 45 graduate students, which he stated was one of his most important accomplishments.

A native of Hampton, Virginia, Mike was a veteran of the Vietnam War, honorably serving in the U.S. Air Force from 1962-1966. After the war, Mike used the GI bill to receive his BS in wildlife from North Carolina State University (1971). He received his MS from Oregon State University (1974) studying mountain goat ecology in the Wallawa Mountains of Oregon under Dr. Charlies Meslow. Mike’s toughness and dedication to wildlife conservation was evident back then, as his field work required wilderness survival skills, winter camping, hiking up snow-covered mountain peaks, and sitting for hours in the snow observing mountain goats. Mike then earned his PhD under Dr. Lloyd Keith from the University of Wisconsin, Madison (1979), where he studied how food shortages impacted experimental snowshoe hare populations in Alberta, Canada. His Journal of Wildlife Management publication on this research earned The Wildlife Society’s (TWS) Wildlife Publications Award in 1982.

In 1980, he was hired as an Assistant Leader of the coop unit and, in 1981, he initiated his first research project on American black bears (Ursus americanus) in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, USA. Although Mike studied a variety of wildlife, including white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, red wolves, clouded leopards, river cooters, and sea turtles, he was internationally known for his research on the American black bear, studying them, and other bear species, from 1981 until his retirement in 2010. Mike conducted bear research in Arizona, three wildlife refuges in North Carolina, two national forests and a national park in Virginia, and overseas in China and Europe.

In 1987, he established the Black Bear Research Center (BBRC) at Virginia Tech, where conflict female bears were kept in temporary captivity from late summer through the following spring, before being released back into the wild. The BBRC conducted ground-breaking research over more than 20 years into black bear hibernation, reproduction, physiology, cub fostering, and pre- and post-natal cub development. The quantity and uniqueness of the data collected at the BBRC has resulted in on-going data analysis and publications by Mike’s colleagues, including this article’s author.

In 1994, Mike initiated the Cooperative Alleghany Bear Study (CABS), a 10-year study encompassing two study areas in western Virginia that examined the ecology and demographics of a hunted black bear population. This study influenced bear management and research study design in Virginia and beyond. For example, population demographic data collected during CABS is still used as foundational data in by multiple southeastern states to track growth trends of black bear populations. Over the course of the 10-year
study, the team included 11 graduate students, more than 30 full time technicians and seasonal volunteers, state wildlife agency biologists, federal biologists, and Virginia Tech faculty members from 4 separate departments. Mike was the team leader and skillful at coordinating complicated project activities, as well as working with a diversity of people and recognizing the differing philosophies of agencies and organizations with a vested interest in black bears. Mike’s ability to listen to everyone and balance differing perspectives earned respect and praise from his students, colleagues, state agencies, federal agencies, NGOs, and even cranky bear hunters.

His applied research informed bear management, improved capture and handling techniques, identified new monitoring methods, led to advancements in bear rehabilitation and cub fostering, and immensely expanded our understanding of bear ecology. As Karen Noyce stated “Mike's insatiable curiosity about how it all works spawned some of the earliest research into the physiological ecology of bears, encouraging a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to understanding populations and behavior.”

During his career, Mike received numerous awards, including the TWS Virginia Chapter’s Henry S. Mosby Professional Award in 1990, which is given to a professional who has demonstrated significant contributions to wildlife. He also received the National Wildlife Federation Environmental Publication Award and the National Biological Service Performance Award.

Dr. Mike Pelton described Mike as a close friend and colleague, who was a persistent and passionate researcher, and had a sense of humor, love of the outdoors, and calm and positive manner. Karen Noyce described Mike as a trusted and kind colleague, and a ready friend to many and to her. His former students would describe Mike as an approachable and patient advisor, despite the many mistakes and mishaps we challenged him with. As a former student of Mike’s, I agree with them all and am thankful he was my graduate advisor, mentor, and close friend.

Mike retired in 2010 and moved to Moncure, NC, where he built a farm house on his wife’s family land. He and his wife, Lynn, joined his brother-in-law in the family business of pasture-raised cattle. His former students often joked that he worked longer and harder hours in retirement than during his wildlife career; he would just chuckle at the observation. He is survived by his wife, Lynn, son, two daughters, six grandchildren and his sister.

Send your News to:

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Issues of Coop Catch-up published quarterly
Your suggestions on topics/sections are welcome.

Cover-page:

Photographer: Colton Finch
Unit: Utah
Location: Logan Canyon, Utah
Details: Bonneville Cutthroat Study

Spring Photo Competition:

Topic: Wildflowers
Winner: Christopher Guy
Unit: Montana

Please see winning photo and honorable mention on the following pages.

Thanks to all who submitted photos!
1st Place: *Balsam Arrow Root*  (by Chistopher Guy, MT Unit)
Honorable Mention: *Blue Globe Thistle*  (by Christopher Guy, MT Unit)