



## **Sport Fish Division Director's Meritorious Service Award Excellence in Fisheries Management and Research**

### **Kristine Dunker**

Kristine Dunker has taken a fledgling invasive northern pike control program and has used her superior writing, networking, and leadership skills to transform it into a well-oiled machine that continues to make significant contributions to habitat restoration in Southcentral Alaska. Examples of her work include deployment of a pike suppression program in the Alexander Creek Drainage (the Chinook salmon stock is designated a stock of concern) that has allowed wild salmon to recolonize many areas of the drainage where they were extirpated. With Krissy's help, most invasive pike populations on the Kenai Peninsula have been removed and native fish populations restored in large areas such as at Stormy Lake within the Swanson River drainage, and the entirety of the 42-sq. mi Soldotna Creek drainage. A similar success story in Anchorage has occurred wherein most waters previously invaded by pike have been restored because of removal efforts.

Krissy has developed professional connections with numerous entities that help the Department further the goals within the Sport Fish Division's Strategic Plan and secured funding partnerships. This has included developing working partnerships with tribal governments, and state and federal agencies in the western United States, as well as several universities.

Krissy completed an Invasive Northern Pike Management Plan to guide the Department's pike control actions, which also facilitated applying and receiving project funds from non-State sources. Krissy formed a Regional invasive pike committee to prioritize research and control strategies; many of the highest priority projects have now been successfully implemented.

Krissy has coauthored scientific peer-reviewed papers on the diet of invasive pike in Alaska and the potential impact to salmon populations. Krissy was also the lead author for a recently published study that pioneered the use of environmental DNA to detect northern pike using only water samples from lakes, and coauthored another paper documenting the development and testing of a northern pike genetic marker. Krissy was sought by European academics to contribute a chapter about invasive pike for a book titled the "Biology and Ecology of Pike". Writing of this book required an international collaborative effort and her chapter will surely be referenced worldwide by many involved in invasive pike issues. If this weren't enough, Krissy has proven to be a



champion grant writer that has produced awards totaling millions of non-State of Alaska dollars to fund numerous invasive pike control projects in Southcentral AK. These programs have helped protect wild salmon populations and the salmon-centric industries that they support.

Although the control of invasive elodea is related to but outside the Department's responsibilities, all known elodea infestations on the Kenai Peninsula and some in the Anchorage area have been removed in large part thru Krissy's energy and partnerships. She seemingly has a knack for discovering new elodea infestations while conducting unrelated field work; so much so, that she has jokingly been called "the Christopher Columbus of elodea" by co-workers.



## **Sport Fish Division Director's 2019 Achievement Awards For Excellence in Fisheries Research**

### **Adam Reimer & Nick Decovich**

Adam Reimer and Nick Decovich pulled together up to 40 years of partial king salmon data from a variety of sources to better inform managers and the public on historic run size in discreet areas of the Susitna River drainage. One of the end-products of this cutting-edge analysis was a simplified escapement goal portfolio within the drainage, and in units of "all" fish that are much more easily related to harvest numbers than the partial counts that have been used for decades. This significant achievement in Fisheries Research is a huge improvement in the Department's assessment of Susitna River drainage king salmon stocks that will certainly facilitate more informed management for many years.

The completion of this analysis was really the first step. Adam and Nick made their creation happen by publishing a very thorough, detailed report that stood up to both internal and external peer review and enabled further outreach of their work thru oral reports and written summaries provided to local Advisory Committees, the Board of Fisheries, the annual Mat-Su Salmon Symposium, and other constituent groups. Through these outreach efforts their work and recommendations derived from it were eventually embraced by the angling public.

Hats off to Adam and Nick!



## Sport Fish Division Director's 2019 Achievement Awards For Excellence in Fisheries Research

### Phil Joy

Phil Joy has been a part of the Fisheries Research program since he started work with ADF&G in 2002 and has worked as a technician, Fisheries Biologist I, FBII, and is currently the Salmon Research FBIII for Region III, supervising three other biologists and 12 technicians. Phil's success has been largely due to the work ethic and dedication to the job that he has consistently shown. He has always embraced new responsibilities, quickly learned new skills, and has consistently put in significant extra time both working and learning the most current science on juvenile salmon research.

Phil has spearheaded and been instrumental in the development and success of our Juvenile Chinook Salmon program that addresses the management priorities in our region based on our most important sport fisheries. This program was started after the Chinook Salmon Research Initiative identified juvenile Chinook salmon research on the Copper River as an information gap that was needed in the production models used to establish the escapement goal. This multi-year project is extremely complex and logistically challenging, involving numerous locations (Cordova to Chistochina) spread throughout the drainage and up to 6 crews working simultaneously. Since its inception his team has tagged over 300,000 juvenile Chinook salmon over multiple brood years and the return information has already shown that it's an extremely successful tagging study. His leadership, attitude, and motivation to succeed are the reasons why this program has been such an accomplishment. In addition, of the systems in Alaska that have a successful juvenile abundance program, which are very few, Phil and his team have accomplished this task on the geographically largest system.

While leading this project he has also completed a PhD in Fisheries (based on his previous juvenile salmon work on the Unalakleet River) doing groundbreaking research that clearly shows how the abundance of other salmon species like pink and chum salmon influence the population dynamics of coho and Chinook salmon. This research has been published in two respected fisheries journals. This information will be very valuable in future understanding of salmon population dynamics when establishing escapement goals that the State of Alaska uses to manage important salmon fisheries.

Phil has mentored several younger biologists, helping them through managing their early leadership duties. He works cooperatively with many other fishery professionals (both inside and outside of ADF&G) on research projects, professional papers,



conferences, and escapement goal review and analysis efforts. He fosters positive working relationships and exceptional teamwork. He has largely trained himself in analytical software and advanced statistical techniques. The regional research program and the field of juvenile salmon research is stronger because of him. Phil has consistently accomplished work that is beyond the scope of his job and is deserving of recognition for his efforts and accomplishments.





## **Sport Fish Division Director's 2019 Achievement Award For Excellence in Fisheries Enhancement**

### **Megan Davis**

From starting her career as a volunteer at the Fort Richardson Hatchery to her current Fish Culturist II position at the Ruth Burnett Sport Fish Hatchery, Megan has continually challenged herself to accept new roles and responsibilities, learning and quickly excelling in all aspects of the fish culture profession.

Megan has quickly adapted to working at the RBSFH, learning new equipment and fish culture techniques. At the same time, she has brought knowledge and techniques learned at the WJHSFH and applied them when beneficial at the RBSFH. She has been an active participant in all aspects of the hatchery, continually pushing herself to learn and understand not only the aquaculture systems, but also learning about building management, DDC controls, personnel supervision, and routine maintenance requirements.

Since her arrival at the RBSFH, Megan has improved almost every aspect of hatchery operations. Highlights of her accomplishments include the following.

1. Compensating for the loss of two experienced fish culturist I positions in 3 months during the busiest time of the year. Megan volunteered for months to work additional hours, weekends and standby weeks to cover the loss of personnel while maintaining hatchery production goals. She changed or cancelled personal plans multiple times to meet the needs of the hatchery schedule. Megan was directly responsible for hiring and training both FCI replacements and a FWT II position in a short amount of time. She also took the lead in training the FWTII position assigned to the Tanana Valley Fisheries Center. During this difficult and challenging time, she continued her normal job duties and maintained a positive, upbeat attitude.
2. Coordinated the 2019 Arctic grayling egg take. 2019 was the first year where ADF&G assisted Michigan DNR's efforts to reintroduce Arctic grayling to Michigan by providing eggs to establish a captive brood stock in Michigan. This egg take was well outside the standard egg take in complexity and required an exceptional amount of coordination between hatchery staff, Michigan DNR staff and ADF&G regional staff. Her efforts led to a successful egg take with all production goals met for Region II, Region III and Michigan programs.



3. Megan instituted a positive change in all remote egg takes by embracing the delayed fertilization method for lake trout, Chinook and coho salmon. This led to the highest survivals on record for the RBSFH and may lead to reduced brood requests in the future, minimizing hatchery impacts on wild stocks while maintain production goals.
4. Megan assisted with planning and executing the first production lake trout egg take in almost 20 years, and the first time ever that ADF&G staff have induced triploidy in lake trout.
5. Megan has greatly improved the hatchery safety program, utilizing the knowledge gained in developing WJHSFH's safety program and instituting many of the same policies at the RBSFH. She regularly develops and leads monthly safety meetings, reinforces the importance of safety procedures with all staff and documents trainings to ensure compliance with OSHA regulations. This increased focus on safety protects hatchery staff from potential accidents and reduces the State's liability if an accident does occur.

Megan is motivated and dedicated to her job and her actions and work ethic directly benefit ADF&G and the anglers we serve. I can unequivocally attest that Megan improves everything around her and absolutely stands out as an exemplary employee and deserves to be recognized for her efforts.



## **Sport Fish Division Director's 2019 Achievement Award For Excellence in Communications & Outreach**

### **Molly McCarthy Cunfer**

Molly has been the Ship Creek Fisheries Center (SCFC) Supervisor for two years and has developed the center into a destination that attracts over 20,000 visitors each year. Through her efforts to develop informational panels and interactive displays, visitors of the William Jack Hernandez Sport Fish Hatchery leave with a better understanding of how Alaska's sport fisheries are managed and the role that enhancement plays in conservation of wild stocks and providing angler opportunity. Her approach to drawing people to the facility to tell our story are creative and innovative, including special public events such as Spooky Tails and the "Ice is Out Help Stock Trout". Molly has not limited her efforts to the SCFC and has been instrumental in developing the visitor space and programming at the Tanana Valley Fisheries Center as well.

Molly is passionate about teaching people how to fish and hunt and has gone above and beyond in creating angler recruitment, retention, and reactivation opportunities. From organizing an annual community fishing event and evening "how-to" fisheries forums each month, to taking small groups of military families and hatchery staff to learn how to fish on Fish Creek on her personal time, Molly always represents ADF&G in a professional manner that reflects well on the agency and an enthusiasm for fishing that is contagious. Furthermore, she has proven her skills as a collaborative team builder to help us accomplish the communication and outreach goals of the Division of Sport Fish Strategic Plan.





## **Sport Fish Division Director's 2019 Achievement Award For Excellence in Communications & Outreach**

### **Kyra Sherwood**

Kyra has been and remains an invaluable asset to statewide fisheries publications. Kyra did exceptional work over the past 2 years, singlehandedly maintaining the RTS Publications program.

She is an exceptional employee that willingly, efficiently, and thoroughly trained her new supervisor in all aspects of the publications process. Kyra singlehandedly trained her supervisor in all aspects of the fisheries division's publications process required to be a Publications Specialist – from copy editing techniques to invoicing to the peer review process, and all things in between. Beyond that, Kyra's handle on the management side of leading the publications program has set the publications program up for success! She willingly, easily and thoroughly shared the duties of coordinating printing invoices and orders, weekly and monthly tasks, and how to utilize the publications tracking database efficiently.

Kyra is integral to the excellence of the RTS Publications program and an invaluable asset. Kyra also possesses remarkable technical editing skills!



## **SPORT FISH DIVISION 2019 AWARD RECIPIENTS**

### **Sport Fish Division Director's Special Recognition Award Outstanding Contribution to the Firearms & Wildlife Safety Program Implementation Project**

The purpose of the ADF&G Firearms and Wildlife Safety Policy was to provide a high level of employee safety by establishing standardized training, equipment, and field procedures to minimize risks associated with working in wildlife habitat and handling firearms. The Department's new policy was effective May 24, 2017, and all provisions of this policy needed to be implemented no later than January 1, 2019. All employees and volunteers must complete the department's Basic Firearms Safety Course and demonstrate proficiency by passing range qualifications to be authorized to carry firearms. Thereafter, completion of the Firearms Refresher Course and range qualifications must be completed annually to remain authorized to carry firearms. The policy also requires that all employees and volunteers who work in wildlife habitat must complete the department's Wildlife Safety Course. If the employee does not pass the firearms proficiency test, then bear spray is the primary bear deterrent they must carry in wildlife habitat. The course must be repeated every three years or less. Practice with inert bear spray is required annually for anyone who relies on bear spray as their primary deterrent. Practice with inert bear spray is recommended annually for anyone who carries bear spray as a backup deterrent.

### **Region I: Jeff Williams, Patrick Fowler, Matt Catterson, Phil Richards, Rich Chapell, Nathan Frost, Craig Schwanke, and Stephen Todd**

Jeff Williams, Patrick Fowler, Matt Catterson, and Phil Richards received Basic Firearms and Level I Firearms Instructor training in Fairbanks, AK, October 15-17, 2018; and, Rich Chapell (FBIII), Nathan Frost (FBI), Craig Schwanke (FBIII), Stephen Todd (FBI) received their instructor training in Juneau, Alaska, March 4-8, 2019. The Department's new firearms and wildlife safety policy required staff to be range qualified to use a 12-gauge Remington® 870™ shotgun as well as the use of bear spray by January 1, 2019. Up until this time, very little effort and progress was made towards meeting the obligations of the Department's new firearms and wildlife safety policy in Region 1.

Soon after the October class, Jeff Williams assumed the role of the Firearms zone coordinator for Southeast Alaska. With other new Southeast instructors, he started organizing materials and efforts to help staff meet policy requirements by providing



training in Juneau and in field locations. Their initiative, diligence, ingenuity and leadership skills demonstrated over the course of a few weeks was outstanding. In addition to their regular job duties, they organized training efforts covering a large number of staff, across four divisions within the Department, to provide training to meet the Basic Firearms & Wildlife Safety policy requirements across the Southeast region. If it had not been for the efforts of these individuals, Southeast Alaska staff would not have met the training needs prior to the start of the 2019 field season. These individuals provided two Wildlife Safety courses, three Basic Firearms classes, and one Level-1 Firearms Instructor course in Juneau. In one four-day period, 52 staff were provided Wildlife Safety, 61 staff were provided Basic Firearms instruction and 14 staff were provided Level 1 Firearms Instruction. Four of those staff receiving Level 1 Firearms Instruction in turn traveled to field locations to cover additional Sport Fish staff that were unable to attend in Juneau. Our training staff conducted themselves in a professional manner and were well received by students and Level 2 Firearms trainers. They were organized, well versed in the training, and approachable to all those attending regardless of their experience level. Jeff, Patrick, Matt, Phil, Rich, Nathan, Craig, and Stephen demonstrated outstanding skill, teamwork, and cooperation and led the Southeast region in fulfilling the training requirements on time.

## **Region II: Mike Booz, Cody Jacobson, Phil Stacey, Andrew Waldo, Colton Lipka, Lee Borden, and Mark Witteveen**

Mike Booz (FBIII), Cody Jacobson (FBI), Phil Stacey (FWTIII), Andrew Waldo (FBI), Colton Lipka (FBIII), Lee Borden (FBIII), and Mark Witteveen (FBII) each received Basic Firearms and Level I Firearms Instructor training in 2018 and 2019. The Department's new firearms and wildlife safety policy required staff to be range qualified to use a 12-gauge Remington® 870™ shotgun as well as trained in the use of bear spray by January 1, 2019. Up until this time, very little effort and progress was made towards meeting the obligations of the Department's new firearms and wildlife safety policy in the Sport Fish Division's Region 2.

After being certified as Firearms Instructors and in addition to their regular job duties, these instructors began the daunting and unrewarding task of procuring class supplies, coordinating a class list, arranging for a location, etc., with the goal of making operations in wildlife habitat a safer workplace for staff and compliance with the policy. Their initiative, diligence, ingenuity and leadership skills were outstanding. They organized training efforts for a large number of regional staff, including those in remote locations and some from other divisions. If it had not been for the *voluntary* efforts of these individuals, Region 2 would not have met training requirements prior to the beginning of the 2019 field season. They proved to be well organized, well versed in the training, and approachable to all those attending regardless of their experience



level. Each demonstrated outstanding skill, teamwork, and cooperation and led the Southcentral region in fulfilling the training requirements on time.

### **Region III: Mark Sommerville, Kelly Mansfield, and Matt Albert**

Mark Sommerville, Kelly Mansfield, and Matt Albert received Basic Firearms and Level I Firearms Instructor training, as well as Armorer certification, in Anchorage, AK, in the spring of 2018. In addition, Matt and Kelly became certified range officers to be able to conduct shooting tests at the Fairbanks State Troopers Range. The hard work and extra time spent by these instructors ensured that Region 3 staff had an opportunity to meet the obligations of the Department's new firearms and wildlife safety policy prior to the implementation deadline.

Between the time of that training and May of 2019, Mark, Kelly, and Matt inspected and serviced 26 shotguns in the region, decommissioned and prepared for surplus 23 non-compliant firearms, and conducted 3 Basic Firearms classes, training 46 employees, of which 44 successfully passed the shooting test. These instructors accomplished all of this on top of all their normal duties, and willingly took on this extra work and responsibility. They conducted the training in a very well organized and professional manner, and student comments were virtually all positive about the learning experience. These instructors were especially adept at teaching and coaching several students who had almost no firearms experience and were somewhat intimidated by the shooting test.

### **Hatcheries: Scott Cunfer**

Scott Cunfer readily volunteered to assist with implementation of the policy and served as range manager, chief range safety officer and armorer. He assisted with classes and serviced countless firearms.

### **Research and Technical Services: Leah Ellis**

Leah Ellis readily volunteered to assist with implementation of the policy, by serving as an armorer, teaching two classes with 17 staff that qualified, and serviced countless firearms.