

In Memoriam

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the wildlife profession in general lost four colleagues on Tuesday, January 5, 2010. Three CDFG wildlife biologists and a contract helicopter pilot died in a crash while conducting an aerial deer survey in a remote section of Madera County. Kevin O'Connor (Senior Wildlife Biologist), Clu Cotter (Associate Wildlife Biologist) and Tom Stolberg (Scientific Aid) lost their lives in the crash, which also claimed Mike Donovan of Landells Aviation.



Kevin O'Connor earned his B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Biology from UC Davis in 1993. He then conducted field studies of Spotted Owls, Pine Martens, Fishers, and other wildlife, and implemented wildlife habitat improvement projects as a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Forest Service in Central and Northern California. He brought this experience to DFG in 1997 when he was hired as a Wildlife Biologist to manage Ecological Reserves in the San Joaquin Valley. From 2000 to 2005, Kevin worked as an Environmental Scientist in the Timberlands Conservation Program, where he reviewed Timber Harvest Plans, continued focused studies on Great Gray Owls, and effectively applied scientific information to better management of timber harvest and wildlife in the Central Sierra Nevada.

In 2005, Kevin became the Senior Wildlife Biologist Supervisor for DFG's Central Region, responsible for nine counties in the San Joaquin Valley and southern Sierra Nevada. He led 15 staff in a variety of highly effective work in wildlife management, lands management, public education, and providing hunting opportunities. Kevin was admired for his energy, enthusiasm, field skills, ability to motivate, and dedication to public service and the wildlife profession. Kevin is survived by his wife and four children.

Clu Cotter earned a B.S. in Ecology and Systematic Biology from CalPoly, San Luis Obispo in 1990. After a year as a Wildlife Technician with the U.S. Forest Service and a year as a Staff Analyst with the Fresno County Planning Department, Clu joined the California Department of Water Resources, San Joaquin District. From 1992 to 1999, Clu rose through the ranks of Environmental Scientist, conducting endangered species surveys, preparing environmental documents, and leading habitat





restoration projects. Clu joined DFG's Central Region, in 1999 as an Associate Wildlife Biologist. There, he assumed increasing responsibilities for wildlife management in the area east of Fresno, where his duties included public outreach, deer herd management, habitat management, and special studies of carnivores in the western Sierra Nevada. He was known for his calm professional demeanor, good humor, field skills, and endurance, and was often called on to hike or ski into rugged country to locate and retrieve radio-telemetry equipment or remote cameras. Clu is survived by his wife and two children.

Tom Stolberg worked with the Boy Scouts of America and was river guide before earning a B.A. in History from Humboldt State University in 2003; he was also a Certified Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician. Tom joined DFG in 2004 as a Scientific Aid in the Wildlife Management office in Fresno. Tom was the first person most people talked to when contacting Wildlife Management for information on hunting opportunities and on wildlife, in general. Tom also assisted with wildlife habitat projects, capturing deer for telemetry studies, and in managing public hunting opportunities. The public and Department staff enjoyed Tom's intelligence, wit, and attention to detail. Tom is survived by his parents, a sister and a brother.



Mike Donovan was a Navy veteran and pilot from Palm Springs who had been flying since 1964. He was a seasoned professional that other pilots respected and looked up to. His career experience included three combat tours in Vietnam, and work as a Naval flight instructor. He also flew for Loma Linda Hospital, Mercy Air, Western Helicopters, and Landells Aviation, where he participated in dozens of aerial surveys for mule deer and mountain sheep and transported hundreds of tons of tools and materials for use in wildlife habitat enhancement projects. Mike also supported the White Mountain Research Station out of Bishop (California) during winter, and during the summer months he fought forest fires throughout the western United States. In southern California, Mike performed numerous rescues with the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit (photo) and the Palm Springs Mounted Police. One of the most challenging and demanding jobs that Mike piloted was for the Palm Springs Tramway in the

San Jacinto Mountains. Don Landells was the man that made the helicopter program work for the building of the Tramway. Don once said that the work on the Tramway was so demanding that only a few pilots were able to handle it; Mike was one of those pilots. Mike's family describe him as a good man, experienced pilot, father, grandfather and husband. He leaves behind his wife of 45 years, two sons, and five grandchildren. and a wife of 45 years. Mike was an avid cyclist who rode his bike three or four times a week.

Aviation accidents have long been recognized as being the greatest hazard facing, as well as the leading cause of accidental deaths among, natural resource professionals. This recent accident took the lives of three young, energetic, and dedicated resource management professionals, and a skilled and dedicated pilot that had accumulated many thousands of hours of flight time and whose skills contributed greatly to our knowledge of mountain sheep and mule deer in California. Each will be missed by their families and friends, and by their professional colleagues. Their efforts and sacrifice should, however, also be appreciated by all of those who benefit from the day-to-day activities that are carried out by those that have dedicated their lives to the conservation of wildlife. The Editors of *California Fish and Game* acknowledge all of those who contributed to the information contained herein.

The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come. To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle. Perhaps the wildness we fear is the pause between our own heartbeats, the silent space that says we live only by grace. Wilderness lives by this same grace. Wild mercy is in our hands.

– *Terry Tempest Williams*