

Jim Olterman
Colorado Division of Wildlife Biologist
1945-2002

I first met Jim Olterman in 1979, at a Wildlife Commission meeting in Denver. He was the Senior Terrestrial Biologist for the Southwest region and I was a District Wildlife Manager Trainee. I remember two things about the meeting; the first was he was wearing a lime-green leisure suit that was incredibly ugly, the second was his poise and ability to discuss the relationship, or lack thereof, between elk numbers in the Gunnison basin and the level of elk damage on a rancher\Commissioner's ranch. It was the first of many situations I watched Jim work his magic by combining his depth of knowledge, with intense passion for wildlife, sprinkled with some southern charm. I also came to realize that one reason I liked him so much was I found someone in the DOW who dressed worse than I did.

Jim Olterman passed away on 4 September 2002 while piloting a DOW plane stocking fish in the Sangre de Christo Mountains. His entire career was a series of successes even at the very end when his actions as a pilot saved the passenger who was riding with him, Brandon White, a DOW hatchery technician.

Jim was born in the hills of east Tennessee, and if you listened carefully to him speak his "hillbilly twang" came out on occasion. During his youth, Jim gained a deep appreciation for the outdoors in general and wildlife in particular while hunting and fishing and exploring the backwoods on his Aunt Floy's farm in rural Tennessee. He enrolled at Georgia Tech and after about 30 days he showed back up at home complaining about "all those people with slide rules". He headed west and somehow ended up at Colorado State University where he graduated in 1968 with a degree in Wildlife Biology. After a stint in the military, where he learned to fly, he enrolled at Oregon State and received his Masters in wildlife science. In 1972 he became part of the largest Division of Wildlife DWM trainee class and was assigned to work in Ridgeway south of Montrose. Jim then moved on to become a terrestrial biologist and in 1977 became the Senior Biologist for the Southwest Region. Along the way, Jim parlayed his outstanding flying skills into also becoming the pilot/Senior Biologist for the DOW in the southwest. Finally in 1996 Jim inherited the rest of the western slope and became the Senior Biologist for the West Region.

Jim showed a great deal of pride and dedication to wildlife by maintaining his peace officer commission during his 28-year career. He looked forward to working the annual big game seasons and meeting his constituents. Jim and his wife Robin were the first husband and wife law enforcement team in the DOW.

Jim's career accomplishments were many; he took a lead role in projects such as desert bighorn sheep restoration, Canada lynx reestablishment, protection of winter range for deer and elk in the southwest and at the time of his death he was working on transplanting Columbian sharp-tailed grouse to the southwest a project which was completed this fall. Jim was passionate about wildlife and never dodged an opportunity

to speak to the press, public or policy makers about his views on protecting wildlife and habitat. He had the uncanny ability to dissect complicated issues into understandable, point by point items. He was particularly passionate about the impacts of public land grazing on wildlife, not allowing people to commercialize wildlife and the disease threats posed to wildlife by game ranching. He was also a consummate pilot; his skill and attention to safety were evident to all who rode with him.

Jim's passing leaves a big and irreplaceable void. The DOW and everyone who cares about wildlife, particularly on the western slope, will miss his knowledge, his advocacy and his ability to reach out to so many constituents. His three children, Lara, Sally and Tandy lost a dad and his wife Robin, the former DWM in Cortez, has lost her best friend and husband. The solace I have found is that Jim certainly left Colorado and its wildlife a better place than he found it and he died doing exactly what he loved doing.

Rick Kahn
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