

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
October 11, 2006**

The October 11, 2006 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners Meeting Room at the Courthouse, 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

**Regular Members Present:**

Gary Hausler, At-Large	Jim Dawson, USFS
Kenny McDaniel, BLM	Greg Peterson, GCSA
Sue Navy, HCCA	Ken Stahlnecker, NPS
John Scott, NRCS	Al Pfister, USFWS
Amy Seglund, DOW, Alternate in for J Wenum	
Jim Starr, BOCC, Alternate in for Paula Swenson	

**Staff Members Present:**

Jim Cochran, Sage-grouse Conservation Coordinator  
Keri Hodgkin, Administrative Assistant III

**Alternate Members Present in Audience:** Sandy Guerrieri, GCSA  
Mike Jackson, USFS

**Guest:** Dr. Jessica Young, WSC

Others present as listed in text.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Meeting was called to order by Chairman Stahlnecker at 10:05 a.m.

**QUORUM & PUBLIC NOTICE CONFIRMED:** Proof of publication presented by Keri Hodgkin. Quorum and public notice was confirmed by Chairman Stahlnecker.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** Jim Cochran said there was a possibility that Congressman Salazar would stop by. Greg Peterson asked for an update from Cochran on the funding request he submitted during the last five minutes of the regular meeting. Agenda was approved as amended.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** Sue Navy requested one spelling change to a name in the August 16, 2006 minutes. She asked Jim Cochran about his comment at the top of page five, which says "Cochran reminded the group to look at the increase as a trend." She asked if he said we were looking for a trend and not that this increase was a trend. Cochran answered that he probably said what was in the minutes adding "we encourage people to look at these changes in population as trends, whether they be up or down." He said the caveat implication is that the number is less important than the trend. Navy said it reads that he would consider the two years as a trend and she thinks of a trend as something longer than two years. He said the numbers indicate that the trend is up. Navy said "I don't know that a trend is two years so I would just say that to you." Chairman asked if that was a suggested change for the minutes, and Navy said no.

**Moved** by John Scott, seconded by Sue Navy to approve the August 16, 2006 minutes as corrected. Motion carried unanimously.

**PRESENTATION BY DR. JESSICA YOUNG- Gunnison Sage-grouse Conservation Priority Regions in the Gunnison Basin:** Chairman Stahlnecker said this document was put together by the Gunnison Basin Working Group Research Sub-Committee. Dr. Young asked

the group what they were trying to get out of this presentation, so she could cover the things the group needs to know. Greg Peterson answered “what the overall goal was when the group undertook this task and how the end result did or didn’t meet that goal.” Sandy Guerrieri said this group is working on a strategic plan and needs to know what is prioritized in this document that is county related and can be put into the strategic plan. Al Pfister asked what information was used as the basis for the prioritization.

Young said it’s been about three years since they worked on this document. She gave a Power Point presentation. She said the most common function of the meetings for a few years was for researchers to gather and report out what they were doing. The intent was to keep the Federal Agencies, the private institutional researchers and state researchers all on the same page of understanding. They realized that they had a group that could also try to synthesize existing information. She discussed who was involved and resources that were used.

Young said that there had been several studies done and over 100 birds that had been tracked. They used map overlays to compile all the information they had. They had lek location information as well as historical highs and rate of decline information. They looked at where the birds were going for brood rearing, where they were nesting, and where they were moving in the winter and fall. They looked at lek activities and lek trends. They also looked at habitat mapping status so they could recommend changes. They considered current habitat conditions in each region. They asked “are we at or exceeding the goals that were set for the local conservation plan?” She said they had to know what type of habitat improvement projects had already occurred as well as where conservation easements were.

Young said that the process used to come up with the end product was to start on the east end of the basin and work west. They assigned a conservation priority to six different categories; research, monitoring, habitat improvement, protection, public land use management and private land management. Knowing they had limited funds and time, they determined the rankings (high, medium and low) for each category by consensus decisions. The 15 polygon boundaries were based on similarities/dissimilarities and natural & management boundaries where they made sense. They based the high rankings on the question, “If someone us gave money today day where would we put it?”

The group mapped by region, showing the priorities for each as well as by action, showing which regions fall under each action. Dr. Young cautioned that the areas shown without priorities in them were not considered unimportant but may have been, for example, areas with habitat in great condition, or areas with a lot of easements already in place. The group assessed what the historical prevalence and the probability getting back there was in each region. They looked for areas that were still core areas. She showed the highest male counts ever recorded, which gives a hint of potential, and what was categorized as different levels of decline, based on the highest count compared to a three year count average. She cautioned that the stable category might be because the lek is newly discovered.

Dr. Young concluded by saying:

- The polygons may not be shown as high priority because of actions already done.
- This is a dynamic, ever changing document. She said “please don’t use this as a limiting document.
- This document was intended to help focus effort.
- This document was arrived at by consensus of the Research Sub-committee in advisement of the Working Group

Navy asked Dr. Young if the group should look at the document as priorities for funding. Dr. Young answered “action and funding”.

**CONGRESSMAN SALAZAR:** Congressman John Salazar, aide John Whitney and Chief of Staff Ronnie Carlton joined the meeting at 11:00 a.m. The Congressman commended the committee for the work they’ve done, the cooperative effort, and for taking a proactive stance to keep the sage-grouse off the listing by taking that collective stance. He said the request he made last year for \$450,000 in appropriations was turned down but he will request it again this year. He said budgets are pretty tight at the Federal level. He said he wasn’t sure what other resources could be tapped and that they took a hard look at the Forestry Legacy Funding for conservation easements for some of these properties. He asked what they could do for the group.

Jim Starr asked if there was a way to direct money to the local Federal agency offices with it earmarked for priority spending for this particular effort. Congressman Salazar said he’s been slammed for trying to earmark things for this district, but he would look into it. He said that it may be better used if directed to this Committee. Gary Hausler agreed with Starr, noting that when some of the private land improvements were done by the Stockgrowers’ Association next to BLM ground, BLM had restraints that kept them from participating more extensively. Salazar requested that each agency put together a proposal stating what amount of money they would need to do proposed projects without any fat- just basic needs. He said that maybe this could be a portion of the 2007 Farm Bill. Ron Carlton, Salazar’s Chief of Staff said those agency proposals would need to be submitted by February. Mike Jackson asked if that would be for 2008 funding. The Congressman answered yes.

Navy asked if the request which was put into the DOW last year could be submitted to the federal government as well. John Scott said it was part of what was turned in. Navy asked if that would work for what Salazar was requesting. Cochran said it doesn’t get to the required level they need. Scott said his agency can get funding through their programs since sage-grouse is a high priority and said the question is can they keep those programs funded at a level that allows extra dollars for the sage-grouse. He said that is where the public needs to write letters of support or give feedback if they think the Farm Bill should be reallocated, if the funding for those programs should be continued and at what level.

Cochran said they have been trying to work with NRCS to get them to allow land owners to participate in their Environmental Quality Incentive Program and use those monies on public lands where there is a tie to private lands, such as an allotment holder. He said that as the 2007 Farm Bill is discussed that should be on the table, since sage-grouse don’t know where the fence-lines are. He noted the difficulty of trying to work on a landscape level and continually having to stop at property lines, adding “That does not allow them to do the best they can for the species, the habitat or the allotment holder.” Congressman Salazar said the administration is cutting these programs and if they could have the requests in from the agencies even by November they could make a stronger case.

Al Pfister agreed that being able to work across boundaries is one of the big challenges, saying if it could somehow be worked in there it would really benefit the species. Greg Peterson thanked Congressman Salazar for his support with the CCAA process, which is moving forward. He said private lands are critical to sage-grouse habitat and are directly linked to Forest Service and BLM lands. He said those all need to be recognized as inter-related and the more we can work towards that with one management scheme the better off we’ll be. He said the CCAA process brought that to light and is the cornerstone of everything we’re trying to do.

Congressman Salazar again commended the group for their efforts and for the cooperation between the environmental groups, private land owners, state agencies and federal agencies. He added “you don’t see this kind of cooperation every where you go.” Peterson reiterated the importance of needing to be able to fund viable agricultural conservation easements that tie in all the things being talked about and protect the habitat for sage-grouse as well as other species. He said that if we fund viable, working agriculture then that will continue to be the cornerstone of what people enjoy about the western slope. Congressman Salazar said he believed the conservation titles will be preserved and hopefully enhanced. He said they are working hard to expand the energy title in the Farm Bill because he believes agricultural has always been a cornerstone of this country.

Pfister said they can provide more money to private land owners and other entities when they have listed species, and one challenge is there’s not as much available for more proactive work with unlisted species. He said the agencies are faced with putting the funds where the priorities are. McDaniel agreed and said that last year they received funding for every project they asked for and this year they didn’t get any. The Congressman said the frank reality is that the federal deficit is almost 8.5 trillion and they have to be responsible for the budget and make priority choices. He said the leadership in the Ag Committee made huge cuts at the request of the President which he felt was irresponsible. “If we want to balance our budget and become energy independent we have to fund agricultural programs and make sure the energy provision of this bill is a good provision with expanded funding.”

Sandy Guerrieri thanked the Congressman for coming and said that Gunnison is unique community of people who pull together from all types of groups and work well together. She asked him to remember this community whenever funding is available.

Navy mentioned that the Land Preservation Board has done really well for about eight years and are now at a crossroads on how to spend what little amount they have. Salazar said funding that comes back here is not wasted. He said his door is always open to this group and asked if they could have those proposals from the agencies. Chairman Stahlnecker said the group will definitely discuss that and thanked the Congressman for stopping by and for his support.

**QUESTIONS FOR DR. JESSICA YOUNG:** McDaniel asked for clarification on something she said about this group updating the Priority Regions document discussed earlier. She understood that this group would take that document and form a Strategic Plan. McDaniel said he hopes everyone understands that the Research Sub-Committee has the experts who are able to update the priorities. Dr. Young agreed that it really does take a lot of hands on familiarity with what is going on out on the ground to accomplish what they accomplished.

Chairman Stahlnecker said he thinks it is the Research Sub-Committee’s responsibility to continue to update this document. He said that as this group uses it and new updates come out of that conversation those are things the Research Sub-Committee can in turn use when updating the document. Pfister asked how readily available the information used to compose this document is so that this committee doesn’t reinvent the wheel. Young answered that some of it is available but a lot of discussions over several months weren’t available in reports or documents. She said rather than bring the old stuff forward this group would probably want to truly update the report. Scott said they didn’t have a lot of private land owners at the table during that process and it’s important for other people to look at it and have their input to make it a better document. He said, “It’s a great start, now how can we keep it moving forward?”

Jim Dawson said the Research Sub-Committee should consider this document a success because of what has been accomplished as a result of the document. He said the real question is how those successes are tracked to be considered in any future deliberation regarding the bird. Pfister said that Amy Seglund is in the process of compiling a database for tracking all of that data and the December 8<sup>th</sup> meeting with all the local working groups is to discuss that database. The tracking database is categorized similar to the PECE Policy categories so they can have an idea of successes and failures. He added that this information would be evaluated in any future listing decisions. Dr. Young said that Page 4 of the Priority Regions document does give a hint of what the Research Sub-Committee thought success might look like. Pfister said looking at the effectiveness of each individual part and then looking at it in a cumulative sense will be a determining factor in whether any species gets listed.

Starr asked if the Research Sub-Committee has the technique to know at what point there is a shift from a positive overall aspect of survival to a negative. Dr. Young said they had those discussions about development, recreation and things they felt had an impact but didn't spend a lot of time writing those down in an effort to avoid finger pointing and keep it a positive document. Congressman Salazar asked if they had done any assessment on how many dollars it would take to show the whole area as a positive shift. She answered that the document his office received from them last year was a very thoughtful, prioritized list of how one million dollars could be spent. She noted that there were a lot of things taken off the list that could have taken it to tens of millions, but the million could really turn some issues in this basin around.

Navy asked Congressman Salazar if there were other people in Congress who would be willing to help push this forward. He answered "Yes. Lots. We just have to look at what the resources are and who we can go to." He said that was one of the attempts last year with the Endangered Species Act reform. He said it was a bi-partisan effort to try to create an incentive program to be proactive instead of reactive. He added that it shouldn't be a tool that's obstructionist but should be utilized to get all people on board. Hausler said that while we are always looking for funds, one change that wouldn't cost anything and would be very helpful is to find a way to allow agencies to work together across lines. Congressman Salazar said he would welcome any recommendations the group might have.

**ADJOURN:** Chairperson Ken Stahlnecker adjourned the regular meeting at 11:40 a.m. The group then met until 2:00 for a work session.

**Certification of Approval:**

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Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

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Keri Hodgin, Administrative Assistant II