

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 10, 2007**

The January 10, 2007 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

Regular Members Present:

Gary Hausler, At-Large	Erich Ferchau, At-Large/Development Community
Kenny McDaniel, BLM	J Wenum, DOW
Jim Starr, Gunnison County BOCC	Sue Navy, HCCA
Ken Stahlnecker, NPS	Al Pfister, USFWS- via phone
Jim Dawson, USFS	Amy Seglund, DOW- via phone

Staff Members Present:

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

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 10:20 a.m.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Approval of December 13, 2006 minutes was moved to the next meeting's agenda. J Wenum requested an addition of watchable wildlife under item #6.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Moved by Sue Navy, seconded by Gary Hausler to re-elect the existing Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary to the same offices for 2007. Motion passed unanimously. Chairperson- Ken Stahlnecker, Vice-Chairperson- John Scott, Secretary- Greg Peterson

SUB-COMMITTEE REVIEW: Chairman Stahlnecker confirmed that the lists of appointed sub-committee members in packets were accurate and noted a need to maintain both sub-committees. Jim Cochran said that this does not preclude other committee members from attending the sub-committee meetings.

Moved by Sue Navy, seconded by Jim Starr to re-appoint all current sub-committee members and to continue the two sub-committees. Motion passed unanimously.

Habitat Assessment Sub-Committee: Ken Stahlnecker, Lars Santana, Greg Peterson, Kenny McDaniel, and Al Pfister.

Strategic Plan Sub-Committee: Sandy Guerrieri, Erich Ferchau, John Scott, and Mike Jackson

Erich Ferchau asked if new sub-committees were needed to deal with the implementation of items identified in the strategic plan. He said the group needs to address who will be doing and tracking completion of projects. Sue Navy thought those responsible for the projects will need to make sure they get implemented. Chairman Stahlnecker didn't think the Strategic Committee would directly implement most projects, but would more likely act as an over-site committee to assure implementation. Kenny McDaniel agreed that this committee could have the pertinent agencies report back to the Committee on implementation of projects. Cochran suggested a standing agenda item for that feedback mechanism.

Ferchau asked what can be done so a land owner who wants to do something with their land to benefit the sage-grouse easily knows who to go to. Cochran suggested that he was the central contact point for the public because his job is sage-grouse specific, he's developing a resource data-base, and he can easily coordinate meetings with agencies and other contacts. McDaniel agreed that Cochran is the point of contact for the County. Ferchau noted that when the general public has to deal with government, they have to go through time consuming processes. He said this needs to be an expedited process and the group needs to anticipate what needs to be done, be prepared and be progressive. Gary Hausler suggested some type of outreach by the County, such as a press release, saying the public can contact Jim Cochran. Jim Starr asked if the group would oversee implementation or have a sub-committee do it. Navy said she didn't see a need for a sub-committee to do that. J Wenum agreed and added that the individual entities represented in the Strategic Committee would be responsible for the implementation. Chairman Stahlnecker agreed and said that the group holds each other accountable for doing that.

Navy asked if the National Park Service was still doing education outreach for younger students and Chairman Stahlnecker answered yes. There was some discussion about the program. Cochran said the Gunnison Conservation District has proposed some educational programs and does a poster contest. Cochran handed out a document about the Colorado Youth Corp Association, which has an office in Grand Junction. Chairman Stahlnecker asked if Ferchau was okay with the approach of the Strategic Committee acting as oversight to those responsible for implementation of projects. Ferchau answered yes.

UPDATE- GUNNISON COUNTY PROCEEDINGS FOR FURTHER REGULATIONS REGARDING GUNNISON-GROUSE: Cochran reported that the Planning Commission approved recommendation of LUR amendments to the Board of Commissioners (BOCC). They are tentatively scheduled to be presented to the BOCC on January 23. The BOCC will then schedule a Public Hearing if they want to consider the recommendations of the Planning Commission. An incentive process for 35 acre and larger parcels is still being discussed. The County is keeping it separate from the LUR. Ferchau asked if the County is seeking input on that incentive process. Cochran said it's still in rough draft, but he will send it out to the entire committee for input when they have a better draft finished. He said the County would appreciate ideas.

UPDATE ON WATCHABLE WILDLIFE: J Wenum said a lot of birders come internationally to see grouse because they are unique. He noted an increase in requests for photo opportunities (ops). He met with Dr. Pat Magee (Sisk-a-dee) and Sandy Borthwick (BLM) to discuss whether or not to approve the photo ops. They agreed that it is not worth the effort needed to make the necessary arrangements for staffing the few professional requests they have had. Wenum said that photo ops and sound recordings can be pretty sensitive because of the need to get extremely close to the bird. He said it can be done, but requires a tight protocol which is adhered to. Wenum added that the previously developed protocol which BLM has utilized seems okay with one exception. He and Borthwick would recommend that these activities only be allowed later in April, to minimize activity during the peak of the lekking period. He asked if it would be appropriate for a sub-committee or the Local Working Group to address refining the protocols in place.

He also discussed the Waunita Watchable Wildlife site, which is a developed site, accessible off the county road and open to the public for about a month and a half. He said the protocols in place there seem to be reasonable. He said the Division of Wildlife (DOW) issues a permit to Sisk-a-dee who then deals with the commercial users. Wenum added that the biggest issue there is the distance from the birds. Navy said she thinks protecting the bird is paramount and

agreed that there should not be commercial use until after the mating season. Wenum also voiced a concern that if they say yes to the commercial photo requests, then word will get out and demand will increase. Amy Seglund said that there are rumors of some birders sneaking on the leks in Crawford.

Kenny McDaniel cautioned that if a 'maverick' type is told no and decides to go out and do it anyway- then there is no protocol being used. Wenum agreed that was a legitimate concern and added that private land viewing can be another problem. Cochran suggested adding the private land viewing discussion to the next strategic plan work session. Wenum said there is a need to educate people on viewing protocol. Seglund noted that in Utah they give an educational lek tour each year, and have noticed people bringing other birders back and sneaking them out on the lek. Wenum said that's part of the reason for closely guarding the exact lek locations.

Jim Starr asked if something should be done to get educational information out to private land owners to try and avoid negative impacts to the bird. Cochran felt the Strategic Plan should have a component which addresses lek viewing on public and private land with recommended way to address both. He said most private land owners with leks on their property are very aware of the implications of affecting the population of the sage-grouse by allowing people to view the leks up close. Navy asked if the Certificate of Inclusion (CI) could address this issue. Al Pfister said that would be up to the land owner. Hausler said most land owners who have leks on their property are already concerned about this issue. He said they should be contacted by staff and didn't think it should be a formal, complicated process. Chairman Stahlnecker agreed that this issue should be discussed as part of the Strategic Plan.

ROAD CLOSURE UPDATE: Cochran said a non-expiring, amended road closure resolution will be sent to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for re-adoption with a recommended date change of May 15th to reopen the roads. This date will correspond with BLM's opening dates. BLM is done installing the new gates, and has reinforced some of the existing ones. County staff will meet next week to finalize the contact list of private land owners who will be effected and will coordinate a single list of the roads with BLM which will go out to the public. The County will have BLM's combinations and information and BLM will have the County's so the public can go to one or the other for information.

Cochran said they are already seeing antler shed hunters. Navy asked if the group should appeal to the Wildlife Commission again about the shed hunting season. Cochran thought it would be logical to discuss it with them again strictly from the sage-grouse perspective. Hausler agreed that it should be pursued by this committee. Cochran said he would get it on the February agenda so formal action could be taken. Erich Ferchau asked if the issue was the lekking season specifically. Wenum said the request was primarily intended to minimize the impacts during the breeding season and the attempt to extend it to protect the nesting season was part of what convoluted the issue. Ferchau cautioned imposing on the public's interest to utilize public lands. Wenum said that the antler shed hunters are having a bigger impact than ever on the bird, because they are using GPS to systematically grid and disturb huge areas of land. Chairman Stahlnecker added that the animals are shedding antlers in sage-grouse habitat which is bringing this particular activity into the lek areas. Ferchau said you have to clarify and isolate certain activities and figure out how to manage those, and be careful saying public land isn't for public use during these months because of the impact. The group agreed to have this issue put on the February agenda.

FEDERAL BUDGET REQUEST TO CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION: Cochran referred to a packet item which was the work John Scott did on refining the Habitat

Improvement Project and Research Program. He noted that comments in the right column were Sandy Borthwick's, who was very involved in writing the original version for the Local Working Group. Cochran said that they are short and concise and usable for grant applications and that they conform to the Committee's idea of what should be submitted. Hausler asked McDaniel what BLM would have to do internally if funding became available for a seeding project or some other treatments. McDaniel said there is an Environmental Assessment required for any ground disturbing treatment. That would not include seeding projects. He said that they are in the process of coordinating with the Park Service to develop a programmatic EA to streamline that process. Chairman Stahlnecker said the hope is that the time frame would go from a year to a month or two, noting that the surveys would still need done. Starr and Cochran thought the numbers for the cost of habitat treatments looked low and suggested raising them. McDaniel suggested raising the upper number. The Dixie harrow treatment last year cost \$90/acre. The group agreed to change the numbers to a range of \$20/acre to \$90/acre and have Cochran get more accurate monitoring numbers from Sandy Hayes at BLM. Jim Dawson noted that none of the projects listed would involve the Forest Service, and wondered if they should be taken off the responsible party list. Cochran said he'd like to leave Forest Service on the list in case a project does come up for them. Chairman Stahlnecker said the list is a first priority list and doesn't exclude other projects. Dawson said that was okay.

Cochran said that all the earmarks in Congress for last year have been eliminated. He said this speaks to earlier discussions of the importance of creating a non-expiring fund when possible, so it's there when the group needs it. Starr asked if the group should solicit projects from private land owners in order to have a list of willing participants and show the necessity of having the money as soon as possible because that base is already covered. Cochran said he'd like to build a data base of projects to have readily available for any funding that may become available. Hausler didn't think it would be difficult to get land owners to come forward with requests. Ferchau spoke of the importance of having the perception that we're all on the same team. He said part of the issue with regulation is that it tends to make people defensive and that's why he recommended trying a more passive approach during the temporary regulation discussions last year, so that people could embrace the whole idea of saving the sage-grouse in a positive way. Cochran suggested bringing the public together in some sort of forum to discuss ideas for projects.

Hausler suggested the County Commissioners sponsor a public meeting through the Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to say "we're looking for specific projects on private lands which will benefit the sage-grouse" in order to develop a list, vet the projects out and have a "shelf" of projects ready to go. Navy said some projects could be funded immediately. Hausler said he thought that would be a good, positive approach- which would likely receive strong support from the ranching community. Ferchau recommended utilizing the Western State College science students as a resource for some of these projects. Starr said the BOCC would be willing to sponsor a meeting. Chairman Stahlnecker said it could be some positive publicity for this committee. There was discussion about who from the committee should attend. Ferchau said to be careful about how this presented to and perceived by the public. He said it needs to be a very positive, open discussion and should not become an agenda about regulations or restrictions. He said there needs to be some trust established with the public and that is the kind of forum with which to start. There was lengthy discussion about what the format should be, where it should be and who should attend.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES: Cochran reported that the committee did not receive 2nd consideration for the Wildlife Action Opportunity Fund. They received 531 proposals. He said that the US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) Private Stewardship Grant Program is open for grant

proposals until February 14th and the projects have to be on private property. He said the Western Colorado Conservation Corps would like to apply and are asking for a sage-grouse project to work on. They train the older kids to run equipment. Cochran and Scott also thought they might be best utilized to catch up on monitoring treatments. Cochran asked the Youth Corps Director to attend the Conservation District meeting on January 24th to talk about these ideas, because the Conservation District does a lot of private land projects using USFWS funding. Cochran said he'll schedule time to present this program to the BOCC as well. Cochran said various working groups and other entities in the sage-grouse range are going after the same money. He said he would like to have a rangewide prioritization discussion to get more coordination between groups. He suggested that Seglund might be the proper avenue for that discussion.

2007 SCHEDULING: The group agreed to continue meeting the second Wednesday of each month, with the goal of fewer meetings once the Strategic Plan is finished.

The February meeting was rescheduled for February 9th from 10:00-2:00, with the second half being a work session and Long Range Planner Mike Pelletier doing a presentation from 11:00 to 12:00. This will allow members from out of town to also attend the Rick Danver of Deseret Land and Livestock presentation at 3:00.

The public outreach meeting was tentatively scheduled for March 7th from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Hausler suggested that Cochran coordinate with the BOCC to discuss advertising and scheduling. Starr said he would like to keep the public meeting focused on asking private lands for land treatment projects, explaining why we are looking and what the benefits of participating would be.

ADJOURN: Chairperson Ken Stahlnecker adjourned the meeting at 12:57.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Keri Hodgin, Administrative Assistant III