

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 15, 2009**

The January 15, 2009 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioner's Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

Regular Members Present:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
John Scott, Vice-Chairperson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Kenny McDaniel, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)

Alternate Members Present

Russell Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Sandy Guerrieri, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA)

Staff Members Present:

Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the January 15, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:03 am.

PUBLIC NOTICE CONFIRMED: It was verified by Stahlnecker that proper legal public notice had occurred.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: A quorum was present.

AGENDA APPROVAL: The designation of a public notice posting location was added to the agenda. Noting the addition, the agenda was approved as circulated.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

BLM Personnel Report: McDaniel advised this will be the last meeting he will attend as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) representative as he is transferring to Oregon. McDaniel was excited to report new staff to the Gunnison office. Keith Berger from the Royal Gorge Field Office will start on February 1st and serve as the interim Field Office Manager until the position is filled by a permanent replacement. McDaniel recommended to the Committee that Russ Japuntich serve as the Regular Member and have Keith Berger serve as the Alternate Member. Swenson requested a formal letter addressed to the Board of County Commissioners requesting

the change. A recent hire, Matt Malick, has experience with water issues, including water quality and sampling as well as riparian restoration. A new archeologist, Liz Francisco, was also added to the team and comes from Mesa Verde National Park. This new position will allow David Lazorchak, who was previously doing both archeological and geologic work, to focus on geologic resources exclusively. Peterson asked if Francisco could perform archeological clearance for treatments. McDaniel felt that she could. The BLM was also recruiting for a permanent seasonal Wildlife Biologist.

McDaniel encouraged the group to continue the great work and efforts in his absence. The Committee thanked him for his contributions and wished him the best in his new position.

Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Alternate: Scott confirmed the transmittal of a letter recommending Liz With to replace Lars Santana as the Alternate for the NRCS.

Division of Wildlife (DOW) Wildlife Commissioner 1313 Meeting: Wenum reported on a public meeting held by area Wildlife Commissioners in Gunnison. The meeting was well attended with approximately 45 to 50 people present. The big game 5-year season structure was a key point of the discussion. He further explained that the recent state hiring freeze, if continued, may impact the sage-grouse lek count operations.

Flights are in progress to conduct deer and elk herd counts and numbers should be available in the coming weeks. Stockgrowers did submit a formal notice of intent to nominate GMU's 54, 55, 551 for limited elk licensing. McDaniel confirmed that BLM and USFS has transmitted a letter to the DOW about this issue.

APPROVAL OF December 10, 2008 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the December 10, 2008 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Swenson, to accept the December 10, 2008 meeting minutes as corrected. Not being in attendance at that meeting Peterson and Ferchau abstained from the vote. Motion carried.

PUBLIC POSTING PLACE: Per the Public Notice Provisions/Senate Bill 91-33 a public notice place was decided upon based on Cochran's recommendation to use the Board of County Commissioners posting place at the County Courthouse, 200 E. Virginia Ave, Gunnison, CO 81230. **Moved** by Pfister, seconded Scott, to adopt the Board of County Commissioners' posting place at the Gunnison County Courthouse for posting of public notices. Motion carried unanimously.

SHED ANTLER ISSUE UPDATE:

Swenson and Cochran were present to testify about the Shed Antler Regulation Amendments to the Colorado Wildlife Commission at their meeting held on January 12, 2009 in Denver. The Wildlife Commission approved the staff recommendation and adopted the proposed changes to the Shed Antler collection regulations. Wenum commented that the modifications to the regulation will be ready for enforcement in the coming season. He explained that there is typically an education period to allow the community to understand the regulations and that strict enforcement would follow. Peterson noted that he hoped that the public would be in support and follow the regulations.

Stahlnecker reminded the Committee that the February meeting was scheduled later in the day, in hopes of getting public interest to allow the focus of the meeting to be education about the change in regulation. Peterson requested a newspaper article to help educate the public as to the status of the regulation as representatives from the press were present. The DOW will also have a press release prepared about the topic.

Cochran invited the Committee to a meeting to be scheduled in the coming weeks for a review of the Gunnison County and BLM road closures.

At 10:36 am Sandy Guerrieri, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA) alternate arrived.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE:

Peterson reported on the Sub-committee meeting held January 14, 2009 from 8:30am to approximately 3:00pm to review and begin the research plan to implement the project proposal.

Topics discussed included:

- Determination of the sample size and the concerns related to it being too large or small
- The scale of the study
- Inclusion of a demographic element and possibly chick imprinting and occupancy modeling
- Issues and difficulties
- Compiling information that is already available and organizing it into a format to make the data usable
- Budget concerns
- The definition of the grazing treatments and the number of them to be used

Pfister asked the BLM representatives for their assistance during this project as concern was expressed as to what would be authorized under the existing BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP). He also commented that Robbie LeValley, Colorado State University (not present) may be tasked with the creation of the definitions and descriptions of the specific grazing treatments. Mike Phillips (not present) encouraged the Sub-committee to seriously consider the research proposal and requested that the group think about advancing science versus just answering questions.

The next Sub-committee meeting is scheduled for February 18, 2009 to move forward on inclusion of the demographic information, set benchmarks, and review compiled data.

McDaniel encouraged the group to move forward regardless of budgetary concerns and to have a project on the shelf if unable to proceed as aggressively as they had initially hoped.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

FINAL APPROVAL

Scott asked for any questions or comments about the most current draft of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Plan.

He covered the recent changes which were:

1. Removal of executive summary
2. Acronyms being elaborated on and/or removed
3. Average annual population numbers versus the chart with explanation
4. January 2000 landfill fees and the income generation added as compiled by Navy
5. Added date and modified format

The Committee requested a change to the text discussing the December 2008 CCAA process and several other minor revisions to tense making them plural versus singular. Proposed by Ferchau, the Committee also decided to add a six month time frame to develop an action plan. The Committee agreed that document with the minor changes was complete and thanked Scott for all his efforts with coordinating the editing work.

Moved by Scott, seconded Ferchau to approve the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Plan Draft as amended for referral to the Board of County Commissioners.

Roll call vote was requested by Navy.

Yeah: Stahnecker, Scott, Ferchau, Peterson, Pfister, Swenson, McDaniel, Wenum,
Abstained: Navy. Her reason for abstention was: "High County Citizens' Alliance (HCCA) supports the Strategic Plan and has contributed to its creation. However, HCCA disagrees with the inclusion of Goal #4 in this Strategic Plan, believing that the need to protect the Gunnison Sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act already exists and that the goals of the Strategic Plan should be focused on conserving the sage grouse without political statements."

REFERRAL TO THE BOCC:

The discussions then lead to the process of presenting the proposed Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Plan Draft to the Gunnison Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). Time was scheduled on the BoCC meeting agenda for January 20, 2009 for presentation of the Plan. It was decided that a public review processes would be requested with a public hearing proposed on February 17, 2009 at 4:00 pm. The Committee also requested that the BoCC have the Plan available on the Gunnison County website for the public to access during the review process.

Cochran requested an email message with contact information if there are any specific interested stakeholders that the Committee would like contacted.

BLM TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN:

Japuntich presented information about the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) comments proposed for a public lands travel management plan that will be available for review in the coming months. He summarized his findings from analyzing data collected for BLM roads and explained how he went through the map route by route to evaluate different attributes to include wildlife habitat sites. The travel management plan research was reviewed to evaluate

the number of routes, their starting point(s) and their destination(s). He used an example of multiple roads with similar starting places that lead to the same end. He clarified that this plan is not designed to limit access to public lands, but to allow the maintenance of used routes.

He further demonstrated (on the white board) the data in the following table:

Miles in the area	.6	2	4
<i>No Action</i>	380	1050	1500
<i>Proposed</i>	230	630	930
<i>Wildlife(resource)</i>	200	530	760
<i>Max Rec</i>	270	700	1025

As discussion of this topic ensued time was proposed for a future agenda, after the plan has been released for public review and comment to evaluate this issue in more detail.

LUNCH BREAK: The meeting recessed from 12:04 pm to 12:28 pm.

DOW MITIGATION FORMULA:

Wenum introduced the presentation. He explained that the formula from a conceptual perspective could be used for understanding the impacts from development to sage-grouse habitat and give the user an idea what might be needed to mitigate for the loss of the developed habitat. The tool was based on a wetlands mitigation model and had been modified for the proposed sage-grouse habitat application.

Paul Jones, Colorado Division of Wildlife, presented the information via the projection screen and demonstrated several examples of how the worksheet functioned. He emphasized how the worksheet was designed to use the measurement of acreage versus dollar amounts to allow the greatest flexibility. He defined the vectors and the weighting factors used to create a numeric value of acres that could be affected on a range-wide scale. He further proposed that this tool could provide a consistent way to implement land use change decisions as well as giving land developers an idea of the process before investment was made to allow the best information for sound decisions.

The indexes used, the weighting characteristics and the standards for rangeland health would still need to be determined and implemented. A copy of the draft spreadsheet application will be circulated for review by the Committee and further discussion may be scheduled for a future meeting

Peterson left the meeting and Guerrieri moved to the table as a voting member.

BIG GAME 5-YEAR SEASON STRUCTURE:

Bruce Watkins, Division of Wildlife, was present for this discussion. Watkins explained the process for 5-year big game season structure and the how observations and data are modeled to allow managers to structure hunting seasons to keep the number of animals in balance with their environment.

During the May 21, 2008 meeting Japuntich presented information on big game browsing. The information covered can be found in a peer reviewed publication that he was willing to provide to readers upon request. Several observations presented in his data elicited a response of

concern as to the rangeland forb health and potential impacts to the Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat from the Committee.

Randy Clark, citizen, commented that he was concerned that if members of the Committee expressed an opinion about this issue it may present a conflict of interest. Stahlnecker assured him that the Committee requested this discussion for information gathering only. Scott further commented that it was important for the Committee to be informed, understand the process, and the potential effects to Sage-grouse habitat as the Committee.

The conversations lead to different methods of game management how models are used and details about the way data was collected. Trends are typically used to analyze data and the current big game counts are not yet available for review. Navy proposed consideration of reintroduction of other predatory species like the wolf as a management strategy versus focusing strictly on human hunting activities.

A request was made for a DOW presentation of big game numbers for a future meeting. The date of the April 9, 2009 meeting was proposed to keep the Committee informed about the current data being collected.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Thursday February 5, 2009

4:00 pm to 6:00 pm - Regular (Business) Meeting

6:00 pm to 6:30 pm - Dinner Break

6:30 pm to 8:00 pm - Shed Antler Season Issue and related topics Public Information Session

Thursday March 19th 10-2 - Regular Meeting

Thursday April 9th 10-2 – Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: MOVED by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting seconded by Swenson. Motion carried unanimously. The January 15, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:35 pm.

Certification of Approval:



Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson



Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:



Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III