

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
February 5, 2009**

The February 5, 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.

Voting Members Present:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS -Regular)
John Scott, Vice-Chairperson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS-Regular)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA-Regular)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA-Regular)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS-Regular)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC-Regular)
Gary Hausler (Public At-Large-Regular)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW-Regular)
Jim Dawson, United States Forest Service (USFS-Regular)
Joe Puchek (At-Large/ Development Community-Alternate)
Elinor Laurie (Saguache County-Alternate)

Other Members Present

Sandy Guerrieri, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA-Alternate)

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 February 5, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 4:00 pm.

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

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Stahlnecker confirmed that a quorum was present.

AGENDA APPROVAL: No modifications to the agenda were requested. The agenda was approved as circulated.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

As Japuntich will not be in attendance of the meeting, Keith Berger, BLM Interim Gunnison Field Office Manager and nominated BLM Alternate member, reported due to changes in administration activities in Washington the Travel Management plan is on hold until further notice.

John Mugglestone, a Public at-Large, Alternate candidate was introduced.

Pfister reported that Gunnison Sage-grouse ESA listing litigation may be another 45 days until presentation to the courts.

APPROVAL OF JANUARY 15, 2009 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the January 15, 2009 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Scott to accept the January 15, 2009 meeting minutes as corrected, seconded by Swenson. Motion carried.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE:

Scott met with the Gunnison Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and presented the draft version of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee Strategic Plan as approved by the Committee during the January 15, 2009 meeting. A typographical error in tense was identified by Commissioner Channell and was modified. Commissioner Starr requested an update on development of the action plan. The BoCC Public Hearing is scheduled for February 17, 2009 at 4:00 pm. An email message requesting assistance about topics to be covered at the hearing was discussed.

GUNNISON RISING MITIGATION:

Steve Westbay, City of Gunnison's Community Development Department, Mike Henkel, Rocky Mountain Resource Management Services, Dick Bratton, Gunnison Valley Partners and other citizens not identified were present for discussion. Wenum provided a brief history of the development of the proposed recommendation. The mitigation formula tool was presented in detail to the Committee at the meeting held January 15, 2009. He explained how the tool was used and the other factors involved to come to the proposed 200 acres of mitigation needed to offset the acreage being developed.

Henkel provided an overview of the lands proposed for development, as well as details about the proposed 160 acres of land in the far northeastern portion of the property to be placed in a conservation easement; and relinquishment of BLM livestock grazing permits accessing approximately 26,000 acres of land in exchange for the remaining 40 acres needed to meet the required 200 mitigated acres.

Committee discussion then turned to the proposed relinquishment of the BLM grazing permits. Many expressed concern that the relinquishment of the permits may not preserve the land for perpetuity as the mitigation process implies. Guerrieri remarked on how the benefits to all species as proposed in the recommendation could be beneficial as mentioned in the DOW comment letter. Peterson expressed his apprehension of this process setting precedence for future mitigation and the impacts the loss of these permits may have on the Taylor Grazing Pool. Dave Means, citizen and grazing permit holder within the allotment, commented that viewed the proposal as a win-win-win situation for all parties involved. As the land is under BLM ownership, Berger explained that overall rangeland health would factor into future permits.

Swenson asked Westbay about the time table needed and he replied that the City is awaiting the recommendation from the Strategic Committee to move the process forward and that it was scheduled as a topic of consideration before the City Council in the coming weeks. He also explained that the current pet control, density limitations and other sage-grouse conservation measures would be included if approved.

Noting that the next meeting is scheduled for March 19, 2009, consideration of the time element was discussed. Pfister and Navy stated that they would prefer to have additional time to review the proposal and perform research to answer several of the questions posed about the grazing permits. Hausler and Peterson expressed that they felt it was not fair to delay a decision.

Moved by Puchek and seconded by Hausler, to recommend the proposal as written and amended by the Division of Wildlife.

Peterson requested language to be included in the motion specifically stating that the grazing permit relinquishment was specific to this scenario and would not be used in every case considered.

Puchek amends the motion to add at the bottom of the paragraph a statement reflecting Peterson's concern.

Discussion continued. Wenum noted that his involvement in this process was not typical and explained how the request from the City of Gunnison to the Committee to prepare a recommendation lead to his involvement outside of the normal process by Wenum and the DOW.

Puchek requested an amendment to the original motion to include: "That we concur with the DOW letter and the sage-grouse Committee would recommend the adoption of the proposal as made by the DOW with the recommendation that this methodology not be used in every case concerning sage-grouse mitigation, specifically the use of grazing permits for mitigation purposes.

Guerrieri requested further clarification of the BLM process and recommended a written document from the Strategic Committee be included in the BLM files for future reference explaining the intent of the Committee in relationship to the grazing permits. Navy further clarified that if the lands were to be released as part of the mitigation, then the same permit holders should not be able to acquire use of lands again later. But, if the health of the land deemed appropriate that it could be used for grazing in the future. The discussion lead to a discussion of BLM land management practices and how that process was unable to guarantee the future use of the acreage.

Puchek then amended the motion again, seconded by Hausler to state: "Additionally we recommend that the grazing permit section of the DOW recommendation (changed from proposal see comment below) be considered unique to the GVP annexation and not used as precedence in any other subdivision annexation proponent's mitigation proposal in the future."

Stahlnecker confirmed the understanding that the DOW has a recommendation and that the proposal was from GVP and the wording was modified to reflect that corrected understanding.

After additional discussion the motion was modified by Puchek seconded by Hausler to state: "Additionally, we recommend that the grazing permit section of the DOW recommendation be considered unique to the GVP annexation and not be used as precedence in any other subdivision or annexation proposal considered in the future."

Subdivision and annexation was reviewed and clarified to: ...not be used as a precedence for any other proponent's mitigation proposal in the future.

Peterson recommended that the Committee keep close tabs on the BLM process in hopes of creating a positive situation for the other permittees still holding grazing permits in the Taylor Park Pool.

A letter outlining the concerns was deliberated. It was decided that a letter could be drafted and communicated to the Committee via Email with approval at the next meeting.

The motion was additionally amended by Puchek, seconded by Hausler to state: additionally the sage-grouse Committee will draft a letter outlining concerns regarding long term BLM policy on allocation on AUM's in the Cabin Creek and Alder Creek Allotments.

The final version of the motion was stated by Puchek and seconded by Hausler:
The Gunnison Basin Strategic Committee agrees to recommend the recommendation as written and amended by the Division of Wildlife (DOW). Additionally, we recommend that the grazing permit section of the DOW recommendation be considered unique to the Gunnison Valley Partners (GVP) annexation and the grazing section of the proposal not be used as precedence for any other proponent's mitigation proposal considered in the future. Additionally, the Gunnison Basin Strategic Committee Sage grouse Committee will draft a letter outlining concerns regarding long term Bureau of Land Management (BLM) policy on the allocation on AUM's in the Cabin Creek and Alder Creek Allotments.

Motion Carries.

Dawson abstained; with the stated reason that this does not affect Forest Service lands therefore there is no reason for him to weigh in on one side or another

Westbay and Bratton both personally thanked Wenum and the Committee for their efforts.

DINNER BREAK: The meeting recessed from 6:15 pm to 6:34 pm.

STRATEGIC PLAN - ACTION PLAN DISCUSSION: Swenson explained that the BOCC reviews the goals and objectives annually for all Committees to verify need and confirm that the goals are still in alignment with the BoCC intentions. A review of this Committee was performed during a recent BoCC meeting. A letter was submitted by Sue Navy, HCCA, advising the BoCC about her perspective of Goal Number Four of the Gunnison Sage-grouse Action Plan and Goals adopted by the BoCC in 2005. The fourth goal of Gunnison County is to implement an effective strategy and programs which will preclude the need to list the Gunnison Sage-grouse or at minimum demonstrate the willingness of the Gunnison Community to preserve and protect habitat which will lessen the impact if listing does occur.

A typographical error of which will, being included twice and the removal of the memo format of the goal and the change of Jim Cochran's title from Sage-grouse Conservation Coordinator to Wildlife Conservation Coordinator was also included in the proposed changes to the document by the BoCC. It was asked by the BoCC if the word will should be changed to the word may.

Moved by Hausler, seconded by Peterson, that the word will remain in the fourth goal, and not be replaced by may.

Swenson advised that if the word will was to remain the BoCC requested a statement from the Committee explaining why. Laurie noted that the decision for listing on the Endangered Species List is not something that was under the Committee's decision making power. Peterson stated that he felt the wording change may send a weakened message and reminded the Committee that during the development of this goal there was give and take on both sides for the language and the opinion as to the wording has not changed. Hausler supported Peterson's comment remembering that original wording for the goal included prevent and the wording will preclude was a compromise.

Navy expressed that she felt the need for listing already exists and that Goal Number Four should be removed entirely as it appeared to her to be a political statement and not a statement about the bird. She further expressed that the Committee was created to help conserve the species and that there was not a need to state an opinion about the listing status one way or another. When asked for additional specifics she reminded the Committee of previous debates that had ensued on this topic.

Stahlnecker commented that implementing strategies and programs to preclude listing is what the forth goal was all about. Pfister noted that if the species is precluded from listing the effectiveness of the goal would be demonstrated and that he supported Laurie's comment that the decision on listing is not within the power of this Committee.

Because the Committee does not want to weaken Goal Number Four, after much discussion, it was stated that emphasis on the strategies versus listing of the species and the importance of keeping the wording as is.

Roll call vote:

Yeah: Puchek, Pfister, Dawson, Stahlnecker, Scott, Wenum, Laurie, Hausler

Abstain: Navy; for the stated reason that it is not important whether the word is may or will, it is having the goal stating the need to preclude listing in there at all. Swenson; for the stated reason that she will be making a decision as BoCC member.

Motion Carries.

Sage-grouse Road Closures and Shed Antler Season Changes – Information presentation for the public:

Randy Clark, citizen, was present for discussion. Wenum provided an update on enforcement. Cochran provided information about upcoming road closures and described the efforts of Japuntich and Allen Moores of Gunnison County implementing the program. BLM is adding two additional routes to the closures this year and will be installing several new gates, updating locks and signage to help deter use of the roads. A press release will be prepared and submitted to the local newspapers for publication in the coming weeks.

Action plan discussion:

Cochran reported that Erich Ferchau (not present) had volunteered earlier to assist with development of the Action Plan. Stahlnecker appointed a sub-committee to address the Action Plan preparation:

Action Plan Subcommittee
Chairperson: Erich Ferchau
Russ Japuntich
Jon Mugglestone

An invitation was extended to the Local Working Group for input and expertise
Any others interested were encourage contact Cochran if they would like to participate

Subcommittee direction: Scott will provide the information developed in the past referencing the Action Plan. He reminded the Subcommittee that if the Strategic Plan was approved in the coming weeks by the BoCC the six month timeline to completion of the Action Plan would begin. The Committee requested that a draft proposal be prepared for the March 19, 2009 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee regular meeting.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

March 19, 2009 10:00 am – 2:00 pm – Regular Meeting
April 9, 2009 10:00 am – 2:00 pm – Regular Meeting
May 14, 2009 10:00 am – 2:00 pm – Regular Meeting

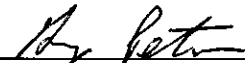
Discussion about implementing a quarterly meeting scheduled brought forth the list of back logged issues. It was decided until the Strategic Plan Action Plan is underway that monthly meeting would need to be scheduled.

ADJOURN: MOVED by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Swenson. Motion carried unanimously. The February 5, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Certification of Approval:



Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson



Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:



Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III