

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
August 13, 2009**

The August 13, 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)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA) Arrived 10:23 am
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)
Jon Mugglestone, Public At-Large
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Amy Seglund, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)

Alternate Members Present

Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Russell Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Dan Reinkensmeyer, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)

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 August 13, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:00 am.

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 APPOINTMENTS: Three appointments to the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee were made by the Board of County Commissioners at their regular meeting on July 23, 2009.

1. Brian St. George was appointed as the BLM Regular Member

2. Russ Japuntich was appointed as the BLM Alternate Member
3. Jon Mugglestone was appointed as the Public at Large Regular Member (Alternate seat is vacant).

It was noted that the Forest Service will submit their formal nominations in the near future.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

High County Citizens' Alliance (HCCA): Navy announced that a field trip was scheduled. The Sage-grouse Stewardship Awards for 2008 and 2009 will be announced during the event. The Miller Ranch, Allen Ranch and Flat Top sage-grouse habitat treatment areas were all slated to be included in the tour. Sage mowing treatment areas, a burn treatment performed near a lek site, potential elk habitat damage and other sites were proposed. Those interested in attending were encouraged to meet at the BLM/Forest Service offices at 8:45 am on September 14th, 2009. An invitation will also be extended to the public.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM): St. George thanked Japuntich for his efforts as a public servant and explained that he was truly appreciated. A welcome from the Committee was extended to St. George.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Pfister noted that Nathan Seward, CDOW (who was present), is working with potential CCAA/CI applicants. Two new CI's are nearing completion. He also reported that a date for the listing decision from the courts was anticipated in the coming weeks.

Board of County Commissioners (BOCC): Swenson reported that Gunnison and Saguache Counties were communicating about wildlife issues as those issues do not stop at the county line. Reports of observations from the Villa Grove lek, as well as birds sighted on Gold Basin Road in Gunnison County were discussed. Japuntich commented that visiting bird watchers were being directed to the Gold Basin Road area to observe sage-grouse and many were delighted when able to sight the birds in the area.

Division of Wildlife (DOW): Nathan Seward announced that the Miller Ranch Wildlife Area will open to the public annually on September 1st. Seward recommended viewing the signs posted to educate the public about the property as it was procured specifically for sage-grouse habitat preservation. The signs have important information relative to the area.

APPROVAL OF JULY 9, 2009 MEETING MINUTES: As the minutes were not prepared for review in the packet this agenda item was postponed until the next scheduled meeting.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE:

Cochran announced an upcoming Grazing Research Sub-committee meeting scheduled for September 3, 2009 in the Board of County Commissioners Meeting Room from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm.

Polygons referencing Sage-grouse use areas were provided by the DOW to Gunnison County Geographic Information Services (GIS) Department. The Local Working Group was reported to

be in communication with sub-committee members with comments referencing the project. Navy reported that there was concern expressed by the Local Working Group that a great deal of funds were being spent for an unknown result.

An article from the front page of the current issue of the Gunnison Country Times was cited with a title of "Sage-grouse, Cows Make Sage Bedfellows?" discussing development in the area.

St. George requested an update about the funding for the project. Cochran responded that approximately \$300,000 is available this year and that there is significant support from Representative Curry for future years' funding. He further explained that once a project is funded it is important to be prepared with a detailed proposal as prior funding places a higher priority within the agencies responsible for administration for immediate implementation.

ACTION PLAN – FINALIZE FOR REFERRAL TO THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

Ferchau thanked his fellow sub-committee members for the extensive time and efforts on this project. He then summarized the process and steps taken since the last meeting. Sub-committee members used the comments collected from the Committee in a prioritization process to review the action items. A form was then populated with data including feasibility, resources, and a potential person willing to sponsor action items. 18 of the actions items were then bundled together into like projects to define the proposed 8 action items. It was emphasized how there was no order or prioritization implied for implementation, but the process allowed them to be prioritized by feasibility.

As the Action Plan was envisioned to be a living, breathing document, how modifications would be made was discussed. The importance of Board of County Commissioner (BoCC) endorsement, yet having the ability to edit and update the document was deliberated. Swenson requested the plan be presented to the BoCC as soon as possible, allowing direction from the Board about allocation of resources to be provided. Several of the action items require County resources for implementation. The Committee agreed that this would be a changing document with at least an annual review schedule.

The Action Plan was reviewed and deliberated. The Committee complimented the Sub-committee on their efforts as the Plan was well thought out, concise and included many of the elements determined to be important to the Committee.

St. George asked how action priorities were identified, and how they would change over time as several were noted to be multi-year endeavors.

Discussion then focused on implementation of the Action Plan. The Committee was reminded by Ferchau that the action items were not written to be complete orders or operation guidelines, just as ideas collected and documented from Committee Members. The importance of identifying and including stakeholders was presented. Recruitment of other entities that could be willing implementation participants, and the importance of understanding the coordination of resources were emphasized. Several Committee members expressed their concern that endorsement of the Action Plan as drafted implied that their agency could be committed to implementation. Possible implementation scenarios were discussed at length.

The importance of the communication process to the BoCC to assure resource availability was discussed. When to review and update the plan was deliberated. Navy asked about inclusion of specific comments provided by the Local Working Group. It was noted that several comments had been received after the requested deadline for document preparation. The Committee discussed the concept of this Plan as a working document and input could be reviewed, considered and included at any time. The Subcommittee was unsure if each and every detail from comments received were included in the current draft.

Moved by Pfister, seconded by Scott, that the Strategic Committee forward the draft version of the Action Plan to the Board of County Commissioners of Gunnison County, for approval, with the understanding that is a conceptual framework for how the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee will proceed and that priority and editorial changes and minor modifications will occur as a result of quarterly reviews by the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee.

Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) biologist and Local Working Group member, Nathan Seward stated that he felt the process was rushed and it appeared that many comments were not fully incorporated into the document. Specifically, he referenced predator control and how that area of study may need further consideration.

The Committee discussion was that these types of concerns could be addressed within the current Action Plan and that this summary was designed to be a starting point for implementation of the Strategic Plan. These action items were not exhaustive and the intent of the motion was to allow for future development and implementation of the Action Plan and the items that make it up. Discussion about how a letter of explanation or the motion itself could be included to help communicate to the BoCC the intent of the Committee, which was that this be a working document and requesting direction as to how to implement changes commenced.

Moved by Pfister, seconded by Scott, to change the word "approval", to the word "review", in the sentence that addressed ...for strategic implementation.

Discussion then moved to priorities and the importance of the Action Plan as a working document allowing priorities to be modified. It was noted that all of the items were of very high priority. The Committee discussed this as a guiding document with flexibility under the strategic plan. The need for adoption was deliberated

Moved by Pfister, seconded by Scott, as a friendly amendment as follows: The Strategic Committee forward the Action Plan to the Board of County Commissions, for endorsement as an outline for implementation, with the understanding that it is a conceptual framework for how the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee will proceed and that priority, editorial changes and minor modifications will occur as a result of quarterly reviews by the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee.

Discussion about a review timeline commenced. The importance that the review process should be on going and priorities could be changed was further deliberated.

Moved as a friendly amendment, by Pfister, seconded by Scott. The Strategic Committee to forward the Action Plan to the Board of County Commissioners of Gunnison County, Colorado for endorsement as an outline for implementation, with the understanding that is a conceptual framework for how the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee will proceed and that prioritization, editorial changes and minor modifications will occur as a result of ongoing, with at least annual reviews, by the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee.

Seglund expressed concern about the level of detail included in the document. She used Action Item 8a as an example of how this idea was proposed as a conceptual idea and the implementation process may look very different than how it was currently proposed. It was asked if the document could be more general, versus inclusion of the specific details. The use of a disclaimer or further explanation was discussed and determined to be included in the introduction of the proposed Action Plan document. She further expressed that she was not comfortable endorsing the Action Plan because it could imply that the timelines, details and the identification of the responsible parties was a commitment to the action item. It was agreed by all that was not the intention of the Action Plan; however those details were available and part of the process and would help guide implementation. It was designed to be a starting point of ideas and would need a great deal of project planning.

Navy commented that she felt this Action Plan should not be conceptual ideas and with a bit more time and planning could be a document with actions ready to be implemented. Mugglestone commented that the intent of the plan was not to be an implementation guide and emphasized the importance of identifying the task as the first step, how the tasks get accomplished will be a future project and will need additional direction from all involved. It was discussed that this document was designed to be a conceptual collection of ideas and the tangible actions will come from the groups, organizations, agencies and individuals responsible for their implementation and they may need to be able to revise these action items before actual execution.

Peterson noted that a deadline was set to move the Action Plan forward. He reminded the Committee that this document will never be perfect or totally complete and gave credit to the Sub-committee for their efforts and working within the timeframe.

The Committee discussed the importance of understanding that this was a working document that may be perceived by some to be a risk, but should lead to results. They also discussed that the details would still need to be completed, the document was still in need of implementation, and how members needed to communicate and trust each other.

Roll Call Vote:

Yes: Mugglestone, St. George, Pfister, Peterson, Stahlnecker, Scott, Swenson, Ferchau, Joseph

No: Navy

Abstain: Seglund, reason: She was not comfortable with the detail and the ranking of prioritization. There was no discussion about when the time for fleshing out the details would occur and also there was a timeline indicated that she was not comfortable with.

Motion Passed.

Japuntich commented that many of the concerns expressed were valid, and that future meetings may be needed to address these types of concerns and find a level of detail that everyone feels comfortable with before implementation would be possible. Stahlnecker requested that the Sub-committee be responsible for presentation to the BoCC. The timeline for implementation was discussed, and how understanding what resources would be available would help to understand how implementation could proceed.

The Committee discussed communication tools for informing stakeholders. Formation of an organizational entity, holding a meeting, sending letters and formation of a stakeholder database was discussed. Making the Action Plan available (at libraries and posted to the Web for example) was proposed. A discussion of the importance of this being a community cause and gathering different perspectives commenced.

November 18, 2009, Fred Field Western Heritage Center, was proposed as a date/location to host a meeting, with formal invitations to stakeholders. Availability of the space was unknown. The importance of understanding what was going to be presented, and who was going to be present was needed. Ferchau explained that the lack of participation from who he thought would be stakeholders in the development of the plan helped him to understand the complexity of the process. He also voiced the opinion that the success of implementation would hinge on project management, organization of people, understanding the tasks and scheduling the tasks to be completed. He noted that assignment of tasks was considered to be a group effort, for example, the assignment of Action Item 8a to DOW made sense at the time. The coordination within the layers of those involved with more comprehensive mapping and the need for someone to take the lead was further deliberated.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Wednesday, October 14, 2009 10:00 am – 2:00 pm - Regular Meeting

Wednesday, November 18, 2009 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm - Stakeholder Action Plan Meeting

St. George asked for additional clarification about the goals for the Stakeholder Action Plan Meeting. Discussion ensued as to how that meeting was planned to identify stakeholders and interest in the Action Items in hopes of moving them forward. The importance of Committee Members expressing their confidence in the Plan relative to Plan success was presented. Ferchau asked if a facilitator would be available to keep the meeting on track, setting rules to limit comments and enforcement of the rules. Cochran offered to research the availability of facilitators. Identifying the stakeholders in advance, having additional opportunity to discuss the Action Plan, and the details were decided to be future agenda items.

ADJOURN: MOVED by Stahlnecker, seconded by Scott, to adjourn the Regular Meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The July 16th 2008 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:42 pm.

WORK SESSION - ESA LISTING WORK SESSION

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III