

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
October 14, 2009**

The October 14, 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.

Members Present:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
John Scott, Vice-Chairperson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Russell Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Left meeting at 8:40 am)
Brian St. George, BLM (Arrived at 8:38 am)
Jon Muggelstone, Public At-Large
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Matt Vasquez, Forest Service

Alternate Members Present (not included in voting):

Liz With, NRCS
Dan Reinkensmeyer, 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 October 14, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 8:02 am.

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

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: It was noted that presenter Betsy Neely would participate via teleconference. The addition of a Greater Outdoor Colorado (GOCO) grant application discussion was requested and if the meeting was on schedule would be added between items 9 and 10. Peterson requested the topic, Committee Listing Review Comments, to be added to a future agenda. The agenda was approved as modified.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

BLM: Japuntich reported that cheatgrass spraying had begun. He was hopeful that close to 50 acres would be treated in the coming weeks. The type of spray being used, the total amount of acres to be included and the details of the Environmental Assessment (EA) process were reviewed.

APPROVAL OF JULY 9, 2009 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the July 9, 2009 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Swenson, to accept the July 9, 2009 meeting minutes as corrected. Motion carried. Peterson abstained as he was not present at the meeting.

APPROVAL OF AUGUST 13, 2009 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the August 13, 2009 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Swenson, to accept the August 13, 2009 meeting minutes as corrected. Motion carried. Wenum abstained as he was not present at the meeting.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS: Cochran announced that Matt Vasquez (alternate) and Roy Mask (regular) were recently appointed by the BoCC to the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee as representatives for the Forest Service.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE: Peterson noted the upcoming Sub-Committee meeting date, November 10, 2009. Vasquez requested additional time for preparation of requested Forest Service information as scheduling a meeting with the Research Team had not taken place and was proving to be a challenging scheduling task. It was decided that the information could be complete by November 6th versus the previous date of October 15th. It was further discussed how important completion of the information was for the meeting scheduled for November 10th. Cochran provided a summary of activities and stressed the importance of the project and allowing agencies the time and opportunity to complete tasks to provide information. Providing pieces of the information in advance when it became available was further agreed allowing adequate time for the Sub-committee to review and prepare for the upcoming meetings (this discussion continued later in the meeting, see below).

ACTION PLAN – BOCC COMMENTS, REQUEST FOR FINAL REFERRAL FOR ADOPTION: Cochran explained the comments provided from the BoCC and how they were incorporated into a revised draft version of the Action Plan. Scott commented about the submittal for endorsement and that the BoCC would formally adopt the document with the understanding that there would be a need for flexibility. For County budget purposes adoption would be needed. Peterson asked how changes would be made and what the process would be. Swenson explained the process and how fiscal impacts and major changes to the plan would need to be presented to the BoCC for approval. Frequent updates and informing the BoCC of needed changes was also recommended. The BoCC comments were discussed. Creation of the Landfill Mitigation Fund/Sage-grouse Conservation Trust and the dates of inception were deliberated. Peterson asked about budget concerns and if the funds could be allocated for specific projects or would there be an amount for overall work and flexibility for allocation to different projects. Swenson explained how funds would be budgeted for a specific project as recommended by the Committee and how if the priorities change there would need to be approval from the BoCC. Swenson also explained how a memo from the Committee to the BoCC explaining any adjustments to the Action Plan would be a way to communicate those needs.

Scott gave an example of use of the Landfill Mitigation/Sage-grouse Conservation Trust fund dollars and how the BoCC would need to approve changes. He further explained that the funds are currently being used to partially fund the County sage-grouse conservation program, as comments were made that the fund had not been used for several years. Cochran explained how the BoCC feels the Action Plan becomes a part of the overall County Strategic Planning Goals and Objectives and if requested and available the budgeting of funds to complete projects would be supported. Adoption of the Action Plan by the BoCC was scheduled for their Regular Meeting on Tuesday, October 20, 2009.

Action Item 3: Changes were reviewed. The role of the Sage-grouse Conservation Trust Fund (Landfill Mitigation Fund) and the use those dollars could have on implementation of the Action Plan was discussed. Funding contributions from other entities were further discussed. Concern that municipalities and private entities facing fiscal issues were no longer contributing to the conservation efforts was expressed. Stahlnecker mentioned that education efforts may help to raise funding contributions as he felt the project was far from completion.

Action Item 4: Peterson asked for additional explanation about the request to include conservation ethics language. Swenson explained that the idea was to include an education piece to emphasize conservation efforts and programs available for conservation of the species. Potential verbiage was deliberated. Peterson expressed how he was concerned that negative grazing language could be included in educational efforts being taught in the schools. Scott emphasized the importance of all members being involved in the process to assure that all factors and perspectives be accounted for. Cochran supported the need for those with concerns to be involved in the process of program development to ensure that areas of concern are addressed. He encouraged everyone to participate in the development of the educational program. Navy commented that she would not want the Endangered Species Act reflected negatively in a program.

Moved by Scott, seconded by Swenson, to adopt the verbiage: Develop and implement age-appropriate sage-grouse, Endangered Species Act (ESA), and conservation education programs in elementary, middle and high school science programs. Motion Carried.

Billboard use within the County was discussed and the removal of that recommendation from the Action Plan was approved by consensus. The discussion led to other public relation efforts like murals on the side of buildings and the potential for students from the School District as well as the College participating in that educational outreach piece of the Action Plan.

The "responsibility" designation for Action Item #4 was discussed. Modifying the language to include all community leaders, versus just county leaders was supported. Specific verbiage changes were discussed.

Action Item 6: The BoCC asked if the word "control" was appropriate. The word reduce was discussed. Peterson explained how he felt the word control expressed the Committee's determination to have an aggressive approach toward invasive plant species "control" efforts. Reduction of the spread, as well as removal of invasive plants was further discussed. The exact verbiage was further deliberated. The word control was further defined. It was decided that

defining the Action Item #6 goal about the spread of invasive plants was realistic and the use of the word control was appropriate.

Action item 8e: Definition of an economic development group was discussed. How that group could be defined, if a newly created organization was needed or a change to the responsibility of existing interested parties was applicable was further deliberated. Navy asked how the topic of economic development was even part of the Plan as it does not directly affect the grouse. Scott explained that this topic was included to define the economic impacts to the community due to conservation efforts. The responsibility assignment was further discussed. Pfister recommended community leaders be assigned this task, allowing a group to form without specific limits to the involvement. Changing stakeholders to all, versus the Business Community and Civic Leaders was decided. It was agreed that economic development was an important portion of Action Item 8.

Stahlnecker closed the Action Plan discussion.

Moved by Scott, seconded by Swenson, to approve the modifications made by the Committee and suggested by the BoCC to the Action Plan and submit the revised Plan to the BoCC for adoption.

Motion carried unanimously.

The next step in the process and how to develop the action plan into a budget request was further discussed.

A Sub-committee was created to further develop Action Item Number 8 for implementation.

Subcommittee Name: Action Item #8 Subcommittee

Chairperson: Pfister

Members: Stahlnecker, Swenson, Peterson, Scott and St. George. The need for other agency participation (Forest Service) was discussed and it was decided to wait until after the initial meeting to determine if additional participation would be needed.

Charge: To identify and work on development of Action Item #8. Specifically, the need to define goals, costs and implementation strategies for Action Item #8. Identifying areas in Sage-grouse habitat that have priority for conservation, versus areas that are not currently occupied was also targeted as a goal of this Action Item and tasked to this Sub-committee.

Meeting date: October 23, 2009 at 9:00 am (several members may participate via teleconference).

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT PROCESS: Cochran reminded the Committee that a public stakeholder involvement meeting was scheduled for November 18, 2009 at the Fred Field Heritage Center. He noted that there had been no Committee input for the development of a database of potential stakeholders. As the topic of the meeting was unknown, the invitation list of stakeholders not developed and the details of a presentation not yet defined, the Committee determined that it would like to further develop Action Plan specifics before requesting input from the community. The importance of the meeting was discussed. It was decided to set a date after the first of the year when there was sufficient time to plan.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY (TNC) CLIMATE CHANGE WORKSHOP – REPRESENTED BY BETSY NEELY, TNC STAFF: TNC Senior Conservation Planner Neely participated via teleconference. She explained that a climate change workshop concerning the Gunnison Basin Watershed was scheduled for early December, 2009 at the Western State College Campus. A brief overview of the workshop was presented and feedback was requested. She noted that they were building on an earlier workshop from 2002 that identified conservation priorities in the area. It was asked if the Gunnison Sage-grouse and their habitats could be an area of focus for the upcoming meeting.

She then explained how workshops were scheduled in priority areas for 2010 in Utah and Arizona to test a new planning framework that was being implemented by several partners in the Southwest Region. The extensive biodiversity, Sage-grouse, Cut Throat Trout, Boreal Toad species and intact ecosystems in both sagebrush and aspen communities indentified the Gunnison Basin as one of TNC's highest priority areas.

The desire of TNC was to bring together the best scientists in the area to identify plans, strategies and actions that could be developed into an implementation strategy to address environmental change. A refined process that was developed from lessons learned in other workshops and focusing on 3 ecological features or targets was planned. The meeting was being modeled after an event that was hosted in New Mexico that helped participants to understand the high priority issues and how to test actions to see if there are effects over time. Neely further explained how funding may be available, and the hope was to gather creative thinkers with a real understanding of the ecology of the area and work together to manage the land to allow projects to be completed. Navy asked about the follow up and implementation as the goals for the workshop appeared to be more than a single meeting type of project and what efforts were planned. Neely advised that additional follow up efforts would be coordinated with Dave Gann from the TNC Montrose office.

Discussion about an invitation being extended to stockgrowers commenced. The participant list will be further considered by Ms. Neely. Committee consensus was to endorse the idea of the Gunnison Sage-grouse being a topic of focus for the upcoming workshop.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT (CONTINUED): Dates were further discussed as there will be delay in Forest Service information. The current schedule only allowed 3 days for the research group to prepare recommendations for the Subcommittee. Data needs were further discussed. As scheduling a meeting with the Research Team posed a challenge additional time would be needed to prepare information. It was decided that all the requested information was needed for the Sub-committee to move forward and to have a complete report back to the Committee. The need for the Research Team commitment to meet with the agencies for data collection organization efforts was determined to be needed before future dates should be set. Cochran recommended adhering to the schedule as much as possible.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

October 23, 2009 9:30 am - Action Plan Item #8 Subcommittee Meeting – Board of County Commissioners Meeting Room

Teleconference Instructions: 1.) Call 970-642-4670 when you are ready to join the meeting 2.) A receptionist will answer and transfer the call to the teleconference bridge. 3.)

When your call is transferred it will be silent, please be patient, when the line beeps you will join the bridge.

October 27, 2009 10:30am – 12:00 pm Joint work session with BoCC, Action Plan – BoCC Meeting Room

November 10, 2009 9:00 am - Grazing Research Project Sub-Committee - Planning Commission Meeting Room (Blackstock Government Center, 2nd floor)

November 18, 2009 10:00 am – 2:00 pm Regular Meeting - BoCC Meeting Room

December 16, 2009 10:00 am – 2:00 pm Regular Meeting - BoCC Meeting Room

2010 Stakeholder Meeting - to be scheduled.

GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO (GOCO) GRANT APPLICATION: Cochran presented information about an opportunity for submittal of basic information for a GOCO grant for open space that may result in sage-grouse habitat conservation. A request to hire a consultant to recommend a plan and then have the dollars available to implement the goals was recommended. Pfister confirmed that this may be an opportunity to secure funding and organizational efforts to create and implement a comprehensive conservation plan. Cochran and Pfister will work together to complete the preliminary grant application information with the hopes that the request would initiate discussion about this topic.

ADJOURN: MOVED by Stahlnecker, seconded by Scott, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The October 14, 2009 regular meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 10:09 am.

WORK SESSION: PRESENTATION BY DR. CAMERON ALDRIDGE, USGS – NPS SAGE-GROUSE STUDY

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III