

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
November 18, 2009**

The November 18, 2009 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners' Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

Voting Members Present:

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

Non-voting Members Present:

Liz With, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Allen Roper, 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 November 18, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:01 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: Pfister requested an addition to the agenda for discussion of an upcoming workshop. It was decided that if time allowed, this discussion could be added to item number 10. Cochran also requested the addition of discussion about the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant application. Navy asked for an update on an upcoming Nature Conservancy Workshop presented at the last meeting. It was decided that the update would be provided under the Committee Member Comments/Reports section of the agenda. The agenda was approved as modified.

COMMITTEE MEMBER APPOINTMENTS: Peterson welcomed Allen Roper as the newly appointed Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association Alternate representative.

It was noted that a letter will be sent from Gunnison County Administration in the coming weeks to appointing agency members requesting nomination for Committee members. A letter of term expiration will also be sent to the Community At-large Members and their positions will be formally advertised in the newspapers along with all County board and commission vacancies. The formal appointments by the Board of County Commissioners will be made on February 16, 2010.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

Nature Conservancy Workshop Update: St. George provided a brief update about an upcoming climate change workshop to be hosted by The Nature Conservancy on December 2-3, 2009 at the Aspinall-Wilson Center on the Western State College campus. He thought that the workshop may already be full. Navy asked if the Committee was well represented, as she had not received any information about the event as a Committee Member. It was reported that approximately 60 attendees were anticipated with a great deal of local interest to attend the event. Attendance by the Committee to the event was encouraged.

City of Gunnison Annexation: Cochran presented information about a Public Hearing scheduled later in the day. Sage-grouse mitigation language included in the City of Gunnison Annexation documents was reviewed. Steve Westbay, City of Gunnison Planner, was present to answer questions about the Public Hearing and the rationale for the sage-grouse language in the draft Annexation Agreement.

Peterson requested an update about Taylor Park grazing permit relinquishment and renewal of a permit relative to the annexation process. St. George advised that he would need to check with staff about the final decision for the permit relinquishment and that the permit renewal was moving through process. Pfister asked about the language referencing the CCAA Certificate of Inclusion (CI) and the implications associated with that proposed requirement. Modification of language to keep the process realistic, yet have the intention of the process included was deliberated. It was recommended that a conversation with the City staff be initiated (this topic continued later in this meeting).

U.S. Forest Service: Vasquez informed the Committee that District Ranger responsibilities were being rotated and as of November 6th, Bill Jackson was temporarily filling the position. There were plans to have a permanent replacement in the position by the end of January 2010.

National Park Service: Stahlnecker reported Dave Showalter, respected wildlife author, was planning a new publication about the Threatened American West. Dr. Jessica Young, of the Local Working Group, provided supporting information about the project.

Division of Wildlife: Later in the meeting Navy requested an update on current applications for Certificate of Inclusions under the DOW's Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) program. DOW representative Nathan Seward reported that 2 applications were in the works and that efforts were ramping up for additional properties.

APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 14, 2009 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the October 14, 2009 meeting minutes were discussed and agreed upon. Changes were made to

the Action Item #8 Sub-Committee with the appointment of Scott. Peterson requested to be removed to allow him to focus his efforts on the Grazing Research Project Sub-committee. **Moved** by Swenson, seconded by St. George, to approve the October 14, 2009 meeting minutes as corrected, and accept the appointment modifications to the Action Item #8 Sub-committee. Motion carried.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE: Peterson reviewed those in attendance at the last Subcommittee meeting. Having agency representation on the Research Team was discussed. The grazing regimes appear to be a difficult hurdle to overcome. He further summarized a table that was developed to bring perspective to the variability of the data collected on the landscape by different agencies. He further explained that the Sub-committee was reviewing data and the Subcommittee will continue to work to develop the project and to determine what baseline data will be needed.

Peterson requested input from the Committee concerning the project. Discussion included approval from the Committee before moving the research project forward. Ms. With provided some example research hypothesis for review and discussion. St. George asked about the sponsorship of this project. Cochran explained that the DOW actually holds the project funding. Peterson provided a detailed summary of the history of the proposal as many have been asking about the relationship between sage-grouse and grazing practices for a long time. Discussion about data currently available and what additional data needed to be collected related to this topic was emphasized.

It was decided to hold a Sub-committee meeting before the next scheduled Committee meeting on December 16, 2009 to further discuss potential hypothesis and direction of the project. The evening of December 1, 2009 at 6:30 pm in the BOCC Meeting Room was proposed (while attendees are in town for the Nature Conservancy workshop).

ACTION ITEM #2 DISCUSSION: Local Working Group Members, Patrick Magee, Steve Westbay, Nathan Steward and Jessica Young were present for discussion. Scott presented information from a topic that was brought forward from the Local Working Group about how they are requesting additional definition of their role in this Action Item as they were identified as a key stakeholder. Scott proposed a meeting combining the membership of both the Local Working Group and the Committee to form a group with mixed membership to discuss this topic further. Discussion about the organizational process commenced. It was decided that there are many plans available to choose from for implementation, and goals could be coordinated with the efforts of the different agencies and groups for success. A Sub-committee was created to better define details related to Action Item #2 and to better understand potential organizational efforts to coordinate actions and provide structure for activities.

MOVED by Pfister, seconded by Swenson, to form the Action Item #2 Sub-Committee. Scott was nominated as the Chairperson, St. George and Navy were appointed by Stahlnecker. Navy nominated three volunteers from the Local Working Group: Patrick Magee, Steve Westbay and Vickie Spencer. Motion Carried Unanimously.

The mission for this sub-committee was to move forward with a direction to define the specifics of coordination and organization of efforts.

Ferchau asked about the efforts to schedule an Action Plan meeting with stakeholders. Dukeman provided a summary of a proposed Night-of-Lights event Friday, December 4, 2009 in downtown Gunnison and a large paper maché Sage-Grouse that was constructed for the event. A plan to present the Action Plan for public review and request those interested to sign-up for notification of the public meeting. The Committee was in support of the event. Materials were offered to help with the project.

CITY OF GUNNISON RISING DRAFT ANNEXATION AGREEMENT (Continued):

City of Gunnison, Community Development and Planning Director, Steve Westbay was briefed about the comments made earlier in the meeting; he strongly encouraged the Committee to provide their input as soon as possible as there was a Public Hearing later in the day.

Discussion about how some Committee members were not comfortable with the wording, specifically concerning the Certificate of Inclusion (CI) verbiage commenced.

BREAK: The meeting recessed from 12:05 pm until 12:15 pm.

The logistics of the CI process and the purpose of the language were further discussed. It was asked if inclusion of the statement about the CI was needed. Pfister proposed removing the language. Mr. Westbay indicated that he would discuss this option with the City Manager and the applicant.

MOVED by Peterson, seconded by Navy, for the Strategic Committee to request that the second sentence, referencing a Certificate of Inclusion (CI) be stricken from the City of Gunnison, Gunnison Rising Draft Annexation Agreement, Page 20, section 14.3 Sage Grouse Habitat Protection. Motion Carried Unanimously.

An invitation was extended to the Committee to attend the Public Hearing at 7:00 pm at the Gunnison County Multi Purpose Building.

ACTION ITEM #8 SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT/DISCUSSION: Pfister reported the attendance at the Action Item #8 Sub-Committee meeting held October 23, 2009. Sub-section 8F was discussed in detail at that meeting. The Subcommittee decided to use the priority regions document as a starting point and use the Gunnison County Geographic Information Services (GIS) Department as a collector/repository of the data. The types of information available were further discussed with the bird location information being specifically noted as being a helpful tool. The Committee discussed adding a link on Gunnison County website to communicate the progress of the Subcommittee. Allocation of funds to support the project was identified as a need. A meeting held on road classification coordination on November 12, 2009 with several agencies was reported. The data available was found to have enough similarities to allow the information to be "cross-walked" into a single source. Research Scientist, NREL, Colorado State University & U.S. Geological Survey, Cameron L. Aldridge is attempting to expand his human infrastructural road/sage-grouse use mapping project (presented at the October 14, 2009 meeting) for the entire Gunnison Basin.

A meeting was scheduled for December 7, 2009 to further discuss the Road Classification system progress relative to the overall Action Plan.

STRATEGIC COMMITTEE DATA CALL SUBMITTAL TO USFWS- DISCUSSION:

Peterson requested this discussion to ask if the Committee was planning to submit comments. It was decided that each entity would submit comments independently. Cochran advised that the County was planning a submission detailing the efforts of the Committee.

Wenum asked if there was any entity in the room that was not represented and wanted to submit comments as a Committee. There were none.

Pfister stated that the formal notice of the Status Review would be made public in the coming weeks. He expressed appreciation for early submittal of data. There will be a 30 day submittal period following the official announcement of the request for information.

PROPOSED USFWS/NRCS WORKSHOP: Pfister announced a proposed workshop focusing on how to address species at risk. The Gunnison Sage-grouse was presented as a topic and the potential benefits for the workshop were discussed. Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) potential and how Federal agencies are not eligible for assurances (CCA) was further discussed. The Colorado Cattlemens' Association request for consideration for CCAA's was noted.

A conference call was scheduled for November 24, 2009 at 12:00 noon between several BLM representatives, Robbie LeValley, Gary Skiba and others. Scheduling a larger meeting about the information available throughout the range was proposed with a focus on funding. This meeting was proposed to be held in February 2010. This is a better time for the ranching community to attend.

Another proposed topic for the workshop was NRCS practices and their effects on the Gunnison Sage-grouse. Any other topics for potential workshops were also requested by Pfister.

Education and sharing of best practices for implementation will be the focus of the workshop. Presentation of the tools available for CCAA's with a special emphasis for the Stockgrowers' and Cattlemens' Association members. Seamless management across property boundaries was noted as a desired outcome. Logistics about the workshop were further discussed.

The Committee was in support of the Gunnison Sage-grouse as a workshop topic.

GREATER OUTDOOR COLORADO (GOCO) GRANT APPLICATION: Cochran updated the Committee on correspondence about a recent grant application indicating consideration for funding from other GOCO programs may be considered. Development of an overall Gunnison area conservation plan budget as included in the initial application was further discussed. Deliberation about the need for a potential Gunnison Basin Management plan, how it would be used, potential cost for implementation of the process to begin a plan commenced. Cochran advised that there does not appear to be a timeframe, however, it is important not to let this topic lose momentum.

GRANT APPLICATIONS: Discussion about submitting grant applications commenced. The Committee discussed how to best to proceed with submitting grant applications. As writing grant applications can be a specific process it was noted how independent contractors are

commonly used. Saguache County and Gunnison County do not currently have a grant writing person. It was thought that they were submitted by each area or department. Peterson mentioned how grant writing responsibility for a Sub-committee may be too much to ask for, and recommended the current process of when staff identifies opportunities the Committee determines actions. It was agreed to make grant funding a priority for the future.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

December 16, 2009

9:00 am -12:00 TBA - Grazing Subcommittee Meeting BoCC Meeting Room

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm Regular Meeting - BoCC Meeting Room

January 2010

2010 Stakeholder Meeting - to be scheduled.

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Swenson, seconded by Scott to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The November 18, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 1:50 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III