

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
December 16, 2009**

The December 16, 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:

John Scott, Vice-Chairperson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Via Teleconference
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Jon Muggelstone, Public At-Large (arrived at 1:07 pm)

Non-voting Members Present:

Liz With, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Allen Roper, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association (GCSA)
Russ Japuntich, BLM (arrived at 1:45 pm and stayed for the Grazing Research Project portion of the meeting).

Staff Members Present:

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

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Vice-Chairperson Scott called the December 16, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 1:02 pm.

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

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: The agenda was approved as circulated.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

BLM: St. George distributed an executive summary of the Gunnison Range (program) review conducted by BLM earlier this year. The review was related to the term (grazing) permit renewal process and has implications for sage-grouse conservation efforts. He explained that there were many questions related to this topic and how a BLM team came to perform an assessment of the process and presented recommendations for improvements to the grazing permit renewal process on BLM lands. Meetings were being scheduled to present the content

of the report to the Stockgrowers' board and the Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners. The executive summary was also sent to Congressman Salazar and Senators Udall and Bennet's offices. He welcomed any comments for the Committee.

COMMUNITY: Ferchau presented information about how the Chamber of Commerce was working to update a cartoon character map of Gunnison Country. Ferchau proposed to include information about the Gunnison Sage-grouse in an ad on the map with educational messages about what and what not to do, if a grouse is encountered. Committing to the space was determined to be an easy process. Funding the ad was further discussed. The cost was estimated to be around \$895 for a double sized ad that would be several inches in size, or \$495 for the smallest size and would have a 3 year circulation. It was thought the publication will go to print in March 2010. Placing a sage-grouse character in the areas where the bird may be seen was further discussed. An electronic digital map could also be available with links to other websites and may be able to provide additional educational efforts to the public. The Local Working Group Information and Education Subcommittee will be approached for a funding contribution to the effort. Agencies were also asked to contribute any available resources. Ferchau will work with Navy and Cochran to complete the logistics of this project. This topic may be added to a future agenda for an update.

NRCS: Scott presented a poster "Clover Seeding for Sage-grouse Habitat and Forage Production on Mountain Meadows" authored by John Scott, Lars Santana, Matt Barnes, Mark Volt and Joe Brummer to be presented at an upcoming Grazing Lands Conservation Innovative (GLCI) meeting.

An update was also provided concerning hosting a workshop in conjunction with the USFWS. NRCS leaders at the state level were in support of the workshop and felt that the event would have better results if held at the local level. Scott and Pfister will work together to schedule the event.

Grazing Permit Update: Peterson requested an update concerning the BLM Taylor Park Pool grazing permits relative to the Gunnison Rising annexation proposal. St. George reported that an EA for the area was currently in the public review phase and that interested parties should have received a copy of the document. He explained that the renewal process and the relinquishment of permits by Mr. Bratton relative to the City of Gunnison annexation were independent of one another. It was noted that once a decision by the City of Gunnison concerning the Annexation has been made, there were plans to move forward on the relinquishment and then work with permittees on renewal. Peterson supported the relinquishment, but expressed his concern for these types of agreements setting precedence for sage-grouse mitigation and removal of lands available for grazing permits.

City of Gunnison Council Meeting: Scott attended the December 8, 2009 Gunnison Rising annexation public meeting and reported that he shared the concerns expressed by the Committee at the previous meeting (see minutes from November 18, 2009). The requested statement was removed from both the Annexation Agreement and the Development Agreement as recommended by the Committee.

APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 18, 2009 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the November 18, 2009 meeting minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Swenson,

seconded by Laurie, to approve the November 18, 2009 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT DISCUSSION: The Research Team arrived at 1:30 pm. Tony Apa, Mike Phillips, and Robbie LeValley were present for discussion. St. George provided a summary of a meeting earlier in the day between agencies discussing the potential availability of information to share. It was noted that Joe Brummer was in attendance at that meeting, but was not able to attend the Committee meeting. The Team noted that they had reviewed a potential research design and the overall goals for the project relative to the data currently available from several specific grazing management files that were thought to be a representative mid-point for collected information, with some files containing more or less information from both the Forest Service and BLM. The geographic areas for the project to focus on, how they could be identified and what additional information would be needed to move the project forward was also discussed.

LeValley expressed her appreciation to the staff of BLM and USFS for their efforts to collect and present the data. The depth and variability of information in a snapshot view of what was available was very helpful. She then explained after evaluation of the information and because there was a great deal of variation in the timing and methodology of the collected data, a new baseline data collection project was recommended. This project would allow extensive baseline vegetative data from specific locations to be collected using consistent data collection methodology. Demographic data would then be overlaid onto consistent habitat data. The geographic areas proposed were: South Parlin, Cabin Alder/North Parlin, Chance Gulch, Ohio Creek, Flat Top and Kezar Basin. Project planning/preparation would be started in January, in time for the upcoming field season. Staffing considerations were discussed. St. George advised that he had been approached by several professional scientists available to help staff the project. A written summary document of the revised project will be prepared and distributed. Ferchau asked if Western State College was involved in the staffing for the project and requested if at all possible to include this local resource.

Moved by Peterson, seconded by Swenson, that the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee endorse the oral recommendations from the (Grazing Project) Research Team for the baseline inventory data collection for vegetative data toward the Grazing Research Project and for the Research Team to move forward, with a status report in the first quarter of 2010, as appropriate. Motion carried unanimously.

The timeframe, logistics and budget for the project was further discussed.

Committee members expressed their appreciation to the Research Team, their support for the direction of the project and their excitement to see the project moving forward.

ACTION ITEM #2 SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE: Scott provided information about an upcoming subcommittee meeting scheduled for Friday, December 18, 2009 at 9:00 am in the Forest Service conference room (216 N. Colorado Street, Gunnison). He extended an invitation to Committee members to attend.

ACTION ITEM #8 SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE: Pfister reported on a meeting that was held on December 15, 2009. He explained the data collection efforts by different agencies to

develop a road layer database to meet the purposes for the project headed by Dr. Cam Aldridge with the USGS. Classification indicators of 1-4 according to the BLM definitions were being used as a baseline tool to keep the data within a common denominator.

Gunnison County Geographic Information Services Director, Mike Pelletier (not in attendance) participated in the meeting and was pleased with the quality of the maps as many of the participants at the meeting were able to provide on-the-ground observations about road conditions and classification categories. Swenson reported that Gunnison County was working to include an additional developed parcel layer to the USFWS for analysis. The next steps of the projects were discussed with plans for the analysis to identify potential conservation regions. Scott proposed working with Local Working Group to update the Priority Regions document to include this new information.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY CLIMATE CHANGE WORKSHOP AND GUNNISON BASIN PROJECT DISCUSSION:

The event was well attended with approximately 60 people. The format of the meeting allowed participants to further develop planning techniques and ideas for management plans using climate change scenarios focused on three ecological areas: Alpine, Headwaters and Sage-grouse habitat. TNC will prepare a summary report. Peterson expressed his concern about a statement in the printed materials that made an assumption about how hay production was defined as a threat to the sage-grouse. It was noted that this topic was included in the workshop materials, but not discussed at the meeting. Specifics about the Gunnison Basin Project document were further discussed. Scott asked that Cochran request additional details about the research claims included in the document. Specifically, distribution of the information, the research performed, and how the researchers came to the conclusions identifying threats to the grouse.

Navy mentioned how in the future events like this could be opened to a larger audience and include on campus participants; inclusion of the committee in research projects and future communications was requested.

USFWS DATA CALL – DISCUSSION ON USE OF WEB PORTAL: Several Committee members expressed their frustration as there were several factors that made the web portal challenging to upload data. Cochran found it simple to use, but explained that the system only accepted a single file attachment per comment entry and that the portal would not accept “zipped” files. He invited Committee members to submit information by disk in an overnight envelope being sent by the County. Pfister requested any insights or comments about the process as he was willing to pass them along through the chain of command.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

January 12, 2010 12:00 noon Cochran has an education outreach presentation scheduled for Woman’s League of Voters meeting at the Blackstock Government Center.

January 20, 2010 10:00 am – 2:00 pm - Regular Meeting

February 17, 2010 10:00 am – 2:00 pm - Organizational Meeting

2010

Stakeholder Meeting - to be scheduled.

ADJOURN: MOVED by Swenson, seconded by Peterson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The December 16, 2009 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:50 pm.

Certification of Approval:

John Scott, Vice-Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III