

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
March 18, 2010**

The March 18, 2010 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 Service (NRCS)
Russ Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Allen Roper, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) via Telephone
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) - Arrived at 12:38 pm
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA) - Arrived at 1:17 pm (Please note: No motions were proposed this late in the meeting, so no voting privileges were needed from the regular or alternate members who were both representing 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 March 18, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:03 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: No modifications to the agenda were requested. The agenda was approved as circulated. Cochran made a scheduling note that Wenum was planning to attend the meeting. However, his schedule did not allow him to be present for the entire meeting.

INTRODUCTION OF BoCC APPOINTED MEMBERS: The Board of County Commissioners ratified the USFS nominations for John Murphy and Matt Vasquez on March 2, 2010.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

Map Project: Scott circulated invoices from the Gunnison Chamber of Commerce for the pledges made for the inclusion of sage-grouse information on an upcoming tourist map. Photographs for the map were discussed. Pictures of a grouse near a rock and

another of a grouse near the side of the road were requested from Vasquez to be included as they were thought to be typical of how one might see a grouse in the habitat during most of the year other than lekking season. The narrative will be further reviewed and circulated via email.

Tomichi Creek State Wildlife Area: Draft regulations were included in the packet materials for review. Discussion about the potential hunting opportunities for waterfowl and the need for dogs to be leashed in the area commenced. A comment about the need for signage with regulations and rules to be posted in the area was made by Navy. Additional details related to the discussion of this topic were recommended to be delayed until J Wenum was available.

USFWS: Pfister reported that the Gunnison Sage-grouse status review determination deadline was extended until September 2010. Additional details will be circulated via email.

NRCS/USFWS Workshop Report: A CCAA/CCA workshop was held February 23, 2010 and reports from attendees indicate that the information was well received. Approximately 30 participants attended both the morning and afternoon sessions. There may be a similar event held in Montrose the last week of April.

Poncha Pass Lek: Laurie reported observing several birds already during a recent lek site visit.

Committee Membership: A regular, public at-large position for membership to the committee was noted to be still available. Peter Caloger, present in the audience, expressed his interest in submitting an application for the position. Swenson noted that the deadline is March 19, 2010 at 5:30 pm for a letter of interest to be received by the Gunnison County Administration Office.

APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 17, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: The February 17, 2010 meeting minutes were reviewed. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Laurie to accept the February 17, 2010 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

UPDATES:

2010 Road Closures: Cochran provided an update about the Gunnison County, BLM and USFS sage-grouse road closures for 2010. All but one gate, that was frozen, were closed and locked on March 15th. It was advised that there was an authorized group working behind a closed gate. A request was made for the workers not to access the site before 9:00 am. Observations were reported indicating a great deal of shed antler hunter activities. The season opened on March 15, 2010 and is open 10:00 am to sunset. The contact locations for those with a need for access through the closures to gate combo's are: Gunnison County Public Works, Gunnison County Administration, and the BLM/USFS Office. Laurie offered to take information about the closures to the Saguache County Courthouse. Stahlnecker also requested a large map and smaller maps/closure lists for the Curecanti National Recreation Area Visitors Center. Japuntich reported an increased presence of BLM law enforcement in the area. Ferchau asked about access to gate codes after regular business hours if there was need for real estate

agents to show properties to prospective clients. Japuntich and Cochran volunteered to serve as after hours contacts if access was required.

Grazing Research Project: The DOW has been recruiting for summer positions for habitat assessment. The job announcement was circulated to the Committee. A detailed update on the project is anticipated at the next meeting. Information about birds being brought into the basin for translocation and a brood rearing project was discussed. Specific details about the project were unknown. There were several researchers anticipated in the valley with the thought that they would be collecting eggs for the captive rearing project with plans for release back into the wild for survival tracking. Details related to brood rearing project success with Greater and Gunnison Sage-grouse species were reviewed with the project's goal to have the birds survive in captivity and then have reproductive success when released back into the wild. Future efforts may include placing captive reared chicks with wild broods. In response to the high mortality rates in chicks, Ferchau proposed "grouse kennels" in areas of natural habitat in hopes of protecting the birds until they are older, then being released into the wild.

State of Colorado Threatened and Endangered Species Listing Process: Cochran provided an update. The DOW received nominations for approximately 124 species for addition to the State Threatened and Endangered Species List. The Gunnison Sage-grouse was included in the proposal. Additional details related to this topic will be provided to the Committee as they are available.

ACTION ITEM #2 SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE/DISCUSSION: Discussion about the proposed guidelines and the current policy commenced. Changes to better clarify statements were proposed. Membership considerations were further deliberated.

Moved by Pfister, seconded by Laurie to adopt/accept the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee Policy on Standing and Ad Hoc Subcommittees as amended.

Ferchau recommended adding a statement that the subcommittees would be required to provide a report within a specific timeframe to help organize the process and to help to guide subcommittees on their mission to assure tasks were completed in a timely manner. Scott proposed wording for the inclusion.

Motion friendly amended to include agreement of the Committee and subcommittee on specific project timelines to be determined when the subcommittee tasks are assigned by the Committee, to be included in the document.

Navy offered to proof the document before circulation. Review of the finalized document by the Local Working Group (LWG) was discussed.

Motion carried unanimously.

Navy offered to communicate with the LWG about the document. Appreciation was expressed to Scott for his efforts on this project. A meeting was proposed with all established Local Working Group subcommittees to implement the new procedures. The need for Committee members to chair subcommittees was further discussed.

LOCAL WORK GROUP/RANGEWIDE PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING - PLANNING: Details about the meeting scheduled for March 19, 2010 at the Ute Indian Museum in Montrose were discussed. Travel arrangements, a request for the Range wide Plan Steering Committee to maintain focus on the proposed original intentions when the committee began to maintain documents, review, consider and implement new information were included. Scott noted that he would provide a presentation about the Committee's activities at the meeting.

ACTION ITEM #2 SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE/DISCUSSION (Continued):

The Subcommittee Policy and specific language changes to include the ideas proposed earlier in the meeting were further discussed.

BREAK: The meeting recessed from 11:49 am until 12:30 pm.

GOLD BASIN FUELS PROJECT: HCCA Public Lands Director Matt Reed and BLM Wildlife Biologist/Fuels Project Coordinator David Kinatader were present for discussion. Kinatader presented information about the project. He explained the proposed location and treatment methods, specific equipment, fire techniques and wildlife habitat considerations involved, including treatment of stands of aspen trees for Sudden Death Syndrome (SAD) in the project. Japuntich explained that implementation of the sage-grouse habitat considerations were only anticipatory as their accomplishment would be dependent on future funding.

Discussion about Committee involvement in scoping notices was delayed until after the next agenda item.

GEOTHERMAL LEASE NOMINATIONS: Japuntich summarized information related to geothermal lease nominations. Many Committee members participated in a public meeting hosted by the BLM/USFS on Thursday, March 11, 2010 at the Aspinall-Wilson Center. The proposed area was described on the maps with the Forest Service managing the above ground resources and the BLM managing the underground resources. Concerns include occupied sage grouse, lynx and bald eagle habitat. Lek locations were reviewed. It was noted that the USFS EA comment period ends April 5, 2010. The process for exploratory drilling, site logistics and the number of impacted sites is still unknown and was further discussed. Navy asked about the noise factors associated with development, road traffic disturbances and expressed concern that it appeared that the operations run twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Considerations included in the Range Wide Plan relative to energy development were reviewed.

Cochran announced that Gunnison County was planning to participate in the planning process as a cooperating agency. The Committee serves in an advisory role to the BoCC and will be consulted for input related to the development of geothermal leasing policy/actions. Pfister presented information related to the species sensitivity to disturbance that was not available when the referenced documents were drafted and noted that the new information should be considered during this process.

COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL PROJECT DEVELOPMENT, PRIORITIZATION AND REVIEW: Additional discussion about the advisory role of the Committee commenced. The Technical Subcommittee may be tasked with initial review of proposed projects, making

recommendations to the Committee as a whole. The level of involvement was discussed. Navy asked about proactive projects versus review of accomplished activities. The Action Plan was determined to be the guiding document for those types of activities. The desire for open communications and project coordination between different agencies was expressed. It was decided that, for the short-term, Cochran would continue communicating projects on a case-by-case basis for comment consideration.

The Gold Basin Fuels Project proposed Environmental Assessment (EA) comment period closed. However, the timetable for the overall evaluation period was reviewed with additional comment submission opportunities being presented. Peterson recommended that the Committee be involved whenever possible and requested scheduling be considered to assure that comment opportunities were not missed.

The Committee expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have information related to the topics presented. Additional details related to projects will be provided as available.

LEK ACCESS: Cochran presented information related to a lek access application/process that was developed by Dr. Pat Magee, founder of the Sisk-a-dee organization, to help monitor and control lek access. The organization manages the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Area and is frequently contacted by birders interested in photographing Gunnison Sage-grouse. Wenum and Nathan Seward (DOW) presented observations about access, previous discussions and how there was no single agency with the jurisdiction to regulate activities. Private land access concerns were also considered. How to minimize disturbances and encourage responsible activities was discussed. There was an overall desire to continue monitoring activities expressed by the Committee. The potential for a subcommittee to assist Dr. Magee with review of applications was proposed. It was decided to contact Dr. Magee to include him in future discussions.

ACTION ITEM #2 SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE/DISCUSSION (Continued): Stahlnecker explained that he felt there was need for clarity when proposing assignments to subcommittees. Providing detailed guidelines, appointing a Committee member chairperson to existing subcommittees and inclusion of a work plan with established timetables was decided to be included in the Subcommittee Policy as proposed by Ferchau earlier in the meeting. The Committee agreed that these changes should be included. Scott proposed circulation of the finalized version of the final "draft" Subcommittee Policy via email for final review before implementation.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Thursday, April 15, 2010 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, Regular Meeting

Wednesday, May 26, 2010 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: The March 18, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 1:54 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III