

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
April 15, 2010**

The April 15, 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 Services (NRCS)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
John Murphy, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Amy Seglund, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)

Non-voting Members Present:

Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)

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 April 15, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:04 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: A request was made to exchange the times for Agenda Items #11 and #12. The agenda was approved as modified.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

Map Ad: Ferchau confirmed that the ad request contract was completed and the ad was submitted for publication. Photographs proposed for use were reviewed. An update was provided about payments. Joellen Fonken provided the layout services at no cost to benefit the conservation effort. The Committee asked that a letter of appreciation to Joellen be prepared.

High County Citizens' Alliance: Navy presented information about a recent project notice from the National Park Service. Discussion about boundaries of the impacted area, the

potential for designating specific routes and trails for mountain biking, as well as the potential impacts to sage grouse commenced. Navy asked if the committee as a whole was planning to provide comments relative to sage grouse conservation recommendations. St. George asked if there was a specific type of comment or concern that needed to be addressed. There was nothing specific that the Committee felt the need to formalize.

Natural Resources Conservation Service: A handout was provided concerning a recently released NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative. The information was discussed. It was noted that May 14, 2010 was the deadline for interested parties to sign up to be considered for participation in this program. Landowner obligations, eligibility paperwork and the timeline for consideration were further reviewed, with the contracts hoped to be completed by September 2010.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Pfister presented information about a proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supporting the Sage-grouse Initiative and working to implement the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) process to formalize sage grouse management practices on private lands. Continued communications will occur. He anticipates that more landowners will be interested in participating in the program.

APPROVAL OF MARCH 18, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the March 18, 2010 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Navy to approve the March 18, 2010 meeting minutes as corrected. Motion carried. Peterson abstained from the vote, as he was not present at the March 18, 2010 meeting.

AGENDA MODIFICATION: Pfister requested an additional item concerning an update about the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) and Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) process be added to the Agenda. The Chair determined that the request could be added during the half-hour time slot allocated for lunch at 12:30 pm. If additional time was needed, adding the discussion to the end of the meeting was proposed.

UPDATES:

2010 ROAD CLOSURES: It was reported that several gates had been damaged. Overall, there appeared to be a reduction in property destruction from previous years. Observations were shared about the shed antler collection season. The opening of the local National Park Service facilities, earlier than typical in the season, seemed to be well received by the community.

USFS GEOTHERMAL LEASE EA: The document in its entirety was included in the packet materials. Cochran advised that the County was working to complete an Interagency Agreement to serve as a Cooperating Agency on the project. Peterson requested a general overview about the timeline for the project. St. George offered information about the different phases to include:

1. Completion of the USFS Phase I Environmental Assessment (EA) scoping comment period.
2. The EA will be formally opened for Public Comment on July 1, 2010.
3. Dependent of the outcome of the EA a leasing decision could then be announced. The potential for different kinds of decisions were presented.

4. The date of publication of notice of the BLM EA scoping comment period in the Federal Register is unknown at this time. Coordinated efforts between the agencies are ongoing. It was noted that public comment may be submitted at any time. The formal process and the inclusion of deadlines were to help guide the schedule.
5. Fall 2010 is targeted to have a draft analysis for public review and comment.

ANTELOPE HILLS WATER PIPELINE: Cochran provided an update about the proposed Antelope Hills Water Pipeline project. Gunnison County is working closely with the Antelope Hills Homeowners Association in hopes of being able to help provide adequate water service to the subdivision to address public health issues associated with their current water supply. A map that included lek status and locations of proposed sites impacted, construction project timing, and other details related to recommendations from the Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator during the pre-application process related to the project were reviewed. Discussion about the impact to BLM lands, their review process and the availability of lek location information commenced. The timeline for project completion is proposed for the fall of 2011. Concern was expressed that if the project was unable to stay on schedule and if it became an emergency water supply situation, that project recommendations, including the time restrictions for construction be followed, as there appeared to be potentially negative impacts to sage grouse and their habitats during critical times of the year.

Inclusion of this area in the City of Gunnison three-mile plan and the potential for future development was discussed. Pfister asked questions related to the water sources relative to the Gunnison River. The source of the proposed water supply was not known. Ferchau asked for clarification about the definition about the "unknown" legend on the map. Cochran clarified the definition by reading the definition from the Division of Wildlife *2009 Gunnison Sage-grouse Lek Count Summary*.

At 10:50 am USFS Regular member, John Murphy left the meeting. USFS Alternate member Matt Vasquez then took John's place as USFS voting member.

This topic is scheduled on the Gunnison County Planning Commission agenda for May 7, 2010. Peterson expressed his concern about the urgency of the project and the importance of habitat concerns. He voiced his concern that the recommendations be followed. Specifically, that project construction takes place only during recommended times of the year to avoid disturbance.

Moved by Peterson, seconded by Scott that Cochran draft a letter for Committee member signature, concerning the importance of the Antelope Hills Pipeline project construction timing related to sage-grouse habitat considerations for review by the Committee at their May meeting.

Potential negative impacts to grouse, project approval and specific timelines were further discussed. Cochran will provide information to the Planning Commission at their May 7, 2010 meeting. Committee members were invited to attend. The audience and addressees of the proposed correspondence will be coordinated with the Gunnison County Public Works Department.

Motion carried unanimously.

SUBCOMMITTEES:

Review Approved Policy: Scott advised that the current document included requested comments from previous meetings and email messages. Navy requested a grammatical change. Peterson asked for clarification about membership. The revisions to the document were further discussed. The Committee determined that this was the final version of the document and that future changes would require formal action from the Committee.

Discussion with Current LWG Committee Chairs: Local Working Group (LWG) members Vicki Spencer and Allen Moores were present for discussion. The information related to the LWG membership and current subcommittees provided by Jessica Young (not present) was reviewed. Moores recommended that the Committee may want to contact the original membership of the LWG to communicate the organizational changes. Recruitment efforts and the willingness for the chairperson to contact the current membership for each sub-committee to let them know about current activities and opportunities for participation were discussed. The Committee determined that a letter informing the original signatories of the Memorandum of Agreement concerning the *Gunnison Sage Grouse Conservation Plan (1997)* was appropriate, informing them of the current actions. Cochran will draft the letter.

Appointments:

Technical Subcommittee: Scott volunteered to be the Chairperson of the Technical Subcommittee. Russ Japuntich and Liz With were nominated to be part of that subcommittee as well. Scott offered to contact members for confirmation of their interests and willingness to serve. The importance of having inclusive membership and the challenges with appointments were further discussed. A formal process to designate interest and confirmation of a nomination in writing was proposed. The importance of making contact with current members, as well as recruitment efforts were discussed. Stahlnecker appointed John Scott to serve as the Chairperson of the Technical Sub-Committee.

Information and Education (I&E) Subcommittee: Membership was discussed. A desire to include agency representation was expressed. Moores explained that he felt there was adequate representation for Gunnison County and that he would prefer to allocate his resources to other projects, stepping down from the responsibilities as the Chairperson of the LWG I&E Subcommittee. **Moved** by Laurie, seconded by Scott to nominate Sue Navy to serve as the Chairperson of the Information and Education (I&E) subcommittee. She accepted the nomination. Motion carried unanimously.

A letter was proposed to the LWG membership list with an invitation for participation in Committee activities. The potential for a future meeting with an agenda item designated to communicate the new organization structure and participation opportunities was discussed. The preference to have a letter in paper hard copy form versus just an email message was expressed. The letter was proposed to be drafted for the Chairperson's signature.

Moved by Navy, seconded by Laurie to formally appoint Steve Westbay (not present) and Pat Magee (not present) to the I&E Subcommittee, in response to their email nomination, subject to their approval. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Navy, seconded by Peterson to include Scott in the I&E Subcommittee. He declined the nomination for inclusion in the I&E Subcommittee.

Moved by Scott, seconded by Peterson to nominate Gunnison County Electric Association representative Vicki Spencer for membership to the Technical Subcommittee. She accepted the nomination. Motion carried unanimously.

The recruitment for membership to subcommittees was further discussed. Cochran requested that the Chairperson of each subcommittee provide a list of members to him for record keeping. Ferchau asked that each subcommittee provide a work plan and timetable for assignment completion to the Committee. It was agreed that formalization of ideas and tasks was a good idea. It was noted that the new subcommittees were still developing membership. With the field season just beginning, it was thought that development of plans could be made before the end of the year.

Cochran reminded the Committee of the existing subcommittees and that action by the Committee was needed.

Discussion about the Grazing Research Subcommittee membership commenced. **Moved** by Peterson, seconded by Laurie to reauthorize the Grazing Research Subcommittee with the removal of DOW representative Amy Seglund and Saguache Board of County Commissioner representative Linda Joseph (per their request). Motion carried unanimously.

The Action Item #8 Ad hoc Subcommittee was discussed. Pfister agreed to continue serving as the Chairperson. Peterson requested formal removal from this Subcommittee. **Moved** by Laurie, seconded by St. George for the renewal of the Action Item #8 Subcommittee, with the removal of Peterson, otherwise, membership should remain the same. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Scott, seconded by Pfister to dissolve the Action Item #2 Subcommittee. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Scott, seconded by Navy to dissolve the Action Plan Subcommittee. Motion carried unanimously. Ferchau reminded the group that there was an ongoing process to maintain and update the Action Plan. He expressed concern that efforts be ongoing, even if the Subcommittee was dissolved. It was noted that the Committee as a whole was responsible for the Action Item assignments, project update and updating tasks. Since six months have passed since approval, it was proposed that a review of the Action Plan be included on a future agenda.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN: Discussion about communications of Local Working Group re-organization and its Subcommittees took place. How County staff was available for public notice and distribution of information was discussed. Action Item #8 was further deliberated.

Having subcommittee updates included on upcoming agendas, concern about Action Items that do not have a subcommittee assignment and assuring that the Committee as a whole overall is able to address the goals of the Action Plan were discussed. It was proposed to send

Committee meeting agendas to the former LWG membership via email. Unless requested, they would not be included on correspondence sent to the Committee.

GRAZING PROJECT UPDATE:

TELECONFERENCE WITH ONE OR MORE RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: The team was not available for a formal update. The status of crew position staffing was unknown. Peterson would like to have a formalized update provided to the Committee about the project. He would be providing an update to the Gunnison County Stockgrower's during their early May meeting. The budget for the 2010 season was discussed. The legislation status for additional funding was unknown.

Seglund provided an update on research projects. She reported that a retrospective study on treatments was ongoing. The treatment areas had been identified with data being collected this season. She expressed her concern about funding sources for multiple ongoing projects. This study includes songbirds in sage habitats. The habitat portion of the project relative to the Grazing Project Research Project was further discussed.

Rangewide Steering Committee Update: Scott reported that Local Working Groups from the region recently met with members of the Steering Committee in Montrose. A prioritization exercise was performed to rate the effectiveness of conservation activities. Many leks, except those in the Gunnison area and several in Utah were showing declines. Tony Apa presented information about his captive rearing project. The Committee decided that a request would be made for him to provide the information to the Gunnison community. Details related to scheduling the event were deliberated. Cochran will communicate with Apa in hopes of developing a schedule. St. George proposed a date before the Road Closure season ended May 15th to deliver information to the public about conservation efforts.

CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT (CCA): Pfister provided an overview of the CCA process for public lands relative to the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA). There are not the same assurances with CCA as provided with CCAA for private lands. The details and the technicalities related to the process were reviewed. St. George explained a commitment from the local BLM office to participate and help to coordinate efforts. There was consensus from Committee that the CCA was something to be pursued and that the exact content for implementation will take broader stakeholder involvement. Management plans, strategies and other concepts for conservation efforts were further discussed.

A public information session related to CCAAs and CCAs was proposed. The timing for the session, building stakeholder lists, preparation of information and the agenda were presented and discussed. May 26 and June 15 were proposed dates for a public session.

BREAK: The meeting recessed from 12:55 pm until 1:04 pm.

SAGE-GROUSE "SUMMIT" DISCUSSION: Scott reported that that Leigh Robertson proposed having the next Sage-grouse Summit in the Gunnison Basin in 2011. Review of the history of the event was reviewed with the first conference style event being held in the Telluride/Norwood area. It included breakout sessions leading to the development of the Rangewide Plan. The most recent event was hosted in Montrose. It was more of an informal project update and information sharing session. The budget from the Montrose event was

reviewed. The costs associated with hosting an event, proposed fundraising ideas and different formats, scientific or a community celebration style event were proposed. An example of the Crane Festival in Monte Vista was provided. Scott offered to help recruit speakers and presenters for an event. Having sponsorship from local business, a raffle or an auction were ideas to raise funds for the event. Cooperative efforts with the local community were presented to help reduce the cost of the event.

This project proposal was assigned to the I&E Subcommittee. It was noted that Leigh Robertson would be willing to help organize the event. Coordinating the event with the 2011 lek season was proposed. Showing films, field trips to lek sites and promoting conservation efforts were presented as ideas to be included.

Dr. Patrick Magee arrived 1:28 pm.

LEK ACCESS: Magee explained that the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Area was reaching capacity with the lek-viewing trailer being reserved everyday of the 2010 season. He then provided information related to the history of lek access. Challenges faced attempting to formalize a process for commercial photographers to access lek sites were discussed. The Technical Subcommittee was tasked with further development of lek access protocols, authorization and development of criteria related to the topic.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

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

Wednesday, June 23, 2010 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: The April 15, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:08 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III