

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
May 26, 2010**

The May 26, 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)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Non-voting Members Present:

Jon Muggelstone, Public At-Large
Dan Reinkensmeyer, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County

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 May 26, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:02 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: No modifications to the agenda were requested. The agenda was approved as circulated.

INTRODUCE NEW MEMBER: Peter Caloger was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee as the Regular Community At-Large member on April 20, 2010.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

HCCA: Navy (in jest), read an ad that was published in the Gunnison Country Shopper for a commercial incubator for sage-grouse eggs (get a grant), as well as other species of birds.

USFS: Vasquez reported that Sonia Islet (member of the Information & Education Subcommittee, see below) was being pro-active with sage-grouse education outreach. Plans were in place for her to work with Crested Butte Community School students during the upcoming school year. Stahlnecker recommended that Islet contact Ellen at the NPS because she too was active in the School District and they may be able to coordinate efforts. Peterson requested a copy of the curriculum being used. Vasquez reported that sage-grouse information was added to the USFS website and a habitat treatment monitoring study would be taking place on Flat Top Mountain.

BLM: St. George provided an update on the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) process. He believes that public outreach efforts would be premature. The process to fill a position for a project lead was being contracted, with a person anticipated to be hired soon. The preliminary goals for the CCA process are: (excerpt from Brian St. George's Notes)

- *Provide awareness to stakeholders on GuSG species and habitat conservation*
- *Develop and implement guidelines that are truly adaptive in nature*
- *Clearly identify priority/core areas and what that means*
- *Tier down from the RCP to priority/core areas to apply management scheme (i.e. apply specific management approaches to specific areas - not one size fits none)*
- *Determine what agencies will do if habitat is not meeting the agreed to standards and guidelines*

- *Ensure our analysis is using the best standards and guidelines available*

The agencies discussed that the scope needs to be based on/informed by (at a minimum):

- *Rangeland Health Standards*

- *Vegetation transects*

- *Rangewide Conservation Plan*

The agencies discussed that a CCA should address:

- *Recreation/travel management*

- *Range management*

- *Ex-urbanization/WUI*

The agencies also discussed as "sideboards" that this CCA process:

- *should focus on managing the landscape*

- *is not just a means to try to preclude listing of the species but rather to guide good management and conservation*

- *should act as a means to focus discussion of management of core/priority habitats & allow continued use of public lands*

- *may not ultimately result in a CCA as the final tool/document but it will help to define and drive the process.*

Caloger asked about the consequences related to input, if the habitat was not meeting guidelines and the potential agency response. Core habitat areas were described, areas not meeting standard and actions to take or activities related to broad level management and how to meet the guidelines were further discussed, but may need additional deliberation. St. George noted that was information not previously considered and that his comments would be considered as part of the public outreach portion.

DOW: Wenum reported that preliminary data indicated that lek counts may be lower than during previous years. However, the DOW was still collecting data from lek counters and the final numbers were still pending. He announced that tours by a DOW committee of areas proposed for augmenting populations outside of the Gunnison Basin was taking place. Dove Creek, Colorado and Monticello, Utah were toured in the previous week with local experts helping to guide the tours over the habitat landscape. Trinchera (San Luis Valley), and the Jicarilla Apache Reservation in New Mexico, as well as other areas in Colorado to include: Crawford, San Miguel, Dry Creek, Poncha Pass and others were on the list of proposed sites to be visited throughout the field season. He explained that the group was reviewing the proposed areas, specifically observing habitat conditions to gain an understanding and an overall perspective of the surrounding areas and their potential for future population augmentation. Logistics related to the number of birds, current populations, the program goals and other details related to the effort were discussed.

Vasquez reported that the USFS had found sage-grouse pellets north of Grand Junction. This may be an interface between Gunnison and Greater Sage-grouse.

APPROVAL OF APRIL 15, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the April 15, 2010 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Laurie, seconded by Ferchau to accept the April 15, 2010 meeting minutes as modified. Motion carried with a majority vote.

UPDATES:

2010 ROAD CLOSURES: Cochran reported that this was the fifth year of closures and that all of the closures had been opened on May 14 and 15, 2010 with the exception of the USFS gates that were opened on May 17, 2010. Reports of damage to the gates were noted. Some damage was thought to have taken place before the closure season. One of the challenges noted was for citizens to understand that the road may be dry at the gate closure, but not passable in other locations.

GEOTHERMAL LEASE PROCESSES: St. George and Vasquez provided an update related to the Geothermal Lease Nomination process. USFS has a draft EA anticipated for release on July 1, 2010 for a 30 day comment period. BLM has a Federal Register noticed scoping period open for the next 30 days with a press release announcing the information. An Open House was scheduled at the BLM/USFS Offices (216 N Colorado) June 14th from 11:00 am – 3:00 pm. A field trip to Burley, Idaho was scheduled the week of June 8th with a bus chartered for transportation to an operating geothermal power generation site. An invitation was extended to Committee members, noting that travel expenses (meals and lodging) were not included. It was thought that the operations may be larger than those which may be proposed in the Gunnison Basin. Meetings with local BLM staff and the company operating the plant were scheduled.

Peterson asked for clarification about the USFS Environmental Assessment (EA) comment period. Additional opportunities for comments related to the proposed project were discussed. Caloger asked about the commercial utilization of the waste heat, specifically, for green houses and residential heating as an environmental concern for secondary operations. St. George noted that this was a topic that was not previously brought forward and would be included as a scoping issue comment.

CAPTIVE REARING PROJECT PRESENTATION-SCHEDULING: Cochran reported that Tony Apa and Mike Phillips had been contacted with proposed dates for a presentation. Potential dates were discussed, a location needs to be determined and public notice and advertising efforts will be needed. The evening of the June, 22nd was proposed with a Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse Strategic Committee the next day. The public will be invited.

SUBCOMMITTEES:

APPOINTMENTS:

Technical Sub-Committee appointments were made by Chair Stahlnecker, with concurrence of the Committee.

Matthew Vasquez, USFS

Patrick Magee, Western State College/ Sisk-a-dee

Nathan Seward, DOW

Theresa Childers, NPS

Tara de Valois, BLM

Brandon Diamond, DOW

David Kinatader, BLM

Dan Reinkensmeyer, USFWS

Information and Education (I&E) Sub-committee appointments were made by Chair Stahlnecker with concurrence of the Committee.

Sonja Eslit, USFS

Kristi Murphy, BLM

Chris Parmeter, DOW

Kerry Spetter, BLM

LETTER TO CONSERVATION PLAN MOA SIGNATORIES: Cochran advised that after review of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Gunnison Basin Population of the Gunnison Sage Grouse (USFS Agreement No. MOU-04-07-98-035) the termination of the Local Working Group as enabled by the MOA may require formal action by the MOA signatories. Drafting a new MOA was proposed to cancel, terminate or to amend the existing agreement. Reporting requirements, membership, duration, the conservation plan and plan continuation were all reviewed as elements to be considered.

Moved by Pfister, seconded Peterson to formally terminate the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Gunnison Basin Population of the Gunnison Sage Grouse (USFS Agreement No. MOU-04-07-98-035) document. With Committee participation to continue efforts, participation from other entities, using the procedure defined under item VII: DURATION OF AGREEMENT of the document, the signatory undersigned will terminate the MOA and replace it with the organization of the Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse Strategic Committee with notification to the Black Canyon Audubon Society.

A letter signed by the participating MOA signatories was proposed. The Local Working Group was working under this document and this will formalize the transition to the Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse Strategic Committee organizational structure. Peterson reviewed the history of the document and supported the official dissolution to assure

tracking of the actions and show respect to those who created the document. Cochran will draft a letter and circulate via email for review.

Motion Carried Unanimously.

I&E SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT: Navy provided an update on a meeting held May 6, 2010. Different ideas including public outreach in the school district, a place mat and other outreach efforts.

Hosting a summit separate from a festival was proposed. Promoting sage grouse education at existing festival events (flea markets, People's fair, concerts and other venues) was proposed versus attempting to create a new festival from scratch. The need to define Summit dates soon was noted as the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Area trailer was already booking out for the 2011 season. A need for a paid coordinator was identified. Discussion about delegation of duties, The Nature Conservancy being a partner in the efforts, a potential budget and specifics related to the event commenced. The I&E Committee felt they could prepare a pre-plan for the event and pass that along to a professional coordinator because no one on the committee had the necessary expertise nor the time needed. The funding, organizational efforts and consulting services related to hosting the event were further discussed. Designating and delegating tasks and having full committee support for the event and coordinating volunteer efforts to assure project success was proposed. It was recommended to contact Leigh Robertson to request her services and expertise as she had indicated that she was willing to assist with the event. Swenson nominated Cochran to serve as the main coordinator for the event versus an external consultant. Designation of a subcommittee to host the event was proposed. It was then decided that every member of the Committee would be needed for a project of this magnitude. The format of the event was still to be determined however, a scientific conference with a public outreach component was proposed for consideration by the I&E Subcommittee. Budgetary concerns were discussed. Grant programs, use of another non-profit organization like the Community Foundation or the Chamber of Commerce to provide profession coordination assistance of the event and to offer a tax deductible donation for contributors was proposed by Caloger.

The I&E Subcommittee was tasked with determining a budget and coordinating the Committee as a whole for task assignment. Ferchau mentioned asking local businesses for assistance with fund-raising opportunities for community involvement and awareness, but declined to head that effort. Dates for the event were discussed, with April 26 -27, 2011 (Tuesday and Wednesday) proposed as the target dates.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT: Mike Phillips was present for discussion with Mary Williams and Robbie LeValley participating via telephone. Dr. Mary Williams, University of Wyoming, was recently added to the team and would be coordinating data collection efforts in the Gunnison Basin. She explained that she had performed research similar to this summer's project component and would be relocating to the Gunnison area in the coming week. Species Conservation Trust Funds are available to fund the project next year with the baseline habitat data being collected this field season. The budget allocation for the baseline data project component was presented. The proposed project monitoring methods, preliminary review of previously collected information, and starting fieldwork June 1st was discussed. There will be twelve weeks of data collection with a contract through February 2011. Ferchau asked if any of the field technicians were Western State College (WSC) students. There were several

applicants from WSC, but they were not available when hiring took place. Peterson asked when information will be available to move the grazing portion of the study forward. Phillips and Williams thought that by mid-November data could be analyzed. An opportunity for local citizens to join in the efforts and to see the work on the ground was discussed. Cochran also mentioned that this was their time to start building relationships with the grazing permittees, during the early stages of the research design. He noted several sites currently being grazed by different year classes of cattle. Matthews further advised that an article was recently submitted for publication and the Committee requested Williams' dissertation for review. The data being collected would be similar to previous data with the Rangewide Conservation Plan (RCP) protocols being utilized. A field trip was proposed for the next Committee meeting to go on-site to view collection sites and how data was being collected. Peterson expressed his appreciation for all the efforts from those involved in the process.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Tuesday, June 22, 2010 Evening Presentation by Tony Apa Captive Breeding (tentative)

Wednesday, June 23, 2010 8:00 - 2:00, Field Trip/Regular Meeting

Thursday, August 19, 2010 8:30 - 12 Noon Regular Meeting (no meeting in July)

ANTELOPE HILLS PIPELINE: Swenson clarified that this is a water pipeline to provide water to the Antelope Hills subdivision residences.

REQUEST FROM PLANNING COMMISSION FOR COMMENTS: The Gunnison County Planning Commission requested Committee input on the development of the water pipeline and the impacts that proposed up-sizing of a portion of the pipeline may have on the Gunnison Sage-grouse. The size of the line was noted to be 4 inches with a proposition to increase the size to 8 inches from its origination to a point approximately at the center of Section 34. 17 new taps could be available for future development, as well as existing properties if the project was approved.

Cochran has been working with Public Works Director Marlene Crosby and she felt that a letter encouraging project timelines to avoid sage-grouse impacts was not necessary at this time.

Discussion ensued about how this area was included in the City of Gunnison three-mile plan and previously identified as an area proposed for development. Wenum noted that impacts to the grouse have already occurred within the subject area.

Moved by Peterson, seconded by Swenson for Cochran to draft a letter, including the elements from the discussion, with approval and signature by Chairperson Stahlnecker. If Stahlnecker was not comfortable with the draft language, it would be circulated to the Committee for review and input. Motion carried unanimously.

BREAK: The meeting recessed from 12:42 pm until 1:04 pm for lunch.

MULTI-SCALE GUSG NESTING HABITAT MODELS – AN UPDATE. CAM ALDRIDGE AND JOANNE SAHER, USGS PRESENTATION: Critical Nesting Habitat Identification For

Gunnison Sage-Grouse. The use and limitations of the data as a potential management tool, priority of the project, future projects, and budget opportunities to continue funding the program were presented. How areas identified as a priority for conservation efforts may be used as a tool to help direct activities in the future was also discussed. Appreciation was expressed to the team that collected the data and to those that worked on the project.

ADJOURN: The May 26, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:46 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III