

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
June 23, 2010

The June 23, 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)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Jim Starr, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Peter Caloger, Community-at-Large

Staff Members Present:

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

Others present as listed in text.

GRAZING PROJECT FIELD TRIP ORIENTATION, PROJECT DISCUSSION; MARY WILLIAMS PHD.: Dr. Williams introduced her field crew and presented information related to the field methodologies that would be used in the field. The group then travelled to, and viewed data collection on-site.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the June 23, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 12:28 pm.

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. The 7:00 pm presentation by Dr. Tony Apa was discussed, with an invitation extended to all who would like to attend.

APPROVAL OF MAY 26, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the May 26, 2010 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. The definition of the word "core area habitat" was discussed, but determined to be adequate and was left unchanged. The date of July 1, 2010 relative to the USFS Environmental Assessment (EA) had been modified to later in the year to better align with the BLM timeline for the project. This was also left as originally documented in

the minutes, with additional information being reported in the USFS Report section of these meeting minutes.

Moved by Pfister, seconded by Navy to accept the May 26, 2010 meeting minutes as submitted. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

USFS: Vasquez reported that the due date for the USFS Geothermal Lease Nomination EA was modified in their project timeline to August or September to better align with the BLM portion of the process. He also provided a photocopy of the curriculum that was proposed for school presentations for review and comment by the Committee. He noted that the presenters would be hosted in classrooms as guest speakers.

USFWS: Pfister reported that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a proposal to protect three Colorado plants under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). If made final, the measure would extend ESA protection by designating the Pagosa skyrocket as endangered throughout its range; and the Parachute beardtongue and DeBeque phacelia as threatened throughout their ranges. The decision by the Service was published June 23, 2010, in the Federal Register.

BLM: St. George reported that, in cooperation with the DOW, ongoing habitat improvement projects include: Construction of check dams in the Rabbit Gulch area, treatment of 70 acres to reduce bank gullying and increase brood rearing habitat. A weed treatment EA is in the process of development, with scoping letters being sent to a targeted audience requesting comments. This broad programmatic document will direct future weed treatments on BLM lands. In this case, a specific EA is being written to allow the use of chemical weed treatments in the proposed area(s). Until the EA is completed, the BLM portion of Gunnison County weed treatments cannot be applied. He also presented information about fire management in sagebrush areas that currently include fire strategies that control and reduce fire related damages, versus allowing them to burn. Future discussions for sage habitat fire control strategies were proposed. A new Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV) rig equipped with a weed control applicator was recently added to the BLM fleet.

Gunnison County: Cochran provided an update on the Antelope Hills Water Pipeline project including a copy of the comment letter to the Planning Commission (included in the packet materials) and that the USDA released a scoping notice for the EA. A report from the geothermal field trip was provided. Overall, the trip was well received, with the travel to and from the site being intense. Two wells, the associated pipelines, a reinjection site and the actual generating facility were toured. A summary of the experience, to include still and video photography was proposed as a future agenda item to share the details with the Committee. Peterson asked about the scale of the production. St. George felt that the size of the operation for the amount of power being produced was reasonable. There is a network of pipelines that move the water around the site, a generation plant and a total of 6 total wells. The generation plant was relatively small in size with the cooling facility making up a large percentage of the facility area. The diameter of the piping being used was discussed. The site was originally built as a Department of Energy testing facility. It was later purchased and further developed as a commercial power generation site. The current layout and design were established when it was converted to the commercial site. The wells were several miles apart, and set away from the

generation site. Discussion about different types of pipeline, buried, placing them directly on the ground surface or elevated commenced. Between the pressure and the high temperature water in the pipes the pipes must be able to move (expand and contract.) It was reported that the facility employed 6-8 highly technical people with salaries in the range of \$50,000-\$80,000. Starr asked about resource, economic or socio-economic issues of concern. There were minimal issues when the facility was built in the mid-1970s. Current issues arose related to a local hot spring resort and cooling water from a nearby river. However, these issues were resolved with the purchase of water rights by the power generation company. Raptor concerns were also addressed. The noise meter indicated that the noise levels for operations were louder than anticipated. The device used for data collection was reviewed. When the data collector was standing about 50 feet from a well pump it read 70-75 decibels, at 1/3 – 1/4 mile from the site it read 58 decibels and at the generating plant, 95-100 decibels, which would require ear protection. The 1000 horsepower well pump motor used was quieter than expected.

I&E SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT: Navy provided an update about the I&E Subcommittee's efforts to organize the 3rd Sage-grouse Summit to be held in Gunnison. The dates proposed are April 26 and 27, 2011. The Fred R. Field Western Heritage Center and the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Trailer have been tentatively reserved for the event. Leigh Robertson, Coordinator for the San Miguel Basin Working Group will be contacted for assistance with organizational elements related to previous events, specifically contact information for participants and sponsors that may be able to assist with funding. St. George summarized his input to the recent Subcommittee. He recommended focusing on the impacts that management decisions have on people personally, like the Travel Management Plan and highlighting why the public was being asked to make concessions for sage-grouse conservation efforts. Trail users (motorized (OHV) and non-motorized) and hang-gliders were cited as examples of groups that may be impacted by seasonal road closures. Groups in the region were cited as examples of the type of audience that would be desired for the event.

The Summit budget was discussed. It was noted that if donations were made to a 501c3 organization they may be tax deductible. An initial budget of \$20,000 from the second Summit in 2008 was being used as a starting point. Finding ways to reducing travel expenses for speakers and presenters was discussed. The Committee voiced support for registration costs only for the professional presentations during the day to help offset costs, with evening public outreach sessions being provided at no cost to the participants. Removal of the sponsorship for private landowners was proposed by Peterson. Food expenses were reviewed and thought to be an area that a reduction could be considered, Peterson also recommended the use of local beef during the menu selection. Starr asked about the proposed field trips. A morning lek visit to the Waunita Watchable Wildlife area was highlighted with trips to other areas possible. Transportation considerations will need to be addressed.

Establishing a theme for the event to help guide the organizational efforts was proposed. ***Third Gunnison Sage Grouse Summit: Lifestyles and Livelihood ~ a Partnership for Conservation and Preservation*** was the slogan developed by Subcommittee with the help of Subcommittee member Sonia Esliit. With the perspective that everyone has a role in sage-grouse conservation, topics of presentations were discussed with the importance of creating an environment that would allow for information sharing and interactions between specialized academics and the general public.

Organizational tasks identified were:

1. Public Outreach: Advertisement, events.
2. Content of the conference: Panel discussions, user groups having brief presentations of their concerns and role, biological presentations and themes/sub-themes based on the listing decisions. Session topics: Land use, climate change, listing decision.
3. Logistics: Food, transportation, lodging.
4. Finance: Drafting a letter to potential contributors soliciting for financial support was proposed. An example of how TNC is working toward a climate change program and how their partnership and financial support may be an element of the event was discussed.

Organizational tasks will be identified by the Subcommittee and assigned to Committee members at the next meeting. After discussion, the title for the event was modified to: ***Third Gunnison Sage Grouse Summit: Lifestyles and Livelihood ~ a Partnership for Conservation, a Role for Everyone.***

Letters requesting support will be drafted and sent to previous contributors and interested parties to include: Livestock producers, Oil and Gas Industry, Gunnison Energy, SG Interests, San Miguel County, TNC, Audubon, Sonoran Institute, North American Grouse Partnership, DOW, Gunnison County, Utah State, Geothermal Interests, Western State College, CU, CSU, Tri-State, WAPA, GCEA, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservation District, Bureau of Reclamation, CBMR, Environmental Organizations and others.

1998 MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (MOA) FOR THE GUNNISON BASIN POPULATION OF THE GUNNISON SAGE GROUSE:

LETTER OF TERMINATION: Moved by Ferchau, seconded by Pfister to approve the letter as drafted and circulated and approve signatures. Motion carried unanimously.

DISCUSSION OF NEED FOR NEW MOA: Discussion commenced about the need for a revised MOA identifying the organizational attributes of the Committee under the direction of the Board of County Commissioners and proposed activities found in the Action Plan. Moved by Pfister, seconded by Scott for the Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse Strategic Committee and its underlying structure to serve the purpose of the Memorandum of Agreement for the Gunnison Basin Population of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as Signed in March, 1998. USFS Agreement No. MOU-04-07-98-035. Motion carried unanimously.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Thursday, August 19, 2010 8:30 – 12:00 Noon, Regular Meeting (no July meeting).

Wednesday, September 22, 2010 10:00 am -12:00 Noon, Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: The June 23, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:06 pm.

7:00 pm - Fred R. Field Western Heritage Center, Van Tuyl Room.

PRESENTATION BY DR. TONY APA; EVALUATION OF ASSISTED BROOD AMALGAMATION IN GREATER SAGE-GROUSE: CAN ADDING DOMESTICALLY-HATCHED CHICKS INTO A BROOD AUGMENT A POPULATION? WILL IT WORK WITH GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE: A PROJECT UPDATE.

Certification of Approval:




Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson



Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:



Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III