

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
September 22, 2010**

The September 22, 2010 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners' Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia Avenue, Gunnison CO 81230.

**Voting Members Present:**

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)  
John Scott, Vice-Chairperson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)  
Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)  
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)  
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County  
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)  
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)  
Jon Mugglestone, Public At-Large  
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)  
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community

**Non-voting Members Present:**

Jim Starr, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)

**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 September 22, 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:** The agenda was modified to shorten the *USFWS 2010 GUSG Status Review Determination* time slot and move the *Lek Access – Request for Technical Subcommittee assignment* discussion to 10:40 am. The agenda was approved as modified.

**APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 19, 2010 MEETING MINUTES:** Moved by Swenson, seconded by Scott to accept the August 19, 2010 meeting minutes as submitted. Motion carried.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:**

**BLM:** St. George reported that several BLM burning treatment projects would begin as soon as an adequate amount of moisture (rain/snow) was received. He also reported that the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) project that was contracted with a third party may be delayed as contracting issues were being addressed.

Off-route travel issues with members of the Grazing Research Teams have been reported. A member of the public had recently identified an incident with photographs. The manager of the Team had been contacted to advise that no special permits have been issued for travel off-road and that the Team has the same restrictions as the public, and that they need to abide by the rules as posted. The Committee expressed concern about the matter. St. George noted that there was a potential for ticketing if the situation is not resolved.

An announcement was made at a recent meeting of a Colorado Natural Resources Group of State and Federal Agencies, chaired by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, that a publication providing recommendations related to managing sage grouse habitat was thought to be released in the coming months. Concern was expressed about how the local agencies have not had an opportunity to review the document or provide insights. Cochran will provide clarification about the document and will determine if there is an opportunity for input from the Strategic Committee and/or individual entities.

**BLM/USFS Travel Management Plan:** It was agreed by both agencies that attempting to implement the plan during the hunting season this fall would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Aggressive implementation of the Travel Management Plan would begin in the spring. Education efforts about the changes to routes affecting users would begin this fall.

**USFWS:** Pfister announced that a presentation by DOW staff about Gunnison Sage-grouse nest survival was scheduled for a Wildlife Society Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah on October 4, 2010.

**DOW:** Conservation Species Biologist Nathan Seward provided an update about the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) progress that was made, with additional staffing assistance, during this field season. There are four properties, which total 7,903 acres, with the Certificate of Inclusion (CI) in the final stages. Eight other properties are in various stages of completion, with a total of 24,000 acres being included in the program when they are complete. One property owner is working through difficult negotiations concerning property liability. Two property owners left the program after the initial review. Educational efforts about the program are underway with the upcoming USFWS Status Review decision likely to increase landowner interest in the program.

**Gunnison County:** Cochran presented information on a request for comments from the United States Air Force, 27<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing (AFSOC) Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, which is conducting Environmental Assessment (EA) scoping on Low Altitude Tactical Navigation (LATN) operations in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, including the upper Gunnison River Basin. Discussion about the concerns related to noise, low-level flight and previous experience that the San Luis Valley had requested flights avoid schools and other areas, resulted in a letter to be submitted from the Committee to include comments requesting that low-level flights be accomplished within Gunnison Sage-grouse Occupied Habitat only

outside of the lekking season (March 15 – May 15.) Navy requested that contact be made with the DOW for guidance about other wildlife issues to be included in the letter from the Committee. Nathan Seward thought that comments from his agency would also be submitted separately and may include information about concerns related to winter habitat, Sage-grouse and Big Horn Sheep.

**Park Service:** Stahlnecker reported that Dr. Cameron Aldridge will be publishing information related to a presentation about modeling potential sage grouse habitat sites that was given to the Committee in October of 2009.

**USFWS 2010 GUSG STATUS REVIEW DETERMINATION:** Pfister reported that the USFWS Status review decision will be published no later than September 28, 2010 in the Federal Register. Submission was made to the Federal Register on September 15, 2010. Pfister expressed appreciation for all the efforts, reports and comments submitted to the USFWS related to the Status Review.

**LEK ACCESS - REQUEST FOR TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT:** Scott reviewed the process used previously when requests have been made to access lek sites. Determining who has the jurisdiction over these types of requests was discussed. Development of an application process by the Technical Subcommittee was proposed. Having Committee consensus related to approval to access public land sites with the local agency responsible for the land being accessed having full and final authority about the decision was determined to be appropriate.

Private land use was further discussed. Peterson recommended involvement of landowners in the application procedure process. Formal agreements between the agencies involved, having a first-come-first-served or lottery style determination for consideration, authorities and jurisdiction was discussed. Navy recommended a database of existing photographs be compiled for use, versus disturbance of the lek sites. Nathan Seward advised that such a database is already in existence and that the issue at hand is for those who have already exhausted the resources currently available and want to visit a site in person. Scott then reviewed past efforts of educational services being provided. It was agreed that there was a desire to continue the service of guiding interested parties to safe locations to assure the birds are not disturbed during viewing. The County Resolution related to road closures may need to be amended pending the findings of the Subcommittee, as lek viewing was not included as a reason for accessing lands behind closed gates.

**USFS AND BLM GEOTHERMAL LEASE NOMINATION EA'S:** Vasquez advised that the USFS Environmental Analysis (EA) was in the final draft and was being submitted for final review. The next phase includes USFWS analysis and comments on the Lynx. St. George reported that the BLM was still working with cooperating agencies and including comments from a recent public meeting to be included in the EA document. A finalized version of the BLM EA was thought to be completed in the coming weeks with the next step being review and comments to the State Level BLM Director, a public comment period, then a protest period. BLM hopes that a decision related to the EA will be announced by the end of October or early November. Timing related to the lease, the listing decision and assuring that the area is properly managed were further discussed. A handout listing alternatives that was created for a public meeting was distributed to the Committee.

Vasquez reminded the Committee that comments on their EA were welcome for consideration at any time. St. George reminded the group that a great deal of habitat analysis resulted from the EA process for both agencies and that each activity proposed will receive full analysis and authorization before any activities will be approved.

Cochran reported on a media release related to the Mt. Princeton Geothermal lease option that was thought to be going to sale in November. The Federal Register included a comment period related to the sale. He noted that a potential bidder was quoted as wanting to make the purchase, then work out the details after the sale.

**BREAK:** The meeting recessed from 11:56 am until 12:29 pm.

### **SUMMIT #3 PLANNING**

**I&E SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT:** Navy presented a revised agenda for the Festival and Summit that included input from the Committee. The entire event agenda was reviewed with locations highlighted and all events being held at the Gunnison County Fred R. Field Western Heritage Center. Cochran advised that Tom Remington has agreed to be a keynote speaker for the event. The current schedule has the Summit ending at 12:00 noon on Wednesday, April 13, 2011. The proposed presentations were reviewed and prioritized in hopes of finalizing presenters in the coming weeks. San Miguel Working Group Coordinator, Leigh Robertson would extend an invitation to Roland McCook from the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. There was hope that a presentation related to a Sage-grouse Dance could be included in the festival portion of the event.

**EVENT PLANNING:** Specifics related to scheduling, presenters and facilitators for the Summit agenda were reviewed. Inclusion of geothermal topics in the energy development symposium was recommended. Pfister was willing to contact Dr. Rick Knight to see if he would be willing to be a speaker for the event. Sunday lek viewing was proposed. A lek webcam was also discussed, as it was thought to be a great way for large groups to be able to view the lek with minimal impacts to the bird and their habitat. Scott volunteered to provide introductions and be a facilitator for presentations. Nathan Seward offered an update about the CCAA program versus a presentation on fence collisions that was currently proposed.

Cochran reported on the budget for the event, with \$31.00 collected to date toward the effort. He provided the accounting documents from the Montrose Summit. A letter was sent to the City of Gunnison requesting funding. Sisk-a-dee was proposed as a possible fiscal agent. However, the status of the proposal was unknown. The details related to logistic needs for funding the event were reviewed. Now that several presenters have been confirmed, the dates for the event were set. Online registration was recommended. There was a desire for a web-based application to help with the advertising efforts and for participants to be able to register for the event. Stahlnecker volunteered to check to see if a link could be added to the National Park Service website, as they are set-up for reservations for different services available at the Park. Registration fees were proposed to be around \$50.00 with special rates available upon request. Scott recommended determining the food costs then pro-rating the registration fees accordingly. Different pricing strategies were deliberated. Having scholarships

available for landowners, students or others who wanted to participate, was also discussed.

St. George requested the most recent version of the agenda, as excitement for the event was expressed from the State Director and he thought the document would be a helpful tool for recruitment of presenters and fund raising efforts. Nathan Seward recommended contacting a Chad Bishop with the State Chapter of the Wildlife Society, as there was a new student chapter started on campus at Western State College. Inclusion of student attendance was desired. Serving Gunnison Sage-grouse wine from a western slope winery was also discussed.

Specifics related to the agenda and presenters was reviewed and adjusted to help the Subcommittee finalize a presentation schedule. Peterson recommended concurrent sessions versus cutting proposed topics to assure that there was adequate representation from a diverse selection of presentations. After extensive deliberation, the agenda was modified with additional communications with Dr. Patrick Magee needed to assist with the final scheduling and prioritizing the topics that Dr. Magee proposed. If needed, Navy will contact the Committee via email to request assistance for recruitment of presenters.

The next meeting of the I&E Subcommittee was scheduled for 2:30 pm on September 22, 2010 (following the Committee meeting) with a meeting proposed following the upcoming Committee meetings in the future.

#### **FUTURE MEETINGS:**

October 21, 2010 10:00 am – 12:00 pm, Regular Meeting, Two topics: Geothermal EA, USFWS GUSG Status Review Decision

November 17, 2010 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, Regular Meeting (including Grazing Project Update)

**ADJOURN:** The September 22, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:00 pm.

#### **Certification of Approval:**

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Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

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Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III