

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
October 21, 2010**

The October 21, 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)
Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Dan Reinkensmeyer, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Jim Starr, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large (arrived at 10:16 am)

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 October 21, 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 OF MEETING CONFIRMED: Stahlnecker verified that proper legal public notice of the meeting had occurred.

AGENDA APPROVAL: The agenda was approved as circulated. It was noted that the Information & Education (I&E) Subcommittee meeting time was changed from 1:30 pm to 1:00 pm (after the Committee meeting).

APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 22, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: The September 22, 2010 minutes were reviewed. **Moved** by Navy, seconded by Laurie to approve the September 22, 2010 meeting minutes as distributed. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

BLM: St. George introduced John Toolen. John is the consultant the BLM retained as the project manager for the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) development process. Several meetings have already been held to initiate the project. Additional detailed discussions with the Committee were proposed. Mr. Toolen presented information about his retirement 3 years ago after a 25 year career with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, involvement with sage-

grouse Local Working Groups and conservation coordination in the Pinon Mesa area. He currently lives near Grand Junction. Discussion about future meetings involving the CCA process, potential public input requests relative to the Stockgrowers, and preparation of an outline to help guide future conversations commenced.

DOW: Wenum expressed his apologies for the short notice requesting participation on a sage-grouse habitat tour scheduled earlier in the month. Several Committee members were able to attend and participants had the opportunity to observe several grouse while on the tour. The different sites visited in the Gunnison area were reviewed. Stahlnecker asked for additional information related to habitat management, trap and transplant and other related issues that were mentioned at a Natural Resources meeting. Wenum explained that a group, informally referred to as the "Trap and Transplant Committee" had been working to review outlying population areas proposed for population augmentation. Participation on the committee included Local Working Group members from various areas, area biologists and DOW staff brought together to review the proposed habitat, identify and document any issues related to the specific geographic areas in need of population augmentation and included a field trip to each area. The group will now make recommendations related to each area visited. Cochran mentioned that the BLM Southwest Resource Advisory Council also has a desire to develop a range-wide prioritization process for species conservation. Discussion about funding allocations for different programs, how each area is facing different issues (development, habitat condition and/or a full-spectrum of other issues and challenges) to enhance population areas commenced. St. George mentioned the concept of reforming the RCP Steering Committee to identify the highest priority areas to help allocate resources and to help develop a range-wide, holistic perspective for sage-grouse related projects. Peterson noted that there was support for a holistic range-wide approach, however, gaining consensus among different groups in different areas may be very difficult. It was agreed that conversations related to the topic were worth the effort to evaluate priorities and strategies and it was thought that the Steering Committee may be the group to be tasked with this effort. Inclusion of the Rangewide Plan Steering Committee was proposed. A letter from the Committee requesting re-assembling of the Steering Committee was directed to be drafted by Cochran.

USFWS 2010 GUSG STATUS REVIEW DETERMINATION:

Cochran introduced discussion asking about activities that agencies will be performing as a result of the recent Status Determination. St. George thought few major changes would be made, as the information suggests that the species remains a sensitive candidate for listing. However, the impacts of habitat fragmentation were highlighted and it was thought that additional attention and evaluation of impacts to the species will occur. Caloger asked about coordinating various activities among agencies. He specifically asked about road maintenance work being performed during a recent habitat field trip. Discussion ensued about the desire to manage impacts, coordinate activities and assure funding for areas of concern. It was proposed that Committee members use the "Committee Member Comments/Reports" section of the meeting to highlight sage-grouse related projects and activities. If needed, additional time could be added to this section, allowing adequate opportunity for information sharing among agencies. The use of email correspondence for reminders to interested agencies was recommended to help increase coordination of communication efforts. St. George requested that the Chairperson call-out each agency during the meeting, reminding them to make a report.

Reinkensmeyer explained that there is a desire to maintain a future perspective including a long-term plan for species conservation. Discussion about the geothermal lease application, CCAA and CCA, future goals, species maintenance, population maintenance or increases and identifying conservation success ensued. Peterson shared a story of moving cattle through an area and observing many Gunnison Sage-grouse occupying habitat that was considered "not desirable". He further expressed hope that the Grazing Research Study will be able to help answer questions related to these types of situations.

Stahlnecker reminded the Committee of Action Plan Item #8 – Manage Priority Areas and relating these types of concerns to those activities. St. George further explained that the CCA process is undefined and with the process now underway, he requested comments and input from the Committee. Discussion about research related to the sage-grouse lifecycle (male lek use, female egg laying) being better understood, concerns related to survival rates, regulatory threats and understanding the goals for species conservation commenced. Additional clarification about the CCA process including the BLM's desire to focus on the wildland interface around developments, habitat fragmentation and road development as these topics may not need policy created, but tools developed to assist in the land management process. Creating definitions for jurisdiction of public lands, addressing grazing concerns, and other habitat related topics were proposed to be included in the CCA process as it moves forward.

Peterson commented that regulations in Gunnison County related to Gunnison Sage-grouse did not warrant any denials for development, yet did not seem to fully capture the benefits from the program. Cochran explained that evaluation of proposed development allowed the ability to make recommendations in consideration of the species needs and may have allowed for benefits to the local populations. Additional details related to inclusion of detailed information about this process to be part of future USFWS evaluations and status reviews was desired.

BLM GEOTHERMAL LEASE NOMINATION EA: St. George reported that the BLM portion of the Environmental Analysis (EA) was forthcoming. The draft document, 151 pages in length, sectioned out with a summary of the project to be only 30 pages in length, was expected from the printers in the coming days. Peterson requested a hard copy of the document when available.

Vasquez reported that the USFS may be releasing their EA in November for public review and comment. Differences between the USFS and BLM documents were discussed, with additional wildlife species issues being considered on the USFS lands. It was noted that the overall structure of the document is also different.

Coordination between different agencies and private entities, 1,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat on the USFS and approximately 3,500-4,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat on BLM lands was noted.

LOW ALTITUDE FLIGHT TESTING: Navy mentioned that several other counties have opposed low altitude flight-testing discussed at the previous meeting (see meeting minutes from 9/22/10 for more information). Starr explained that the deadline for comments was extended to November 15, 2010 and that the Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners would be meeting during an upcoming Work Session to further evaluate the topic. The

Saguache County Board of County Commissioners was also reported to be submitting comments related to the proposed activities. Discussion about current testing, sound levels, effects to wildlife, that DOW was also preparing comments, and an understanding that there is a need for this type of training to take place, yet finding solutions to minimize effects commenced. It was felt that the comments already provided related to sage-grouse were sufficient for the Committee.

SUMMIT #3 AND FESTIVAL PLANNING: Cochran reported that the Dr. Patrick Magee and the Sisk-a-dee organization were willing to serve as the fiscal agent for the event. Their professional web designer would add the Festival and Summit information to their existing website. Sisk-a-dee was willing to donate this service to the Summit, however it was noted that if this process became more than was manageable, that a request could be made to the Committee for assistance.

Moved by Navy, seconded by Peterson, to accept the offer from Sisk-a-dee to serve as the fiscal agent for the Festival and Summit to be held April 9 – 13, 2011.

Lodging options were presented. Concern was expressed about use of a specific facility. Use of the Gunnison Chamber of Commerce and/or the Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association website links was proposed. It was decided that a Request for Proposals (RFP) would be advertised (with no cost associated with them) for lodging proposals to be submitted to the Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator's office.

It was proposed to engage community artists with a Festival/Summit logo contest. Offering a prize to generate interest was supported with a generous donor coming forward with a \$500.00 donation for use as prize money. Participation in this contest would allow the artists to display their work at the festival without any additional costs or fees and was hoped to promote participation and community awareness. Advertisement efforts were to begin immediately with press releases (that have no cost) and judging of submissions to take place at the January meeting.

The Summit agenda and scheduling was discussed in detail. Confirmation of speakers was deliberated, with contacts being made to assure the desired speakers were invited and able to attend. Wenum will research the possibility of a remote webcam filming a lek site during the event. Western State College would also be approached to see if they are interested in participating in the technical aspects of the proposed webcam.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

November 8, 2010 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm Technical Subcommittee Meeting (Lek Access)

November 17, 2010 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, Regular Meeting (Grazing Project Update, Geothermal EA, BLM CCA process discussion)

January 20, 2010 10:00 am -2:00 pm, Regular Meeting (GUSG Festival/Summit Logo Contest Judging)

ADJOURN: The October 21, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:14 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III