

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
November 17, 2010**

The November 17, 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)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
John Murphy, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (arrived at 10:08 am)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large (arrived 10:18 am)

Non-voting Members Present:

Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners

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 November 17, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:00 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.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 21, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: Moved by Navy, seconded by Scott to accept the October 21, 2010 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

BLM: St. George advised that funds are very tight, prioritization of projects was underway and it was thought that some external projects would not be scheduled and seasonal hiring may be limited. The final budget is not anticipated until the spring. He also announced that the BLM offices would be moving to a new location at: 650 11th

Street (corner of Rio Grande and 11th Street) in Gunnison. Coordination with the USFS for implementation of their Travel Management Plan is underway.

NPS: Stahlnecker echoed budgetary concerns similar to the BLM. Projects that were coming to completion, including collaring and monitoring sage grouse might not have funding to be continued in the future. An Environmental Analysis (EA) for motorized access in the Curecanti Recreation Area is available and there will be a 60-day review period (extended for the holiday season). A public meeting about the EA is scheduled for December 1, 2010 from 5:00 pm until 7:00 pm at the Fred Field Heritage Center Multi-purpose building.

DOW: Wenum reported that the trap and transplant efforts were complete for the season. All of the birds needed were available for the project. All sites proposed were used, except for the North Fork where birds were observed, but after 10 nights of efforts, none were trapped.

Saguache BoCC: Joseph reported that a new conservation effort called Northern SLV Conservation Roundtable was being developed that included a representative for sage-grouse issues. The newly formed group will be addressing water issues.

BLM Geothermal Lease Nomination EA: BLM Real Estate Specialist Marnie Medina was present for discussion. St. George confirmed that everyone who requested a paper copy of the document had received it for review. Peterson confirmed the location of the proposed lease area on the maps provided in the document. Murphy advised the USFS EA is also in the works and explained that resources were still being evaluated. Forest Supervisor Charlie Richmond (not present) is still researching issues related to the EA and additional meetings may be scheduled in the coming weeks. Specifically, coordinated efforts between the BLM and USFS is a goal. It was noted that there were few contiguous parcels between the agencies. St. George went on to explain resource values, slopes of the topography and the tools available for management stipulations if they were needed. Medina highlighted the phases of review, approval of the proposal and that the details related to the definition of development were not yet available. Caloger asked about the size of the footprint of the project on the map. It was estimated, based on the preliminary information from other geothermal production sites to be around 10 to 15 acres. The area(s) needed for construction are unknown. Concern was expressed about having so many unknowns for the project and a desire was expressed for more information about proposed development for a greater understanding of potential impacts. The alternatives in the draft EA were further discussed with Peterson requesting clarification about the differences between exploration and development. St. George explained that the land could go to auction for lease for the right to explore and/or develop, then if exploration and/or development were to occur another set of analyses, permits and permissions would be needed for each stage of the project. He further detailed that after analysis of the additional information, management stipulations and requirements could be modified, changed or revised from this EA. Navy asked about the length of the lease. St. George thought that exploration would be 10 years, with development rights for 30 years. Specific sage-grouse protection included in the different alternatives, the unknowns related to an acceptable level of disturbance to the species, setting precedence for protection of inactive and historic leks for future population increases was discussed. Traffic, temporary construction disturbances and the number of employees that might travel to and from the site were areas defined as needing

additional evaluation. St. George assured the Committee that exceptions, modifications and waivers were tools to modify the document, if needed, as additional information became available.

Scott asked about the definition of "special species". It was explained that the Gunnison Sage-grouse would be included in that definition. The Endangered Species Act section of the document and the ability of land managers to have additional control over habitat of these species if listing were to occur is included in the EA. This clause explained that species would be eligible for protection even if discovered after-the-fact. Historically, this section applied more to sedentary plants that may have blooms outside of the analysis period, versus animals.

"Routine Operations" was recommended to be further defined for geothermal activities versus using the standard oil and gas information. Caloger thought the San Juan basin might already have additional information in this area. Emergency activities and how they were defined was also recommended for additional clarification. The level of analysis at this level of the request was a determination about the level of considerations for the project. The desires to balance the needs of the sage grouse and other resources with the needs for development were supported by the Committee. A letter of comment was proposed. BLM and USFS Committee members would not be included. A letter will be drafted to meet the December 4, 2010 deadline.

BREAK: The meeting recessed from 12:16 pm until 12:32 pm.

CCA REPORT/DISCUSSION: BLM staff Tara deValois and Gay Austin were present for discussion. St. George introduced John Toolen, a consultant hired to help implement the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) process for BLM. Discussion about the importance of input from the Committee as this was the preliminary document for the CCA program; the desire to create an inclusive document; and the benefits of this type of program commenced. St. George explained that this topic was new and defining relationships between different programs may be a result of the program. Discussion included different definitions, the potential scope for the project, defining technical questions, and combining this task with the Gunnison County Sage-Grouse Conservation Action Plan, Action Item #8. A workshop was scheduled to develop this topic further in early December.

LEK ACCESS:

REPORT BY TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE: Scott explained that the Technical Subcommittee recommended that the full Committee review applications for lek access. Historically, just a few individuals reviewed these requests for observation and photography of sage-grouse on the lek. The Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator's office was recommended as the contact point for application material and that they would then be presented to the Committee for review and approval. Dr. Patrick Magee and Nathan Seward are willing to assist with the coordination and serve as guides for the on-site visits to leks. The Technical Subcommittee recommended access be limited to leks on private lands only as access to private lands could have more restrictions and would need land owner permission to help protect leks. The Subcommittee believes that there are several landowners that will be willing to participate in the program and will need to be contacted.

DISCUSSION: Navy recommended specifically noting in the process/protocol that supervision is required for access to the lek sites. Peterson asked about the number of applications and proposed limits. Seward advised that the document was specifically drafted to avoid limiting the number of tours, landowner participation or applications. The original process was drafted for public use and Caloger asked that the criteria for determining approval of the applications be added. Wenum recommended a clause that states that there are many factors that may prohibit access be added. The public lek access option at the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Area was included, recommending that the area be used as much as possible to limit lek access. Navy recommended promotion of the DOW established photograph database to photographers wanting to take pictures of birds on the lek. Future photographs will be added to that archive. The desire for the protocol to provide guidelines to photographers and provide landowners some protection and the ability to have those accessing their land to be supervised was expressed. Removal of the introduction to landowners provision was agreed on, as many would prefer to remain anonymous and to help protect landowners from viewers who are attempting to circumvent protocol.

Moved by St. George, second by Peterson to approve the Gunnison Sage-grouse Lek Access Process Spring 2011 documents as modified, and perform an annual review of the information. Motion carried unanimously.

SUMMIT #3 AND FESTIVAL PLANNING: Stahlnecker expressed his appreciation for efforts of the Subcommittee. Development of the agenda and the budget were ongoing. Sisk-a-dee has included information on their website related to the event. The fundraising letters were sent with several responses received to date for support pledges. A Work Session is scheduled with the BoCC on January 18, 2011 to discuss options for support funding. Requests for proposals for lodging for the event were circulated, with a few responses received from lodging providers. An application for a grant program was noted, however other related organizations were submitting requests for project funding, therefore it was decided that it was not appropriate to compete for funding. Funds remaining from the previous event were transferred to the Sisk-a-dee Summit/Festival account from the Black Canyon Audubon Society.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

December Workshop for CCA - to be determined

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

February 9, 2010 10:00 am -2:00 pm, Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: MOVED by Stahlnecker, seconded by Scott to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The November 17, 2010 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:27 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III