

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
February 9, 2011**

The February 9, 2011 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)
Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Dan Reinkensmeyer, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) via teleconference
Russ Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Left the meeting at the lunch break)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Arrived at the lunch break)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) (arrived at 10:23 am)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) (arrived 11:11 am)

Interested Parties Present:

John Toolen, BLM CCA Consultant
Nathan Seward, DOW
Dave Wiens, Gunnison Trails
Jenny Nehring, Poncha Pass Working Group

Staff Members Present:

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

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the February 9, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:05 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 THE JANUARY 20, 2011 MEETING MINUTES: Moved by Scott, seconded by Navy to accept the January 20, 2011 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

BLM: Japuntich presented a proposed draft letter for submission to the editors of the local newspapers addressing Gunnison Sage-grouse issues and encouraging attendance at the upcoming Gunnison Sage-grouse Festival and Summit. Discussion about the language included in the letter, the desire to address community concerns and to use this opportunity to raise awareness about the educational opportunities available for the community commenced. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Swenson to submit a letter to the editor of the Gunnison County Times using the BLM proposed draft with appropriate editing. Motion carried unanimously.

Japuntich reported that he had received comments from citizens in the community regarding the preliminary Grazing Research Project results. The importance of communicating that the results are preliminary and from a single season of data collection was emphasized. A Press Release or other community outreach efforts were discussed. Cochran recommended waiting until the final report is complete before communicating information to the community about the results of the project.

NRCS: Scott reported on a recent NRCS News Release about an allocation of \$23 million dollars for funding sage-grouse conservation easements. Information about the funding was passed along to the Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy. They are working on several conservation easements that may be able to apply for this funding. Discussion about how \$30 million is already allocated and this \$23 million is in addition to the existing funding commenced.

GUNNISON COUNTY: An announcement was made that clerk Ruth Dukeman would be leaving the Wildlife Conservation Department and relocating within the County to the Assessor's Office.

USFS: Vasquez advised that a final report from recent projects near Flat Top Mountain is now available for review. The projects collected habitat data from an area that was previously treated with fire in 2007 and other nearby areas that were not treated. It was hoped that the information could contribute to the baseline data for Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat. Ferchau provided word-of-mouth information related to hunters reporting more Gunnison Sage-grouse in the area since the burn treatments. Cochran asked about the use of a re-habilitated lek in the area. Japuntich reported that historic records indicate that 16-20 birds used the area. However, a skeet range was recently built and now observations were minimal as there were challenges accessing the area without disturbance (flushing) of the birds.

ELECTRONIC PACKETS: The use of the FTP site versus emailing packets was discussed. The use of email and the FTP site was proposed.

BLM GEOTHERMAL LEASE NOMINATION EA – STATUS UPDATE: Japuntich reported that the draft EA comment period is complete with a final draft anticipated in the coming weeks. Caloger asked about the authority of the BLM with regards to subsurface rights. Using an example he asked about specific access. Japuntich recommended visiting with Marnie Medina as she would be more familiar with the specifics in that area.

USFS GEOTHERMAL LEASE NOMINATION EA-STATUS UPDATE: Vasquez reported that the USFS Geothermal Lease Nomination Decision Notice is complete, and has been released for public review and comment. The final EA and notice are available on the USFS website. An error was noted about a reference to the Waunita Watchable Wildlife lek. That lek is located on private property, not BLM lands. Peterson asked about the relationship between the USFS decision and the BLM process. The USFS decision is a consent to lease. BLM will administer that lease process and any subsequent lease. BLM can choose to be more restrictive, but not less. The BLM did work with the USFS, and vice-versa during their separate EA processes, but the decisions do have differences, with regard to sage-grouse.

REVIEW/DECISION ON LEK ACCESS APPLICATIONS: Cochran explained that five applications to access lek areas for commercial photography purposes had been submitted for review. Only three opportunities are available (Seward leading one and Magee leading two) for the 2011 season. Discussion about ranking the applicants one through five, allowing others to have an opportunity if a guide and private lek becomes available commenced. The applications were reviewed. The details of the applications, concerns related to disturbances of the birds, lack of control over the literature and the desire to have a process in place in hopes of limiting the disturbances were deliberated. Glenn Chambers, Mike Danzenbaker and Dave Showalter were selected as the top three applicants. **Moved** by Swenson, seconded by Navy to accept the applications from Glenn Chambers, Mike Danzenbaker and Dave Showalter for the 2011 Lek Access season. Motion carried.

A matrix of criteria was proposed to help the decision making process in the future. No action was taken on this subject.

TECHNICAL/ACTION ITEM #8 SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT: Scott reported on the Technical/Action Item #8 Subcommittee meeting held February 8, 2011 at the Fred R. Field Heritage Center. Gunnison County Geographic Information Services Director Mike Pelletier (not present) provided an update to the Subcommittee on the cooperative mapping project. There was a desire expressed for an overlay of threats and habitat. Mike explained that filters could be developed to help present data. The development of a conservation plan was suggested, with the inclusion of mitigation being proposed. Regulatory abilities related to the mitigation process were discussed. The Gunnison Rising project and the mitigation formula that was developed and used for that project is being considered for use County-wide. Future projects were highlighted in hopes of developing maps and products to help create tools for the decision making process. Parameters to be included will need additional development, and input from the Committee was requested.

Information and data collection are underway with the use of NPS data to develop a rough habitat model then apply that model to recently collected data in hopes of developing a tool that could be used to help with the decision making process related to habitat. There was a desire expressed to maintain land value when making "zoning" decisions. Being able to identify priority habitat areas and the potential uses of the data and considerations when using models were further discussed. Development of future projects was proposed: inclusion of nest success, bird habitat use and refinement of models to help manage for the majority of the population. The Conservation Priority Regions document is still being considered for revision and may be updated or influenced by the mapping data when that project is completed.

Gunnison County Community Development Director Joanne Williams and Planning Commissioner member Ramon Reed were present at the Subcommittee meeting. Appointment to the Sub-committees was discussed. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Swenson to appoint Community Development Director Joanne Williams to the Action Item #8 Subcommittee. Peterson and Navy expressed their support of appointment. Motion carried unanimously.

Appointment of a Planning Commission member will be forthcoming after the Planning Commission completes the reorganization process. Navy requested inclusion of a review of all Action Items in the Action Plan and their priorities on a future agenda.

SUMMIT #3 AND FESTIVAL PLANNING:

Cochran reported that the Gunnison Valley Cattlewomen had agreed to provide lunch for the Summit on Tuesday, April 12, 2011. Greg, Pete and Mae Peterson and Kathleen Curry will provide locally grown beef for the event. The Summit #3 Agenda was reviewed, with a few confirmations still needed. A funding commitment from NRCS, a request to the Mitigation Committee, City of Gunnison Challenge Grant application, as well as an application for a DOW grant were all reported. Logistics related to funding commitments were reviewed. USFS pledged \$2,500 for publication expenses (insert fee) for the event with an additional \$2,200 of in-kind services from Roger Haga for the layout of a proposed newspaper insert.

USFS Information Receptionist Roger Haga presented information related to an insert for the newspapers related to the event. The cost for printing and insertion for the Gunnison Country Times, the Shopper and 4,000 extra publications for distribution in the community, inclusion of the Crested Butte News was discussed. Stahlnecker made a preliminary commitment to the needed \$963 for printing costs. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Peterson to go forward with the insertion on the materials into the Gunnison Country Times, Shopper and 4,000 overprints. Motion carried unanimously.

On-line registration, forms and information about the events will be available on the Sisk-a-dee website in the coming weeks. Collection of information for the Summit program was discussed with contributor logos needed for both the program and insert. Travel arrangements were discussed with presenters making their needed reservations then being reimbursed for travel expenses.

Gunnison Trails founder Dave Wiens reported that organization efforts were well underway for the 5k and 10k run/walk "Lek Trek" scheduled for Saturday, April 9, 2011.

BREAK: 12:13 pm until 12:30 pm.

PRESENTATION OF LOGO CONTEST AWARD: Cochran presented Nathan Seward with the Logo Contest Award of \$500.00. Mr. Seward was grateful for the award and expressed that he was surprised that his work was selected when there are so many talented artists in the community.

CCA REPORT/DISCUSSION: BLM Consultant John Toolen provided an update about the project and draft documents. He explained that a geographic information services project to collect data was of a priority and making correlation between habitat and threats to address the

goals of the project was desired. Toolen was hopeful that coordination of efforts would be completed in the coming weeks. St. George expressed his appreciation to Scott for the efforts related to the Technical/Action #8 Subcommittee and the ability to help direct the success of the CCA goals. The CCA document was not intended to direct actions of the County, but was hoped to be a helpful tool to begin discussion and highlighting areas of concern. Addressing threats to the species was a known priority and inclusion of Gunnison County Community Development staff and members from Planning Commission was hoped to benefit the private/public land decision interface and allow brainstorming for ideas on addressing these concerns and issues. Peterson asked about the relationship of Action Item #8 and the CCA process. It was explained that the interrelationship between the two projects and involvement of stakeholders was thought to be similar at this stage. Involvement of other perspectives from stakeholders is desired, with future outreach efforts needed. Peterson requested that the grazing permit process be considered. St. George asked Toolen to begin discussions with this segment of the stakeholders as soon as possible. Cochran recommended inclusion of rights-of-way permits in the CCA process for stakeholders as well as to provide coordination between agencies on access applications/needs. Discussion about outreach efforts to different user groups, including recreation users (Colorado 500, Rage-in-Sage event organizers, etc.), grazing permit holders and others commenced.

LONG-TERM TRAIL PLANNING –GUNNISON TRAILS, DAVE WIENS: Gunnison Trails founder Dave Wiens was present for discussion. St. George introduced this topic and explained the desire to include recreational user's considerations in upcoming planning efforts. The history of the organization, accomplishments, travel management and recreation management ideas were shared. Gunnison Trails typically represents non-commercial, dispersed recreational activities and their plans for development includes creation of trails to access lands close to Gunnison for exercise, recreation and peace of mind opportunities for citizens. The focus of the organization is for daily trail use, close to town, with a minimal approach, typically with repetitive use, versus long distance travel. Trail designs have evolved over time in response to the current climate of physical fitness, recreation, outdoor activities and peace of mind elements. Existing trails in Gunnison County and near the Western State College campus are being marketed to trail users for local economic development. Educational messages related to trail closures and sponsorship of activities to help educate users is also a desire of the organization. Explanation of modern trail building techniques was presented with future development and/or management of social trails that in many cases are heavily used, but without structured management were also an area of proposed outreach for the organization.

The spring season is the peak time for local trail use. This is also a critical time for the sage-grouse, so there is a desire for continued educational efforts so that the public understands the rationale for closures. There is also a desire to reduce route density by decommissioning redundant routes and adding new, modern trails to the system that attract users, ideally outside of Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat.

Current recreational opportunities, how many roads and trails were created during the "uranium boom" and are currently used during the various hunting seasons; funding challenges and the desire for a sustainable trail system in the area were discussed. An example of the Aberdeen Quarry Loop in the Hartman's Recreation Area being re-routed away from sage-grouse habitat onto a modern trail that allows for the much needed springtime recreational use without disturbance to the birds was presented. Trail modification/closure challenges could be

minimized and Wiens believes that peer/user enforcement is more effective than law enforcement. Decommissioning trails or rerouting them to “better” locations would help conservation efforts while allowing for the recreation opportunities needed in our community. Comments related to the desire to balance the need for trails and wildlife habitat were shared. Membership of the organization and the extensive ability to communicate with trail users was presented. The Committee expressed appreciation to Mr. Wiens and his organization for their support of Gunnison Sage-grouse conservation efforts.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

March 17, 2011 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm, Regular Meeting (Grazing Research Project, Summit/Festival Plans, Road Closures)

April 9, 2011 Gunnison Sage-grouse Festival – Fred R. Field Heritage Center

April 11-13, 2011 3rd Gunnison Sage-grouse Summit – Fred R. Field Heritage Center

April 20, 2011 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, Regular Meeting (Action Plan Assessment/Evaluation, CCA)

NEWSPAPER LETTER TO THE EDITOR: The draft letter was reviewed with modifications discussed. Cochran recommended St. George include the suggested changes and circulate the revised draft via email for Committee comment and submission to the newspapers.

ADJOURN: The February 9, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:13 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Ruth Dukeman, Administrative Assistant III