

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
March 17, 2011**

The March 17, 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)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community (arrived at 1:38 pm)
Russ Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Dan Reinkensmeyer, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) (via telephone until 3:41 pm)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large

Non-voting Members Present:

Allen Roper, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)

Interested Parties Present:

John Toolen, BLM CCA Consultant for the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) Process
Nathan Seward, DOW
Dave Wiens, Gunnison Trails
Allen Roper, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association
Ramon Reed, Gunnison County Planning Commission Member
Mike Phillips, Gunnison Sage-grouse Researcher, Colorado Division of Wildlife
Mary I. Williams, Post Doctoral Research Associate with the Department of Renewable Resources at the University of Wyoming at Laramie (via telephone)

Staff Members Present:

Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Katherine Haase, Assistant to the County Manager

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the March 17, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 1:00 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.

APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 9, 2011 MEETING MINUTES: Moved by Navy, seconded by Swenson to approve the February 9, 2011 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Moved by Navy, seconded by Swenson to reappoint all officers that we have presently for another term. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

1. Solar Update. Japuntich stated that the BLM has nationally been preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to determine where the best solar areas may be. The comment period will end at the end of April.
2. Antler Collection Concerns. Navy asked if there might be a way to amend the regulations so that persons collecting antlers would not be allowed to use dogs. Wenum responded by stating that the collection activity is already prohibited from January 1 to March 15 annually, but Navy questioned what would happen when the activity is not prohibited. Peterson noted that enforcement could be very difficult because other persons could be in the area with their dogs, but not be collecting antlers. Cochran stated his concern that opening the regulation to amendment discussions could make it vulnerable to change or loss altogether. Wenum felt that further discussion should be suspended until such time as an issue is brought before the committee.
3. Trap and Transplant Program Update. Wenum informed the committee that two males and approximately 10-15 hens will be captured/transplanted in 2011.
4. Poncha Pass Lek Update. Laurie informed the committee that there are three males active at this lek.
5. Research Project for Landscape Genetic Analysis of Gunnison Sage Grouse. Stahlnecker explained that the objectives are to delineate biologically meaningful groups of Gunnison sage-grouse based on genetics, assess overall levels of connectivity within and among sage-grouse populations, and locate/map potential barriers to movement within and among sage-grouse populations. As many as 20 feathers will be collected from each lek. Feather collection protocol information is available for review.
6. Capture and Transplant Comments. Peterson stated that, while he was originally supportive of this if it would preclude listing the species, he questions what the current incentive(s) may be. Phillips opined that the target populations are already small and susceptible to extinction; the small infusion may be what is keeping some populations alive. Wenum stated that losing the outlying populations will create larger issues. Peterson questioned whether the committee should focus on creating one sustainable population in lieu of many susceptible populations. Wenum stated that part of the evaluation process has been to consider the effect(s) that the transplants have on the receiving area. To monitor behavior and movement within receiving areas, birds are marked.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT: Williams presented her final report entitled, "Characteristics of Gunnison Sage-Grouse Habitat in Dry Mountain Loam and Mountain Loam Ecological Sites of the Gunnison Basin". She explained that the final report, which includes all

collected data and analyses, was based upon the draft that was distributed in February. The report will be formally presented during the upcoming Summit.

Williams recommended continued monitoring for up to two years, depending on the availability of funding. Phillips reiterated that funding is the real issue, not whether or not the monitoring should continue. Peterson asked if any information within the report was previously unexpected, but Williams explained that she did not enter into the project with any preexisting expectations since she'd never worked in the Gunnison valley before.

Scott requested 2010 project cost information. Phillips estimated that approximately \$200,000 was expended. Cochran wondered if it would be possible to provide a rough estimate for 2011 project costs, and Williams agreed to provide an estimate at a later date.

Peterson questioned whether or not the committee should try to advocate for funding from the State of Colorado, depending on whether or not the committee agrees that monitoring should continue. This funding would be added to the Species Conservation Trust Fund Bill, which Cochran explained had not been introduced as of approximately two weeks ago.

Wenum stated that the committee would need to decide on a direction within the next 10 to 14 days. Scott proposed that the committee utilize the cost information to be later provided by Williams to construct a letter of support. He also noted that he would like to receive an accounting of how approximately \$800,000 was expended from the Fund. Peterson felt that the committee could contact Senator Gail Schwartz and Representative Roger Wilson, among others, for information on how to proceed. **Moved** by Peterson, seconded by Swenson to authorize Jim (Cochran) to, in consultation with the president (Stahlnecker), move forward to advocate for securing funding for the continuation of the monitor and research project that was started in 2011. Motion carried unanimously. Stahlnecker requested that Williams provide budgetary figures as soon as possible.

CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT (CCA) UPDATE: Toolen informed the Committee that work has been progressing with regard to Action Item #8. Discussions are continuing regarding mapping and various weighting factors for leks. Another map will be created to illustrate threats to the grouse to determine where additional effort may be needed with regard to habitat value and threats. Cochran explained that this is currently being done through Gunnison County Geographic Information Services Manager Mike Pelletier with regard to soil type, ditches and streams.

Toolen distributed printed material regarding grazing management. Peterson stated his preference to allow the Committee members to evaluate the information and then provide comments at the next meeting.

Toolen informed the committee that he would be submitting a draft of the entire CCA to the BLM before the next Committee meeting. Because of this, he requested to receive comments before the end of March.

Navy asked how the grazing management options mesh with the BLM's management options. Toolen explained that how it will mesh with BLM and other agencies remains to be negotiated. Peterson stated his belief that the document will need to allow for flexibility as management

options will likely need to change, and that the Committee may need to provide recommendations to the various agencies.

Ferchau asked whether new grazing permits can be applied for. Japuntich confirmed that they can. Stahlnecker asked what would need to happen at the BLM in order to make these changes. Japuntich explained that changes would require the cooperation of the other agencies during the permit renewal process. Japuntich noted that 2009 was a busy year for permit renewals and that a large batch of renewals will be completed over the next year. Though each renewal is good for 10 years, Japuntich explained that collecting data and working on new management techniques can begin immediately.

Toolen asked if a CCA is finalized and a stock grower wanted a certificate of participation with it, could it automatically become part of the grazing plan. Japuntich stated that, if the permit changes, it may need an EA. He felt that a batch EA for all sage-grouse allotments may be a possibility, but he could not confirm this possibility without first speaking with his superiors.

Caloger asked about a possible mechanism for salvaging leftover irrigation water, as referenced in the draft CCA document. Peterson agreed that this language will need clarification as the Committee could minimally address how the current irrigation measures work with sage-grouse protections. He felt that the potential is there, but that additional thought and comment would be necessary.

Peterson asked if the eventual process will be faster if the Committee receives detailed comments from the FWS soon. Reinkensmeyer confirmed that it would be faster.

Ferchau asked who the participants of the CCA, beyond ranchers with their allotments, would be with regard to recreational use. Toolen stated that the participants would include those from agencies that sign the CCA, as well as any person with certificates of participation.

Ferchau asked for clarification of the "resting pasture" language relevant to a private landowner. He noted that owners of large parcels of land don't always understand how they can benefit sage-grouse and ranching.

Peterson felt that the committee should be careful not to include so much detail in the document that it runs the risk of bogging it down. He stated his primary goal of protecting the grazing permits.

Toolen stated that he would likely either remove the seasonal habitat mapping section or place the information into an overall strategy.

Peterson and Toolen will communicate via email to schedule a time to discuss comments.

Toolen explained that, although his contract for services through the BLM would be expiring at the end of March, others will be able to continue with his work with the remaining funding. Stahlnecker felt that the committee should be thinking about how to proceed once Toolen's contract expires. Scott wondered what steps the committee could take to support this work in order to ensure that it moves forward.

Toolen further explained that the process could have reasonably taken a year and not just the six months that he was contracted for. He confirmed that any comments can be incorporated, but that the document will suffer somewhat because of the timeline. Japuntich felt that the state BLM office should support figuring out how to continue the leadership, and he felt that a letter from the Committee may help with that process. **Moved** by Peterson, seconded by Scott to write a letter with those points written into it and to ask for the continuation of guidance with this document. Stahlnecker stated that the letter should be addressed to the State BLM Director. The Committee requested that Cochran immediately pen and send the letter after it has been signed by Stahlnecker. Motion carried unanimously.

BREAK: The meeting recessed from 3:03 until 3:17 pm.

TECHNICAL/ACTION ITEM #8 SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT; APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO AI #8 SUBCOMMITTEE: Cochran introduced Ramon Reed and explained to the committee that he had recently been nominated by the Planning Commission to the Action Item #8 Subcommittee. **Moved** by Scott, seconded by Ferchau to accept the nomination for the appointment. Motion carried unanimously.

Scott informed the committee that the Subcommittee held its third meeting earlier in the day. Gunnison County Geographic Information Services Manager Mike Pelletier is creating the mapping product. Liz With, Toolen, Cochran, Nate Seward, and Gay Austin developed the prioritization lists, which have been enhanced. Pelletier created the mapping and can perform geographic queries. The individual maps will illustrate habitat, threats that cannot change, and threats that may be able to be mitigated. The next meeting is scheduled to take place on 4/8/11 from 9:00 am until noon. The location has not yet been determined.

Reed stated that this direction shows promise. Scott expressed gratitude for Pelletier's expertise and assistance.

FESTIVAL/SUMMIT PLANNING: Cochran handed out copies of the current schedule. He stated that he has been contacting all speakers to confirm their commitment, discuss their presentation materials, and to work through any travel-related compensation issues.

Cochran asked for volunteers to assist at the registration desk on 4/11. He also asked for volunteers to serve as session moderators to introduce speakers on 4/12 and 4/13. Biographies and abstracts will be provided for each speaker. Japuntich agreed to serve during Session III on 4/13 at 9:00 am. Stahlnecker agreed to serve during Session I on 4/12 at 9:00 am. Scott agreed to serve during Session II on 4/12 at 1:00 pm.

Cochran informed the Committee that sufficient funding had been obtained. He also noted that the USFS was able to contribute to education and outreach by directly assuming the cost of newspaper inserts, insertion fee. The BLM will be paying for a lot of the Festival activities.

Cochran announced that the Committee would have till the end of the meeting to suggest edits to the newspaper insert, which will be sent to the publisher on 3/18. Over and above the several thousand inserts into the newspaper, the Committee will receive an additional 4,000 to distribute. The Festival will also be publicized on the Sisk-a-dee and Gunnison Trails websites.

Weins confirmed that he had created a separate poster for the 10K run and 5K walk. T-shirts are being planned for. He stated that there had not been many registered participants, but that the majority of participants would likely register on the morning of the event.

Navy confirmed that she would be developing a program for the Summit.

The cost of registration will entitle persons to lunch, attendance to the Summit and a dinner. Onsite registration at the event will be allowed. Agency booths will be available.

2011 ROAD CLOSURE UPDATE: Japuntich informed the Committee that all roads were closed on or prior to 3/15, which is earlier than expected, due to mud season. Access can be granted via the BLM office, Gunnison County Public Works, or Cochran's office in the courthouse.

Vasquez announced that an order was in the process of being signed for the Almont triangle closure, which won't affect the County road closures. Upon execution of the document, all appropriate agencies will be notified.

Cochran stated that not all County road gates have been locked due to being physically blocked by snow/ice. All gates will be locked as soon as possible.

FUTURE MEETINGS: The Committee scheduled future meetings to occur on 4/20, 5/18 and 6/15. All meetings are expected to begin at 10:00 am and end at 2:00 pm. The Committee preliminarily agreed not to schedule a meeting for July.

ADJOURN: MOVED by Swenson, seconded by Japuntich to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The March 17, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 4:20 pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Katherine Haase, Assistant to the County Manager