

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
April 20, 2011**

The April 20, 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)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW)
Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Liz With, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Al Pfister, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) (by teleconference)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large

Staff Members Present:

Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the April 20, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:01 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 March 17, 2011 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the March 17, 2011 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. **Moved** by Sue Navy to accept the March 17, 2011 meeting minutes with changes to page 2, item #5, strike the last sentence because they did not receive assistance. Motion was seconded by J Wenum. Motion carried unanimously.

Jim Cochran introduced Bobbie Lucero, she is the new Administrative Assistant III.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

FENCES & FENCE LINES: Brian St. George began the discussion about fences and fence lines. Brian commented that staff of the Bureau Land Management (BLM) is trying to assess and study movement patterns and mortality rates on fences lines. Mortality rates of sage-grouse may be increased by fence lines. If the fences are removed the mortality rate may be decreased. Currently the BLM is collecting data. They will be looking at higher lek activity areas and walking fence lines before marking fences. Brian will check on the BLM GIS "fence layer" and will invite Mike Pelletier to show maps of the data collection. Brian will bring data that the BLM collects. This topic will be placed on the next agenda.

HARVEST INFORMATION: J Wenum explained that deer and elk license numbers are the same as last year. With changes in structure and mixed license types, Unit 54 doubled its elk harvest. Cooperation with landowners also helped with the larger harvest of elk. There is a change in distribution of elk as well. Elk are scattered more now than they have been in the past. Elk have shifted from Flat Top to Lost Canyon, moving from unit 54 to unit 55. Wenum is curious to see if any elk come back to other units to calve. Overall the distribution and harvest numbers increased.

FEATHER COLLECTION: Elinor gave an update on feather collection on Poncha Pass. They collected feathers and fresh scat piles.

GRAZING RESEARCH PROJECT:

The Species Conservation Trust Fund (SCTF) Bill was introduced on March 25, 2011. After some investigation, Cochran found there was no money in the Native Grouse Conservation Section of the Bill for the Grazing Research Project to fund a second year of baseline habitat assessment. CDOW Avian Research had \$100,000 left over from previous years funding, but it was not enough money to contract with the University of Wyoming. Greg Peterson & Tim Lehmann traveled to Denver to testify at the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee hearing. At this hearing the CDOW agreed to take money out of the 2011 SCTF appropriation and use the left-over \$100,000 to contract with the University of Wyoming and conduct another baseline habitat study in the Gunnison Basin this summer. The ranching community wants to maintain a consistent level of expertise with the study. The Bill passed out of the Senate and is heading to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The ranching community may travel to Denver to testify. Cochran commented that the Strategic Committee needs to re-look at the actual grazing component of the study, what came out of the proposal, and where we would like to go. The Committee discussed going back to the original plan and grazing guidelines. There was deliberation on allotment plans.

St. George expressed concerns about the 2010 habitat study, primarily because none of the transects were permanently marked. They were "GPS'd". BLM could have utilization data to match their transects. It was discussed that if they review the landscapes in the photos taken, they may be able to get close to the sites, by navigating back to where they were taken, and drive nails in the ground with flags for markers.

Stahlnecker recommended continuing to revisit this and keeping the link. If researchers are telling us not to go down this path (even after only 1 year of study) we may want to take this in to consideration. The question remains: "Is grazing affecting sage grouse?"

CCA:

St. George reported that they are working on solutions to find a project manager. They have received 12 applications through a fellowship program. The BLM will be reviewing resumes soon. Stahlnecker noted that at the last meeting the Committee discussed submitting a letter to the BLM State Director in regards to the importance of keeping the process going and to find a replacement. They did not have a chance to submit the letter. St. George commented that the letter would still help. Stahlnecker suggested the Committee still send the letter. Cochran will draft the letter for Stahlnecker's signature.

TECHNICAL/ACTION ITEM #8 SUBCOMMITTEES REPORT:

Liz With reported that no recent progress has been made, Mike Pelletier has a draft prioritization tool up and running. The subcommittee has been playing with the numbers. Pelletier met with Cam Aldridge and tried to work out modeling differences.

The Subcommittees have been working on a habitat map with soil types and slope/aspect for nesting and winter habitats. Pelletier has been working to create a map that identifies all sagebrush in the basin. The map will be assigned values to ensure the map is measuring what is relevant. The Subcommittees needs to agree upon a base habitat map first, and then assign prioritization values to areas, on a point scale. The Committee discussed areas that should be considered as habitat, such as if sagebrush has been replaced with wheat grass. They concluded that it will still be considered habitat. Areas where there is sagebrush that there shouldn't be is a bigger issue. Habitat may look great from an aerial photograph, but once on the ground the habitat does not provide much cover from predators.

The next Technical/AI#8 Subcommittee meeting is May 11th from 9-12, in the Planning Commission Meeting room. Ferchau commented that once the Committee is ready to discuss values, he would be interested in participating with the Subcommittees.

Laurie commented that the priority is addressing planning, which will not be easy at the State level. The priority should be getting the habitat mapping agreed upon. Ferchau needs to be involved in the Private Land prioritization discussion. The steps the Committee needs to take are: 1) defining the habitats and 2) how to prioritize and regulate the habitat. The Gunnison County Ranchland Initiative program needs to be taken into consideration as well. The Committee needs to move ahead and make a determination on habitat mapping. All other issues that need consideration will fall into place. Need to have Cam Aldridge & Mike Pelletier review with their expertise.

Wenum reported that the 2011 request for proposals for the CDOW habitat protection program will be out shortly and are due by the end of June. The program is funded in the \$10-12 million range. The money is from a combination of big game cash and habitat stamp fees. Private land owners can apply. The priority last year was on threatened and endangered species. If the Committee can meet 5 out of the 5 requirements, they would get higher priority and could secure bigger chunks of habitat.

FESTIVAL /SUMMIT DEBRIEFING:

Stahlnecker commented that he was impressed with the work the I&E Subcommittee and Festival Committee had done to put together the Festival and Summit. Many people on the Committee and outside of the Committee deserved recognition. The Committee will send out letters of thanks and also a "letter to the editor" thanking the community for participating. Sue Navy will draft the letter to the editor. Stahlnecker gave specific recognition to the following for their hard work on the event: Dave Wiens for the festival run/walk and all the support Gunnison Trails provided; Navy, for the I&E Subcommittee and organization; and Jim Cochran, for organization and making the Festival and Summit happen.

The Festival helped the community access information about the sage-grouse that they otherwise would not have had. The Committee noted that there may be money left over in the Festival/Summit account. They agreed that the money will be held for next year's Festival. The Committee discussed recommending that the next Summit be held in that area of the Glade Park population (possibly Grand Junction). The Festival will hopefully become an annual event in Gunnison. In the future the Committee will need to try to avoid planning the event on ski resort closing days, and possibly target it around Western State College's Spring Fest. Otherwise the event may lose a lot of families and attendance. Information presented at the Summit and Festival was new and exciting. Estimates for the cost of the Festival were \$6-7,000. If the event were on the college campus, it would involve more kids and user groups, because you can do many outdoor events on the campus (biking, hiking, golf, etc.) A majority of the Festival benefited kid's' education. The Festival needs to continue to target the youth for sage-grouse conservation efforts. St. George reported that the classroom efforts at Crested Butte & Gunnison schools received great feedback from teachers. Teachers commented that they were impressed with the information and how engaged the kids became. The Summit had 131 people registered, fed around 110 people, and an estimated total of 150 people attended (including the free evening sessions). Navy reported that I&E Subcommittee sold 33 t-shirts, with 14 of them sold at the festival. This was a record on sales, all due to the Festival and Summit.

PowerPoint Presentations- Cochran has had a number of requests to distribute the Summit Power Point presentations. He will contact all speakers to ask for permission and if given, will lock the files so that no one can tamper with information. Eventually, Cochran would like to put the presentations on the County's FTP site, for anyone to access.

5 K and 10k Run- The 5k and 10k run had 85 runners, many with children. During the race, a lot of mom's showed up with strollers. Terrain was difficult for those with strollers. With requested that next year this needs to be taken into consideration for decisions on trail routing.

Newspaper insert- The committee discussed making it a non-dated source of information as a handout. The insert helped put sage grouse information in almost everyone's hands in Gunnison County. The inserts are distributed easily. Cochran will discuss the possibility of utilizing Roger Haga for this effort with John Murphy. This should be less expensive than the current glossy pamphlet.

Tuesday Night Public Land Users Panel- Navy commented that she thought there would be a lot of users, but there were actually more scientists instead. The Committee needs to take this into consideration for the future. The Committee wants to help the Public Land users fit in, instead of telling them how they are going to be locked out. St. George commented that the BLM wants to buy a portable display to get the message out and outreach to the community.

Action Item review- The committee began reviewing the *Gunnison County Sage-grouse Action Plan*. This plan was prepared by the Committee and adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in October 2009. The Committee reviewed the Introduction, and then the Planning Process. The Planning Process states that the Project Teams will provide the County with regular reporting of progress. The Committee discussed if this expectation was being met on a regular basis. Cochran commented that the Board of County Commissioners should be updated, and if appropriate/necessary, approve the progress and changes to the Annual Plan. The Committee noted that there are no Project Teams, except for Action Item #8 and Action Item #2 and that this was one cause of the dissolution of the local working group. Another team created was the Grazing Research Subcommittee. Transitions should be allowed in the document to change teams. The Committee considered that they may need to revise this Action Plan and what the vision is. The Committee agreed that they need to keep the plan updated to have accurate goals, completion times and dates. The Action Plan also needs modified charts and documents to be current with goals. The Action Plan needs an Appendix, with the original Action Items and their completion dates. Once an Action Item is completed it will be deleted from the Action Plan and can be found in the appendix to create a history. Once the plan is revised, the Committee will give a report to the Board of County Commissioners. The Committee will provide an annual report regarding accomplishments and upcoming goals. The Introduction needs to be modified so that it specifies Committee will review the plan annually. The goals also need to be modified to reflect what needs to be accomplished. Along with an appendix, the Action Plan needs a box at the end of each Action Item labeled as "Accomplishments to Date", so that it stays with its project, and also lists the project's status.

The committee reviewed the following Action Items:

1. **Grazing Research:** Action activity sentence needs to be restructured to read "...the recently funded Species Conservation Trust Fund Project", and add BLM to the responsibility. Everything else is currently funded. The committee discussed that they need \$200,000 for additional base-line habitat data collection and \$500,000/year (estimated) for the grazing research component.
2. **Create Organizational Structure for Action Plan Implementation:** Accomplishments have been that two groups (strategic Committee and Local Working Group) have been incorporated into a single entity, the Strategic Committee, and two Subcommittees were brought into the Committee as a single Subcommittee. The Committee discussed that Action Plan Implementation has not been accomplished, although they have accomplished the description and action activities in this Action Item. Stahlnecker declared that Action Item #2 is complete, and would like to add another Action Item specifically labeled as Action Plan Implementation. Ferchau will

work on creating the new Action Item: for "Create Organizational Structure and Resources for Action Plan Implementation."

3. **Use of the Gunnison County Sage-Grouse Conservation Trust:** A part of the Strategic Plan recently adopted by the Board of County Commissioners is to make the application process more helpful and have measurable results. Navy informed the Committee about a conservation easement proposal on Greg Peterson's Ranch on Razor Creek. This proposal was taken to the Land Preservation Board for funding. The Land Preservation Board approved funding, but the Mitigation Fund could possibly help with partial funding.
4. **Community Awareness:**
The Committee discussed several ideas for community awareness:
 - o Sage-grouse awareness week
 - o Stake-holders
 - o Links to County Web site
 - o Conservation and sage-grouse education programs
 - o Road and Recreation closures
 - o Website research
 - o Sponsors
 - o Mural painting (look into the billboard east of town)
 - Out by Sergeants put up a mural or billboard that says "Welcome to the Land of the Gunnison Sage-grouse"
 - o Make the sage-grouse the Gunnison bird
 - o Annual 1 day festival
 - o Leaders/community representatives
5. **Campaign for Continuation of Land Preservation Fund:** All 2011 dates on this page need to be changed to 2013. The County election on renewing the provision for this fund will be in 2012.
6. **Coordination of Invasive Plant Control Efforts:**
Mike Pelletier is currently working on weed inventory record keeping system for County efforts. The organizations that may work together to coordinate and consolidate weed mapping are the BLM, USFS, NPS, DOW, Weed District, NRCS, and the Conservation District. This is an ongoing Action Item that will always need to be updated. Having an active Weed Commission is a success, and this helps bring all the entities together. The Committee needs to accomplish planning and implementation of the weed database and the database should logically be kept by Pelletier. The DOW could pass on their information on noxious weeds that they have treated, to keep track of herbicide use and avoid overkill. The resource requirements need to be amended, so that the Committee doesn't fail just because they don't find a certain amount of funding. The funding amount will be taken out of the text.
7. **Programmatic Environmental Assessments for Habitat Projects:** No progress on this Action Item, leave as is. What needs to be changed is the USFS's participation from possibly to will assist the other agencies on this activity. The Committee will discuss this action item at the next meeting. Ferchau would like to get together with Japuntich, Scott

and Cochran to go over the Action Items and Action Item #8, with proposed modifications. The Committee agreed unanimously that this should occur.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Next meeting agenda items will include further discussion on the Action Plan, specific discussion on Action item #8, habitat mapping and prioritization, and fences.

- May 18, 2011 from 10-2pm
- June 15, 2011 from 10-2pm
- July – No Meeting
- August 17, 2011 from 10-2pm

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The April 20, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 1:55 pm.

Certification of Approval:



Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson



Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:



Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III

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