

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
May 18, 2011**

The May 18, 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.

Members Present:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
John Scott, Vice-Chairperson, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Erich Ferchau, At-Large, Development Community
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Al Pfister, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County (by teleconference)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW)
Kathy Griffin, Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) (after Wenum departed meeting)

Non-voting Members Present:

Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)

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 May 18, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:04am.

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 presented.

APPROVAL OF April 20, 2011 MEETING MINUTES: Modifications to the April 20, 2011 minutes were discussed and agreed upon. Moved by J Wenum to accept the April 20, 2011 meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Navy. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

Chamberland introduced Doug Hudson with the **Gunnison Valley OHV Alliance of Trailriders**. Chamberland invited him to the meeting for motorized input.

Division of Wildlife (DOW):

Wenum introduced Kathy Griffin, who is the new CDOW Grouse Coordinator and also the new alternate for the committee. The Board of County Commissioners officially appointed Griffin at their 5/17/2011 meeting.

DOW Lek Count Coordinator Mike Jackson and Conservation Biologist Nathan Seward reported on the spring 2011 lek count. Sage-grouse numbers have increased. The 2011 high male count was 772 males, which is an increase of 40 males from the 2010 count. Two hundred twenty eight (228) females were counted, which is not far from last year's count of 227. The DOW is waiting for more data sheets to be submitted. The weather may have been a reason why lek counts were low in 2011. The bad weather caused low visibility.

Wenum announced that the CDOW's annual Habitat Protection Program, for conservation easements to protect and conserve habitat of threatened and endangered species and species of special concern. Applications are due June 22nd. Funding may be available next year depending on how long the ranking process takes.

US Fish and Wildlife Service:

Pfister reported that he received an email from a news reporter, which stated that a settlement between the USFWS and Wildearth Guardians has been stayed until June. The judge felt that the Center for Biological Diversity should be a party to the agreement. The Stay letter was received via email from Green Wire. Pfister also announced that he will be retiring August 3rd.

Sage-grouse Kiosk:

On a recent road trip, Navy stopped in Dove Creek, and in the middle of the park she took pictures of a plaque, which was a testament to sage-grouse. Navy suggested that the Committee consider putting up a similar kiosk in Gunnison. Wenum noted that the DOW would participate in the kiosk if the subject conveys a wildlife message. Gunnison Trails Director Dave Wiens stated that his organization would donate \$300 to build a kiosk. The Committee discussed possible locations for the kiosk. One of the most popular locations suggested was the entrance to Hartman's Rocks. Other suggestions were parks in Gunnison. The Committee discussed the idea of having interchangeable panels on the kiosk, which could be changed seasonally. The Committee liked the kiosk idea which would contribute to their Action Plan.

Sage-grouse Strategic Committee Recreation Seat:

Swenson asked the Committee for their opinion on recommending a new recreation seat on the Committee to the Board of County Commissioners. **Moved** by Pfister to recommend to the Board of County Commissioners, to add an At-Large member and alternate, to represent the recreation community. The motion was seconded by Peterson. The motion carried unanimously.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

St. George reported that BLM will be working on two projects this summer. St. George will get details for volunteers that want to help. The two projects are:

1. Woods Gulch Lek Enhancement: St. George will be working with Pat Magee on 1-2 acre parcels to remove taller sagebrush to increase visibility on leks.
2. Gold Basin Burn Plan: They were only able to burn 11 acres this year during the "burn window." They will be performing mechanical treatments on 40 acres.

Festival and Summit

Cochran reported that he and Pat Magee are working on the accounting for the Summit. The Festival and Summit spent around \$7,500. Revenue totaled \$10,270. The balance in the Festival/Summit account held by Sisk-a-dee will be approximately \$2,800. The Committee discussed that the money could be used to build the kiosk, or be held for next year's Sage-grouse Festival. Cochran and Magee are working on the total event's costs, including monies spent directly by agencies and entities.

Stewardship Award

Navy suggested that the Strategic Committee assume responsibility for the Gunnison Sage-grouse Stewardship Award, formerly sponsored by the Local Working Group.

Moved by John Scott that the Sage-grouse Strategic Committee continue recognition of the Stewardship Award, and make it apart of the I&E Subcommittee. The motion was seconded by Swenson. Motion carried unanimously. The Subcommittee will develop the details of the award, which will be discussed at the June meeting.

Grazing Research Project-

CDOW Avian Research Program Leader Jim Gammonley reported that the funding to conduct another year of baseline habitat data is secure for this year. The DOW extended the contract with University of Wyoming, and will have the assistance of Mary Williams. They will begin the data collection next week. The plan is to have the crew perform the data collection into the end of the year and afterwards develop reports and manuscript preparation. Williams may be leaving during this project due to a job offer elsewhere. In the event Williams has to leave, her crew will gather the measurements and continue the data collection with guidance from CDOW staff. Data analysis will be accomplished cooperatively by the CDOW and the University of Wyoming.

The BLM has been in touch with the crew and is satisfied with the answers to their questions and concerns regarding the sampling protocols. The BLM had previously suggested installing permanent markers to identify the plots for better detection on a yearly basis. It was discussed if GPS transects would be sufficient to support the research if the project became long term, taking into consideration there is a margin of error. Accuracy of the GPS transect is within 3-5 meters. St. George commented that the BLM will be comfortable with what decisions Gammonley and Williams make. Gammonley assured the Committee that the transects will be repeatable. St. George stated the BLM is comfortable with the GPS and photo points because they can be repeated and used in the future. There were concerns as to why this may not become a long term study. The purpose of this study was to answer questions on sage-grouse and grazing and to assess baseline habitat conditions. Peterson commented that historically the data collected by BLM regarding livestock grazing was used to negatively affect grazing permits.

Peterson would like assurance that this data will be used in BLM grazing permit actions. Peterson asked St. George if he could give him assurance that this data will be usable in the future, because they don't want to perform 2 years of data collection to find out that the data is not useable. St. George said he could not give Peterson that assurance. St. George stated that they are on the same page as much as they can be and at this point they are not questioning the value of the data. The Grazing Research Subcommittee will discuss technical issues, and then report back to the Committee to change protocol issues. Gammonley will connect with Cochran to set up details in the next meetings.

Moved by Pfister to go forward with this project without installing rebar. The motion was seconded by St. George to move forward as Gammonley proposed without placing permanent markers. The motion passed with a majority vote.

CCA

Candidate for the position will be a facilitator and coordinator. The BLM has not finalized the hiring process. This position is for 2 years, and will begin in July. St. George will provide additional details after the hiring process is finalized.

Technical Action Item #8 Subcommittee Reports

Scott reported that Gunnison County GIS Manager Mike Pelletier, who was not present for discussion, has mapped controllable and non-controllable threats. They will also be creating a map layer with high quality habitat. The idea is to overlay the maps to identify high threat areas in good habitat. Mike Phillips is working on habitat models this fall/late summer. The next Subcommittee meeting is June 8th 9 am-12 pm. Once there is more definition to the product they will present it to the Committee. The next step in the Gunnison County Strategic Plan is identifying areas for development (agriculture, commercial, etc.), and identify areas where they want to see growth. There will be a joint Planning Commission and County Commissioners meeting Friday, May 20th to discuss this topic. The Committee agreed to discuss Action Item 8 at the June 15th meeting.

Threats

The Committee reviewed the handout on the impacts of fences on the *Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho: Collision Mitigation, and Spatial Ecology*. St. George commented there are some differences between and comparisons to the Idaho sage-grouse and the Gunnison sage-grouse. The Committee discussed that there may only be a need to mark fences when there is a fence installed next to a lek. There is no evidence of mortalities in the Gunnison area. The Committee discussed if they should perform a fence line survey. Arden Anderson, representing the Black Canyon Audubon Society, who was present for discussion, would like to volunteer to perform fence line surveys, and he may be able to get Western State biology students to volunteer as well. Anderson commented that if they were also marking the fences while performing the survey, he would be able to get more volunteers. The Committee would like to know if the fatalities and collisions occur during take-off or landing. St. George will ask the BLM GIS Coordinator to work with Seward on what fences they have on private and public lands. BLM could perform this survey next spring and gather data as to miles of fence with proximity to the leks, topography of fences, etc. St. George will gather the details and present them to the Committee at a future date.

Predators

Peterson commented that the Committee needs to discuss predators and he would like to discuss this at the June or August meeting. Crows, fox, and ravens are bothering the sage-grouse. The DOW will need to report on this topic and inform where this is taking place and how they evaluated this situation. The Committee will discuss this at the August meeting, or when Mike Phillips is available.

Action Plan Review

The Committee began reviewing the *Gunnison County Sage-grouse Action Plan*. The Committee reviewed *Action Item #6: Coordination of Invasive Plant Control Efforts*. The goal for this Action Item is to create a centralized weed database. Pelletier has been working on a data collection system for the Weed Management Coordinator Jon Mugglestone. This will happen in the fall, after the summer spraying season. The Committee discussed interest in this database and who wants to help maintain it. St. George commented that the BLM has mapped and consolidated weed information for BLM public lands in Gunnison County. St. George stated that the BLM is interested in weed issue identification and helping with the weed database. The Committee agreed that organizations should help one another to collect this information and create a centralized weed database.

Action Item #8C: Assess Landowner Values & Priorities. Scott reported that a University of Fairbanks doctorate student Corrie Knapp is studying the social side of climate change. Knapp has a draft proposal and Cochran will ask her if he can distribute the electronic version to the Committee for review. Knapp will be in Gunnison in July and August.

The Committee discussed that *Action item #8A: Assess Sage-grouse Activity* includes Pelletier's demographic research. *Action Item #8B: Assess Habitat & Listing factors* includes the habitat models from Pelletier and baseline habitat assessment being conducted by the CDOW and the University of Wyoming.

The Committee agreed that everything under Action Item #8 will be given a medium priority ranking. The Committee discussed that the Action Plan needs to replace lower priority projects with higher priority activities. The Committee needs to review what they are currently working on and what needs to be added or removed for the Action Plan. The Committee discussed that they need to begin documenting their accomplishments. The Committee has accomplished, is working on or helping facilitate projects such as demographic work collected by the CDOW, USGS Analysis of Park Service data, William's Habitat and Vegetation Assessment, lek counts, habitat screening tools and the CCA.

The Land Preservation Board (LPB) will discuss with the County Commissioners the continuation of the Land Preservation Fund. The Committee agreed to write a letter of support to the County Commissioners. Navy will draft a support letter for Stahlnecker's signature. The letter will be submitted to the BoCC at their next work session. **Moved** by Navy to write a letter of support to the County Commissioners, to continue the Land Preservation Fund. Motion was seconded by Swenson. Motion carried unanimously.

The Committee agreed that they need to have a subcommittee created to revise the Action Plan. The subcommittee will incorporate all the new corrections and separate Action Items that are on-going vs. the Action Items with deadlines. The Action Item Subcommittee will consist of Ferchau and Japuntich. The Subcommittee will prepare a recommendation for the June meeting regarding structure, a draft for review in August, and final revision for approval by the County Commissioners in September.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Future meeting were discussed:

- June 8th at 9am, Action Item #8 Subcommittee meeting will be held at the USFS Building.
- June 15th from 10 am-2 pm, Regular Meeting. At this meeting the Committee will set time for the field trip to view fences and markings.
- July- No Meeting
- August 17th – Add to agenda the discussion on predators.

ADJOURN: MOVED by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting seconded by Scott. Motion carried unanimously. The May 18, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:16pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III