

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

The August 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 Service (NRCS)
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Paula Swenson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
J Wenum, Colorado Division of Parks & Wildlife (DOW?)
John Murphy, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Dan Reinkensmeyer, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
David Wiens, Gunnison Trails, Inc.

Non-voting Members Present:

Allen Roper, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
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 August 17, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:00am.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Stahlnecker confirmed that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC NOTICE CONFIRMED: Stahlnecker verified that proper legal public notice had occurred.

AGENDA APPROVAL: Cochran informed the Committee that Ferchau cannot make the meeting, and Ferchau has all of the proposed revisions to the Action Plan. Stahlnecker stated that the Committee will still talk about the Action Plan. Action Plan revisions will have to be deferred. Stahlnecker commented that the agenda stands as modified.

APPROVAL of June 15, 2010 MEETING MINUTES: Moved by Swenson to accept the June 15, 2011 meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Sue Navy. Motion carried. Peterson and Joseph abstained because they were absent from the June 15, 2011 meeting.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

Division of Parks and Wildlife:

Nathan Seward commented on the Lek Count email he had distributed earlier in the week. This year 83 leks were surveyed. The high male count was 763, which is slightly higher than in 2010 which were 745. Using the Rangewide Conservation Plan population formula, the Gunnison Basin population is estimated to be around 3,744 birds, which has basically been unchanged over the past 4 years. Seward informed the Committee about a brood rearing grant application, which he will have more information on in November. The pre-proposal was accepted, and Seward thinks this grant is looking favorable.

BLM:

St. George informed the Committee about a habitat improvement project, near Gold Basin road. The project is underway and they are performing sagebrush treatment and potentially burns. St. George estimates it will take 5 years to get the entire acreage completed. St. George stated the BLM will not be performing burns in sage-grouse habitat this fall. St. George introduced Barbara Hawke, a BLM Southwest Resource Advisory Council member. Barbara works for the Wilderness Society out of Montrose. St. George introduced Samantha Staley. Staley is the new BLM CCA Project Manager. Staley introduced herself, discussed her academic background, and noted that her priority is to get the CCA up and running again. St. George asked that the Committee meet with Staley and give her their perspective on the CCA.

Division of Parks and Wildlife:

Wenum commented on the Division of Wildlife and Division of Parks merger. Rick Cables is the new director of the Division of Parks and Wildlife. Wenum informed the Committee that they will have a formal transition team with representatives from each division to move the agency forward. This transition team will work on transition and have work groups. Funds management is one of the big issues and there is an accounting issue for lack of accountability for approximately \$30 million. Financially they are okay but the reserve is low, and they will be going through an internal audit to find out what happened. Wenum informed the Committee that certain projects have been approved while others have not, and after the audit they will know how to move forward.

US Fish and Wildlife Service:

Dan Reinkensmeyer announced that Al Pfister has officially retired, and they are trying to get a replacement for him by January 2012.

PREDATOR CONTROL

Audience:

The following were in the audience and present for discussion:

- Jim Garner, Division of Parks and Wildlife.
- Ramon Reed, Gunnison County Planning Commission.
- Joanne Williams, Gunnison County Community Development Department.
- Allen Moores, Gunnison County Public Works Department
- David Moreno, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services

Dr. Mike Phillips' presentation on the Rangewide Plan Predator Strategy:

Dr. Mike Phillips gave a presentation on the Rangewide Conservation Plan (RCP) Strategy for Predator Control. Stahlnecker informed everyone the presentation is for informational purposes, and there will be no action on this subject at this time. Phillips reviewed the evaluation process the RCP recommends before considering a predator control program. Phillips noted that there isn't much known about sage-grouse/predator interactions because there hasn't been much research accomplished. The triggers for a predator control program were reviewed. The probability of extinction was discussed. The group had a discussion on the population targets desired for sage-grouse. Phillips commented that the Gunnison Basin has managed for a good number of males. Phillips commented that predators kill chicks within a couple of days after they hatch, and they collected this information from finding chick transmitters in coyote scat. Phillips mentioned that people have commented that these chicks are killed because they have been handled, making them more liable to be killed. Phillips discussed why they don't believe handling and monitoring the chicks increases their mortality rate.

Garner commented on why he is advocating for predator control. He stated he wants to do something to help the sage-grouse before it is too late and try to avoid the extinction curve. Garner stated that sage-grouse are reaching an emergency status because chicks are not surviving and there are only older birds alive. (note: Garner works primarily with the San Miguel Basin Gunnison Sage-grouse population.)

The Committee discussed that some issues need to be solved before they consider predator control, because this becomes a political, economic and controversial issue. They discussed the "trigger point" that identifies the need to start a predator control program. The Committee discussed costs, because it will be a large issue.

Allen Moores, local sportsman and Gunnison County Public Works Department employee, commented that they have been limiting grazing and closing roads to help protect the sage-grouse, yet there have not been any quantifiable results. Moores stated that the community needs to be proactive and start a predator control program on foxes, raccoons and ravens. Moores commented that they need to control specific populations in areas of the Gunnison Basin, 85% of males and 52% of females fall to predation before they can reproduce. The Committee discussed options to control corvid

predators and legalizing harvesting ravens on private property. It was suggested to maybe breed more rabbits to create a different food source for predators.

The Committee discussed if the Gunnison Basin is in crisis mode, and how to justify spending a large amount of money on predator control when we are uncertain if there is an emergency on getting ahead of the extinction curve. The Committee will follow up on the results of Miramonte lek predator control program to identify actions, triggers, and to educate the Committee. The Committee will also follow up on asking the Fish & Wildlife Service if they have the ability to manage 1 endangered species in potentially benefiting another.

Action Plan

Cochran commented that he, Ferchau and Japuntich met to review comments received from Committee members on the Action Plan. The Action Plan Subcommittee's (Ferchau and Japuntich) goal between now and the next Committee meeting is to hold a Subcommittee meeting to finalize the Action Plan revisions and have a draft for the Committee to discuss. The Committee was encouraged to get their comments to the subcommittee sooner than later, so that the Subcommittee can incorporate all of the comments before the next meeting.

Fencing

St. George mentioned that at the Summit there was great information on fencing issues. The study (presentation at the Summit) had shown fatality rates of birds in fence lines had decreased when the fences were marked. Marking fences was discussed by the Committee. The question is: Should the Gunnison Basin be marking fences as well? St. George will put together a study with his GIS department and Japuntich to attempt to determine if there are fatalities on leks near fence lines. This study will help determine if there are fatalities caused by fences. Phillips mentioned that the data collected on marked birds has no evidence/data of fatalities due to fence collisions.

St. George would like to wait on adding the fence issue to the Action Plan. St. George will prepare a proposal to determine if the Committee will need to place this in the Action Plan. Seward commented he was at the presentation at the Summit and found this subject very interesting. Seward mentioned he has data from private land owners on their fence lines, and would like to team up with St. George to prepare the presentation/proposal to the Committee.

St. George announced he may call a small CCA meeting in September, and get a single cohesive understanding of what is going on. St. George will work with the Subcommittee in September and bring an update to the Committee in October. St. George commented they will need to discuss what the Committee is trying to accomplish with the CCA. Staley will create an outline for the Committee.

The Committee was encouraged to prepare questions and comments on predator control that can be addressed at the next meeting, and email questions and comments to Cochran.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Notes</i>
September 21 st	9am-12pm	Action Item 8 Subcommittee.
October 7 th	8am	Field Trip
October 19 th	10am – 2pm	Regular Meeting (Predator control, CCA and Action Plan)
November 16 th	10am – 2pm	Regular Meeting
December		No Meeting

The Committee directed staff to tie all future meeting agenda items to either RCP strategies or Action Plan items where possible.

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The August 17, 2011 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:03pm.

Certification of Approval:

Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III