GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
November 20, 2013

The November 20, 2013 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners' Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Voting:
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
J Wenum, Vice-Chairperson, Colorado Division of Parks & Wildlife (CPW)
Chris Bove, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC) (conference call)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS) Alternate
Patty Gelatt, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Erich Ferchau, At Large, Development Community
Polly Oberosler, At-large Recreation Community Alternate

Non-voting:
Nathan Seward, Colorado Division of Parks & Wildlife (CPW) Alternate
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Alternate (conference call)
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) Alternate
Charlie Sharp, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Alternate

IN THE AUDIENCE:

- Erin Minks, San Luis Valley Regional Director, Senator Mark Udall
- Brenda Felmlee, Field Representative, Congressman Scott Tipton
- Sarah Fierce, USFWS; Denver Regional Office
- Susan Linner, USFWS; Denver Regional Office
- Nicole Alt, USFWS; Denver Regional Office
- Drue DeBerry, USFWS, National Sage-grouse Energy Coordinator
- Vicki Spencer, Gunnison County Electric Association (GCEA)
- John Scott
- Steve Westbay, City of Gunnison Planner

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 November 20, 2013 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:00 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 SEPTEMBER 18, 2013 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved** by Navy and seconded by Bove to accept the September 18, 2013 meeting minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

CPW: Wenum informed the committee that Robert Broscheid from Arizona was hired as the new CPW Director, beginning in December 2013. He also reported that there will be changes to Governors tags in 2014. Wenum informed the committee that the Capital Development Committee had a meeting and approved amendments to an existing easement that clarify some issues with the easement.This easement benefits sage-grouse.

USFWS: Gelatt informed the committee that the Gunnison's prairie dog was withdrawn from the candidate list with a not warranted finding. The Committee is aware of the proposed rule for the yellow-billed cuckoo, Gelatt informed the Commitee that a proposed critical habitat rule for that species is anticipated soon. She reported that there will be an Economic Analysis, if there is proposed critical habitat. There was discussion that the cuckoo has habitat in New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. There was discussion about how well the various organizations have been working with each other regarding the efforts in the Gunnison Basin on the prairie dog and sage-grouse.

USFS; TRAVEL MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION: Vasquez reported to the Committee about the travel management implementation. There was discussion that there have been hunters using helicopters to spot trophy animals. He mentioned that they are having issues with compliance on Flattop for sage-grouse and big game animals on routes that they de-commissioned. These routes are still accessible to hikers, but there are still citizens using these trails for ATV use when not allowed. He mentioned to the Committee that they are needing to outreach to the community and requested that the Committee assist with outreach for compliance on Flattop because it is very important habitat for sage-grouse. The Committee commented that they could put on the sign that there will be a fine for removal of the sign and violation of road closure will result in a ticket. The committee suggested providing information that a citation for violating the closure may result in a 10 point assessment against their hunting license privilege. The Committee discussed that it would be helpful if the Gunnison Basin travel map was revised to also inform the public with an updated and more accurate map of open/closed routes. The Committee discussed writing a letter to the USFS. **Moved** by Peterson and seconded by Chamberland to have Cochran write a letter to the USFS urging them to update the

Gunnison Basin map. Motion carried. St. George, Wenum and Vasquez will provide information to Cochran to assist in drafting the letter.

CPW: Seward informed the committee that the USFWS signed a notice of Certificate of Inclusion (CI) that enrolls 1,800+ acres. He reported that the total number of final CI's is 20, which has a total number of 27,774 acres. He reported that the USFWS is currently reviewing a second CI with 1,600+ acres. He reported that there is an additional six properties that were started this summer, if completed they will be an additional 24,000 acres, which will be 102% of the CCAA goal, in acres for the Gunnison Basin. Ms. Alt confirmed that they do not have to be completed during the comment period. She stated that the CI's will need to be completed no later than January to be considered in the final listing decision.

GUNNISON COUNTY; AMENDED LAND USE RESOLUTION (LUR): Cochran informed the committee that the Gunnison Sage-grouse portion of the Gunnison County LUR was amended. He provided a clean copy of the regulations to the Committee. He noted that the redlined copy is in the September meeting packet materials. He reported that Gunnison County is using the amended regulations and continuing to use the Habitat Prioritization Tool (HPT). He informed that the Tier I and Tier II HPT map is provided on the Gunnison County Interactive Map on the Gunnison County website. Ferchau suggested that the Assessor's Office could send out this map with tax notices or assessments, which will inform homeowners of what may be coming up with the listing.

SAGUACHE COUNTY: Joseph informed the committee that Saguache County now includes all avian species in their Land Development Code and construction permit section. She reported that they received before the government shut-down the MOU from BLM. The county will be a cooperating agency for the Excel powerline upgrade that is now in process. She reported that there will be a field trip to Poncha Pass soon. Seward informed about the grouse transplant effort this last fall. He confirmed that Poncha Pass received 18 birds.

USFWS STAFF REPORT/DISCUSSION – GUSG PROPOSED RULES: Gelatt thanked everyone who attended the public hearing last night. She informed that there is another public hearing tonight in Montrose, and then another in Monticello on Thursday. She reported that the USFWS has reviewed comments and they are in the process of incorporating new information into the final rule. She reported that the end of the comment period is December 2nd. The committee responded that there are three areas that are still not clear:

1. PECE Policy Analysis;
2. Distinct Population Segment; and
3. Significant portion of the range.

Alt confirmed that there is a Significant Portion of the Range draft policy, and it is being used several months beforehand. She informed that there are some areas that are undergoing revisions, but she is unsure how the final policy will turn out. She informed that the final policy will be released in the next few weeks and then they will know how to apply the policy. There was a discussion about the methodology. Alt confirmed that NEPA does not apply to listing decisions.

Vicki Spencer, Gunnison County Electric Association, commented that the power lines are designated as a major threat in the Proposed Rule. She reported that they hired an economist to develop a report and make comments to the USFWS that GCEA hopes the USFWS will listen to because it will significantly affect the Co-Op and the community.

The USFWS confirmed that everything will be released to the Federal Register on March 31, 2014. Depending on the size, it may take a few weeks after to upload to the Federal Register.

The USFWS confirmed that it will be difficult to add additional information and if anything is finalized after the comment period, to go ahead and submit it up until March 2014, and the USFWS will attempt to take it into consideration. Alt stated that the December 2nd comment period deadline does not stop the communication with the USFWS. There was discussion that the presentations given at the public hearing last night were all against the listing. If there are so many organizations that are for the listing, it was interesting that no one had a representative at the public hearing. There was discussion that the emergency listing is the same long process as the regular process and is performed when the species is facing an imminent threat.

Alt informed that they can only come to one of three conclusions with the sage-grouse Proposed Listing:

1. Not warranted;
2. Threatened
3. Endangered

The Committee inquired to the USFWS, how can they reach a negotiated settlement for the bird by holding the landowners responsible and accountable and follow through with the management of the bird and in return the USFWS not list the bird. The Committee asked if there is a way to reach a negotiated settlement, and expressed that this is why the County Coalition was created, to show local efforts. The Committee pointed out to the USFWS that the Conservation Agreement has been signed by the States of Colorado and Utah and there is a complementary tool in the CCAA for the individual state agencies to cooperate in the agreement. The Conservation Agreement is offered as an agreement that there will be conservation of the bird. Gelatt commented that the USFWS recognizes the value of that agreement but it would be challenging. The USFWS commented that the difference between the County MOU and the Lesser Prairie Chicken plan is that the prairie chicken plan has specific mitigation ratios. The USFWS informed the committee that the Lesser Prairie Chicken Rangewide Conservation Plan shows a very detailed plan of how the agencies will work together and a plan of action and that this is a process that the states have been working on for three years. Linner commented that the more specific it is regarding measures and actions the better and this is the piece missing from the County MOU. The committee expressed frustration to finally hear, at this point in the process, what the USFWS was needing to see for the proposed listing. The committee opined that this could have been readily available in the Conservation Agreement if the USFWS would have provided this information earlier. The Committee expressed more frustration to the USFWS, because the agencies have been asking blatantly for specifics from the beginning, and the USFWS would not provide them. Alt stated that they will try to keep the lines of communication open.

Wenum opined that his concern is the USFWS is missing out on an opportunity to acknowledge the incentive to work together locally, if the USFWS does not acknowledge this, it will be removed. They will leave other communities wondering why they should sink the amount of money and effort into it, when it will not be rewarded. He opined that this will affect the outcome of the Greater sage-grouse.

The Committee expressed that the listing of the sage-grouse will greatly impact other agencies and landowners working collaboratively together to accomplish conservation of the birds. If they list the bird, a lot of landowners will retract, and many organizations will not work together. The Committee strongly expressed how unique the Gunnison Basin is and how they have worked together That the USFWS is playing a game that when you do succeed, you still loose. The Committee expressed that the USFWS did not provide the goals the agencies should have tried to achieve, until it was too late.

COUNTY COALITION REPORT & DISCUSSION: Cochran reported that the coalition meets monthly, they are all engaged and moving ahead. He informed that Montrose County used "10-41" powers to adopt Gunnison Sage-grouse land use regulations that are modeled after Gunnison County's. He informed that the next meeting is December 12th in Montrose at the Fairgrounds.

FESTIVAL ALTERNATIVES: Navy opined that she does not want to waste time and effort to create a display if it just sits in a box. The committee agreed that this agenda item can wait for a future meeting.

SUMMIT: There was discussion that the summit could be held. There was discussion that Lee Robertson may not be able to commit her time from the San Miguel Local Working Group, unless there was dedication from a team to help organize the Summit. The committee discussed that the Summit is a lot of work and very valuable. St. George informed that BLM cannot be involved in the Summit due to staff vacancies and a limited budget. There was discussion that this could be brought to the County Coalition and ask if they are interested in sponsoring the Summit. Houck will make sure this is on the Coalition's agenda for December.

CRAWFORD HABITAT PRIORITIZATION TOOL. Cochran informed the Committee that the Coalition agreed to take a conservative approach to Habitat Prioritization Tool development for other GuSG populations.They identified Crawford as a population to attempt to use this tool on. Cochran and Pelletier have worked with NRCS to prioritize the soils in occupied habitat for Crawford. The Committee reviewed the map that was provided in the packet materials. He reported that there is still considerable work to do and they have not begun to use the Tool. Cochran invited anyone who would like to be involved in this project to participate.

LEK PHOTOGRAPHY APPLICATIONS: Cochran reminded the committee that the application process is open and applications are due 2/1/2014. The committee will make decisions at the February meeting based on the protocols that are in place.

USFS PROJECTS

REMOTE SENSING: Vasquez handed out a summary of the project. The Committee reviewed the summary.

HABITAT TREATMENT MONITORING: The Committee reviewed Vasquez's presentation. The Committee discussed this project, finding it very interesting.

NEW MEETING LOCATION / NOTICE POSTING LOCATION Cochran informed the committee that next meeting the Committee will include designating the new meeting location and agenda posting locations.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Date	*Time*	*Notes*
December 18, 2013	10-2	Regular Meeting
January 15, 2013	10-2	Regular Meeting; Fred R. Field

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by St. George and seconded by Wenum to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The November 20, 2013 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:32 pm.

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL:

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Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

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Bobbie Lucero