GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
April 16, 2014

The April 16, 2014 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was conducted in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2nd floor meeting room, located at 221 N. Wisconsin # D, Gunnison, Co. 81230

Committee Members Present:
Voting:
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
Nathan Seward, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Alternate
Sue Navy, High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Doug Washburn, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
David Wiens, At-large Recreation Community
Chris Bove, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Eric Ferchau, At Large, Development Community
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)
Charlie Sharp, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Non-voting:
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Alternate
Tom Spezze, Public at Large Alternate

Staff Members Present:
Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Beth Baker, Planning Services Manager Community Development Department

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Stahlnecker called the April 16, 2014 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:04 A.M.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Stahlnecker confirmed a quorum was present.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: No modifications to the agenda were requested. The agenda was approved as circulated.

APPROVAL OF February 19, 2014 meeting minutes: **Moved by;** Navy and seconded by Bove to accept the February 19, 2014 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

USFWS Member Change-
USFWS representative Patty Gelatt has retired; the USFWS has requested that her temporary replacement on the committee be Susan Linner.

Introduce Saguache County, San Luis Valley Wildlife and Habitat Strategic Committee-
Saguache County Commissioner, Linda Joseph, introduced members of the Saguache County, San Luis Valley Wildlife and Habitat Strategic Committee attending the meeting. They have been working towards creating a Saguache County, San Luis Valley Wildlife and Habitat standing committee. Joseph noted that the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout is now being considered for listing. She added their committee is not a species specific committee. They have not officially appointed the committee yet. When the members have been appointed their committee will attempt to mirror the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee. They are attending today's meeting to observe how the group works and how it functions.

Committee Member Comments/Reports-
HCCA representative, Sue Navy, announced High Country Citizens Alliance (HCCA) has changed its name to High Country Conservation Advocates. HCCA has changed its name to better reflect the mission of the group. She noted there will be no major change to their mission. HCCA's new website address is, HCCACB.org.

Navy reminded the committee this is the last meeting prior to the official decision on the listing of the Gunnison Sage-grouse, on May 12, 2014. She encouraged the group to continue to work in the spirit of cooperation, regardless of the final decision.

CPW representative, Nathan Seward, informed the group that lek counting began on April 1, 2014 and will continue until May 18, 2014. He added the lek counting has been difficult because of the amount of snow on the ground this year. They have discouraged the use of snowmobiles for counting access because of potential disturbance.

Seward explained the Trap and Transplant program will attempt to capture and move 30 birds to one of three different sub-populations: Poncha Pass, Miramonte, and Dry Creek. There will be 10 transplanted birds going to each population; preferably six females and four males, in each group. They have only trapped five birds so far. It is optimal to transfer the females before breeding. They are attempting to spread the Gunnison Sage-grouse genetics to other populations through the Trap and Transplant program. Seward said the Crawford population hens have initiated nests and the males have showed up on leks; this will give them a better chance of survival. They prefer to transfer juvenile birds rather than adult birds. USFS representative, Matt Vasquez, asked if there are statistics on the survival of the transplanted birds. Seward explained the program has been in place for seven years. They only have rough number counts, but there is an estimated 40% to 50% survival rate. He said it is a good tool, but it does cause some disturbance in the population.

Poncha Pass GUSG Working Group representative, Jenny Nehring, said they are tracking 17 birds this spring. There are now four known mortalities and four MIA. She added two (of this year's) transplanted males had already displayed on the lek, noting it was a fantastic outcome. Two of the known mortalities have been attributed to collision with power lines.

DRAFT

BLM representative, Brian St. George, reported he had recently counted 21 males on a lek. He reminded the Committee it is important to be mindful when accessing areas behind locked gates; the public sees us going into those areas, when they have been denied access. He reiterated it is important to adhere to and be mindful of the closures.

Public at Large representative, Peter Caloger, asked if the excess amount of snow this year will be difficult for the birds. It was noted the snow does make it more difficult, because the birds seem to prefer muddy ground. When they are on the top of the snow they are more visible and vulnerable.

BOCC representative, Jonathan Houck, said the County Coalition met in Montrose last week. He added there is now a Range wide Conservation Plan Addendum implementation team. He explained the Gunnison Basin has become an example for successful road closures, signage and public outreach education.

Houck discussed the link between sage-grouse, drought and livestock management. It was noted drought is not an emergency situation because we will always move through wet and dry cycles. It is important to find a way to be flexible and look at different solutions across agencies and landscapes. Houck was encouraged by the engagement of many Colorado counties and across state lines into Utah.

Hartman Rocks and Signal Peak Recreation Area Management Plans-

St. George explained the BLM is looking at the listing decision to provide certainty. They will be implementing the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) regardless of the listing decision. Hartman's Rocks and Signal Peak are both components of the CCA.

The CCA considers livestock grazing, recreation, and the urban interface. He said waiting to act for the final listing decision has caused great frustration. The CCA will promote recreation and Sage-grouse management. Their focus will be on the urban corridor, close to town. It will be designed to meet user demands. There are three areas included; Hartman's Rocks, Signal Peak, and Antelope Hills across the river from the Palisades. These areas can be dedicated to recreation, relieving some pressure in other areas. The Hartman's use plan was updated and incorporated into the CCA. There is now a draft Recreation Area Management Plan out for public comment. They will focus use in the front portion of Hartman's Rocks and minimize disturbance in the back country for sage-grouse.

They are working with Gunnison Trails and Dave Wiens on the Signal Peak area. It is a good opportunity to provide connectivity, while sustaining Sage-grouse management. They will be laying out the trail system this summer, using a resource specialist to look at proposed routes and build management tools. St. George reiterated the CCA is the most important element introduced this year.

Navy expressed her concerns with the Lost Canyon shooting areas; St. George explained with all the spring road closures Lost Canyon is one of the only public lands shooting areas available right now.

Gunnison County Sage-grouse Conservation Trust (Landfill Mitigation Fund)-

Wildlife Conservation Coordinator, Jim Cochran, made the committee aware the Landfill Mitigation Fund will be expiring in 2015. It was created by charging a $1 per yard tipping fee at the landfill. That fee generated between $50,000 and $60,000 per year, since the inception of the fee, September 30, 1999.

DRAFT

The funds were used for projects at the landfill and was extended to conservation easements, and other activities within Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat in Gunnison County.

Project Update, Dr. Pat Magee: *Spatial and temporal abundance and distribution of the Common Raven* (Corvuscorax) in relation to anthropogenic resources and subsidies in the Gunnison Basin.

Dr. Magee presented a PowerPoint program. The purpose of the study was geared toward understanding the basic habitat use of ravens over a year in the Gunnison Basin. He studied how the raven uses habitat in the basin in space and time.

He included areas with human activity and areas without human activity. He said the ravens use the landfill area primarily in the morning and evening after the human activity is over each day. It has shown a classic late summer activity pattern; low activity during the day and returning after landfill closes down in the late afternoon until almost dark. They are communal nocturnal roosting birds.

He chose 12 locations, three were sagebrush areas and the other nine had human activity. He visited each site twice a month, and conducted sampling three times a day, in six minute increments. The airport and City Market had the least sightings of ravens. There were relatively few ravens using the sagebrush sites. There were 6000 ravens (total) at the landfill, which is 80% of the ravens counted. He noted of the 569 site visits there were ravens sighted 50% of the time; they are very common. There is a lot of seasonal variation of raven usage. The landfill is a predictable food resource.

In the winter dead carcass usage increases, especially in January, and February. The snow accumulates and there is more road kill being used by the ravens. Late winter finds more usage in the agricultural fields.

The spring revealed heavier use of carcasses in March, and increased use of the agricultural fields in March. It could be they are eating the afterbirth from calving.

The ravens are ubiquitous, nocturnal roosters, and their activity varies with resources and weather. They are highly visible and vocal. They use the landfill and animal carcasses as food bonanzas. They are not using the most urbanized areas, but the crows are.

GuSG Brood Rearing Habitat Restoration/Resiliency Project. Betsy Neely, The Nature Conservancy - Update on demonstration (pilot) project and The Scaling Up project-

Nature Conservancy representative, Betsy Neely, presented a PowerPoint program. She discussed the strategies developed to better understand how climate change impacts various species. Their small group has increased to 17 members. They have not signed a Memo of Understanding (MOU) yet.

Their goals include a better understanding and increased awareness of the effects of climate change, developing strategies, and prioritizing actions. They have seed funding being used to develop an assessment of vulnerability in the basin. They are looking at 73 species, half are at risk because of the changing climate. They are looking at both plants and animals.

The experts have said one of the biggest issues is the (sage-grouse) brood rearing habitat. They are working on restoring the habitat areas using simple tools to raise water tables and reduce erosion. This

DRAFT

has been a two year pilot project to reduce the vulnerability of the sage-grouse brood rearing habitat. Improving the hydrologic regime was critical.

There are four steps involved;

- Pulling the necessary permits
- Bring the rocks in- they did not collect rocks on site because of potential for disturbance
- Training of field crews and volunteers
- Building the structures

After finishing the two year pilot project they are scaling up the project, using funding from the Tara Foundation. They are now concerned with restoring the hydrologic function, and building a long term enduring program to increase restoration efforts. This should make a difference over the long run.

Audubon Rockies Proposals. Becky Gillette, Audubon
-Restoration/Resiliency Project Monitoring
-K-12 Education Program-
Audubon Rockies representative, Becky Gillette, explained she runs programs educating children in communities on the western slope. The Tara Foundation has funded the three year program. They are interested in seeing The Nature Conservancy and Audubon work together.

There are two main components in the Restoration and Resiliency Project;

- Monitoring the program by doing line or grid transects –and putting the information into the data base
- The educational side uses the long established Traveling Trunk program. The trunk is taken to various sites and used to teach children about the ecosystem as a whole. Teachers use the trunk as an extension of their education plan.

Joint Discussion with Saguache County, San Luis Valley Wildlife and Habitat Strategic Committee-
The Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee and the Saguache County, SanLuis Valley Wildlife and Habitat Strategic Committee held a joint discussion. Saguache County is looking for a good foundation for their committee.

Cochran explained the Gunnison BOCC instituted by-laws to create a formalized structure, and they provided administrative support. The members are actually appointed by their respective BOCC; they can be nominated by their agencies but not appointed. This group has met once a month for nine years, with few exceptions. It requires funding by the County.

St. George agreed structure and support from the County has been advantageous. Navy said the cooperation between the agencies has grown over time.

It was noted it would be more difficult to produce tangible results without the County support of someone in Cochran's position. Agencies collaboration has been dramatically improved by participation in this group. It extends outside this group, and the good relationships carry over.

Houck noted a point person is really needed; having someplace and someone to direct the coordination of the group is essential to success.

DRAFT

FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur on the 3rd Wednesday of the month in the Planning Commission meeting room, located at 221 N. Wisconsin, Gunnison, Co. 81230, unless changed for a specific reason.

Date	Time	Notes	Building and location
5/21/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
6/18/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
7/16/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
8/20/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
9/17/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
10/15/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
11/19/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
12/17/14	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The April 16, 2014 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:00 P.M.

_____
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

_____
Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:
_____
/S/ Beth Baker
Planning Services Manager
Gunnison County Community Development Department

DRAFT