GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 21, 2015

The January 21, 2015 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)
J Wenum, Vice-Chairperson, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Sue Navy, High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
David Wiens, At-large Recreation Community
Elizabeth With, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Eric Ferchau, At Large, Development Community
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)
John Toolen, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Alternate – (via teleconference)

Non-voting:
Nathan Seward, Colorado Division of Parks & Wildlife (CPW) Alternate
Tom Spezze, Public at Large Alternate

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

Others present as listed in text.

8:21:54 AM **CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Stahlnecker called the January 23, 2015 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:00 A.M.

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 November 19, 2014 Meeting Minutes: Moved by Navy and seconded by Wenum to accept the November 19, 2014 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried. Greg Peterson abstained from voting, because he had not attended the November 19, 2015 meeting.

10:01:34 AM **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/ REPORTS**

- **Sue Navy** noted that the Local Work Group/Committee was 20 years old this year, 2015.

- Stahlnecker introduced Bruce Noble the new Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park/Curecanti Recreation Area Supervisor.

- **J Wenum-** updated the committee on the Parks and Wildlife's activities in regard to the listing of the Gunnison Sage-grouse. They have locally completed their annual winter classification for big game. They will be conducting a landowner workshop on February 17, 2015, in Montrose and February 19, 2015, in Gunnison. Wenum reported on listed species process issues associated with a number of City of Gunnison Projects including proposed riparian restoration north of the City and City trail projects.

- **Jonathan Houck-** the County Coalition has continued to meet. The State and Gunnison County have entered into a 60 day notice period, to sue the federal government, on the listing of the Gunnison sage-grouse.

- **Liz With –** is temporarily filling in for Chris Bove. Bove has accepted a position in the southeast U.S. The listing of the Gunnison Sage-grouse has put a burden on NRCS and their staff.

- **Matt Vasquez-**the Forest Service is working on streamlining Section 7- consultation on activities, and the whole process for Gunnison sage-grouse projects. He is hoping to get a Biological Assessment to the FWS by spring and finalize consultation by August.

- **John Toolen –**is working on the Gunnison sage-grouse 4d Rule.

- **Greg Peterson-** the Stock growers have filed a 60-day notice to sue the federal government on the listing of the Gunnison sage-grouse.

- **Jim Cochran -** two lawsuits were filed by WildEarth Guardians and other challenging the threatened listing of the Gunnison Sage-grouse. They feel it should be listed as endangered.

10:42:19 AM **BLM Resource Management Plan Amendment EIS status report:** Melissa Garcia said the project team is making headway on the amendment. The draft is moving forward, and there will be a full draft for public review in June.

10:44:32 AM **Signal Peak Recreation Area Planning Subcommittee:** Jonathan Houck said the Signal Peak Recreation Area Plan recommendation will be reviewed by the Committee and if approved will be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for their review.

Houck said the trail head would be on the University campus. They are striving for an urban interface area, with minimum impacts to the Gunnison Sage-grouse. There will be trail proposals that include seasonal closures included in the layout. Baseline numbers will be formulated with the information from County Public Works.

They intend to develop trail monitoring and a maintenance program. It will not be as dense as Hartman's Rocks trail system; it will be a mixed use area that will be manageable. It was noted the Gunnison sage-grouse could benefit from the trail system, because of the trail monitoring and restoration.

Melissa Garcia reported that the BLM timeline for initiation of their planning process is based on a Notice of Intent through the Federal register; they assume there will be a record of decision in the fall of 2015.

11:05:48 AM **Post Listing Issues – Immediate Concerns;** John Toolen said lek access photography management authority has shifted to the Fish and Wildlife Service; he did not know how the Fish and Wildlife would proceed. Cochran recommended that there should be no program this year.

J Wenum noted there is a public viewing site at Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site and there are private ones that are covered and are not covered by a Cis; legally it is entirely up to the land owner.

Ferchau asked is there a legal consequence to a private land owner; Toolen doesn't consider the mere flushing of the bird to be take, but if it is continues it could be construed differently.

The Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site was approved by a County land use change, which included specific requirements which were unenforceable. Wenum explained the site is off a county road, a right of way and on private land. The lek has started to move and the birds flush earlier. There are University students monitoring the activity at the site.

Jim Mendonca said he is the only one that counts the birds on the Wanuita lek. In 1998 the first count was 2,927 birds. Last season there were 177 birds. Some have moved but not all. He said the constant flow of people viewing the birds has becomes a major disturbance. He requested a minimum of a one year hiatus for the lek viewing at the site. He was concerned with the commercial tours bringing vans in to view the lek. He was also concerned with overnight camping on the site, permanent signage at the site, and parking on the county road. He noted there were 207 vehicles on the road last year. There is no monitoring of the lek until mid-March.

Pat Magee agreed that when the viewing program started it was not an ideal site or situation for controlling access; the site is on county road. They now have people monitoring the site, although they have no policing authority. He added coyotes and eagles, late snowfall and flooding add to the impacts to the Gunnison Sage- grouse.

Wenum was not impressed with the site at first; there could be a better location. It was done to minimize the impact to the South Parlin lek, without this site there will be more pressure on other leks.

Peterson suggested no commercial activity be allowed at the site.

Toolen noted the birds have moved farther away from the parking area over the years, but that is not necessarily a take. He doesn't have a problem continuing when there is a CI that covers it. He is concerned about no access, resulting in the public disturbing many leks, he would rather continue at this site.

John Scott said the Committee took this on at the urging of private land owners, to provide screening for photography.

Cochran suggested no more than two applications be processed each year. He asked if the Fish and Wildlife Service wants the Committee in this process, in the manner they have been in the past? Toolen does not see a problem with it, but it is not a guarantee.

Moved by Ferchau to endorse the continued viewing at the Waunita Watchable Wildlife site, seconded by Peterson. The motion passed unanimously.

The committee discussed the continued commercial tour use of lek site. Wenum suggested forming a subcommittee to research the continued commercial tour use of the lek site.

Committee members Houck, Navy, and Peterson were in favor of closing the site to commercial use.

Chairman Stahlnecker created the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site Subcommittee. Chairman Stahlnecker appointed Greg Peterson, J Wenum, Pat Magee, Matt Vasquez and Jonathan Houck to the subcommittee.

1:25:45 PM **Land use reviews-** Cochran explained the County land use reviews are proceeding as per Gunnison county regulations. They will not be conditioned on a federal approval. It is up to the applicant to contact the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Fish and Wildlife Service will have to do their own research and make their own determinations.

1:36:25 PM **Gunnison Basin Weed Management Program-** The committee discussed the private land component of the weed management program. Toolen agreed to work to try to consolidate the various Section 7 consultations for federal lands and determine/facilitate authorizations necessary from FWS to allow weed management activities to continue on private lands.

Common Raven Use of Human Subsidized Resources: Report by Dr. Pat Magee;- Due to time constraints Dr. Pat Magee agreed to present this at the next meeting of the committee.

12:52:36 PM **Preliminary habitat selection analyses for GUSG telemetry data: Presentation by Dr. Mindy Rice and Dr.Tony Apa, CPW;** There were no minutes taken.

1:57:55 PM **Climate Change Working Group Report;** Betsy Neely thanked the committee for the support of the wetlands and resilience project. Over the past three years they have worked on five sites and installed 475 structures.

2:01:37 PM **Gunnison Sage-grouse Stewardship Award;** Sue Navy recommended Rufus Wilderson, and Bret Redden for the Gunnison Sage-grouse Stewardship award.

Moved; by Wenum and seconded by Navy to approve Rufus Wilderson and Brett Redden to receive the 2014 Gunnison Sage-grouse Stewardship Award, for participation in the restoration and resiliency project. Motion carried. Navy will coordinate with Betsy Neely on the awards.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur on the 3rd Wednesday of each 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
2/18/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
3/18/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
4/16/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
5/20/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
6/17/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
7/15/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
8/19/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
9/16/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
10/21/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
11/18/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
12/16/15	10-2	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The January 21, 2015 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committed adjourned at 2:30 P.M.

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Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:
Beth Baker
Planning Services Manager
Gunnison County Community Development