Waunita Watchable Wildlife Subcommittee Report and Recommendation to the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee:

This Subcommittee met on July 2. In attendance:

Greg Peterson, Chair
Peter Caloger, Member
Pat Magee, Member
Matt Vasquez, Member
J Wenum, Member
Jonathan Houck, Member
Nathan Seward, CPW Staff
Jim Cochran, Staff

The Subcommittee reviewed the ***Final Report Gunnison Sage-grouse Watchable Wildlife Program Waunita Lek 2015, Dr. Patrick Magee and Daniel Joseph Schneider (Report).***

The Subcommittee also reviewed the lek count protocols used by CPW. They discussed how lek use polygons change and how this is addressed by CPW.

The "traditional lek" in the meadow appears to be the lesser used of three lek use areas: 1) traditional lek; 2) East Ridge use area; 3) North Meadow use area. This is a recent change. At this time it is unknown if these are separate leks or part of a lek complex.

The Traditional Lek was not used in a reliable or consistent manner in 2015. Only a few birds were viewed passing through the lek over the entire season. The East Ridge use area was used predictable throughout the 2015 lekking season. The North Meadow use area was used consistently but varied in grouse locations and viewing opportunities (Report, 2015). It should be noted that in 2014 the area immediately west of the traditional lek site was inundated with water during much of the lek season due to high flows in the creek. The extent of this impact is unknown in relation to changes in grouse use in 2014 and 2015.

The Committee discussed, among other issues, being consistent, educational benefits of the Watchable Wildlife site and the extra-ordinary efforts of Sisk-a-dee and WSCU in operating the site, and the roll the USFWS has in conservation and management of the grouse. The latter was of considerable concern to the Subcommittee as the USFWS now has regulatory authority over the Gunnison Sage-grouse but does not have a formal member on the Strategic Committee nor has participated in a meaningful discussion on the continued operation of this Watchable Wildlife Site. Two USFWS staff did visit the site this spring.

Acknowledging the need for a controlled opportunity to view Gunnison sage-grouse, and for the continuation of the considerable educational efforts provided at this site, The Waunita Watchable Wildlife Subcommittee makes the following recommendations to the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee. These recommendations, if adopted, are intended to be forwarded to the responsible entity as noted:

1. Reduce Site operations to 5 days a week in 2016 (it has been open 7 days previously) (**CPW, Sisk-a-dee, WSCU**)
    a. Work to accommodate current reservations for the 2016 season within this transition to a 5 day/week schedule. This may mean a non-consistent 5 day/week schedule in 2016. (**Sisk-a-dee**)
    b. Begin a specific 5 day/week schedule in 2017. Schedule shall be 5 continuous days open, 2 continuous days closed. (**CPW, Sisk-a-dee**)

2. Monitor human (lek viewing) response during the 2 closed days. (**Sisk-a-dee, WSCU, CPW**)

3. Close Gunnison County road 887 to parking for a minimum period of March 15 to May 15 for a distance to be determined in consultation with CPW and Sisk-a-dee (Dr. Pat Magee). (**Gunnison County**)

4. Provide additional signage at the site noting that lek viewing outside of the established Watchable Wildlife Site and associated protocols is harmful to the grouse. (**Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee, CPW, Sisk-a-dee, WSCU**)

5. No minimum grouse male attendance threshold for this lek complex be established at this point in time. (**CPW, Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee**)

6. The Strategic Committee review the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site Final Report annually and take any action (in the form of recommendations to the appropriate entity) deemed necessary. (**Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee**)