

GUNNISON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND OUTDOOR TOURISM COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
October 11th, 2018

The October 11th, 2018 Gunnison Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Tourism Committee (STORC) 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 Members:

John Messner, Chair, Gunnison County Commissioner
Kevin Alexander, Vice Chair, Professor of Biology WSU
Chris Parmeter, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Tim Kugler, Gunnison Trails
Matt Fier, Crested Butte Mountain Resort
Matt McCombs, USFS District Ranger
Mallory Logan, Gunnison City Council
Frank Kugel, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy
Scott Borden, Graduate Faculty at WSU
Ben Breslauer, GOATS
Kristi Murphy, Bureau of Land Management
Elijah Waters, Bureau of Land Management
Bruce Noble, National Park Service
John Norton, Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association
Christi Hicks, Crested Butte Nordic

Others in Audience:

Chris Haaver, Crested Butte Town Council
Mel Yemma, Town of Crested Butte

Staff Members Present:

Cathie Pagano, Director of Community and Economic Development

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve minutes:

Upon Motion made by Kevin Alexander and seconded by Frank Kugel, the Committee voted all in favor to approve the following:

Voted:

That the STOR Committee hereby approves the Minutes of the meetings of the STOR Committee held on September 13th, 2018.

Shady Island GOCO Grant Application

Pagano reminded the committee that a draft letter of support for the County's GOCO grant application for the Shady Island project was shared with the group. She wanted to allow the group to discuss the project. Messner added that a draft project report was recently completed that summarizes public comments on the project. Pagano explained that the project planning has been funded by GOCO, Trout Unlimited, and the District. Met Rec has agreed to fund the implementation phase. Now, the County is moving forward with its effort to secure additional implementation funding.

Met Rec- 7D

Hicks explained that the Met Rec District has the ability to fund outdoor recreation facilities. In fact, it has funded multiple projects in the past, including trailhead facilities, Nordic grooming and playgrounds. However, it has not been able to fund as many recreation initiatives in the recent past because of a limited budget. Hicks noted that if we vote yes on 7D, the Met Rec's budget could increase substantially while also keeping the TV programming going. She explained that this year, Met Rec committed to funding the County's Shady Island Program and the NFF's West Marron trailhead project. It also funded \$5,000 to the Lazy K project. Unlocking, or, de-brucing Met Rec could make available an additional \$100,000 a year for recreation oriented projects. Hicks underlined the fact that voting yes on 7D aligns with the committees' goals. Hicks noted that in the past, there was concern from those favoring TV programming, that if the Met-Rec was de-bruced, funds would only go towards recreation. However, Hicks emphasized that that's not accurate. She added that there is the potential for the north end of the valley to pass further initiatives to increase the levy for the north end of the valley only. Hicks noted that there is a website for 7D with more information, www.yeson7d.com

Hicks would like the committee's help to spread the word in the Gunnison community. De-brucing it has been pursued twice in the past, but without success. If not passed, Hicks noted that the Met Rec could fail, resulting in the loss of TV and potential funding for recreation. Lastly, she noted that most other special districts in the State have de-bruced. Messner suggested that Met Rec funds could help leverage NFF funds.

Hicks concluded with a request for a letter of support from the STOR committee.

Upon Motion made by John Norton and seconded by Scott Borden, the Committee voted all in favor to approve the following:

Voted:

To provide a letter of support from the STOR committee on behalf of the 7D campaign.

Shady Island Visual

Pagano shared the sketch plan for the County's Shady Island project. The area is located just north of Garlic Mikes. The plan includes increased parking (36 trailer spots and 46 vehicle spots). It will also have restroom facilities, 19 walk-in campsites, and an RV-compatible campsite for a campground host. Pagano added that some adjacent landowners voiced concern over noise levels from RVs. To mitigate the concern, only tent camping will be directly adjacent to the property line and a noise buffer has been included in the site design. The on-site camp host will also assist with managing the area for noise. In addition to a new bridge, a three-lane staging area for boat access will be built. Other amenities on site include a picnic pavilion, a small craft launch area, short term ADA parking, an outdoor classroom/gathering space, and an outdoor play area. Stream restoration will also be completed to improve fisheries habitat. Eventually, Pagano added, there is a desire to connect the bike path from across the street to Shady Island. The desired start date for construction is in 2019.

Alexander asked how the area will be maintained long-term. Pagano responded that she's been working with John Cattles to develop a strategy for the area's long-term maintenance. Ideally, they believe that campsite fees will help fund site maintenance. Other ideas are also being considered. Alexander asked if a permit system will be used for commercial users. Pagano noted that no permit system exists currently. Pagano concluded that a letter of support for the GOCO grant application has been drafted on behalf of STOR and that they're asking for the committee's support.

Motion:

Upon Motion made by Kevin Alexander and seconded by Bruce Noble, the Committee voted all in favor to approve the following:

Voted:

To support the County's Shady Island project by providing a letter of support from the STOR Committee.

National Forest Foundation & Fee Program

Pagano shared Emily Olsen's overview for how the Gunnison NFF Stewardship Fund could be structured. Pagano asked if there were suggestions from the group for how STOR could participate in the NFF framework. Olsen has proposed that a sub-committee of STOR could act as the selection committee and consist of 4-5 STOR members, representatives from NFF, the participating guides and operators, a Met Rec representative, and someone from the USFS Gunnison office. Pagano asked if this structure is something the STOR committee would be supportive of. The committee responded positively. It was added that up to \$100,000 worth of funds could be available after the first year, but that the goal would be to build the revenue to \$500,000 annually in five years. It was noted that Olsen's early conversations with Vail Resorts have been positive, and that working to develop a Gunnison NFF fund is something they'd be interested in exploring after their first year operating in the community. The committee briefly discussed the ski area's role in the NFF structure. McCombs reiterated that funds from the resort would be collected through a point-of-sale structure and reallocated to NFF to be put towards community projects that benefit National Forest lands. McCombs confirmed that the funds do not go back to the ski area. Instead, any local organization or entity can apply for funds to implement a project that benefits USFS administered land.

Olsen has spoken with a number of local guides and operators and they are generally very supportive of the program. Fier reminded the committee that NFF provides a 50% match on the funds raised. Pagano

asked the committee if they'd be interested in serving as part of the selection committee. Multiple committee members confirmed they would be. Messner asked for clarification around funds collected from Epic Pass sales, as the pass can be used in multiple locations. McCombs was unclear on how that breaks down but noted that the funds collected are not limited to season pass sales. The committee discussed the types of projects that could be funded, including infrastructure enhancement projects, as well as relevant projects being completed by local non-profits, like Coal Creek Watershed Coalition and CBCC. Noble asked if funds can go to USFS employees. McCombs answered no, however, non-profits can acquire grant funds to put towards overhead/staff time. McCombs went on to explain that NFF has developed strategic funds and competitive funds in other areas, and suggested that this could be a model considered by STOR.

Kugler asked if NFF will fund habitat related projects? McCombs noted that while recreation is an easy focus, he has seen NFF fund very competitive stewardship, forest health, fisheries improvement and ecological restoration projects. The committee reviewed the opt out format of the donations collected from visitors. McCombs explained that NFF funds are only a .5 match to every dollar raised. Pagano noted that on page three of Olsen's document, there is information about the project selection criteria. The next step is for STOR to let NFF know whether they're interested in moving forward. Then, Pagano added, an MOU would be developed that would include additional criteria. McCombs added that NFF is looking for STOR's involvement in the process because it is a unique opportunity to engage the community in the process while also generating greater capacity for project implementation. Pagano added that STOR's involvement will give NFF more ability to understand community priorities and needs. Alexander asked that there be diverse socio-economic representation in the selection committee. Hicks noted that while this is undoubtedly a wonderful opportunity, she hopes the committee will enthusiastically support other projects that do not fit NFF's criteria. Noble noted that it would be interesting to see if there could be coordination between NFF and the National Park Service for more resources to be brought to the table. Pagano asked if BLM had similar opportunities. Waters does not think they do. In response to Hicks, McCombs noted that NFF has made contributions to Land Trusts for projects that are adjacent to USFS administered land and that NFF is acutely aware that funds need to support a multi-stakeholder agenda.

To conclude, there was consensus from the committee to pursue next steps with Olsen.

National Forest Fee Program

McCombs reminded the committee of Jason's September visit, when he discussed fee programs. McCombs explained that he briefed the USFS on the fact that this discussion is occurring and reminded the committee that it must be a Gunnison-driven proposal to be successful, especially knowing the political headwinds that it can stir. Feedback from USFS is that if it is wanted at-large by the community, and there is broad support, it will sail and likely be implemented. McCombs explained that where fee programs have been established, they've been wildly successful. For example, the Sedona program is capable of bringing in \$1 million annually. McCombs touched on some of the barriers to implementing fee programs. He explained that sometimes, certain infrastructure needs to be in place, creating up-front costs. He added that NPS has led the way on technological advances for fee programs, including the use of POS systems for park passes. McCombs noted that Congress is looking for models for where the fee program can be used effectively. Waters noted that many things have to happen before you can charge a fee and that they went through this as part of the Oh-Be-Joyful project. Overall, it has been successful, added Waters.

The committee discussed the complexities behind how funds are re-allocated to multiple agencies as well as the importance of not over burdening visitors. Parmeter suggested that revenues not be used as a measure of success for agencies and that he favors donations over fees. This, he explained, is especially important considering the affordable housing challenges that our community faces. Parmeter reminded the committee to be cautious of pricing out certain populations. Several committee members agreed and it was noted that other models exist and they can be adapted to meet our communities' needs. McCombs noted that they can also partner with non-profits to mitigate these costs by providing passes to people. Ultimately, fees can be applied in areas the community feels is most appropriate to mitigate impacts from visitation. Free days can also be issued. McCombs noted that part of the fee proposal is an extensive engagement with the communities who may be outsized to determine applicable mitigations. Norton asked if this is really something worth pursuing considering the number of passes visitors and locals must already purchase. Committee members shared ideas for how a creative fee program could be developed at the STOR level. Messer suggested that the fees would likely have to be collected by a semi-government entity. Pagano noted that it would likely be a capacity challenge for the County to take on.

Fier noted that there did not seem to be a good tie-in between the impact level and fee amount (i.e hikers vs. ATVs) in Sedona's Red Rocks program. McCombs reiterated that the idea behind the free structure is to allow the ability to enhance the visitor's experience. Kugler noted that it seems like the committee is leaning towards implementing fee structures in select, more acute areas. Therefore, he added, we could narrow our focus and not model it directly off Red Rocks' more regional pass. Norton suggested the committee take this consideration to the next step, and asked McCombs, Waters and Noble to help develop a plan for what it could look like. McCombs reminded the committee that they still need community support and therefore would look for a sub-set of people to help craft a proposal. A committee member asked if there's a chance Congress denies the proposal, or, for agencies' budgets to be cut because fees are being collected. Waters noted that would only occur if they don't spend the funds collected from the fees. Pagano suggested for STOR committee members to reach out to the community to gauge their interest level. A sub-committee agreed to develop a concept for the fee-program. The following committee members agreed to help: Tim Kugler, Matt Fier, Chris Parmeter, Christie Hicks, Chris Haaver, Scott Borden, Elijah Waters, and Matt McCombs.

Sub-Committee Updates:

CB to CB South Trail- Fier explained that discussion have been had with key landowners. A drone was used to assess different routes. Messner asked if Jake Houston, from TPL, met with the sub-group to discuss the project. Fier said he had not spoken with him.

Communications, Stewardship & Wayfinding- Messner explained that different strategies have been discussed for consistent messaging. Their conversations include how to build this into apps. The goal is for folks to understand where to go, how to do it and how to act. Messner noted that there is also a need to develop winter messaging and wayfinding for river access points.

Messner noted that he would soon like to discuss a State Park concept with the group. In short, it would entail 3,000 acres of open space and trails. Additionally, a topic that continues to be brought to the BOCC is OHV use. Of particular concern is how to manage razors. Messner asked if there was an opportunity to develop a Working Group to discuss strategies for improving the situation in 2019. Overall, the committee showed an interest in the topic. Pagano noted that Sally, the VOC Volunteer Coordinator is willing to speak to committee. The committee confirmed that they are interested in hearing about Sally's role and how it could be implemented here.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05 pm.