GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
December 18, 2019

The December 18, 2019 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 Members:
Jonathan Houck, Chairperson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
J. Wenum, Vice-Chairperson, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large
Sue Navy, High Country Conservation Advocates
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Dan Olson, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Non-Voting Members
Nate Seward, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Alternate
Mike Babler, Public At-Large, Alternate

Others in the Audience:
Susan Copping, BLM
Toby Nickel, WCU
Paul Jones, Wet Meadows
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Mike Pelletier, Gunnison County Geographic Information Systems
Ben Billings, BLM
John Scott
Brandon Miller, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program
Jessica Young, WCU
Chloe Beaupre, WCU

Staff Members Present:
Rebecca Ricord, Administrative Assistant
Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District, Wildlife Biologist

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Houck called the December 18, 2019 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:30 A.M.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Houck confirmed that a quorum was present.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Agenda approved as presented.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 16, 2019 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved:** by Peterson and seconded by Wenum to accept the October 16, 2019 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

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COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Wenum reported that they have started the capture work for deer and elk. It's mostly helicopter based right now. They are having difficulty getting to land-based areas right now due to weather. The first week of January they will do their helicopter classification flights. There is an aquatic meeting at the CPW office tomorrow, regarding the lake trout management at Blue Mesa Reservoir. The issue paper regarding the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site has been approved at the regional level and will be sent to the commission in January and decided in April. They went from six alternatives to three alternatives, with the preferred alternative staying the same. It would be effective June 2020. Wenum reported that letters of support would be helpful. Peterson thought that a letter from the Committee may be helpful. Discussion followed on what the committee would like included in the letter.

Moved: by Navy and seconded by Peterson to have Houck represent the board at the January meeting in Denver and draft a letter of support from the committee, reviewed by the executive committee and signed by the chair. Motion passed unanimously.

Olson reported that the interim conservation program rules for the farm bill 2018 have been released. They are on the federal register. There have been some notable changes. There was an increase of wildlife funding from 5% to 10%. The new rules allow for extended contract periods for specific wildlife management practices for up to ten years. They have also expanded the program purpose to include adaptation measures for weather volatility. It will also add a provision to allow for increased incentive payments for State priority practices. The comment period ends February 17, 2020.

Seward introduced Paul Jones as the new Wet Meadow Restoration and Resiliency coordinator.

Kugler reported that all roads to Hartman Rocks are closed for the winter to vehicular traffic. It will also be closed March 15 to May 15 for sage-grouse, anything south of the power lines. Signal Peak will be closed January 1 to April 30, 2020 no mechanized use and motorized traffic for wintering wildlife. January 1 to May 15 for motorized use pertaining to the roads. There is an area in the northwest corner that has never had any closures before last year. They will be closed to all human activity March 15 to May 15. They are working on trying to get the information out there for all the closures.

Houck reported that the County Coalition hasn't had a formal meeting. There have been some meetings regarding comments. The county is working on their comments now. The County passed their budget for 2020. The funding for Gunnison Sage-grouse has not gone down and remains a priority. He spent time with new CPW director, and believes he is familiar with the Sage-grouse issues in the area and offered continued support.

CHEATGRASS EFFORTS UPDATES

Nickel reported that a group of land managers, community members and university scientists is now called Gunnison Basin Sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance. They created a website https://gb-sea.weebly.com/. They have gained new members, Gunnison Trails and Stockgrowers Association. They have had multiple events associated with national public lands day. The group submitted a grant proposal to the Western Integrated Pest Management Center's Work Group Program for funding. Graduate students from WCU have compiled existing datasets to create a rough map of cheatgrass distribution in Gunnison County to work on strategies to make sure it doesn't spread.

Chloe Beaupre showed a map of where the cheatgrass is in the City right now and is concerned because with the high density of cheatgrass and high density of people it becomes highly likely that cheatgrass seeds are going to hitchhike on boots and gear from the City to Public Lands where cheatgrass poses a very real threat of decimating the sage-brush ecosystem that the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse is dependent upon. They are working on getting cheatgrass bumped up on the City of Gunnison's management priorities. Cheatgrass experts including Dr. Matt Germinio (USGS) and Dr. Richard Lee (BLM) have determined that Gunnison County is at a tipping point in regards to cheatgrass.

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MURAL UPDATE

Navy reported that Magee has been talking with Ann Michel and at this point they have learned that there is a major challenge to getting the mural done because not everyone can do it and she gave a name of someone in Canon City that is able to do mural painting. Magee is still working on determining where it could go. They looked at using the water towers on campus but they aren't a great location because they have to be nearly empty and have condensation on the outside. They would have to sandblast the paint off the towers but it would be too expensive ($10,000 for painting and $10,000 for sandblasting). They have been working with different local businesses to see where it might work. Magee is also working on the 2020 summit.

Vasquez stated he believes that they have lost the connection with community awareness and knowledge of Gunnison sage-grouse that the 2021 Summit would really be helpful to get the awareness back up. Wanted to know if there is an opportunity for partnership with the I & E subcommittee to work on getting the awareness out too. Houck stated that they will put the educational outreach piece, along with fundraising, on the next agenda to discuss.

PRIORITY PARCELS FOR CONSERVATION- GIS EXERCISE AND POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Seward and Pelletier gave the presentation. Seward would like to generate some creative thinking and discussion on how they can fund the smaller sized parcels that they know are high priority in the landscape for sage-grouse conservation and provide critical habitat for them. There has been ongoing conversation on putting together a simple GIS exercise. They put together a map of the Gunnison Basin, with critical habitat. He went over the impacts of building permits in sage-grouse occupied habitats, the application is required to have a sage-grouse review and sometimes a site visit. For this effort they focused tightly around the leks and determined how many parcels are within a quarter mile. Pelletier provided a buffer around the leks and then selected the parcels within the quarter mile distance. Seward went over how he rated each of the leks within the quarter mile buffer and how impacted each of them are. Pelletier went over the map presented.

Seward is worried that there is going to be a time that there is not going to be a building envelope that won't affect the sage-grouse on a parcel. Then the value of the parcel is taken away and that is a situation they are going to have to find a way to purchase that property or implement a conservation easement. They have done that a couple of times in the past but because the properties are so small they don't rank well through other conservation easement protection programs. Discussion followed on ideas of what they can do to protect the smaller sized parcels with the programs out there.

STEWARDSHIP AWARD PRESENTATION

The Committee and Magee presented the stewardship award to the Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy Board and staff.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

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.

01-15-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
02-19-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
03-18-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
04-15-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
05-20-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
06-17-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room

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07-15-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
08-19-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
09-16-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
10-21-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
11-18-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room
12-16-20	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The December 18, 2019 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:48 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Rebecca Ricord, Administrative Assistant

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