GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
June 17, 2020

The June 17, 2020 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was conducted by Zoom virtual online meeting, 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) (by phone)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large
Sue Navy, High Country Conservation Advocates (by phone)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Ann Timberman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (UFWS)
Matt Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

Non-Voting Members
Nate Seward, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Alternate

Others in the Audience:
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Sam Liebl, Upper Water Conservancy District
Jess Young, Western Colorado University
Colton Rosalez, USFS
Courtney King, Western Colorado University M.S. Program
Dayle Funka, USFS

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 June 17, 2020 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:04 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 MARCH 11, 2020 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved:** by Houck and seconded by Peterson to accept the March 11, 2020 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Childers reported that the North Rim Project won't be able to be started as they planned this year because they can't hire WCC crews this year but will have the funding for next year. They are in a holding pattern but are making some progress.

Vasquez reported that they are limited with their activities with COVID but are getting out on the field with priority projects. Funka is working with permitees on water storage projects by the Kilborne Spring area. Their seasonal closure for the Flat Top area is now open. RG Severson, a Range Technician for the Gunnison District, passed away and there will be a Celebration of Life at the fairgrounds this Friday at 2 pm.

Wenum reported that they have been fortunate in the high demand for people to get outside. They have seen increases at State Parks with the tighter restrictions in Gunnison County. Their office is open with a walk-up service at a window next to their door, but not open for walk-ins. J thanked the Fish and Wildlife service for funding the acquisition of two parcels of land near the Blinberry State Wildlife Area that contains an active sage-grouse lek west of the City of Gunnison. He sat in a Capital Development Committee meeting hearing where the transfer of two forty-acre parcels from the Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation, who used Fish and Wildlife funds to purchase those two parcels, was approved by the Committee. They will add acres of land to Gunnison State Wildlife area, which will further protect that active lek. Wenum reported that there is a disease that has been found in Texas, New Mexico and a few locations in Colorado that is fatal to wild and domestic hares and there is concern it could affect pikas. The disease as been found in the far south end of San Luis Valley, Paso County, Adams County and Weld County. It is called Rabbit Hemorrhagic disease and it has an extremely high transmission rate between those species to the point that the people investigating those deaths have to wear protective gear, disinfect their clothing and boots so they do not spread the virus. Asked that if you see clusters of dead rabbits that you let CPW know.

Wenum reported that starting July 1, they will have a significant change for people wanting to access State Wildlife Areas and State Trust lands that are enrolled in CPW's public access program in cooperation with the State Land Board. Anyone wanting to access those areas, who is 18 or older, must have a valid hunting or fishing license to access those properties. The reason for doing so is that State Wildlife Areas have purposefully been acquired and are managed purposefully for the benefit of wildlife as the primary objective of those properties. Many are for public access for hunting, angling, wildlife viewing and other wildlife recreation. In the last five to ten years they have started to see significant increases in other forms of recreation that are not wildlife related that have started to take over and have created an impact in direct conflict with the purposes of those purposes. Generally, people have been able to use the properties in the past for whatever they would like so the first year will be an educational push with signs and educational outreach. There are exemptions allowed for commercial users, so people going through Sisk-a-dee for the Waunita Watchable Wildlife site can still access the area. The link to get more information is: https://cpw.state.co.us/.

Caloger reported that he hasn't received any input regarding the road closures or heard of any conflicts.

Navy reported that Magee intends to put together the Summit for next April and will have more information for the July meeting and would like that on the next agenda.

Houck reported that the County is doing revisions to the Land Use Resolution. They looked at some of the contextual language around sage-grouse but not the protections. There is reference to continuing the actions and the expectations from a land use prospective, looking to not have to uplist from threatened to endangered. The overall perspective is to continue what they have in the Land Use for sage-grouse habitat and sage-grouse protections. Talked to Hillary Cooper with San Miguel County to go over starting a strategic committee and land acquisition.

Kugler reported that their inhouse trail crew kicked things off June 1. They were able to do some shifting of funds because they couldn't host any Western Colorado Conservation Corp groups this seasonand they had six weeks of funding so they were able to move that funding to hire five additional trail crew workers. They will be doing a lot of work in Signal Peak, Hartman Rocks, and further in high country. They are very flexible and can help with any needs that come up in the season.

USFWS UPDATE

Timberman reported that they are still working and engaging with communities by telework. They are close to reaching important milestones. They received 202 comments on the draft recovery plan. They incorporated some of the comments and thanked others. Went over some of the comments received.

The big change everyone will see is that based on the PVA analysis and comments, they will now only have four populations under Criteria One. The delisting criteria, Criteria One, is that the high male count targets are maintained to a certain number for 7 of 9 years. Now that will be for Gunnison basin, San Miguel, Pinon Mesa and Crawford. The looked at Monticello and Dove Creek, and those populations now have a combined habitat protection goal to support a certain number of males but those birds don't have to be on the ground to reach the criteria. That was the biggest change between the draft and the final. The added a priority action for evaluating predators and making predator management more appropriate.

We are on target with have the final recovery plan done by the end of September and then will implement it on the ground.

Peterson asked what the goal of the webinars was. Timberman stated that they are to go over the final recovery plan and what it will look like.

Timberman would like to be on the next meeting agenda for Allison to further develop the Recovery Implementation Strategy for the Gunnison Basin. Houck and Rummel will look at adding them to the next agenda and making it a longer meeting, through lunch. Timberman will talk to Allison again and see how long it will take.

COLORADO PARKS AND WILDLIFE'S 2020 LEK COUNT REPORT

Seward reported that after last year's gloomy lek counts given poor access and extended winter conditions in the Spring of 2019, CPW recorded lower counts in 2020. They needed to see how the drought of 2018 and hard winter of 2019 affected the sage-rouse. This year there was an average snow pack. This year's counts increased to 449 for the high male count, increase of 86 from 363 in 2019. 2020 high female count was 125, decrease of 38 from 163 in 2019. Using those numbers their minimum population estimate for Gunnison is just over 2,200, which is an increase of 441 birds from 2019. That's below what they were in 2017. In 2017 the population estimate was just over 3,000 birds. In 2015 and 2016 their estimate was around 3,700 birds. They have gone through cycles in lek counts since 1995. This shows that the Gunnison Basin population has some resiliency, they have gone through some lows and rebounded. Seward is hoping that with this year's more typical snowpack, range conditions look pretty typical right now. The past couple of weeks of wind have dried things out. Has seen a hen with chicks out there.

This Spring he was able to work with the Ute Mountain Tribe on Pine Creek Mesa and was able to help train to do the lek counts to standardize their efforts. They found males on two of the four leks out there. The data from the Pine Creek Mesa area leks are not incorporated in the high counts or population estimate because they do not have a data sharing agreement with the Ute Mountain Tribe. He is optimistic that they will get something in place to use that data for a more complete picture of the population trend.

Discussion followed on the counts and what they can focus on the future, resiliency and conservation.

SISK-A-DEE'S WAUNITA REPORT

Rummel went over the information that Magee forwarded to her. The Waunita site was closed this year. Magee conducted four lek counts. He did not see any viewers at the site. He spoke with Jim Mendonca a couple of times and Jim had not seen anyone either, but that was halfway through the season so people may have come later. Mendonca had counted up to 57 on one date but because his methods are different there may be some discrepancies. Sisk-a-dee and Western did a lot of planning and communication for

2020 but given the lack of implementation of that, aside from the four lek counts, he decided to write a final report. Navy stated that she knew someone who visited the site when it was closed, but went further up the road, and isn't sure if more people did that also. Wenum reported that they left the use open for general public use, but not commercial use. The viewing opportunity for general public was available, there wasn't a trailer or toilet available.

CHEATGRASS EFFORTS UPDATE

King, coordinator for Gunnison Basin sagebrush Ecosystem Alliance reported that she hopes to mitigate the threat that cheatgrass invasion imposes to the Gunnison Basin. They had a work group meeting at the end of April, where they talked about a variety of topics; remote sensing and other forms of mapping being carried out by the BLM and NPS, cheatgrass treatments being carried out by BLM, NPS and CPW They began discussion of a multiagency strike force day in the Fall and also spoke about coordinating various cheatgrass inventory and mapping approaches already being carried out by agencies to create a prioritization map for early detection and rapid response. They have formed subcommittees for mapping, education and outreach, and grants.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur by Zoom online meetings, unless changed for a specific reason.

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 June 17, 2020 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 11:45 AM.

Minutes Prepared By: Rebecca Ricord, Administrative Assistant

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