

**GUNNISON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND OUTDOOR TOURISM COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
March 25, 2021**

The March 25, 2021 Gunnison Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Tourism Committee (STORC) meeting was conducted by Zoom virtual online meeting.

**Committee Members Present:**

Voting Members:

Kevin Alexander, Chair

Christie Hicks, Vice-Chair, Crested Butte Nordic

Dave Ochs, Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association

Tim Kugler, Gunnison Trails

Brandon Diamond, CPW

Steven Guerrieri, Stockgrowers' Association

Matt Reed, High Country Conservation Advocates

Matt McCombs, U.S. Forest Service

Mark Voegeli, CBMR

John Norton, Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism Association

Joellen Fonken, UGRWCD

Hannah Cranor, Stockgrowers' Association

Jake Jones, Crested Butte Land Trust

Hedda Peterson, MetRec

Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Commissioner

James Lovelace, BLM

Mona Merrill, Crested Butte

**Others in Audience:**

Nicholas Kempin

Pam King, USFS

Isa Reeb, Mt. Crested Butte

Nicholas Kempin, Mt. Crested Butte

Joey Carpenter

Celeste Hemiski, Gunnison Chamber

Russ Forest, City of Gunnison Manager

Dara MacDonald

Lizy Bauer

**Staff:**

Cathie Pagano, Community Development Director

Joe Lavorini, Gunnison County Stewardship Coordinator-National Forest Foundation

**CALL TO ORDER:** Alexander called the March 25, 2021 meeting to order at 2:02 P.M.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** Agenda approved as amended.

**APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 25, 2021 MEETING MINUTES:** Moved: by Norton and seconded by Cranor to approve the February 25, 2021 meeting minutes as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

**OVERFLOW CAMPING IN THE NORTH VALLEY**

Norton stated that they are still trying to figure out where to send people when they are sold out. They are trying to find a place that they can go, including hotels that they can go to for the night. Houck stated that they started the conversation with what to do when the North Valley is full but there are locations all over and that they need to look at it holistically. Norton stated they are cognizant of that and that the Taylor area isn't as full but sending someone that far is a long way, especially late at night. Hotels might be the answer. They don't want people to feel unwelcome or feel like they are being unhelpful. They would like people to hear that they are sold out but they are sympathetic.

Diamond stated that he was leaning towards consultation with the agency folks to start discussing overflow issues. The logical first steps might be to promote other designated campsites as a starting point and working with the other agencies.

Alexander asked what that process looks like. Norton stated that the thought is that on Fridays they will have people up in the drainages trying to direct people. Ideally, when a drainage is sold out they will capture people before they head up the drainage. Talked about having the signs that were used for COVID between Jacks Cabin and Cement Creek where they could alert people to designated places only and where open drainages are. Idea is to make sure people aren't bouncing around trying to find a place to stay.

Lavorini reported that currently they are planning on working with TAPP to update websites. They want to have an online presence to get to people before they get here and share their expectations on how they hope people to behave. They will have a huge on the ground focus, especially on the weekends. Lavorini has been speaking with the Chamber and they see a lot of people, so they are working on making sure they have current information for visitors. They are hoping to get signs to at the start of the Valley with the new regulations for designated camping only. They are looking at funding to support additional messaging.

Fonken asked about having a campground host. She said that a lot of people live throughout the County that enjoy camping all summer long and is curious if there would be volunteers that they could get for campground hosts. They would then give information out when the areas are full.

McCombs stated that he appreciates the concern. He said that you try to reserve any on the campsites in all the areas, from open to close they are all booked. The idea that they will be able to send people to other sites, isn't going to be an option. Beyond that they have some ideas for overflow options. There are different sites that they are looking at. They are going to work closely with the community with messaging. The reasonable expectation this year is that they are expecting a COVID 2.0 summer. He believes they will do what they can but that the visitor needs to have a backup plan. It is going to be a challenging season this year and they will work with everyone as much as they can.

Lovelace stated that Oh Be Joyful is completely reservable at this time. There are limited overflow camping opportunities in that area. They are in the process of hiring a campground host. BLM land is pretty limited in the Northern Valley. Closer to Gunnison they have Hartman Rocks, which is not reservable. The opportunities there are pretty limited as well. They have 60 sites and they appear to be full most of the season. They are about to embark on a yearlong visitor study for Hartman Rocks. All of that is going to set the stage for them to be able to make reservable campsites in the future. They are also going to be recruiting a campground host for Hartman Rocks, mainly to make sure they don't stay longer than the allowed 14 days.

Ochs stated that they are also preparing for COVID 2.0 but are hoping that people are getting vaccinated and events are occurring again. Believes the most important thing is plan B. Stated that Kebler Trailhead is ideal and that the solution is finding the alternative, a temporary place to put people. How can they find more places to park, possibly the school?

Pagano stated that she urges caution about finding a variety of temporary camping sites. The reason for that is that she worries that if they pick a specific place, Kebler Pass, the gravel pit, etc., it becomes a permanent solution and in two years they have to add bathrooms and structures to the areas to support it. Maybe they are at capacity and the message is that they are full and that they recommend they find a hotel. Worries that the temporary solutions become permanent expectations immediately.

Merrill stated that they have been hearing that they are full. That is a message that needs to be told and needs to be done positively. It seems like if you do it positively, that everything is booked. The more you can get it out there in the forefront the better. The message should be they are booked, here are other options, so they don't come here with expectations that could cause heartache.

Norton stated that every outward facing website they have will talk about it. Doesn't know how to tell how many people they will reach. If you are a Crested Butte regular you don't necessarily check on websites because you know the area and just come. Merrill wasn't sure what all the website were going to say or are saying. If you go to the website right now it doesn't seem like there is any messaging right now. Believes it is important to use those websites to reach out. Norton mentioned that they are going to have a very strong PR push. They will work on getting the message out there. They won't capture everyone.

McCombs stated that it is important that communities who go through these transitions know that there is a displacement in effect. Traditionally visitors will just pull over on the side of the road and reevaluate their options in the future. They want to consider that. The Forest Service has seen occupancy at sites that were rarely at capacity at full capacity last year. Is curious how much responsibility the community wants to take to inform the visitor.

Alexander stated that Chaffee County is marketing Taylor Park as well and it is good to consider what other areas are marketing.

Pagano asked McCombs to clarify what he meant when he said he doesn't necessarily agree with the direction the group is heading. McCombs stated that he doesn't necessarily agree with the communication approach that is being discussed because he thinks it puts a huge responsibility on the community and less responsibility on the user. Thinks it's fair to communicate the changes that have occurred and some opportunities that were available in the pass won't be available in the future. He thinks the message is that they expect record visitation and popular sites will likely be occupied early in the day and that people need to have a plan B and that plan needs to be reasonable. That plan B might be somewhere far removed from where they planned and then point folks to the resources that are available to provide them where the opportunities might exist.

Alexander asked if they could develop a message of how to go camping, make a good plan and then have your backup options.

Pagano asked for clarification of what they need to do, find alternative campsite locations or should it be other lodging, hotels or all of the above.

Alexander asked if there are other camping locations that could be formed on BLM or Forest Service available.

McCombs said that there are sites south of 50 that traditionally haven't been inundated like Taylor Park and the north drainage. Believes there are some other sites they could send people to. If they can help the user come up with a reasonable plan B that would be what a good host community could feel good about acknowledging. They knew there was going to be some issues with designated sites until they can get everything in place.

Diamond stated he supports getting a message out for hotels, lodging and any other campsites out of the north valley. Believes it is a difficult task to just pick three sites to send people to.

Fonken stated that it would be helpful to have a wag bag, at least they are picking up after themselves in all respects.

Alexander stated that there was a question in the chat that Norton go over their PR plan and how that effects this discussion. Norton stated that it is another way to reach out to people who aren't checking websites. There's going to be an official US Forest Service press release and one from TAPP. The effort is for people to have a plan B if they are planning on coming to the Valley. The tough thing about the plan B is that you are leaving Denver and hoping that you get your site, but will you find a room if you can't get your campsite. It will be difficulty to find a room in a peak summer night. Part of the Release is that they are taking care of business, why they are doing designated camping in the first place. Alexander believes some of the messaging will be effective.

Pagano stated that the point of the designated campsites is they want to contain and control the impacts. With the pains of doing that and needing to find more places to send people they are sort of defeating the purpose of designated camping. Believes it's going to be a summer of growing pains but if they push the message and continue to stick with it, over time they will be known for that.

Ochs stated that they are in a transitional period right now. The point of designated camping is to have a reserved camp system so they can't get to a point of putting signs up until they have the reservation system in place, where they know that the campgrounds are full. Appreciates the comments of a plan B but they have to do something temporary until they can control it.

Alexander stated that there has been good conversation and asked how they are going to move forward, what are their chief action plans to communicate.

Norton asked that it be put back on the next agenda for a quick update. Alexander stated that they will add it to the next agenda and have the communications subcommittee meet between now and then.

#### **UNIFIED MESSAGING UPDATE**

Lavorini reported that the communications subcommittee continues to meet about designated camping and working on the unified messaging. TAPP has offered STOR the opportunity to use their website as their landing page for messaging. TAPP already reaches a large audience. The goal is to develop a digital stewardship toolkit that any of the STOR affiliated groups in the valley can use are their leisure. They are going to hone in on seven to ten principles that they want to promote. If anyone is interested in helping them develop the values please let them know. The are working with Logan/RoShamBo to update signs at Hartman Rocks with the cartoons that were developed a few years ago. They will also be using the same cartoons on the TAPP website. They talked about opportunities for updating signage and language out on the forest and there are three areas that they are going to look to do that; toilets, winter trailheads and wilderness kiosks. There is significant funding to update kiosks all over GMUG.

#### **GUNNISON STEWARDSHIP FUND OVERVIEW**

Lavorini gave the fund overview presentation. Went over the vision statement, project criteria, fund partners, fund selection committee, results, previously funded projects and the 2022 funding cycle.

#### **STOR CORPS 2021 UPDATE**

Pagano reported that they are in their second year of the program. They applied for a grant for the GOCO resiliency communities grant opportunity last fall and received that. They identified \$100,000 from the GOCO grant for stewardship work. They may modify it this year and have less people but for a longer period of time. Lavorini has been working with agencies to outline the STOR Corps work this year. They are trying to be mindful of not duplicating work, be redundant or step on each other's toes. They are focusing on outreach, education and the messaging effort. They are looking on kicking it off this spring and work through the summer. Lavorini stated that if any partners have projects or events in mind to let them know. There have been a few counties that have reached out to run something similar to the STOR Corps.

## **TRAIL PLANNING WITH WILDLIFE IN MIND**

Alexander stated that there have been a few of the STOR Committee members that have been working with CPW on their document "Trail Planning With Wildlife In Mind", how to manage trail design, trail use and developing a document to help inform people that if you are thinking about developing the trails and how you consider planning that. There is a draft document open to public comment at: <https://rockymountaininnovationlab.com/about/planningtawdraft/>. Since so many of the committee members have expertise in the topics Alexander asked that they look through the document and provide some feedback.

Lavorini said that CPW is looking to the STOR Committee and what they have accomplished to help inform the document.

Fonken asked if the draft is year-round or just summer/fall use. Alexander said it's year-round and then what to plan for the winter. Fonken asked if it is statewide. Alexander said it could be applicable everywhere.

## **STOR SUB-COMMITTEES REFRESHER**

Alexander asked that they go over the subcommittees and opportunities. The group went over the existing subcommittees and gave overviews of what are going on with each. The following subcommittees are:

- Communication – formally known as the education and outreach committee
- Designated Camping Fees
- E-Bikes
- Slate River Working Group
- Slate River Winter Trailhead
- Gothic
- CB-to-CB South
- Trail Planning

Alexander would like to see a list of the active members in each of the groups, what they focus on and where they are.

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The group went over possible future agenda items: Update from GPLI, waste management and drought conditions.

**ADJOURN:** The March 25, 2021 meeting of the Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee adjourned at 3:42 PM.

Prepared by Rebecca Ricord, Community Development Administrative Assistant III