

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
August 18, 2021**

The August 18, 2021 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 and by Zoom virtual online meeting, Gunnison, CO, 81230

Committee Members Present:

Voting Members:

Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Matt Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Brandon Diamond, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Ann Timberman, US Fish & Wildlife Service (UFWS)
Jon Kaminsky, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Liz Smith, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Jessica Frey, National Park Service (NPS), Alternate

Non-Voting Members

Nate Seward, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Alternate
Kathy Brodhead, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Alternate

Others in the Audience:

Leah Waldner, BLM
Whit Blair, USFWS
Jamin Grigg, COW
Jess Young, WCU
Bronwyn Taylor, WCU

Staff Members Present:

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District, Wildlife Biologist
Rebecca Ricord, Gunnison County Community Development

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Secretary Peterson called the August 18, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:08 A.M.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Agenda approved as presented.

APPROVAL OF JULY 21, 2021 MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Smith and seconded by Brandon to approve the July 21, 2021 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Seward introduced their senior wildlife biologist, Jamin Grigg, for the southwest region. Diamond reported that they did three public outreach efforts in the area for wolf reintroduction. They had a focus group in Hotchkiss, an open house in Gunnison at the college, and a focus group in Gunnison at the fairgrounds. They will have more public outreach in the future. The known deadline is December of 2023 for wolves on the ground.

Vasquez reported that the GMUG released their Forest Service Plan and draft GIS for the 90 public comment period.

Kaminsky reported that they have received a 60-day notice for an intent to sue. They will be revisiting the CCA and consulting with the Forest Service. They are weighing their options on the path forward.

Smith stated the more comments they can get for the Forest Service Plan would be great, The more comments they can get the better.

COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Subcommittees:

- Executive

Members:

Nathan Seward, CPW, Chair
Liz Smith, Gunnison County BOCC, Vice-Chair
Greg Peterson, GCSA, Secretary

- Technical Subcommittee

Members:

Matt Vasquez, USFS, Chair
Suzie Parker, USFS
Liz With, NRCS
Kathy Brodhead, BLM
Tara de Valois, BLM
Nathan Seward, CPW
Theresa Childers, NPS
Whit Blair, USFWS
Pat Magee, WSCU
John Scott, Public
Aleshia Rommel, Gunnison Conservation District

- Information and Education (I&E) Subcommittee

Members:

Sue Navy, HCCA, Chair
Pat Magee, WSCU/Sisk-a-dee
Nathan Seward, CPW
Tim Kugler, Recreation Community At-large

Members will reach out to others to see if want to be added to the subcommittee.

- Predator Control Investigation Subcommittee- Moved by: Diamond, seconded by Brodhead to not reauthorize. The motion passed unanimously.
- Signal Peak Recreation Area Planning Subcommittee- Moved by: Smith, seconded by Brodhead to not reauthorize. The motion passed unanimously.
- Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site Subcommittee- Moved by: Diamond, seconded by Smith to reauthorize. The motion passed unanimously.

Members:

Brandon Diamond, CPW, Chair
Greg Peterson, GCSA
Nathan Seward, CPW
Liz Smith, Gunnison County BOCC

Pat Magee, WCU
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Whit Blair, USFWS

The Committee went through and updated the rolodex with regular and alternate committee members.

VOTE FOR CHAIR, VICE-CHAIR AND SECRETARY

Chair

Moved by: Smith and seconded by Frey to appoint Nathan Seward as Chair. Motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chair:

Moved by: Peterson and seconded by Diamond to appoint Liz Smith as Vice-chair. Motion passed unanimously.

Secretary:

Moved by: Smith and seconded by Frey to appoint Greg Peterson as Secretary. Motion passed unanimously.

WAUNITA LEK COUNT UPDATE FOR 2021 SEASON

Taylor gave presentation. She was the 2021 coordinator for the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site. Gave summary of the program and program goals. The site was open from April 1, 2021 to April 10, 2021 and April 18, 2021 to April 30, 2021. Viewers had to view grouse from their vehicles due to COVID.

There were 246 visitors (including volunteers), total true visitors was 203, total vehicle was 113 (including volunteers), true visitor vehicles was 90.

Number of available viewing days:

2014-2015- 40 days

2018- 28 days

2019- 26 days

2021- 23 days

There has been a 42% reduction of days from 40 to 23, but only 25% reduction in visitors. The amount of visitors per day has increased from 7.9 people from 2004-2017, to 8.8 in 2021.

Grouse Activity:

High male count- April 10- 38 individuals

High female count- May 4- 8 individuals

High male and female count- April 10- 45 individuals

High male, female and unknown- April 19- 56 individuals

Lek Use:

Main Lek- 0 grouse observed during season, grouse began moving away from main lek in 2014

North Meadow- On 31 out of 35 days, a combined total of 750 grouse observed, average 24.2 per day, high male count was 35 individuals on April 10

East Ridge- One 28 out of 35 days a combined total of 200 grouse were observed, average 7.1 per day, high male count was 18 on April 15

Monson Gulch- Counts were made by Tasha Blecha on April 15- total count was 45, 27 on east ridge, 18 on the lower eastern slope of the ridge.

All potential disturbances to grouse:

-These events did not necessarily lead to a flush event.

- Coyotes- 22
- Birds of Prey- 0
- Weather- 6 occasions
- Other (raves, elk, pronghorn, hawks, cows)- 9
- Human related to passing vehicles on road- 98
- Human activities associated with parking area- 39

Visitor Protocol Violations:

30 out of the 90 total non-volunteer vehicles committed a protocol violation
33% of private vehicles, 33% of tour vehicles

Highest number of protocol violations since 2004. These high numbers may have been because viewing from cars instead of trailer.

Flush Events:

54% occurred before sunrise, 46% after sunrise

- 39 flush events out of the 35 monitored days:
- 26- no disturbances observed correlating
- 9- passing vehicles
- 3- coyote presence
- 1- visitor disturbance

Economic Impact:

The estimated economic impact of the site was calculated based on 64 returned visitor surveys:

- Dollars spent in Gunnison: \$15, 037.44
- Dollars spent on travel to Gunnison: \$15,292.79
- Average dollars spent per person: \$473.91
- Estimated dollars spent in Gunnison by 203 visitors: \$96,203.70

Discussion followed on the update.

GB-SEA UPDATES AND PLANNED ACTIONS

Young reported that GB-SEA in general emerged from the intent to coordinate agencies to share resources, ideas, and professional development over cheatgrass. They have been doing cheat pull and education events. They have submitted for a small grant for a coordinator and to help with mapping cheatgrass. There is a Fish and Wildlife grant that they put in for a similar ask. They are trying to bolster their capacity. They continue to work in the Signal Peak Area. They need to readdress it in the Fall. They are having a hard time finding someone who can spray for cheatgrass. They have a National Public Lands Day event coming on September 11, 2021. Last year 50 volunteers showed up to work on the projects and are hoping for 40-50 this year. Over the last three years the agencies have gotten together and identified an area to both train and treat cheatgrass and hoping it will occur this October. She believes that cheatgrass is the leading cause that threatens the existence of sage-grouse. If it continues to converge on the sagebrush as it has in the past the Committee will have nothing to meet about because there won't be any more sage-grouse. Asked that the Committee think about what the group can do to accelerate the effort and not lose the species.

Discussion followed on possible cheatgrass prioritization and work that the Committee can do. They will look at reforming the Habitat Restoration Subcommittee at a future meeting. Peterson suggested that the cheatgrass discussion be added as a specific item on the September 2021 meeting.

2022 SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT UPDATE

Young reported that the Summit will be April 4 and 5, 2022. They are meeting on August 27, 2021 to meet with leaders to go over the Summit and topics. Working on getting funding for the summit. Asked that they keep an idea on projects that they would want highlighted. They are working closely with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

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

9-15-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
10-20-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
11-17-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
12-15-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The August 18, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:52 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Rebecca Ricord, Gunnison County Community Development