

**GUNNISON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND OUTDOOR TOURISM COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
July 22, 2021**

The July 22, 2021 Gunnison Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Tourism Committee (STORC) meeting was conducted by Zoom virtual online meeting.

**Committee Members Present:**

Kevin Alexander, Chair  
Christie Hicks, Vice-Chair, Crested Butte Nordic  
Brandon Diamond, CPW  
Matt Reed, High Country Conservation  
Advocates  
Hedda Peterson, MetRec  
Kimberly Schappert, At-Large Community  
Member  
Russ Forrest, City of Gunnison  
Steven Guerrieri, Stockgrowers' Association  
Hannah Cranor, Stockgrowers' Association  
John Norton, Gunnison Crested Butte Tourism  
Association  
Tim Kugler, Gunnison Trails

Joellen Fonken, UGRWCD  
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County  
Commissioner  
Matt McCombs, U.S. Forest Service  
Dave Ochs, Crested Butte Mountain Bike  
Association  
Jake Jones, Crested Butte Land Trust  
Scott Borden, WCU  
Mark Voegeli, CBMR  
Deanna Greco, National Park Service  
James Lovelace, BLM  
Mona Merrill, Crested Butte

**Others in Audience:**

Rob Strickland  
Pam King, USFS  
Nick Catmur  
Celeste Heminski, Gunnison Chamber of Commerce  
Joey Carpenter, Town of Crested Butte

**Staff:**

Cathie Pagano, Community Development Director  
Joe Lavorini, Gunnison County Stewardship Coordinator-National Forest Foundation

**CALL TO ORDER:** Alexander called the July 22, 2021 meeting to order at 2:02 P.M.

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

**APPROVAL OF June 24, 2021 MEETING MINUTES:** Moved: by Schappert and seconded by Fonken to approve the June 24, 2021 meeting minutes as amended. Motion passed unanimously.

**COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE**

Lavorini gave the update. They are working on a number of different topics. They met earlier this week. So far they have accomplished:

- Designated Camping- working on encouraging a “plan B”, camping in Gunnison Valley handouts, CBCC-GT-TAPP designated camping websites synchronicity, TravelCB camping outreach, Chambers and CBCC spending GOCO grant dollars.

Ochs stated that the average time on the website is four minutes. Visitors have been reading the page. He believes it worked to have a “plan B”. There have been open areas in the gulches. They haven’t been doing as many silly things as they have in the past. He believes the messaging was great.

Catmur stated the number of people creating new sites is down. They have been seeing issues with the number of vehicles at the sites, which will be the most difficult to enforce.

Norton believes they scared people away but that more people will be here next year. There are places that are great for group campsites where they will see half a dozen cars and eight or ten tents. Schappert asked if it was businesses that are being affected or backcountry campers. Norton clarified it’s been seen in the backcountry.

Kugler asked if they have any numbers for the campsites. McCombs said no that they will see them at the end of the year. They aren’t seeing as many people as last year but the visitors who have made their reservations are showing up. McCombs stated that they are still very busy.

Alexander asked if there has been any negative feedback. Lavorini went over the occupation levels that the STOR Corps have collected. Visitors have asked for clearer signage, specifically fire restrictions, the response to designated camping has been positive but negative towards reservations and fees. They would like to see more enforcement presence. Most illegal camping has been done out of ignorance or not understanding the rules. More obstacles, boulders, pit privies. E-Bikers are asking for clearer messaging. There have been a number of comments on how clean the area is and that they can find a site in July. Ochs stated it has been a better response then they thought.

- Reasonable Recreation- RoShamBo created updated stewardship principles and graphics for TAPP website, Leave No Trace metal signs for install, RoShamBo/GT/BLM updating signs at Signal Peak and Hartman Rocks.
- Ground Game- CBCC-STOR Corps-USFS/SCA coordinating monitoring and VMS signs.

What they will work on next:

- STOR/Stewardship webpage on new TAPP website, USFS pit toilets- Brush Creek/Tent City, Winter Trailheads, Wilderness Kiosks (GAOA), need to set up feedback loop for ground crews to provide updates to TAPP to communicate with the public, GCB/Stewardship Fund Sticker campaign, Research into where people learn about camping in Gunnison Valley-update wherever possible with new regulations and out expectation, determine feasibility of adding campsite to recreation.gov and EDA State Tourism Grant.

Diamond asked if Lavorini is planning on continuing the monitoring through the fall. Lavorini said that he will have his crew until the beginning of September.

Peterson asked if they can merge the stats with CBCCA’s stats and put a graph in the paper for the community to see for the STOR stewardship accomplishments.

Fonken asked if there is a map that shows how many sites are in different areas. Catmur stated that in each area there are kiosks that show how many sites there are. They are also included in the map that Logan put together. McCombs said that in the future they will be updating their motorized map. Schappert thought it would be a good idea to have more signs on the roads that give more information on how many more sites are ahead and what size campers the sites will support.

McCombs stated that the map will be on the CBG map and that they won't need any service once they have downloaded it. The campsites are on there.

## **WASTE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE**

Carpenter gave the update. They had a productive conversation this morning. There's a handful of options they have identified. No matter what, they are looking at a costly project to move the station, multi-millions. There are four options: A full service station at a waste water treatment plant, a service station with some sort of utility service station (similar to the one in Gunnison), a septic style station on a piece of land adjacent to town, with no utilities, or a septic station with limited utilities.

They identified three major areas they have to figure out. The first, have a service station at a serviced treatment facility. They need to hire a consultant who specializes in building the systems. They have been putting cameras at the stations to determine the usage levels. They are going to look at the opportunity for some land swap with the Forest Service. They are going to pursue the idea of public private partnerships, gas stations or is there a service that can drive around to campsites to pump. Apparently, those tanks are meant to be done with gravity not force. He has a spreadsheet with cost estimates if the members want to see it.

Jones asked whether they are seeing usage track similar to the campsite usage. Are there RVs lining up around the block? Carpenter stated that the mitigation measures that he has put in has solved the traffic issues from last year. There is signage not to idle. There is more camping available and the volume has been affected at the station.

Houck asked if the usage and corrective measures get it to the point that the Town deems it manageable, is it possible to keep the station where it is. Carpenter stated that it is up to the Council and community and believes that if there is a project to lessen the use of the system in the area they may be open to it, but isn't sure at this time.

Ochs asked if they have received any feedback from the neighbors and Carpenter stated that they haven't lately but when it was first pit in they received feedback right away but that they haven't said anything recently.

Carpenter asked whether anyone has seen more or less waste this year in the backcountry as they did last year. Ochs stated it is the same this year. Catmur stated it is still an issue. Ochs asked whether 403 is still the worst and Catmur said yes because there isn't a port-a-potty there.

## **PUBLIC LANDS UPDATE**

Diamond reported for the CPW. The public engagement process for wolves is in full effect at the moment. There will be an open house at the WCU ballroom tonight from 5-8. Some of the STOR Committee and other entities will participate in the focus group in Gunnison. As far as recreation goes, there are still pockets of high use areas but it doesn't appear to be a COVID 2.0 surge that they were worried about. The angling and fishing communities are here. They have had low water issues but the rain and cooler temperatures has been helpful.

Diamond stated that they have had questions about the CO-OP and how people were selected. He is awaiting a debrief on the process and will report back to the group. Lavorini gave a summary of what happened, stated that this spring they came to the group requesting a letter of support for STOR to apply to Colorado Parks and Wildlife Colorado Outdoor Partnership and Regional Partnership Initiative. There were a couple of options: to request to join the co-op and not request any funding, to join the co-op and ask for funding for capacity building or to request to join the co-op and ask for funding for planning. They submitted their request for \$94,000 for capacity building and to join. They were not chosen. They were surprised they weren't asked to join this time. Diamond will share the information he gets on why and will let everyone know.

Diamond reported that in regards to the State Park proposal situation, CPW had a committee that vetted all of the proposals that came in this season. They have decided to pass on the broader Tomichi Creek proposal but are still interested in the Gunnison River Corridor. Reported that Spring Creek Reservoir is about drained, to the point where they can commence work on the dam. They need to do dam repairs and had to drain it. The work will run through September this year.

Diamond reported on the State Wildlife Area Access Pass. Most of them were purchased for wildlife conservation, conservation, hunting and fishing. They have had more use on those properties so they have passed a regulation. It started in May and they are in earnest and education mode now. If folks want to be on the state wildlife areas you have to have a hunting fishing license or a State Wildlife Area Access Pass. The idea to have the people who use the areas help pay for management.

Schappert asked what the boundaries are for the State Park moving to the Gunnison River Corridor. Diamond stated that the idea was to have Parks and Wildlife manage from Almont to Park Service Lands or Blue Mesa. Parks and Wildlife could manage the campgrounds, outfitting, Shady Island, put ins take outs and have one entity to take over what is a complicated management situation right now. They started talking about it in earnest when Shady Island was being implicated. Fonken asked if that includes the White Water Park. Brandon believes so but it will be something they discuss. Fonken asked about the flows on the Tomichi. Brandon stated they implemented a voluntary put in closure when the temperatures are highest.

Grecco with the National Park Service reported that they were expecting the worse and have been pleasantly surprised. The visitation has remained steady and high but visitors are also better behaved this year. Employees were more prepared this year. They have a lot of confused visitors in Black Canyon due to Highway 50 construction. They have been trying to do better at educating people.

Grecco reported that there was a press release that went out from the Bureau of Rec that the situation has been getting so dire in the lower Colorado that they started looking at the upper reservoirs. They initially thought they were going to be spared but was told last week that they were looking at anywhere from zero to 80,000 acres. It came out to be 36,000 acres. They asked that they wait as long as possible. They will start releasing in August half that amount and the other chunk will come out in September and October. They are scrambling right now and trying to run elevations and see what that means for the ramps. At this point the area they are most worried about is Elk Creek Marina, the dock system is locked in place and they could sustain a lot of damage to that system.

They are going to keep their ramps open as long as they can. They see 42% of their visitors during August and September. Bureau of Rec is a team of engineers that they have been working with getting the messaging out to educate the public on what it means. Alexander stated that every fall when the water starts dropping people always get stuck out there and asked whether there will be any messaging for that and Grecco stated that it will be a large part of their messaging. Alexander asked if there is any long-term planning for the kokanee fishery. Grecco stated that she is hearing that the fishing is great at this time and the kokanee is starting to school and this is not the best place to be in. Forrest asked about what she thinks about the future. Grecco stated that the type of recreational user, paddle boards and non-motorized use. It is safe because there are less motorized users out there. They are testing for algae and ramping up testing at this time. Pagano asked about the economic impact. Grecco will share the statistics that she has. Reported that they are using the water to raise Lake Powell by three feet to save the generators. They are multimillion dollars to fix if they aren't running. Fonken stated that they have a directors meeting on the Upper Gunnison next week and directed everyone to talk to John McClow. The permittees that are on the Gunnison and Taylor are permitted by the Forest Service and in the even that they wanted to entertain the options for rafting down, could they do a permit process. Grecco reported they can do a Commercial Use Authorization. They have some that have put ins for a lower thrill experience. They could entertain the idea. Fonken asked if they are going to reach out to them. Grecco reported the users will be notified. Some of them will not be affected. \_\_\_\_\_ asked what the flow, cfs, will be released. Grecco stated that they are concerned about Black Canyon but have been told they won't really notice because it will be done slowly. Heminske asked how this might affect wishing in the

winter. There is a large scheduled tournament. Grecco stated that there will be less fishable area but that she expects that they will see ice sooner and fishing will start sooner. Access will be out a little further. They are warning people about the areas that will be different this year during the winter.

Lovelace reported that the BLM manages 685,000 acres inside the Gunnison Valley and all the way to Lake City and Silverton. Lake City and Silverton comprises the Alpine Loop, an area that is comparable to what they see in the Crested Butte area in regards to visitation. It appears to be just as busy as last year. Every piece of their infrastructure is consistently full on a daily basis. The motorize recreation economy appears to be booming. The bulk of their summer season efforts is focused on keeping up with the visitation demands in the Alpine Loop area.

Lovelace report that the flash floods that are occurring across Colorado are having interesting effects on the landscape. The Alpine Loop and the fourteeners in the areas are expanding in visitation by leaps and bounds. They are going to implementing designated camping at the Alpine Loop, hopefully by summer of 2022. Oh-Be-Joyful has been a very busy place this summer with full reservations, day use and the new connection to Gunsight. They are recruiting for a campground host at the Oh-Be-Joyful campground because their current one is leaving. He has potentially identified a campground host for Hartman Rocks. They have 55 designated dispersed campsites in Hartman Rocks. It has not been as busy this year as last year. They have a handful of sites that need some level of correction. They have opted to keep them open this year and things are holding solid right now. They have a yearlong visitor study at Hartman Rocks that started in June that a student from Western has been running. They have 14 traffic counters at the main entrance and other access points. Also have traffic counters from one management zone to another, front middle and backcountry zones. They have counters documenting vehicles going in and out. They have developed a campsite tracker, list of all the campsites, and looking at occupancy, vehicles, visitors, why they are there. The student is also talking to visitors to get feedback. Lovelace stated that at this points they are compiling enough background information to look at whether reservations and fees will be developed there.

Fonken said that at the Hartman Rocks planning meeting they were told they won't be counting in the winter. Lovelace stated that in the winter when they close the gates for grooming they will remove the magnetic counters but they will keep the infrared counters up at locations where they will be able to count vehicles. Part of what the grad student is doing is counting heads in vehicles, getting an average number of people so they can use it as a multiplier they can put in to attribute it to the traffic counter. Heminski asked if they are counting dogs and he said that they have the counters are pointed at chest level and that they are trying to avoid that. They are more interested in people counts right now.

Schappert stated that she believes they should be proactive in policy changes and that there should be room in the process to make changes today to make sure it doesn't see the same impacts as other areas. Lovelace said that there is a lengthy process and potential register notice and along those lines they will get the ball rolling once they get more data. They are working with agencies to look at sourcing native boulders to use as parking delineation and parking controls to define the amount of user impact. They are looking at the handful of sites they have that need to be relocated or clustered near a bathroom. Schappert asked whether they could do donation boxes and the campsite host could check it daily. She believes that there is a lot that could be done now before all of the data is collected. Fonken stated that the Hartman Rocks user groups has talked about putting in one of the tubes at the base of Hartmans for 25 years and isn't sure why they haven't yet. Lovelace stated it comes down to who will manage the donation. Fonken asked who is paying for the port-a-potties. Lovelace stated that the BLM will pay for them. Kugler stated there are two new pit-privies out there and thinks it might be a good idea to raise more money to pay a campsite host. Lovelace stated there are four pit privies at Hartman Rocks at this time.

Lovelace stated that the staffing at the Gunnison field office is lean. That means that the folks at the office are doing two and three jobs. They specifically need an archeologist. They will be redoing their Resource Management Plan (RMP) but have not yet started and don't have a schedule at this time and will be dealing with it for the next couple of years.

McCombs with the US Forest Service stated that designated camping will be fully deployed by the end of the year. They are in the early stages of exploring some unique ways of managing those sites beyond the current condition which involves turning in to a living laboratory partnership with the Western Colorado University and are putting in a grant to explore that opportunity. They had to put off the North Valley Trails project until the fall. The Forest Plan revision will be coming out for public comment in the next few weeks for a 90 day comment period. In regards to the Great American Outdoors Act, they are working on the RFPs for the Irwin rebuild and Deer Lakes Campground. They have had good indicators that the Palisade wall will be rebuilt, through a historical preservation approach and will be funded next fiscal year. They got a sizeable grant from the CPW Trails Program to restore access in the interim. They didn't submit anything for FY 2023 but will in the FY 2024 the target is the Taylor River Corridor, Almont to the top. The stage 1 fire restrictions will be lifted tonight at midnight.

#### **UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Pagano stated that her and Marlene Crosby had a meeting with a representative from CDOT who deals with water and culverts. They went with him from CB to CB South with him to go over the proposed trail. They had a different meeting with CDOT that they didn't like the trail or wanted it but recognized they need it. Also reported that Shady Island may open next week. The official grand opening will be August 19, 2021 from 4-7 and she will send out the invite as soon as she has it.

**ADJOURN:** The July 22, 2021 meeting of the Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee adjourned at 4:02 PM.

Prepared by Rebecca Ricord, Community Development Administrative Assistant III