

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
November 17, 2021**

The November 17, 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. The meeting was also available on Zoom.

Committee Members Present:

Voting Members:

Nathan Seward, Chairperson, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Liz Smith, Vice-Chairperson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Matt Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Stockgrowers' Association
Peter Caloger, Community At-Large
Ann Timberman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Non-Voting Members

Jessica Fry, National Park Service

Others in the Audience:

Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Jessica Young, Western Colorado University (WCU)
Pat Magee, Western Colorado University (WCU)
Whit Blair, US Fish and Wildlife Service (UFWS)
Dayle Funka, U.S. Forest Service
Darren Long, U.S. Forest Service

Staff Members Present:

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District, Wildlife Biologist
Shannon Frias, Gunnison County Community Development

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the November 17, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:05 A.M.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Agenda approved with addition of cheatgrass letter to Senator Bennett's office review, discussion to have Dr. Jessica Young as the alternate at-large committee member and appoint Young as chair of the I & E Committee and revisit the proposed revisions to the policy on standing ad hoc subcommittees.

APPROVAL OF October 20, 2021 MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Sue Navy and seconded by Peter Caloger to approve the October 20, 2021 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Peter Caloger informed the committee that he found a couple articles online on how invasive species can alter soil bio. Caloger shared 2 analogies. The first analogy is: There was a guy in Durango who set up a

bio mediation company to take care of locusts by inoculating grape nuts and locust would ingest them. The second analogy is prairie dogs. The only way to get rid of them is plague. As far as cheatgrass goes we might have to find a biological way to contain cheatgrass. Seward commented that there are examples of biological control but they haven't been completely successful and have altered system processes and have added additional challenges. Seward has not heard of anything as successful as herbicide. The newer herbicides do not have adverse effects on native plants. Long commented that Federal Agencies are probably open to biological controls but he went through the program, some of the biological controls had merit but not as effective. BLM needs to go through a rigorous process to get approval for Rejuvra. and they are not there yet. Forest Service does have approval. Trials done in Gunnison have not been terrible on native grasses. Herbicide status quo right now for effectiveness.

Young commented that she appreciates that biological perspective was brought up. Young heard that the experience with the fungus, that it is not vigorous enough for the rate that cheatgrass takes over. Major part of biological that the technical committee needs to think about is parasitism. And another major part of biological control is mutualism or competition. What is exciting about some of the herbicides is what a great job they do biologically releasing that dominance in competition. Young commented she looks at herbicides as a type of biological control but it has to come along with a health understory and seed bank as well as possible augmentation. We have to get back to a healthy community biologically.

Matt Vasquez mentioned that the Technical Subcommittee has set a date to meet, December 6th 230 -430 The committee will meet with people from GV-SEA. There will be discussion about thinking critically and generating ideas. Process these and what can be moved on. Vasquez stated that the comment period for the draft forest plan has been extended to November 26, 2021. Vasquez also added there has been over 6300 comments, so far. They are working on someone to be on "reading the comments" committee, to categorize the comments. Working with Fish and Wildlife Service. Appreciates the cross coordination. They have jumped into the Gunnison sage grouse. Taking a good look at proposed forest plan direction for sage grouse. Doing a crosswalk with the recovery plan and the recovery implementation strategy document to make sure we are in line with the priority actions. While working through, looking for opportunities to do more conservation and seeing where there are gaps. This will be done for all of our listed species as well as at risk species. Also, will be looking at the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Childers commented that she doesn't believe there will be any enabling legislation passed for the Park Service. Childers stated that there will be some land exchanges, and asked Vasquez if he thought this would change the new forest plan. Vasquez commented that he doesn't believe it would affect the new forest plan. Believes the team has an awareness of that. Vasquez believes that is a good question and could be asked in the comment section.

Greg Peterson did go to the Stockgrowers board of directors the first Monday of November and they are supportive of him moving forward with the cheatgrass project.

Liz Smith looked into the financial piece of getting a facilitator onboard in early 2022. Smith stated that the committee can absolutely use some of the sage grouse funds for that. Smith stated that there is a very important point to be made that this is not just a Gunnison Sage Grouse issue so there are some key stakeholder organizations and it would be great to have some buy in and collaborate in terms of a funding piece. Something to be thoughtful about how we proceed. John Whitney with Senator Bennett's office believes the sage grouse issue is one of the more compelling issues in getting federal funding. It would be a healthy show of support to have local stakeholders pitching in for a facilitator.

Peterson stated that he did contact BLM and there seems to be support from them.

Smith followed up with Dan at NRCS. To check in and keep the conversation going.

Seward informed the committee of a meeting of the Wet Meadow Restoration Resiliency Project. They are having an end of the field season meeting on November 30 at 9 am at Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District office. A lot great work was accomplished this year that will be reported on and they will be discussing future treatment sites for next summer. Navy stated that HCCA has been really involved in the stewardship work and they intend to continue into next year.

APPOINTMENT OF DR. JESSICA YOUNG TO THE I & E SUBCOMMITTEE AND CHAIR

Seward did reach out to Dr. Young about filling the alternate community at large spot. Dr. Young did send an email to Seward stating she would be honored. Seward stated that by filling that position it will alleviate some of the wording in the policy about needing to be a member on the strategic committee to actually chair a subcommittee. Dr. Young will send the letter to the BOCC.

REVISION OF SUBCOMMITTEE POLICY

Smith commented that the filling of the alternate community at large position on the committee alleviates the concern about the chair of the I & E subcommittee but asked if they should still move forward with the change to the policy for the future. Seward stated that was exactly what he was going to recommend. To still move forward and look at the revised proposed wording of the standing in ad hoc subcommittee. Peterson submitted the change made to the subcommittee policy. Seward discussed the changes. In point #2, under the standing subcommittees, the old wording was "standing subcommittee is chaired by a committee member that was appointed by the committee chair with concurrence by the committee as a whole". Peterson proposed it be changed to "the executive subcommittee will be chaired by the chairperson of the committee. The Technical Subcommittee and Information and Education Subcommittee are Chaired by either a Committee member, or member of the subcommittee, who is appointed by the Committee Chair with concurrence by the Committee as a whole. Other membership to Standing subcommittees will be solicited from the membership defined above, and approved with concurrence of the Committee as a whole.

Peterson explained that he looked at the wording and it seemed that the executive subcommittee by itself should be chaired by a chair. It didn't make sense that you go through the process of doing it the same as the other 2. Peterson explained that is why he changed that. The other language is simple. Continue to allow it to be someone on the Strategic Committee or someone within the subcommittee but still appointed and approved by the strategic committee.

Navy commented that the changes looked good. It is flexible and gives the committee latitude. Seward agreed. Seward commented that it gives the committee the flexibility that they are looking for. Navy moved to approve the revised wording to the subcommittee policy. Smith seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

CONTINUATION OF APPOINTMENT OF DR. JESSICA YOUNG

Dr. Young requested that the Strategic Committee appoint her to the I&E committee. Navy commented that it is in the policy not in the bylaws. It is the policy. Navy moved that they appoint Dr. Jessica Young to the I&E sub-committee. Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Seward appointed Dr. Young as chair of the I&E committee. Peterson moved to approve the appointment of Dr. Young as chair to the I & E subcommittee. Smith seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Young commented that she wanted to acknowledge the previous chair for their long service and hopes Sue Navy stays on the committee. Navy will consider it.

Seward discussed creating a position on the committee from Western Colorado University. Seward proposed that we add that to the December meeting agenda.

CHEATGRASS LETTER TO SENATOR BENNETT'S OFFICE

Seward stated that the committee needs to take a formal look at the letter to Senator Bennett.

Seward proposed changes:

First paragraph: instead of across a geographically fragmented habitat, it is changed to landscape. Also change roughly half of its historical change to 10% of its historical range. The 10% comes from a peer reviewed paper by Schroeder. Seward does not believe there needs to be a citation. Caloger asked if the present range of the Gunnison Sage Grouse and the greater sage grouse share a common ground? Seward answered that the 10% is based on museum type specimens that were found or they felt like there was evidence of suitable habitat of the Gunnison sage grouse. Some of it goes as far south as Northern New Mexico, north eastern corner of Arizona, maybe western Oklahoma, and maybe at one time Kansas had sage brush that would have supported sage grouse. The range in south eastern Utah is now a small fragment. That is why the paper is saying there is a 90% reduction in the overall suitable range Young commented that she one of the perceptions is that the genetics are not derived from the greater sage grouse, its that they split between 600,000 and 1 1/2 million years ago. The distribution that it was looked at as a historic range is from a couple of different papers including the Schroeder paper and Sara Olyer-McCance looking from the 1950's, well after the species was a species. Looking at the sage brush habitat, specimens, and the reports from Rogers and others, to recognize it at a minimum 10%. The Greater Sage Grouse and the Gunnison Sage Grouse divided years ago. Caloger stated he was thinking in terms of the geographic area of the habitat vs the saturation. Young commented that it is the best data they have now looking at the suitability vs occupied.

Peterson suggested that the committee should put approximately 10%. Seward agreed, 10% is the best guesstimate.

Seward proposed a change to the next sentence from a noxious non-native grass to a non-native invasive grass.

Second paragraph proposed changes by Seward

First sentence, delete the word remaining. Also, add that it is approximately 85% of the overall population. Last sentence, delete across sage grouse habitat and add throughout the range of Gunnison sage grouse in the Gunnison Basin.

Changes to paragraph 3

4th sentence, change capital letter in sage grouse to lower case. This will be consistent throughout. Last sentence apply herbicide and add monitor treatments in place of monitor treated areas.

Lead in to the last sentence. Seward added further to the beginning of the sentence. Also change "would" to "could".

Smith will get the letter through the county staff to get signatures. The BOCC has already signed off on it.

Navy moved to approve the letter to Senator Bennett's office as revised. Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Whit Blair was unable to be heard through the online meeting. There is an issue with the microphone. Blair wanted to comment regarding the UFWS support of the letter. Blair also wanted to add if the committee is interested in adding a piece about the threaten status and the letter is aligned with the recovery implementation strategy and recovery plan strategy objectives. Smith is going to drop the letter in the chat and Blair will make a comment. The committee will then re look at the letter.

2022 Summit and Summit Budget Update

Pat Magee reminded the committee that the 2022 Summit will be held on April 4th and 5th. Organized around the priority implementation strategies. There will be one-hour sessions on each of the 8 priorities that they are focused on now. Leaders in each one of the groups. They are the same people who organized the pre-summit back in February. The idea is to make the summit useful to those working on the ground.

On the first day the goal is to have the presentation of the stewardship award.

Magee mentioned, he reached out to Peter Coats who is an active Greater Sage Grouse researcher who covers a broad realm of topics. Mr. Coats will be at the summit and helping with the predator management session as well as the research session.

Magee also reached out to Courtney Conway who is a researcher at the University of Idaho. He has a 10-year study going looking at the effects of livestock grazing on sage grouse. He has not confirmed that he will be at the summit.

Magee has reached out to other researchers that might present.

Another element of the summit is taking a look at the local working group and the models that are out there. The one thing they heard back from last year's pre-summit is people really care about working groups, and it is the best way that implementation gets done, but there isn't enough capacity at that scale and lacking being able to implement sage grouse conservation at the scale we need to.

There will be discussions and brain storming of working group models.

They will be celebrating the 21st birthday of the Gunnison sage grouse. There will be activities.

The planning team for the summit took on the task of the budget.

Budget items	Proposed Budget	Registration Fees	ENVS/Western	CPW (Request)	Stock-growers (Request)	GB SG Strategic Committee/Gunnison County (Request)	USFWS (Pending)	Total Requested	Unmet Need
Facility Fee	\$650		\$650					\$650	\$0
Food	\$15,000	\$10,000	\$3,000		\$1,000	\$1,000		\$15,000	\$0
Honoraria	\$2,000					\$1,000		\$1,000	\$1,000
Speaker travel	\$3,500							\$0	\$3,500
Landowner free registration	\$1,000			\$1,000		\$1,000		\$2,000	-\$1,000
Advertising	\$500						\$500	\$500	\$0
Videotaping, editing, distribution	\$2,000			\$2,000				\$2,000	\$0
Registration gifts	\$1,600			\$1,600				\$1,600	\$0
Supplies	\$400			\$300				\$300	\$100
Poster session printing	\$500						\$500	\$500	\$0
Totals	\$27,150	\$10,000	\$3,650	\$4,900	\$1,000	\$3,000	\$1,000	\$23,550	\$3,600
Registration = \$50, 20 Landowners free registration, Estimating 200 registrations + free student participation									
Possible other sponsors/partners									
NRCS, USFS, SGI, BCR, HCCA, Gunnison Trails, etc.									

Kathie Griffin is on the planning team and has been thinking of other resources. Asking Gunnison County and Strategic Committee for \$3000 in support. The support would go toward food, honoraria, and landowner fee registration.

Seward asked about the \$4900 from CPW, if they are committed. McGee responded that at this time, Kathie Griffin is still seeking that support from CPW. Seward commented that he could see CPW likely helping cover landowner fee registration, registration gifts, and supplies but \$2000 for videotaping and editing may be scrutinized by superior. Seward asked McGee to let them know. Peterson asked what fund the \$3000 would come out. Would it come out of I&E funds? Navy stated that some funds from I&E should be in a separate portion of the sage grouse funds. Smith stated that there is a new person in the finance department. They didn't have the details. Smith will follow up with county finance. There was the Cochran fee already being allocated. There is roughly \$200,000 in the fund. The county manager did explain to Smith that the fund has ran in a negative fund balance due to different needs as they come up. Smith will look into what is all allocated in that fund. Seward commented that there was a credit after previous summits. Magee stated there were no overlap funds from the last summit and that was all ran through Western. Magee stated that they checked on the I&E fund a few years ago. And there was \$3000-\$4000 in that account. Navy suggested that the committee should be overseeing the fund. It is discretionary to the committee. Would like to see what the wording of the purpose of the fund states. Jessica Young stated that she served on the committee that defined that fund with Marlene Crosby and suggested that we go back to Marlene Crosby to get the exact wording. Young stated that it did have to do with a more direct mitigation and the impact of expanding the landfill and by directly doing projects that would affect the sage grouse. But things change over time. It was a long time ago. Historic dive in to the finances. Navy explained that the fund used to work like the land preservation fund where people would come with a project and ask for a match.

Peterson does not recall exact wording but does know that the fund was depleted from paying Jim Cochran fee. Smith wants to make sure the different accounts are not getting mixed up.

Seward commented that he noticed going through the conservation action plan that Gunnison County Electric Association and Tri State had both made significant contributions in 2006 and 2009. It could be a good idea to go back and revisit to see if they would be willing to make contributions.

Magee requested that the Gunnison County Sage Grouse Committee contribute \$3000 to the 2022 Summit. Navy moved that the committee, after checking balances and making sure it is available, contribute \$3000 to the summit. Peterson seconded. The motion is to approve the request of \$3000 to the 2022 Gunnison Sage Grouse Summit. The motion passed unanimously.

Childers does not know where the budget process is for NPS but she will find out if they can contribute in anyway.

GUNNISON COUNTY SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN DISCUSSION AND UPDATES

Seward shared the proposed changes. The first revision was to change the wording under #2 in the introduction. The change would take out "and work to preclude the need to list it under the Endangered Species Act" Committee agreed on these changes.

Navy requested that they look at #5 action item in case she is not at next month's meeting.

Land Preservation Fund:

It was originally authorized in 1997 for 15 years and in 2012 for 20 years. This action was accomplished but will come up again in 2033 and it will need to be done again. Seward added 3 addition rows: Corresponding USFWS RIS Actions and Activities, Current Status and Ongoing Actions, Accomplishments by 2021

Navy commented that another change was that action item #5 will become high priority in 2032. Smith and Seward suggested that the date needs to be what the priority is now. Navy suggested that the 2021 year not be used. Seward said the year 2021 can be used but it would be low priority. Keep at 2032 as High.

Under current status and ongoing actions, add funding in place wording.

Under Accomplishments by 2021 add the following wording: Successful re-authorization of GVLBPB in 2012 with 81% of vote. And Approximately 44,000 acres GUSG habitat conserved by YE 2021.

Return to introduction: Seward asked how the committee feels they are capturing our accomplishments, and the current status. Agreement that it is represented.

Added standalone sentence at the end of the introduction "It is the intent that the Conservation Action Plan work in conjunction with the Recovery Implementation Strategy as numerous needed actions overlap."

Pat McGee added that he isn't sure if this is the place for it but the new conservation database should be added. Seward commented that it will be captured in a later action. Blair commented that he thought that information could be captured in 8B with Assess Habitat and Listing Factors. McGee commented that there will be a conservation database training on Monday, November 22nd. You can contact Pat McGee if interested. Seward commented that action item #8B should be the best place to add the conservation efforts data base. With Blair's recommendations and Magee's suggestion the conservation efforts data base information is added to accomplishments in action plan #8B. Seward asked what priority does the committee suggest. Seward feels comfortable with keeping it at medium.

Childers suggested that conservation data base not be listed under accomplishments without explanation that it is being developed. Added to the Conservation Efforts Database in accomplishments, "is being developed to capture Gunnison sage grouse habitat improvement work."

Vasquez commented that the forest services has accomplished prescribe burn monitoring in 2010 and 2013, that should be captured and there are internal reports on those results. Seward suggested that 8B is the most appropriate place to capture those habitat projects.

The list could be extensive. Seward suggests that the list includes Wet Meadow restoration resiliency building partnership and USFS prescribed burn monitoring.

Seward commented that he would have to think of other CPW programs that have been funded through the strategic committee fund. And revise action item 8B more.

Seward lead the committee back to action item #1, Grazing Research.

Seward commented that he tried to capture more of what was accomplished.

Peterson commented about the grazing study in Idaho, separate from the summit, might be interesting to look at and see if there is anything out of that that the committee could do here and take it one step further. It is interesting how they keep the study alive. McGee informed the committee that he study is a 10-year study and they are in the 6 year. There is some preliminary data. Peterson asked if there is a digital copy of the report that is easily accessible. McGee stated that it is out there, probably in PDF.

Navy asked, what about the part that states currently being funded at \$300,000. Peterson commented that is not taking place any longer. Peterson stated that the whole action plan #1 is complete, we can either get rid of it or change the priority to low.

Seward commented that there may be some of the funds set aside for this action item left with the idea that the action item will be repeated. Peterson commented that if that is the case, it changes things with this action item. Seward commented that even though the action item did not turn into the research project it did help Parks and Wildlife as far as the CCAA commitment to the Fish and Wildlife Service by looking at the landscape habitat quality for sage grouse.

Peterson asked if there is a way to check if that money is set aside and at the next meeting the committee can talk about how to go back repeat the action item. Seward responded he can talk to Kathie Griffin.

Blair did have a couple recommendations for minor changes to the letter to Senator Bennett's office. One was to include US Fish and Wildlife and the National Park Service. Also, Blair added a sentence at the end of the 3rd paragraph stating, these actions will align with US Fish and Wildlife Service high priority objectives outlined in the 2020 Recovery Plan and recovery Implementation Strategy for threatened Gunnison sage grouse.

Navy moved to approve the letter as amended with changes. The motion passed unanimously.

Table the rest of the conservation plan updates to December.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

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

12-15-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
01-19-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
02-16-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
03-16-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
04-20-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
05-18-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
06-15-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
07-20-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
08-17-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
09-21-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
10-19-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
11-16-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
12-21-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The November 17, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:29 PM

Minutes Prepared By: Shannon Frias, Administrative Assistant III, Community Development