

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
December 15, 2021**

The December 15, 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
Jon Kaminsky, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Tim Kugler, Recreation

Non-Voting Members

Others in the Audience:

Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Jessica Young, Western Colorado University (WCU)
Whit Blair, US Fish and Wildlife Service (UFWS)
Darren Long, U.S. Forest Service
Brandon Diamond, Colorado Parks and Wil
Allison Hearne, National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)
Pat Magee, Western Colorado University (WCU)
John Scott, Scott Resource Management Service
Paul Jones, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District

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 December 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: Smith moved to approve agenda as presented. Vasquez seconded.

APPROVAL OF November 17, 2021 MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Smith and seconded by Caloger to approve the November 17, 2021 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Smith updated on letters of support. Letters of support have been received by the Gunnison Conservation District, Stock Growers, Colorado Wool Growers Association, Sisk-a-dee who contributed \$500 annually to the facilitator position, Upper Gunnison contributed \$4200 and potentially another \$15,000 for development of the environmental assessment for the aerial spring of herbicide. There is money coming in. Smith stated that if we could pull together some of the bigger stake holders, it would be helpful. Smith stated that she thought she could get the BOCC on board to use some of the Sage Grouse funds for the facilitator position with a wide scale of stakeholder commitment. Seward inform the committee that at the Technical Strategic meeting on December 6, 2021 letters of support from different entities supporting that we needed to do more of a landscape effort to eradicate and control cheatgrass and other noxious weeds. Seward asked members to get letters of support as soon as possible. Seward stated that he would get a letter later in the day from CPW. Magee asked what the funds from the Gunnison Sage Grouse fund is. Smith explained that the fund is from the fees collected from the landfill for a dedicated Sage Grouse fund. Many years it operated in a deficit or low balance. It has built back up. At the end of 2022 it is projected to be \$200,000+. Possible money that could be allocated to a facilitator. The perspective reflected back to Smith is it is not just a county issue. There are a lot of stake holders when it comes to cheatgrass mitigation. If we can get letters of support from stake holders, it will help get the funding from the County and it will help when looking at Federal funding. Magee asked where the fund is now, Smith said she would have to look it up but it is somewhere in the mid \$100,000. Magee commented that it would be good to have an update a few times a year. Smith stated that the fund is intended to be used to fund projects. Navy stated that there was a committee formed called the Sage Grouse Mitigation Committee, which was separate from the Strategic committee, the purpose of that committee was to allocate those funds. Smith suggested that the fund be looked at again. Navy said Marlene Crosby would know more about the fund. Caloger stated that the fund is from landfill fees. Waste Management does not use the landfill. Caloger feels like it is a discriminating tax. Only those who use the landfill are contributing. Should we try to figure out a way to tax those that are using Waste Management. Paul Jones stated that he helped develop that and the question was how was the county going to pay for the expansion. They saw a dramatic decline in Grouse numbers in that area. Instead of a onetime mitigation it would be ongoing. The intent was that it was seed money. It was tied specifically to the landfill and use for the impacts from the landfill. Caloger asked if the money is being used for other projects. Smith stated that her understanding was that the idea the fund is not carrying all of the water, it was seed money. It helps attract other funding opportunities. That is why they are asking other stakeholders or organizations to contribute.

Seward explained to the committee that at the Technical Committee meeting, they decided that they needed to reach out to stake holders and get letters of support.

Hearne stated there are 2 other options. One is using the NRCS RCPP program for a cheatgrass project. This could be after a coordinator was hired and they could be the point person. The NFWF also has a couple funding opportunities. There is the Rocky Mountain Range lands RFP open in February 2022.

John Scott stated that the majority of the mitigation fund was used to pay Jim Cochran and now that he isn't being paid it is building up.

Childers had a question. She did discuss a letter of support with her superintendent and they have a draft letter of support but felt uncomfortable with putting a \$ amount and stating that they would provide financial support. Childers asked the other agencies what \$ amount are they considering putting in a letter of support. They also wanted to check that this would be going through the CESU group or Western State so it would be easier to transfer money.

Seward stated that CPW was not going to put a specific \$ amount but they are going to outline what sources are available and feels like that will still be a great sign of support.

Blair gave update on a letter of support. He is in a position that because of the continuing resolution and for the Federal Budget they cannot put \$ amount but he did put grants that he would seek once Fish and Wildlife grants are unlocked again.

Young stated that Western does have cooperative agreement with National Park Service and if that becomes a possible mechanism of transfer to support the coordinator position, Young would be happy to work with the liaison member to make it work.

Hearne shared a link. A grant opportunity through Land Trust. They have up to 8 awards for capacity building.

Childers thanked everyone for the input.

Vasquez updated the committee about the Forest Service letter of support. It has been given to the supervisor and should be sent out today or tomorrow. They cannot specify a specific amount. What they could put in letter of support is to seek funding through different resources.

Vasquez also mentioned comments closed November 26th for the draft forest plan. Work begins on reviewing. There were 8700 comments. After the new year they will begin work on the final forest plan.

Matt McCombs will be leaving. He took a position as the State Forester. Dayle Funka will be acting as district ranger starting in January for about 4 months.

Navy commented that as she was walking out of the last meeting, Seward asked her if she would be willing to work on the poster that started a few years ago. Navy agreed to work on it. Navy sent Seward some language and ideas. Seward has not had time to review.

Seward explained that some of the landfill mitigation funds were set aside for the poster.

Navy would like the I & E committee to look at the posters before it is printed. Seward would like to sit down with Navy to select photos. Navy asked if anyone has any pictures of Sage Grouse chicks, they would love them. Young stated that in addition to the poster they have other swag. Keep a deadline in mind and have a table at the summit. Eric McPhail came through from the CSU Extension and University communication team. They have decided to adopt I&E for the communication portion of the summit. Originally asked if they could provide some high-resolution recordings and have them uploaded on YouTube. They are willing to go a little farther, and work on live streaming and other options.

Young added that if anyone has a nominee for the stewardship award that she would appreciate the nominees by Friday, December 17th.

Seward updated the committee on CPW. The black bear management plan is open for comment. Bear proof containers are becoming a huge issue. Provide feedback if you have time. Caloger asked about aversion training. Seward commented that they have done some of that. Pepper spray and electrified mats where nuisance bears are.

DISCUSSION OF ADDING WESTERN COLORADO UNIVERSITY MEMBERS TO THE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE

Caloger stated that he thinks the involvement needs to be something long term. A member from Western might be a student. A faculty member would have more of a tie to the community. Seward commented that they would be leaning toward a faculty member. Maybe have a MEM student with a 2-year commitment, could be an alternate. Seward stated that the professors do encourage students to attend.

Young stated that when the strategic committee was formed it was important to include all of the stake holders. With time one thing that occurred, when you look at the subcommittee lists, Pat Magee seems to be on every list. We would welcome the opportunity to populate a seat on the strategic committee from Western. Believes Western should have a seat. Young agrees that students should be encouraged to attend may not be a good fit as a member.

Seward went through the organizational and procedural guidelines, has not found any specific wording on how to add committee members. Seward believes that this needs to be brought to the BOCC. It would likely be a committee member that the BOCC would appoint. Smith stated that this could be discussed after the holidays. Smith will send an email on procedures to add new committee members. Rummel looked at 2011 guidelines and the bottom there is the approval section. It looks like the committee amends the guidelines and sends to BOCC for approval. Scott stated that he was reading the same. Technically there should be a letter from the University recommending the member and the alternate. The last amendment was 2011 when they added the recreation seat. Navy commented that the same process would be followed that HCCA follows. Seward asked if the 2011 guidelines were distributed to all members. Rummel has those guidelines and will distribute.

Navy suggested that the committee recommend that we would like a Western member as part of the committee. Seward commented that the number of members would go from 13 to 14. Navy moved that the committee put forth to the BOCC a request to add a representative and an alternate from Western Colorado University to the Strategic Committee. Peterson seconded.

Peterson discussed that whomever that person is as well as the alternate that they need to have as much authority as possible so items could be moved forward without needing to wait for approval.

Smith stated that based on her discussions with Magee and Young that is what the position she perceived from Western. Young commented that it has been discussed. When looking at decision making partnership, Magee and Young are the best people for that positionally. Considering the relationships with the Masters of Science council and graduate studies council. Entities that bring resources and decision to bear. If they do need something from the cabinet or presidential level they could work with Julie Baca.

After discussion, Seward restated the motion on the table: to add a Western Colorado University seat to the strategic committee pending BOCC approval. Motion passed.

Next step is for Young and McGee to work on the letter that outlines the initial best representative and alternative.

Smith stated that the BOCC will be making quite a few appointments they beginning of the year. She will try to get this on for the first regular meeting of 2022.

Seward reminded the committee that they need to get their letters in for the renewal of seats for the committee.

Rummel sent what letters she has received to Smith. Jon Kaminsky asked if the letter can state that the field manager is the senior representative or does there need to be a name? Seward responded that the preference is to have the representative and alternative to be identified by name.

Vasquez asked if the email that was sent earlier with Darren Long being the regular member and himself as the alternative. Is that good for the next term? Rummel explained that they need to submit new letter.

SUMMARY OF TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING AND FOLLOW-UP CHEATGRASS DISCUSSION

Vasquez told the committee that the meeting was on December 6th. Had great presence and the right people to discuss all of the issues. One discussion focused around how do we become more effective. And they also discussed the coordinator position which led to the letters of support. Vasquez will take a poll regarding another meeting in January. Vasquez will send that out in January as well as the meeting notes. Magee supplied some information about the study in Sublette County Wyoming. It was excellent information. We can learn from that and make it work here. Vasquez said next steps: each partner write letters of support to the BOCC and each member should take on an action item for the hiring of the coordinator. Scott was looking through the action plan and saw action item on invasive species, # 6 states

coordination of invasive plant control efforts. Make it a recommendation to the BOCC for a coordinator role created. Seward commented that the action plan will be looked at and updated in the afternoon part of this meeting. Seward asked Scott if he thought the action item 6 covered what they discussed in the technical committee. Scott commented that it covers everything they talked about in the technical subcommittee meeting. The technical subcommittee moves forward the need for a coordinator to the strategy committee. And once it is in front of the strategic committee it can then be brought to the BOCC. Seward stated that the more he reads the action item 6 it defines creating more of a database. It would be a good idea to add an action plan for the coordinator. #6 of the action plan is specific to cheatgrass. Smith suggested that they add a separate action plan. Smith spoke with Marlene Crosby and they will meet and have a detailed discussion.

Vasquez told the committee that the Technical Committee also stated that they should add more agencies and partners to the table. That will be discussed in January.

Seward suggested to table further discussion regarding the adding of a coordinator until the afternoon when the conservation action plan is discussed.

Peterson stated that from his perspective and also the Stockgrowers, that they are all in favor of the treatments but want to make sure the lands can be grazed the year after treatment. In the past there has been 2-3 years of rest on the land, they will not be supportive if the rest is mandatory. Seward asked if the view is across the board of the Stockgrowers. Peterson said it was unanimous. Seward said it would depend on the herbicide. Peterson stated it doesn't need to be discussed at length today but it is an issue that needs to be discussed. Magee stated that he has only seen that with the Rejurva that there is 1-3 years rest that you should not re seed but has not seen anything about grazing. To reiterate Smith's statement that the Gunnison County weed commission and weed program are doing a great job and are short on capacity. Smith stated that Crosby believes that they are in a better place now. Her discussion with Crosby is projecting out what is our capacity and what is needed. Scott commented on the statement about rest after treatment dealt more with sage brush treatments and Rejuvera works by going an inch or 2 below the soil and remains for years and effects annual and not perennials. The application is later in the fall and it can be added with snow melt.

Seward shared Magee's summary from the technical subcommittee with Peterson that was distributed at the Technical Committee meeting. Vasquez said he would work with Magee to invite Julie Craft to the next subcommittee meeting.

WET MEADOW RESTORATION 2021 FIELD WORK UPDATE

Paul Jones updated the committee on the Wet Meadow Restoration. Jones shared a power point.

2021 seventh year of wet meadow work

Project Areas:
 Common Nook Projects
 Sagebrush Tract Projects
 Crawford One Project
 Pinon Mesa One Project
 Silt (Greater Sage-grouse) One Project

Since 2017 spent \$835,443
 Funding remaining: \$314,067
 BLM L17AC000355-\$113,224, Grant Period ends 8/18/2022
 BLM L19AC00207-\$41,187, Grant Period ends 9/29/2024
 NFWF Easy Grant # 66627, \$159,656, Grant Period Ends 12/31/2022

2020-2021 Wet Meadow Restoration Resiliency Building Project Summary
 Prepared by Paul Jones, Tomichi Creek Ecosystem Services for the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District

Gunnison-2020-2021 Projects Private Van Toy, Cab n Creek, MILLER Ranch

Gunnison-2020-2021 Projects Private Black Canyon, Kraybill, South Canyon Wood Flat, Fox

Gunnison-2020-2021 Projects Private Redden

Satellite Populations- 2020-2021 Projects Private Mountain Island Ranch

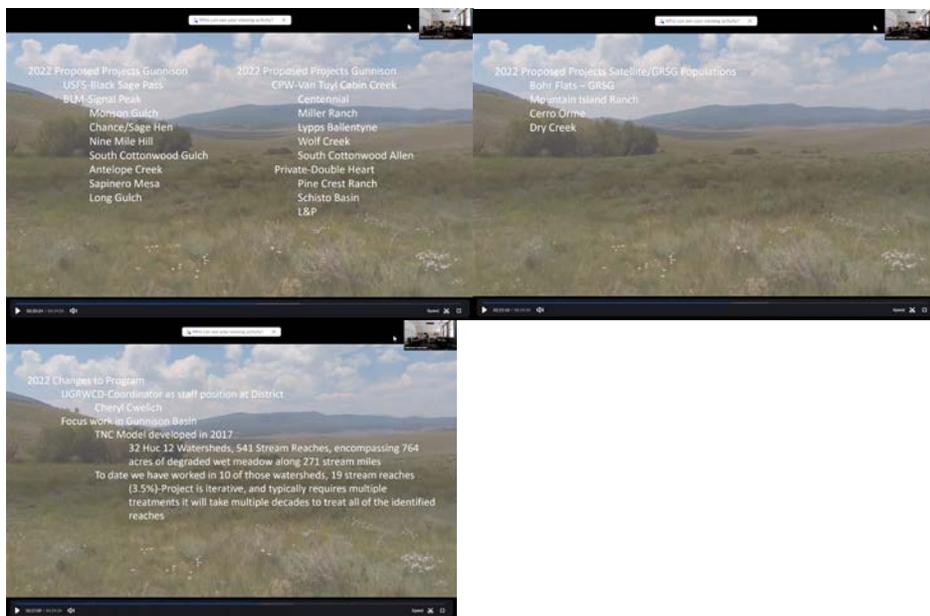
GRSG Populations- 2020-2021 Projects BLM Bohr Flats

PROJECT YEAR	Metrics				Cumulative			
	# Structures	Stream Miles	Wetland Acres	Sagebrush Acres	# Structures	Stream Miles	Wetland Acres	Sagebrush Acres
2012-2018	1531	23	164	1100	1531	23	164	1100
2019	316	3	6	105	1847	26	170	1205
2020	96	2	33	143	1943	28	203	1348
2021	293	4	40	172	2136	31	243	1520

Metrics Vegetation Monitoring
 Increase the average cover of native sedges, rushes, willows, and forbs (obligate and facultative wetland species) in the restored portion of the treated properties by at least 20% within 3 years after treatment

Site	Hydro Type	Wetland Plant Cover		Change (%)	No. of Treatment Years	Average Improvement /year (%)	No. of Yrs to Reach Target	No. of transects
		First Yr (%)	Final Yr (%)					
Sage Hen	Ephemeral	9	64	647	5	129	2	13
Chance	Ephemeral	72	108	50	6	8	3	12
Sage Hen	Perennial	59	102	73	5	15	2	7
Wolf	Perennial	101	146	45	7	6	4	12
Chance	Perennial	98	139	42	6	7	3	10

Ephemeral-snow melt driven system
 Perennial-spring driven system



Navy informed the committee that HCCA is going forward with projects this coming year and are working on getting a bigger pool of volunteers. Looking to involve more of the community. Magee asked about the number of sage brush acres. How do we define sage brush acres. Jones responded, that the goal of the project is to improve the habitat. We measure 50 meters on each side of the wetland area. The vegetation monitoring also showed that through drought there is a dip in vegetation but it has an immediate recovery. Magee also asked, on the wetland acres what resolution does it have on the wetland plants? There is a huge data set that will go to publication this year. They monitored all species.

Seward called a break for lunch at 12:47 pm.

Seward called the meeting back to order at 1:13 pm

GUNNISON COUNTY SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN DISCUSSION

At the December meeting, action item #1 was discussed and updated.

Action item #2, Create Organization Structure for Action Plan Implementation. With the specific objective, Communication and Coordination

In Action Description, agree to change the word “Research Subcommittee” to “Technical Committee”.

Navy commented that the term “local working group” needs to be taken out throughout the document. First place being in action plan #2 in the Measurable Results. Rummel made a note to remove from entire document. Peterson suggested that the wording was meant for a transition. What it was designed to do has been accomplished. Peterson stated that this action plan has been complete. Scott commented that it was completed. Navy stated that the name of the action group is to create an organization structure which could have many new ways to do that, not relating to the working group. Scott stated that you can either put it down as an ongoing activity that we do or create another action item. Scott stated that the communication is better now then ever so not sure if you need an action plan. Navy stated that it seems that every action on the action plan has its own method to being implemented. Do we want an overarching action plan? it may not be necessary if every action has an implementation of its own.

Seward was leaning toward a new action item but believes that they just list it has completed and move on.

Caloger suggested making a footnote about the change to the “local working group” explaining what it has changed to.

Seward suggested that they add the change to the introduction under “Including Stakeholders”.

Scott asked if the committee was updating or rewriting the action plan. You won’t lose the historical aspect of the document.

Navy commented that there are important items that needs to be added. For instance, the wetland restoration, that was not being done 2009.

Seward commented that the wetland restoration should be added to the living document as action item #9. Action item #10 can be the development of a weed coordinator.

Under accomplishments add the ongoing organizational structures such as the technical subcommittee.

Action item #3- Use of the Gunnison County Sage Grouse Conservation Trust with the specific objective of habitat conservation.

Navy suggested that under description the funding partnership part be updated.

Seward sees this action plan as ongoing with the fee at the landfill. He wouldn’t consider it high priority any more.

Scott suggested that if you look at the measurable results and the objective, it is about habitat conservation. The wetland restoration would fit under the measurable results.

Navy commented that it could also include all of the acreage that is being protected by Legacy. Scott commented that a lot of items could be added.

Seward asked if all of the funded improvements should be added. It was decided that under accomplishments by 2021, funded several small scale- habitat improvement projects will be added.

Navy commented that how the funds are going to be used now should be added. Seward suggested that a comment could be added to state it is being considered to use some of the funds for a county weed program coordinator. Peterson asked if it would specific to cheatgrass. He is concerned about overlap with what the county already has.

Smith commented that there is an overlapping piece. And it should focus on the aspect of restoration of habitat for Sage-Grouse.

Seward commented that is what separates it for him and makes it a separate action item. Under current status and ongoing Actions, it was decided to add, the strategic committee is exploring the use of the fund for cheatgrass treatment coordinator, see action item #10.

Kugler asked if that would change the priority ranking? Smith commented that since it is going to be a separate action item that the ranking can be listed in that action item.

Seward stated that if it is going to be its own action item, it will be ranked high priority in the action.

The committee agreed that they were comfortable with action item #3 and can move on to #4.

Action item #4- Community Awareness with the specific objective Information and Education

Seward stated that this is ongoing. Doesn't see much change in this action item. Need to add the development of a conversation poster that is currently in progress. Capture it in Current Status and Ongoing Actions

Change "man" power to "people" power.

Smith asks if the items under accomplishments have been attempted and are they still relevant? Rummel stated that she believes there are T-shirts and bumper stickers. Navy said some are still being worked on. The mural came to a halt but Navy believes that it should be done. Rummel asked if the mural that is happening at the IOOF park can be combined with the Sage Grouse. The committee thinks it is a good idea. Smith will look into that.

Added under Current Status and Ongoing Action: Links for understanding wildlife issues are in place on the Gunnison County website. Rummel will look into the website to see what there is. Navy suggested that Kugler probably has information going out to the public about sage grouse and trails. Kugler responded that it is mostly on closures and that falls in the recreation action item. Kugler suggested that it could be added here that Gunnison Trails collaborates with other stakeholders to distribute information about seasonal sage-grouse related road and trail closures.

Seward commented that more research needs to be done on the websites to see what links exist and what can be improved on.

Action item # 5 was addressed at the November meeting

Action item #6 – Coordination of Invasive Plant Control Efforts with the specific objective habitat/monitoring and reporting

Created a centralized database and utilize Gunnison County GIS department to keep better track of locations. Rummel stated that she began to update this to include the hiring of a cheatgrass coordinator. The hired cheatgrass coordinator working directly with the GIS coordinator would help move it along. Seward commented that it would be best if it was all encompassing of public and private lands but there has to be sensitivity to what sensitive information is being stored regarding private lands.

Seward suggested that Mike Pelletier from the GIS department could help us with sensitive information collected for private lands. Seward asked Peterson if it is in state regulations that private landowners have to mitigate noxious weeds. Peterson was not sure if there is a specific regulation.

Scott stated the Colorado Department of Agriculture may have that information. They have passed that responsibility on to counties and local weed commissions. Seward asked Scott if he thought it was a problem to collect data on private lands. Scott stated that he would leave it up to the private landowner on what information they wanted documented and shared. Coordinated effort needs to be target.

Under responsibility add detailed information regarding the coordinator position but it still needs to be its own action plan.

Navy suggest to add "formally" before the Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator and after field work add the word coordinator.

Committee agreed to escalate ranking/priority to high.

Smith asked how the historical and present is being differentiated?

Rummel stated that she could reference the edits to the action item #10 to help clarify the changes.

Other changes to the action item were, change coordination to mapping in the title of the action. With this change, take out coordinator and add to the additional action item.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

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

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 December 15, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:11 PM

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