GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
June 28, 2012

The June 28, 2012 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners' Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

Committee Members Present:
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
J Wenum, Vice-Chairperson, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Liz With, Natural Resources Conservation Service Alternate (NRCS)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Alternate
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS) Alternate
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Lee Spann, Public At-Large Alternate (non-voting after Mr. Caloger arrived)
Eric Ferchau, At-large, Development Community
David Wiens, At-large, Recreation Community
Patty Gelatt – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)

Staff Members Present:
Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the June 28, 2012 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:00 am.

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

PUBLIC NOTICE CONFIRMED: Stahlnecker verified that proper legal public notice had occurred.

AGENDA APPROVAL: No modifications to the agenda were requested. The agenda was approved as circulated.

In audience:
- **Charlie Sharp, USFWS**
- **Nathan Seward, CPW**
- **Barb Hawke, Wilderness Society**

INTRODUCE NEW MEMBER: Patty Gelatt with the USFWS. Regular member, approved by the BOCC. Patty introduced herself. She took over Al Pfister's position as the Western Colorado Supervisor for Ecological Services. The Committee introduced themselves to Gelatt.

APPROVAL OF MAY 16, 2012 MEETING MINUTES: The Committee discussed amendments they would like made to the minutes. **Moved** by Chamberland to accept the May 16, 2012 meeting minutes as amended, seconded by Navy. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF JUNE 14, 2012 MEETING MINUTES: Cochran commented that these minutes should have taken longer to review before submittal to the Committee, but all of the other working groups asked to see them as soon as possible. The Committee discussed amendments they would like made to the minutes. **Moved** by Wenum to accept the June 14, 2012 meeting minutes as amended, seconded by Navy. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

GUNNISON COUNTY LAND PRESERVATION FUND: Navy informed the Committee the Land Preservation Board Committee representing the Reauthorization Initiative is Citizens Protecting Our Heritage, Open Space, & Economy. Navy informed the Committee that she has a slide show to provide at a future meeting. The Committee discussed that this is one of the action items in the Action Plan.

NRCS: With informed the Committee that the new District Conservationist is Chris Bove. With provided a press release for the Sage-grouse Initiative, which is money to help with sage-grouse habitat. There was a discussion on the report With handed out. There is a problem finding funding, not finding projects. With will try to get a dialog started with the state director.

CPW; LEK COUNT NUMBERS: Seward gave the final lek count numbers from 82 leks that were visited. The final report will be available soon.

FINAL LEK COUNT	2011	2012
Males	763	832
Females	233	138

FINAL LEK COUNT FORMULA TOTALS	TOTAL
Rangewide Conservation Plan Population Formula	4,082
Local Conservation Plan Formula	3,327

BLM; FIRE SUPPRESSION: St. George informed the Committee that there were 1,000 lightning strikes in the last 2 days in Gunnison County. He informed the Committee that BLM's policy with fire in sagebrush is immediate and complete suppression.

BLM; TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION: St. George informed the Committee that BLM has an Environmental Assessment dealing with travel management implementation out for review and comment. He explained that the basin will be divided into zones, and by doing this they will not have to write a NEPA document every time they have a route closure.

PROPOSAL TO CPW: Ferchau informed the Committee that he submitted a proposal to the CPW for a large parcel in Tier I habitat for a client. He commented that if this gets attention and through screening, he will follow up with the Land Preservation Board, Mitigation Committee, Foundation & the Committee. This proposal is for a conservation easement for good access and hunting, which is roughly 600 acres up Ohio Creek. Wenum informed the Committee that the proposal made the RFP deadline, and CPW will evaluate the proposal before the end of July.

USFS; ROAD CLOSURES: Vasquez passed around a map that indicated access points for seasonal closures, and the number of violations. He informed the Committee that the USFS will be installing new gates to replace ones that were ruined and removed. He handed out a poster that demonstrates what the signs will look like.

SAGE-GROUSE FESTIVAL FUNDS: Cochran informed the Committee that Sisk-a-dee transferred the remaining funds to Gunnison Trails. Cochran referenced the email provided in the packet.

CPW; CCAA: Seward informed the Committee that 3 draft CIs have been submitted to the USFWS for their review, 2 CIs have been signed by CPW and the USFWS and are awaiting landowner signature. 6 CIs are close to being finalized for submittal to the USFWS.

LEK ACCESS POLICY – ANNUAL REVIEW: Cochran informed the Committee that they wanted to review this again this June, and that is why it is on the agenda. Cochran informed that there were no applicants, but some photographers went straight to landowners and negotiated their own access with those landowners. Seward informed the Committee that landowners are aware of the process and are following the protocol pretty well. Wenum explained that CPW does not consider taking photographs as harassment. **Moved** by Peterson and seconded by Laurie to approve the lek process for another year and review the process again in June 2013. Motion carried.

RANGEWIDE PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE: Wenum informed the Committee that he has not received a response. Wenum will continue to pursue a response.

MEETING WITH USFWS – FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION: There was a discussion regarding corvids. Caloger informed the Committee that he received a few comments from people who were in the audience at that meeting. The comments he received urge the Committee to continue a dialog with USFWS regarding corvids, to avoid listing the sage-grouse. Caloger stated that the USFWS needs to establish or eliminate predation as a reason, not just push it aside. **Moved** by Caloger and seconded by Ferchau to remove the USFWS from all predation discussions. The Committee discussed the motion made. Ferchau opined that the USFWS

avoided the predation issue and failed to support the urgency or entertaining the issue. The Committee discussed that they cannot deal with the predator issue unless the USFWS is on board.

Chamberland commented that he took from the meeting that even if we protected 100% of the habitat we currently have, the bird will still be listed. Chamberland commented that he is preparing for the bird to be listed because even though our community is being proactive, other communities are not.

Wenum commented that if predation were the main cause then it would have been taken care of years ago. Wenum explained that Miramonte is an experimental area and a process-driven study that Mike Phillips had done on nesting success and hen recruitment. The experiment was expensive. Wenum opined that our community is very involved and proactive, outlying populations are the ones that will cause the bird to be listed.

The Committee discussed that they need to finish the CCA, figure out how to market the conservation targets, and explain/sell to the USFWS what the Committee will do to avoid listing. There was a discussion that the population numbers do not indicate predation as a cause, instead habitat conservation appears to be the key issue. The Committee discussed encouraging other counties to place regulations and address this concern about the sage-grouse being listed because it will affect them as well. Caloger & Ferchau withdrew their motion.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION: Spann handed out a report regarding sage-grouse. Spann asked the Committee to review the articles regarding the sage- grouse and the spotted owl because it has a different perspective than what we normal hear.

USFS – STEREO IMAGERY PROJECT: Vasquez gave a presentation on Stereo Imagery Acquisition. He explained that the aerial flight will result in high resolution photographs which will help the USFS assess vegetation in the Gunnison Basin and can be viewed in 3D. USDA Farm Services Agency Aerial Photography Field Office contracted with AERO- Graphics. Vasquez informed the Committee that the remote sensing proposal that was submitted in March was accepted. Vasquez opined that the goal is to use these photos for long term monitoring; the primary objective for this project is to measure sage brush heights and canopy cover, and identify vegetation types and bare ground. Vasquez explained that this will not be available until early 2013, and RSAC is working on developing a project plan and compiling existing data. Once datasets are compiled and reviewed, project partners will work with RSAC to identify pilot study areas in the Gunnison Basin. The benefits if this project is successful are the long term monitoring, to update and improve the Habitat Prioritization Tool (HPT), and mapping seasonal habitats for sage-grouse (nesting and winter habitat).

CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT: St. George recapped the Committee's meeting with the USFWS and the discussion regarding the CCA, and that voluntary measures do matter. He commented that the CCA has an influence to help avoid listing the sage-grouse. He informed the Committee that BLM received comments, and has completed the 2nd round of review and response to the comments. St. George opined that he received good feedback that we need to clarify the scope, the intent and what we are trying to accomplish, and clarify roles and

responsibilities. St. George encouraged the Committee to continue to try to review comments from their constituency. The Committee discussed some of the key concerns that were received from the various organizations. The Committee discussed that the target is to achieve signatures in September and to submit a biological assessment to the USFWS. Gelatt informed the Committee that it may be to the Committee's advantage to have a consultation. Sharp informed the Committee that the formal consultation period is roughly 135 days. Gelatt informed the Committee that the USWFS will wait to sign the CCA until after the consultation process.

Timeline:

- July: 3rd round of review
- July & August: Complete the CCA document (Review & Revise)
- September: Sign by September 1st and ready for USFWS consultation process
- September – December: In the consultation process with the USFWS
- January: Receive a conference opinion (Revisions from the USFWS)

The USFWS changes may occur during the Biological Assessment. St. George anticipates that the changes will be included in the document.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Date	*Time*	*Notes*
July 18, 2012	10-2	Regular Meeting
August 23, 2012	10-2	Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The June 28, 2012 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:08 pm.

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL:

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Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

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Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III