GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
October 17, 2012

The October 17, 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:
Voting:
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS), Regular
Kathy Griffin, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Alternate
Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA), Regular
Chris Bove, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regular
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Regular
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA), Regular
Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), Regular
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS), Alternate
Patty Gelatt, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Regular
Russ Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Alternate
Peter Caloger, Public At-large, Regular
Eric Ferchau, At-large, Development Community, Regular
David Wiens, At-large, Recreation Community, Regular

Non-voting:
J Wenum, CPW Regular (attended afternoon session)
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Alternate
Lee Spann, Public At-Large, Alternate

Visitors:
Christina Santana, NRCS
Nathan Seward, CPW, Gunnison
Doug Washburn, GCSA
Dr. Pat Magee, Western State Colorado University (WSCU)
Allen Moores, Gunnison County Public Works

Staff Members Present:
Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the September 19, 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.

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AGENDA APPROVAL: Cochran requested that agenda item #7 be amended to add a report on the SGI Conference Report transition to a Conference Opinion. The amended agenda was approved.

APPROVAL OF September 19, 2012 MEETING MINUTES: The Committee reviewed the minutes. Stahlnecker noted that he did abstain from the vote on the Land Preservation Fund resolution. The note requesting clarification is to be struck from the minutes. **Moved** by Navy, seconded by Bove to approve the September 19, 2012 meeting minutes as amended. Motion passed.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

Navy: Reported on the status of the Land Preservation Fund renewal ballot initiative. The campaign is going well. Navy read a list of entities supporting the initiative.

Griffin: Reported that she attended the Poncha Pass Local Working Group (LWG) meeting on October 16, 2012. Griffin provided the Committee with a Gunnison Sage-grouse (GUSG) population summary that was part of her report to the Poncha Pass LWG.

Seward: Reported that the CPW Gunnison Sage-grouse (GUSG) trap and transplant project for this fall is complete. Eighteen birds (12 females, 5 males and 1 unknown (to the transplant crew)) were radio collared and transported to the Glade Park area in the Pinon Mesa population. A new radio transmitter and attachment harness was used on some of the male grouse to help alleviate past transmitter slipping issues.

Laurie: Reported on the Poncha Pass LWG meeting. One new landowner attended.

Joseph: Reported that the Saguache County Planning Commission is meeting next week. It will be discussing Gunnison Sage-grouse issues. Joseph invited Cochran to attend the meeting to introduce Gunnison County GUSG related land use regulations and to begin discussion on a "project screen" for land use related projects in GUSG habitat.

Cochran: Reported that he had received notice that the CPW draft mule deer management plans for the Gunnison Basin Data Analysis Units (DAU) are available for public comment. Cochran distributed the preferred alternative excerpts from the draft plans. Cochran suggested that the Committee request a discussion with Brandon Diamond at its November meeting. The Committee agreed that would be a good idea. Japuntich provided information on the habitat discussion section of the plans. Seward suggested that the Committee provide input on the deer DAU plans, but noted that the potential for deer and elk to have impacts on GUSG habitat is understood by Diamond and is reflected in his population objective numbers. Seward stated that the Committee may be more interested in providing input in the future on elk DAU plans because elk have been commonly viewed by the Committee as having the most impact on GUSG habitat.

FIELD TRIP REVIEW: Cochran reported that the Redden Ranches portion of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Climate Change Adaption/Riparian/GUSG Brood Rearing Habitat demonstration project was completed. The Wolf Creek part of the project has 8 to 10 structures remaining to be installed. Finding volunteers for this last effort is proving difficult. The Committee discussed the project. Members attending the field trip provided a positive report on the project and its potential.

Navy asked how a private landowner might do this kind of project in the future. The Committee discussed various options. Several Committee members asked if this type of project might be extended out onto public lands. Japuntich and Vasquez both noted that it will be if it proves successful.

The consensus of those Committee members attending the field trip was that the trip was informative and useful.

CCA STATUS UPDATE: BLM has been in contact with CPW. CPW has not signed the CCA. Griffin asked who within CPW might sign the document. Seward thought it likely would have been the Southwest Regional Manager, but he retired in September. Japuntich reported that he has been working on the Biological Assessment (BA). Peterson asked if the Committee will see a draft of the BA before it is submitted to the USFWS. Japuntich replied that a draft may be available for Committee review by the November meeting.

Japuntich also reported that because of the need to complete the CCA BA and because BLM has been working closely with the USFWS since the last data call, they decided not to submit additional information during the informal request for information that occurred because of the Proposed Rule deadline extension.

WORKING LANDS FOR WILDLIFE INITIATIVE: Santana reported on the program. She has attended several teleconferences on WLFW. The assurances mentioned in the program information are not clearly understood by staff yet. WLFW is supposed to provide regulatory predictability for NRCS practices undertaken by a landowner as part of a NRCS Conservation Plan. As Santana understands the program, the regulatory predictability provided is far less substantive than that provided by the CPW Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) program.

Santana and Gelatt provided information on the Sage-grouse Initiative SGI Conference Report that is being transitioned to a GUSG-specific Conference Opinion. The intent is to have the Conference Opinion completed by the date of the Final Rule so that it can be transitioned to a Biological Opinion. This will allow those NRCS practices specified in the Biological Opinion to be implemented within GUSG Critical Habitat without further consultation by the USFWS.

COOPERATIVE HIGH RESOLUTION PHOTOGRAPHY UPDATE: Vasquez reported on the project status. Photography flights were completed in mid-September. Data (photography) will be available by mid-December. The USFWS remote sensing project officially began October 1, 2012 (FY 2013). Two study areas, including one BLM Lydar area and one USFS vegetation plot area on Flattop Mountain will be used for initial sagebrush height/canopy cover measurement methodology development as they both have ground-truthed height/canopy measurements.

The remote sensing unit has 13 weeks of program time to develop the technology. If the technology is determined feasible and useful, then a separate proposal will be submitted to process the rest of the GUSG occupied habitat within the Gunnison Basin. A preliminary report is expected by July-August, 2013 with a final reported expected by September 30, 2013.

The Committee complimented all the entities involved in making the project possible. Vasquez was thanked for his diligence and persistence. Vasquez thanked Mark Hatcher, USFS, for identifying this opportunity.

PREDATOR CONTROL SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT: Peter Caloger, Subcommittee Chair, led the discussion. He reported that the literature indicates that ravens and red fox are the two primary predators likely impacting GUSG. He believes that reducing their numbers will allow GUSG to increase in the basin.

Discussion on red fox ensued. Seward noted that most red fox don't occur in sage-grouse habitat. Magee concurred. His studies on red fox have primarily been in and around urban Gunnison and the University. Vasquez recommended that the Committee be cautious about using red fox predation information based upon information from Greater Sage-grouse populations. Caloger noted that the literature indicates that coyotes will not tolerate red fox.

Caloger reported that in his discussion with researchers working on raven predation, the researchers recommended identifying a weak "link" in the life cycle of the raven. Caloger feels that there is a need to study the local raven life cycle closely to determine if there is a weak link that can be utilized to reduce raven numbers.

Moores provided information on the Gunnison County Landfill depredation permit for raven control. All control activities have to occur within the fenced boundaries of the Landfill. The permit allows the take of up to 250 ravens per year. Moores and 4 subpermittees are named on the permit. Moores also noted that ravens identified nest markers placed near nests during a research project in the Basin.

Caloger believes that ravens killed at the Landfill should have their gut contents tested for sage-grouse DNA.

Moores opined that a project should be undertaken to reduce raven numbers for 3 to 5 years and measure sage-grouse population response. He does not believe that current conservation measures, including land use regulations and spring road closures have been effective.

Navy asked about raven birth control as a possible population control option.

Navy opined that predator control discussions always seem to be circular in nature, with no real outcome. She believes that research is necessary to move forward.

Peterson noted that he doesn't necessarily believe that Greater Sage-grouse predator related research doesn't apply to Gunnison Sage-grouse.

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Griffin stated that each area has its own predator community. To move ahead logically, one needs to know what predators are impacting the grouse.

Peterson asked what degree of certainty would be required for CPW to accept predator research as valid.

Spann stated that the Committee was formed to address issues impacting Gunnison Sage-grouse. If his cows were "taking" grouse, he would be off of public land. The Committee needs to say that predators are a problem and do something about it.

Santana opined that some of the work (research) already done should identify whether predation has occurred and whether it is a threat to the grouse population.

Ferchau stated that land use regulation is approached without substantiation and that this is inconsistent with the approach to predation. He believes that land use regulation should be "backed off".

Caloger recommended that Dr. Delehanty from the University of Idaho, and Dr. Peter Coates from the U.S. Geologic Survey be contacted for advice because the Committee is at an impasse as to whether raven predation is an issue in the Gunnison Basin.

Moores stated that he will find the Landfill MOA and provide the predator control language in that document to the Committee.

Peterson asked at what level does the quality of the habitat not become a concern in relationship to predators?

Chair Stahlnecker directed that the following items be included in the November meeting information packet:

1) Process and time frame to expand they physical boundaries of the current County Landfill Depredation Permit
2) Copy of MOA for Landfill
3) Copies of the USFWS and CPW predator control response letters

Moved by Peterson, seconded by Joseph, to send a letter to the Rangewide Plan Steering Committee, through CPW, requesting a discussion on the predator control criteria in the Gunnison Sage-grouse Rangewide Conservation Plan. Motion approved.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Date	*Time*	*Notes*
November 14, 2012	10-2	Regular Meeting
December 19, 2012	10-2	Regular Meeting

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The September 19, 2012 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 8:59 am.

FIELD TRIP:

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL:

_____
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

_____
James O. Cochran, Wildlife Conservation Coordinator

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