

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
UNOFFICIAL PUBLIC RECORD MEETING MINUTES
August 23, 2023

The August 23, 2023 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)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Tim Kugler (Gunnison Trails)
Jessica Young, Western Colorado University (WCU)

Non-Voting Members

Patrick Magee, WCU
Jessica Frey, NPS
Steffanie Chain, Public-At-Large

Others in the Audience:

Petar Simic, Gunnison County Cheatgrass Coordinator
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Staff Members Present:

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District
Sean Pope, Gunnison County Community and Economic Development Department

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the August 23, 2023 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:05 AM.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Seward confirmed that a quorum was not present at the beginning of the meeting with 6 of 8 members needed for a quorum.

AGENDA APPROVAL: Cheatgrass Update was moved to 10:10 am, and the BLM GUSG Resource Management Plan Amendment Update was moved to the end. Approval of July 19, 2023 agenda and August 23, 2023 agenda was delayed until a quorum is present.

APPROVAL OF MAY 17, 2023 MEETING MINUTES: Approval delayed until a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF JULY 19, 2023 MEETING MINUTES: Approval delayed until a quorum was present.

CHEATGRASS UPDATE

On June 10, 35 people attended the cheatgrass pull day and pulled over 600 pounds of cheatgrass in City limits. Jason Evanko from Gunnison County and Simic treated all areas where cheatgrass was pulled with herbicide after the event.

The interagency conservation crew has been doing cheatgrass inventory and will be starting cheatgrass treatments soon. The crew's inventory shows >500 acres of cheatgrass between Red Creek, Cochetopa, and other drainages. Red Creek was treated in 2021 and 2022 and the crew saw some decrease in cheatgrass cover, but 322 acres of cheatgrass remain. This may be from treating only places where plants were seen (and having seeds in the seed bank in untreated bare soils that germinated this year), or there

could be some seeds brought over by wildlife from the drainage east of Dillon Pinnacles. Rejuvra also does not have directions for use of backpack sprayers, which was the method used for treatment. The BLM has closed bids for their Cochetopa Canyon cross-boundary treatment, which will treat over 200 acres this fall. The BLM will plan on treating all bare areas in addition to the areas with visible cheatgrass plants.

Rachel Miller (BLM) wanted to make sure industrial right-of-way holders were treating areas they are responsible for. The BLM is working through the Environmental Assessment process for aerial treatments and the use of Rejuvra, and the BLM wants to start with smaller scale aerial treatments to be sure there are no negative impacts to sage-grouse habitat. The BLM is buying and collecting a significant native seed source, used for decommissioning roads and other projects.

A WCU student (Emma Muslic) will be testing the effects of Rejuvra versus Plateau in the Dillon Pinnacles area and is collecting pre-treatment data currently including all native forbs and grasses.

The NPS will be treating priority areas of each park (20-25 acres each) with Rejuvra using backpack sprayers. The Gunnison Conservation District will be working on a treatment at Signal Peak on non-federal lands. The USFS has been focused on cheatgrass treatments at the Almont Triangle. Simic will work with private landowners this fall to treat some cheatgrass, likely around 50 acres. The cheatgrass workshop did help recruit landowners to be part of the program.

IMAGINE (Institute for Managing Annual Grasses Invading Natural Ecosystems) will help with a landscape scale planning effort for the Gunnison Basin on October 24.

Open Range Consulting is working through the remote cheatgrass mapping that was done this year, which will be used for prioritizing treatment areas.

The Cheatgrass Subcommittee is meeting monthly on the third Friday of each month and having Cheatbeer at Kelly Hall later in the afternoon. The subcommittee was renamed to the Gunnison Sagebrush Alliance.

Simic and Cheryl Cwelich (Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District) prepared a pre-proposal for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation America The Beautiful grant and they were invited to submit a full proposal, but were not able to move forward given the limitations in agency capacity at the USFS and BLM. Without hydrologist and archaeologist staff, they cannot complete NEPA or planning for projects.

Smith said it was nearly time for an annual review of the coordinator position, and Young asked that it also be an evaluation of the agencies involved, their participation in cheatgrass treatment efforts, and limitations of the agencies.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Caloger reported there was a letter to the editor in the most recent Crested Butte paper by David Leinsdorf, discussing how to get things done, and Caloger encouraged all members of the Strategic Committee to read the letter. Caloger has also been working on an email to Pete Coates asking about any research in Canada on sage-grouse, where private landowners may have pursued raven control and there may be a subsequent difference in recruitment on private and public lands.

Smith received preliminary approval for the CPW Human-Bear Conflict Reduction grant, so a subset of the Strategic Committee and partners will be sorting out the implementation soon. The grant had not specified in advance that it would be on a reimbursement basis. Young said WCU will find a way to allow their portion of the work to move forward without advance payment.

Kugler reported that Gunnison Trails has been working on South Lottis Creek (the trail that goes to Lamphier Lake, with access to Henry Lake over Gunsight Pass), with a contract from the USFS Great American Outdoors Act grant. They have had the National Forest Foundation grant administrator come view the work that was done. They are hoping to start a new trail in Signal Peak in fall on the far eastern end of the trails there, for which they just got clearance. The archaeologist had a site that they thought was a Native American vision quest site, in a non-typical type of location, and that was confirmed through the State

Historic Preservation Office. The trail was moved away from that site. Kugler noted multiple cheatgrass sites in the new trail area, which they are working to avoid. They have also been picking narrowleaf goosefoot at Signal Peak (approximately 300 pounds last night).

Seward updated that CPW has made some progress on the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site management. CPW is now fielding all calls for use of the site, and all trailer dates are currently booked. There is a CPW employee that handles many of the wildlife viewing opportunities, and they anticipate her being able to assist with the transition of the site to CPW management. Seward has not finalized the 2023 lek count report for the Gunnison Basin and Crawford populations, but he will share it once completed. Seward also reported that Kevin Blecha has left his position with CPW, and interviews are occurring today to backfill that position. Codi Inloes-Williams will lateral transfer into the 55 District from her current District in the North Fork. Her District will likely be filled by an incoming trainee at the new year.

Childers reported that the NPS approved a contractor to develop a grazing management plan as part of their CCA grazing litigation. The contractor can start as early as October, and will address grazing in Curecanti Recreation Area and Black Canyon National Park.

Magee reported that he visited the Fitch Ranch in the Kremmling area, and they were using a virtual fencing system to move their cattle. They also used remote sensing to detect changes in the vegetation productivity to move cattle at the most ideal time to maximize rangeland production.

USFWS 5-YEAR REVIEW

Blair and Clayton were not present to give an update to the Strategic Committee.

RAVEN SUBSIDY SUBCOMMITTEE LEADERSHIP AND MEMBER APPROVAL

Seward self-nominated for the chair position for the Raven Subcommittee at the July meeting. Tim Kugler confirmed he was willing to be a member. Hannah Kersting (CSU-Extension Gunnison County Director) had expressed interest to Seward given the intersection with composting. The Committee should still look to have a CDOT representative (Cinnamon Levi-Flynn, or potentially a local employee). Other subcommittee members could potentially include Michelle Cowardin (CPW), who works statewide on ungulate movements and highway crossings, as she may be able to help the subcommittee more effectively report and dispose of roadkill.

Caloger said that estimates show that some households throw away 30-40% of their food, whereas institutional and commercial kitchens are better at sorting out food waste. Individual households may be more of a challenge. The City is considering expanding their Gunnison Gold Program to accept household compost products, but they need to figure out some of the logistics and to be sure it does not conflict with their current program. WCU has their own composter and uses the compost product in their gardens.

Approval of the membership and leadership of the Raven Subcommittee will be tabled until the September meeting if/when a quorum is present.

BLM RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

Tabled until BLM representatives attend a Strategic Committee meeting. Seward reported that Coordinating Agencies were able to provide feedback recently, and the public will be allowed a comment period this fall.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2nd floor meeting room and by Zoom online meetings, unless changed for a specific reason.

09-20-23	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
10-18-23	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
11-15-23	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
12-20-23	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The August 23, 2023 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 11:33 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District