



Gunnison County, CO
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To: Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee Members

From: Misty Castillo

Date: May 8, 2024

Included in your packet for the Wildlife Conservation Strategic Committee Meeting:

May 15, 2024 Agenda

April 17, 2024 Draft Minutes

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

DATE: Wednesday, May 15, 2024

PLACE: Planning Commission Meeting Room, Blackstock Government Center OR via Zoom meeting, Meeting ID: 859 9849 7601 (see Teleconference Information below)

1. 10:00am
 - Call Regular Meeting to Order; Determination of Quorum; Verify Public Notice of Meeting
 - Agenda Approval for May 15, 2024 agenda
 - Approval of April 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes
2. 10:10
 - Committee Member Reports/Updates
3. 10:40
 - County Road 26 Use
4. 11:00
 - I & E Subcommittee Membership Review for Road Closure Messaging
5. 11:20
 - STOR Wildlife Decision Tool
6. 11:50
 - Lek County Update
7. 12:00pm
 - Public Comments
8. 12:05
 - Future Meeting
9. 12:10
 - Adjourn

NOTE: This agenda is subject to change, including the addition of items up to 24 hours in advance or the deletion of items at any time. All times are approximate. Regular Meetings, Public Hearings, and Special Meetings are recorded and **ACTION MAY BE TAKEN ON ANY ITEM**. Work Sessions are not recorded and formal action cannot be taken. Two or more Gunnison County Commissioners may attend this meeting. For further information, contact the County Administration at 641-0248. If special accommodations are necessary per ADA, contact 641-0248 or TTY 641-3061 prior to the meeting.

Teleconference Information:

Zoom meeting, Meeting ID: 859 9849 7601

Passcode: 754099

<https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fus06web.zoom.us%2Fj%2F85998497601%3Fpwd%3DZUxSVE1zY1IPV2wwYXFXaGZvaFo3Zz09&data=05%7C01%7Caleshia.rummel%40cco.nacdnet.net%7Ce0bedb66aff04d97923108dbb3c721e4%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638301440063443156%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLjBtIi6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=r7ytE13e2VcUU5isTjkhYF0CrSGvUZMJO1KEnNkHkbo%3D&reserved=0>

Dial by your location

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- +1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)**
- +1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)**
- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)**
- +1 646 558 8656 US (New York)**

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 17, 2024**

The April 17, 2024 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)
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large (Gunnison Trails)
Whit Blair, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Liz With, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Jon Kaminsky, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Paul Mowery, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association
Matthew Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

Non-Voting Members

Brandon Diamond, CPW
Nathan Darnall, USFWS

Others in the Audience:

Marissa Markus, NRCS
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Brinnen Carter, NPS
Lyn Dea, Western Colorado University (WCU)
John Hare, HCCA

Staff Members Present:

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District
Misty Castillo, Gunnison County Community and Economic Development Department

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the April 17, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:06 AM.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Moved: by Navy and seconded by Smith to approve the April 17, 2024 agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MARCH 20, 2024 MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Smith and seconded by With to approve the March 20, 2024 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

ELECTIONS

Moved: by Navy and seconded by Blair to nominate Seward for Chair. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved: by Navy and seconded by Kugler to nominate Smith for Vice-Chair. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved: by Navy and seconded by Smith to nominate With for Secretary/Treasurer. Motion carried unanimously.

NRCS REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Markus, the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Coordinator, introduced RCPP and how to apply. The RCPP pillars (considered to determine if a project will be funded) include projects having conservation benefits, partner contributions, innovation, and partnerships and management. Other NRCS programs (EQIP, CSP) focus on land management activities, or land rental (CRP), or easement acquisitions (ACEP), or watershed projects (Watershed Program). RCPP can do any of the activities that are possible to accomplish in these other programs, with additional flexibility. Applicants can include agricultural producers, State and local governments (conservation districts), etc. Funding can be used for financial assistance (~75%) and technical assistance (~25%) for projects on eligible land with eligible producers (similar eligibility requirements to other NRCS programs) within an identified project area. Control of land can include public land if there is an eligible agricultural conservation project (such as a permit for an allotment for the lifespan of the practice and with approval of the federal land manager).

Blair asked about virtual fencing and Markus and With said several Conservation Districts are running Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) programs to explore the use of virtual fencing, which may eventually lead to an NRCS scenario specifically for virtual fencing. Producers would be required to meet certain prescribed grazing requirements for some higher-level management grazing. Some Conservation Districts have purchased a base station and producers are responsible for their own collar purchases. Blair wanted to know how to support annual rentals for collars because they already have base stations in Crawford, and With recommended signing up for EQIP for prescribed grazing, especially with the possibility of a 2025 virtual fencing scenario. RCPP has some flexibility for creating interim practices for projects that are not currently NRCS practices or scenarios.

There are several reasons to apply for RCPP – resource concerns not addressed in other programs, backlog of unfunded projects, pre-selected parcels that are critical to conservation goals and objectives, bundle of landowner applications that receive priority consideration for fundings, or easements on working lands without eligible entities. RCPP has an Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) where the partner leads the technical assistance, or a classic RCPP where the partner does not have the capacity to deliver the planning, installation, and checkout so NRCS staff is responsible for those activities. NRCS cannot delegate cultural resources, NEPA, land eligibility, and landowner eligibility.

There are several fund pools. The Colorado River Basin Critical Conservation Area (CCA; requires the project to meet specific priority resource concerns), state and multi-state, or Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) fund pools for climate smart agriculture but national headquarters determines appropriate IRA projects. July 2 is the application deadline for the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO). Apply after the resource concern and capacity for assistance has been determined by the partner. Markus said it probably takes about 2 weeks to get access to the portal for eAuth required to log in to the system for a proposal submission. The application process takes about 4 weeks for state review, and 4 weeks for national review after a proposal is submitted. After that, there is a negotiation period of about 3 weeks where deliverables can be negotiated, and then a supplemental agreement is created for each part of the project which contains the specific information about funding for the different parts of the project (i.e. easements, technical assistance, etc. are different supplemental agreements).

Carter asked about the funding available, and Markus said it is \$1.5 billion (\$1.2 billion for IRA) for this NFO. There is a \$25 million cap for each project, and a minimum of \$250,000. Within each RCPP project, each landowner has a contract cap of \$450,000 for each batching period. Farm Bill fund pools have a limit of 15 funded AFA projects.

With reiterated that it is a partnership to accomplish goals for conservation projects. With said there is a project already related to carcass management, exploring which ways the NRCS can be most effective with the partners to accomplish their goals, because there are some limitations to meet NRCS standards and specifications which can make carcass removal challenging. They are looking at an interim practice to be able to remove the carcass from the private land and bring it to a County landfill rather than create individual carcass disposal sites at each landowner's property, but it requires the County must meet NRCS standards and specifications at the carcass disposal site. Seward thought wet meadows could be a potential project.

RAVEN SUBSIDY SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

Seward reported that the committee met on March 25. The mission statement was finalized as “The mission of the Raven Subsidy Subcommittee is to provide a forum for stakeholders to address threats to the Gunnison sage-grouse caused by Common Raven and other Corvids, and to cooperatively design and implement local solutions to minimize those impacts.” Smith wanted to make sure the mission statement reflected the “assessment of local solutions” because she wanted the mission statement to reflect the motion from the Strategic Committee that formed the subcommittee. Seward thought scientific literature adequately documents potential impacts from corvids (common raven, American crow, and black-billed magpies) on sage-grouse, so the subcommittee could potentially do a literature review to demonstrate that there has been an assessment of the threat of corvids. Navy brought up the Action Plan, and Smith found one mention of corvids in the “Assess Habitat and Listing Factors”, so it may be pertinent to update the Action Plan to reflect the formation of the Raven Subsidy Subcommittee. Diamond thought part of the assessment could include the inventory of potential mitigation actions that have been pursued locally and how effective the measures have been. There is language in the landfill agreement with the BLM that the County may need to act if there is a detrimental impact to sage-grouse related to the landfill. The landfill mitigation fund was created, and some of that money was spent on legal fees for litigation on the listing decision, Jim Cochran’s contract, and now it is used for Petar Simic’s contract as the cheatgrass coordinator (up to half of his salary for up to 3 years).

The Subcommittee meeting included presentations from Clayton BonDurant and Paul Rivera. CPW is trying to support a continuation of Paul Rivera’s project through the CPW Raffle and Auction Fund to have a second graduate student to carry on the work.

The Subcommittee also discussed a green laser technology (Agrilaser Avix Autonomic Mark II Laser) with Martin Schmidt (Public Works) for bird control. The laser technology could be used to deter corvids. If the birds continually flush, the subsidy may be less attractive. They were looking at installing it at the landfill because the point counts from Pat Magee indicated ravens concentrate at the landfill. This would be about 4 miles from the airport and the technology has been used at airports to keep birds from runways but will be discussed with the airport. They are unsure if it would require 1 or more lasers and are going to meet again with the company to discuss what the cost could be for the equipment and programming the laser technology. CPW would likely find funding for cost-share. With thought there could be potential for funding through the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) from NRCS but the dump might not be a great fit because there has to be a tie to agricultural producers.

Smith asked about virtual fencing through CIG, and With said there are 2 projects in Colorado related to that. Mowery said there was a lot of interest from local producers in virtual fencing, but the limited cell service in Gunnison and the topography is a limitation. Diamond looked into virtual fencing at Tomichi Creek SWA but Vence told CPW it was too small of a property.

The laser might require special eyewear, and it does require 110-volt power, which the landfill has 2 locations already with power. They are also looking into the warranty for the bulb. Diamond thought an MEM student could potentially do some before and after monitoring.

APPROVAL OF LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR NPS GRANT APPLICATION

There have been a number of committee members that did not receive the meeting packet and were not able to review the letter in advance. It is federal lands transportation planning proposal, and it is a targeted request, so a letter of support can come later but earlier is better. Deadlines were not provided. With said NRCS does not have the authority through legislation for the take of predator populations, so With wanted to read through the letter more carefully. Carter said NPS was also aligned with NRCS, and the NPS goal would be to align with natural population levels and assess impacts of roadkills, and how roadkill may supplement predator populations. **Moved:** by Smith and seconded by With for Rummel to resend the letter addressed to the Federal Lands Planning Program for review by the Strategic Committee today, and abstentions or nays need to be sent by midnight on Monday April 22nd to vote for approval of the letter. The motion passed unanimously.

EARLY LEK COUNT UPDATE

The early lek count period is the last week in March and counts found 52 males, 12 females. This is not significantly higher than 2023 (48 males, 10 females) and is less than 2022 (89 males, 12 females). Winter flocks can significantly impact the numbers, and this year there were about a dozen leks counted, several with actively displaying males. Seward thought right now could be the peak of breeding, and the activity of males is high right now. Snowpack can determine the start of the lek season.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Seward reminded the Committee that the Cheatgrass Pull Day will be June 8.

Blair said the Recovery Implementation Strategy (RIS) workshop would be tomorrow from 1:00-3:30 at the Gunnison Public Library to go through the RIS, Conservation Efforts Database (CED), and Preset Tool for restoration prioritization mapping through the USGS. Blair wanted to specifically address the feedback on general restoration efforts, and if there are missing restoration activities. This will contribute to the 5-year review, to be completed in August. Blair also updated that he just accepted a position with CPW as Seward's counterpart in the Grand Junction area. His last day with USFWS will be May 3, after he completes the RIS workshops and the Biological Opinion for the BLM Resource Management Plan Amendment.

Navy brought the book "Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet" by Ben Goldfarb and recommended the Committee read it. Navy wanted to bring Goldfarb to do a reading, and she would like to have some guidance for inviting him. The library is an easy venue for hosting. Carter wanted to talk to the Chief of Interpretation to see if NPS could host it as a public speaking engagement. With asked about if the event would be to build community engagement, and Navy and Carter thought it could. Hare thought maybe bringing in local issues like how roadkill can impact a threatened species, or advising people on where the highest conflict zones might be could generate interest and demonstrate relevancy. Carter did want to clarify that roadkill mitigation could be site and species specific and may involve alternatives to overpasses and underpasses (could include speed limits, signage, etc.). Childers thought it should be a public event, with some potential partners specifically invited. With thought a public event could be scheduled as a worknight evening event.

Seward also suggested having Goldfarb address why seasonal road closures are important for sage-grouse. Mowery thought if the Strategic Committee is sponsoring the event, it should be focused on sage-grouse such as the road closures, flushing birds from roads, raven subsidies, etc. Carter thought if the NPS hosted, they could have a broader focus. Kugler thought spring could be a good time for a community event. With wanted to have a community request/call for action. Carter said NPS can identify needs such as determining animal-vehicle collision issues and potential solutions, but the NPS cannot advocate for actions.

Smith thought there were a lot of people that were upset with road closures when they encounter them (in the field). Hare thought that a celebration of road closures and why we have them might be a way to address the community and showing why it was a special place to live and recreate. Seward thought a lot of the roads that have been closed were historically user created, and asking people to stay on existing roads could be a beneficial message.

Kaminsky asked about having signs on Highway 50 for increased penalties for speeding during wildlife hours, but it was a CDOT pilot program that did not continue. Because the BLM faces potential litigation if they do not enforce rules such as road closures, Kaminsky said every time someone goes through a gate closure, it forces the BLM to act. Kaminsky thought we need peer pressure to address community culture, and some pressure for recreationists to work within the systems to avoid endangering their freedoms. Smith recommended the local marketing district and TAPP should be involved with making sure visitors have appropriate expectations when visiting, and these marketing experts could be used within our community as well. Smith thought putting educational opportunities at the gate closure would be good. Kugler thought

the TAPP did focus on having a “Plan B” for visitors and locals so there are alternatives if your planned road or trail is closed.

Seward thought the I&E Subcommittee could convene with members from TAPP and STOR to potentially create a map, signage, and messaging surrounding sage-grouse road closures.

Vasquez reported that the final Forest Plan Revision will likely be signed mid- to late-May. Blair and Seward would receive letters that outline the objections to the plan, how the plan changed as a result of the objections, and how the changes do not impact listed species. One of the changes was to implement conservation measures. Smith said that Senator Bennett is still working on pushing the GORP Act through, and that could potentially result in more changes in the Forest Plan Revision.

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.

05-15-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
06-19-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
07-17-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
08-21-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
09-18-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
10-16-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
11-20-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
12-18-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The April 17, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:46 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District

34th Biennial Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop – WAFWA Registration Information

Registration for the workshop is now open!

The link to register along with additional information can be found on the website [34th Biennial Sage & Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop – WAFWA](#)

We'd like to thank all of our great sponsors for helping us keep the workshop registration fees down.

Registration

General admission:

Early bird registration (until June 15) \$280

Regular registration (June 16-July 15) \$350

Late registration (after July 15) \$450

Student/Retiree admission:

Early bird registration (until June 15) \$150

Regular registration (June 16-July 15) \$250

Late registration (after July 15) \$300

One day admission: \$150

Call for presentation abstracts will be coming shortly.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me or Mike Schroeder.

Thank you,

Michael A. Schroeder
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Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee Subcommittees
Appointments/Authorization at August 18, 2021 Regular Meeting

Standing Subcommittees

1. Executive Subcommittee
 - Nathan Seward, CPW, Chair
 - Liz Smith, Gunnison County BoCC, Vice-Chair
 - Greg Peterson, GCSA, Secretary

2. Technical Subcommittee
 - Matt Vasquez, USFS, Chair
 - Suzie Parker, USFS
 - Liz With, NRCS
 - Kathy Brodhead, BLM
 - Tara de Valois, BLM
 - Nathan Seward, CPW
 - Theresa Childers, NPS
 - Pat Magee, WCU
 - John Scott, Public
 - Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District
 - Whit Blair, USFWS

3. Information and Education (I&E) Subcommittee
 - Jessica Young, WCU, Chair
 - Sue Navy, HCCA
 - Pat Magee, WCU/Sisk-a-dee
 - Nathan Seward, CPW
 - Tim Kugler, Recreation Community At-large
 - Kelly Wood, NPS

Project Based (ad-hoc) Subcommittees

1. Predator Control Investigation Subcommittee
(appointed 7/18/12, reauthorized 2/19/14, 2/18/15, 3/16/16, 3/28/18, not reauthorized 8/18/2021)
2. Signal Peak Recreation Area Planning Subcommittee
(appointed 5/21/14, reauthorized 2/18/15, 3/16/16, 3/28/18, not reauthorized 8/18/2021)
3. Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site Subcommittee
(appointed 1/21/15, reauthorized 2/18/15, 3/16/16, 3/28/18, reauthorized 8/18/2021)
 - Brandon Diamond, CPW, Chair
 - Greg Peterson, GCSA
 - Nathan Seward, CPW
 - Pat Magee, WCU
 - Peter Caloger, Public At-large
 - Whit Blair, USFWS
 - Liz Smith, Gunnison County BoCC
4. Grazing Management Research Subcommittee
(appointed 7/16/08, not reauthorized)
5. Action Plan Item 8 Subcommittee
(appointed 10/14/09, not reauthorized-combined with Action Plan Subcommittee)
6. Action Plan Subcommittee
(resurrected 5/18/11, not reauthorized)
7. Cheatgrass Subcommittee
(appointed 5/17/23)
 - Petar Simic, Chair
 - Nate Seward, CPW
 - Dan Zadra, CPW
 - John Scott, Scott RMS and Gunnison County Stockgrowers
 - Pat Magee, WCU
 - Robin Bingham, WCU
 - Tim Kugler, Gunnison Trails
 - Whit Blair, USFWS
 - Danguole Bockus, NPS
 - Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
 - Brian Stevens, Bureau of Land Management

8. Raven Subcommittee
(appointed 5/17/23)

- Nathan Seward, CPW, Chair
- Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
- Pat Magee, WCU
- Whit Blair, USFWS
- Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large
- Jason Kibbler, City of Gunnison
- Hannah Kersting, CSU-Extension