



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

From: Misty Castillo

Date: July 10, 2024

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

July 17, 2024 Agenda
June 12, 2024 Draft Minutes
May 15, 2024 Draft Minutes
Subcommittee Meeting Notes

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

DATE: Wednesday, June 17, 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 July 17, 2024 agenda
 - Approval of June 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes
 - Subcommittee Membership Approval
2. 10:10
 - Committee Member Reports/Updates
3. 10:30
 - Virtual Fencing: Sharl Liebergreen, Gallagher eShepard
4. 11:00
 - Virtual Fencing: Hannah Cranor-Kersting
5. 11:30
 - Virtual Fencing: Wynn Martens and Colleagues
6. 12:00pm
 - Public Comments
7. 12:05
 - Future Meeting
8. 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%40co.nacdnet.net%7Ce0bedb66aff04d97923108dbb3c721e4%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C1%7C0%7C638301440063443156%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=r7ytE13e2VcUU5isTjkyF0CrSGvUZMJO1KEnNkHkbo%3D&reserved=0>)

Dial by your location

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**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
MAY 15, 2024**

The May 15, 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)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Petar Simic, Research and Education At-Large
Matthew Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Paul Mowery, Gunnison County Stockgrowers

Non-Voting Members

Brandon Diamond, CPW
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County

Others in the Audience:

Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Jon Hare, HCCA
Ben Prior, CPW
Pat Magee, Western Colorado University (WCU)
Nick Catmur, Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) Committee

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 May 15, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:05 AM.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: **Moved:** by Navy and seconded by Caloger to approve the May 15, 2024 agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF APRIL 17, 2024 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved:** by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the April 17, 2024 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Seward reported that a wolverine reintroduction bill was approved by the Colorado legislature and that the next steps would include drafting a reintroduction plan. Smith confirmed that the bill did include some funding and staff time. One of the reintroduced wolves was depredated by a mountain lion about a month ago. Seward also reported that there was a Colorado Sun article that illustrated some of the concerns with the use of County Road 26 regarding Gunnison sage-grouse breeding activity and long-term impacts. Seward also reported that the letter in support of the National Park Service grant for road crossings was finalized and submitted.

Vasquez reported that the Forest Plan Revision included updates to the species of concern; Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, desert bighorn sheep, black swifts, and 2 plant species were added. Whenever a USFS project is initiated, it must demonstrate that it meets planned conservation measures for the species of concern. This will involve some surveying to determine species distribution, habitat use, and populations. The Record of Decision is likely to be signed by early June and the plan will take effect 30 days later. Vasquez reported that the USFS is continuing sage-grouse habitat monitoring as required under the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA), and Liam Duggan is finishing his related thesis now, but they are coordinating with a new Western Colorado University (WCU) student named Jenna to continue and expand monitoring efforts. Vasquez also mentioned that he went to the Black Sage Pass wet meadow restoration site and did an assessment of needs for maintenance and new structures. Tomorrow, the USFS plans to assess Lick Park north of Sawtooth, which would be a new USFS site to assess for restoration potential. Diamond reported that the USFS is planning prescribed burns in the Willow Creek drainage north of Centennial in the next couple of weeks, and CPW has granted access through Centennial after 9:00 am.

Simic reported he has had good recruitment from private landowners interested in cheatgrass treatment, including a \$68,000 contract with Silhouette for 3 large acreage landowners. Bradley Wigginton with Native Landscapes Company will take care of some smaller acreage projects. June 8 at 11:00 am to 2:00 pm will be the cheatgrass pull day, and June 15 will be a cheatgrass blitz using the app Cheat Maps to inventory cheatgrass at Hartman Rocks. June 30 will be Simic's last day as cheatgrass coordinator. Smith asked about ongoing monitoring or maintenance with private landowners, and Simic said it depends on the owner. Some engaged landowners have been following up with monitoring, whereas others are absentee or have very large acreage. There is no protocol for monitoring. Simic planned to ask the people that had treatments last year to check for cheatgrass and see if there is a need for follow up. Seward asked Smith about timeline for hiring a replacement, and Smith said they are going to try to list it quickly and start a new job search. Caloger and Navy thought it would be good to work with Mesa and Montrose County Commissioners to inspire them to work on cheatgrass infestations, but Smith thought cheatgrass was a low priority for most counties and that they lacked funding. Smith thought conversations with CSU-Extension could lead to replicating the position in other counties, and Houck said that the County Coalition no longer exists and some of the other counties do not have a stewardship interest. Simic reported that Wigginton worked on a contract with CDOT to treat some of the highway rights-of-way in Gunnison County, and he was awarded a bid to treat along highways in multiple adjacent counties, and the funding from that will allow him to hire additional help and purchase additional equipment.

COUNTY ROAD 26 USE

The Middle Bridge on Blue Mesa (near Dillon Pinnacles) failed an inspection on April 18 given noticeable cracking in the steel, the road was closed to all traffic, and the road closure has now been designated a federal emergency. The Strategic Committee was not given an opportunity to weigh in on any decisions, given how quickly events transpired. Public Works looked at alternate routes (County Road 26 and County Road 25) including inspecting the roads and removing the snow plugs. CDOT provided crews to assist with alternate routes on April 19, and Diamond immediately provided input about significant concerns for wildlife. Houck contacted Cochran who agreed that there were concerns about wildlife but that the County Road is County jurisdiction. Recommendations for minimizing wildlife impacts included keeping cars on the road and moving, minimize impacts beyond the road way, and be mindful of timing. The County and State worked together to address the road, initially with gravel from Montrose to address soft spots on the road.

Houck acknowledged that County Road 26 likely has larger sage-grouse impacts than other alternatives. County Road 25 crosses Ute Mountain Ute property, and there was a weight restricted bridge and a series of switchbacks, making it less suitable for the County. There was initially only an opening in the morning and evening with construction work during the day between openings. Despite community feedback for an earlier opening from Montrose to Gunnison, Houck said the County pushed back the opening time frame 30 minutes after the first two days, and opened the road from Gunnison to Montrose first to reduce impacts to the leks. Additional openings were then allowed during the day. The road normally opens on May 15, but the County will not fully open the road until at least Friday, May 17th.

Houck said partners have concerns about the long-term impacts to wildlife. The County and BLM have worked proactively to have road closures in sage-grouse habitat 8 years prior to the listing decision, so Houck said they did not take the opening of this road lightly. CDOT will continue to use a pilot car and will apply magnesium chloride to reduce dust and travel speeds to reduce impacts to wildlife.

Navy asked about the distance of leks to the road, and Seward and Childers said the roads were multiple active leks that were very close to the road and in direct line of sight to the road. According to a 12-year telemetry study by the NPS and observations from biologists of multiple agencies, sage-grouse frequently cross County Road 26 and have nested adjacent to the road. Some nests are likely already initiated and frequent traffic near any nests may cause nest abandonment.

Houck said he believed it was unrealistic to expect the road to remain closed until May 15 or until after 10:00 am. He thought there was social collateral for wildlife issues in the Gunnison community, and Houck thought there would be a loss of Gunnison sage grouse conservation support because people would think the County was prioritizing sage-grouse over school, work, or hospital appointments. They had several outraged citizens plowing County Road 25 and trying to get through seasonally locked gates.

Smith was at the capitol during the initial closure, and said there was talk of paving County Road 26, but she said the County and CDOT did not want to do that.

Navy asked about lek counts, and Childers said that the counts were a little bit lower this year even before the road closure. During both counts after the road was opened, there was significant dust. The highest attendance per morning occurred when the roads opened, and the birds hunkered down and stopped displaying when cars drove by but did not flush.

Simic asked who can pass through the opening. Houck said the State has declared an emergency and is working on County Road 26 with federal funds, and the State can choose to take over jurisdiction on the road. However, the County says they have maintained control and management of the road. Anyone for any reason will be let through the closure at the opening times. Houck thought it is not practical for semis to use it right now and that most of the semi traffic will continue to come in from the east, although several people noted they have seen semis using County Road 26. Houck expects heavy summer traffic. Normal traffic is about 140 cars per day on County Road 26, and they are already exceeding that. Simic was concerned about tourist traffic coming through that area, and asked why during the lek season the timing could not be pushed back until 9:00 am. Houck said there is a portion of the workforce that live in Montrose. Simic said it was risking the viability of the species and decades of conservation efforts, but Houck disagreed and said sage-grouse conservation loses out to people paying a mortgage. Simic pointed out that tourist traffic is not people paying a mortgage. Houck said that the recreation traffic in Gunnison comes from Denver, and that recreation traffic from the west only goes to Blue Mesa so he believed tourist traffic on County Road 26 would be limited. Caloger asked how much of the traffic is discretionary versus emergency, and suggested education about using alternate routes when possible.

Blair did say the County would have to engage in emergency consultation before he left the USFWS.

Houck explained that depending on the time frame to repair or replace the bridge, the County may engage in different mitigation efforts. Navy asked how long it would take to repair the bridge, and it could be weeks to years depending on what scenario was required. Smith thought the pilot car would continue, which she thought was enough of an inconvenience to deter some traffic. Hare suggested improving protections in other places in Gunnison to make up for this unforeseen wildlife habitat sacrifice, and was hopeful for more funding for conservation efforts.

Mowery thanked Houck on behalf of the agricultural community, given the increased costs that they were facing for trucks and gas. Mowery asked about Kebler as an alternate. Houck said CDOT is helping open Kebler earlier than they might have otherwise, including use of equipment that the County does not normally use and replacing culverts, but they might not be able to open much more than a week early given the time it will take to dry out.

Caloger brought up Google Maps, and CDOT and the Federal Highway Transportation Administration have been working with Google to show Middle Bridge is closed, and that County Road 26 is open but has designations to deter people from using it. Smith said the commissioners would work with the Tourism and Prosperity Partnership and airlines for messaging about how to avoid going through Sapinero Mesa.

I & E SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP REVIEW FOR ROAD CLOSURE MESSAGING

Tabled until the June meeting.

STOR WILDLIFE DECISION TOOL

The STOR Committee is working on a Wildlife Decision Tool for land use decisions and processes. There is an increased demand for outdoor recreation both given a growing population in Colorado and growing tourism, and this results in trash, resource damage, human waste, and other concerns. There is also a decrease in agency funding, but 95% of citizens have an interest in managing recreation for wildlife in a Chaffee County community survey. The CPW Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative (RPI) was created to build local collaboratives to address sustainability issues with wildlife and recreation. Gunnison County is part of a tri-county collaborative with Chaffee and Lake County, and the STOR Committee received funds through the RPI in 2022 for creating the collaborative and creating the Wildlife Decision Tool.

Diamond introduced the tool by explaining how nearly everything humans do impacts wildlife and their habitats, and any compromises where the viability of a wildlife population is considered, wildlife and their habitats often are overlooked or undervalued. Habitat fragmentation is incremental and tends to build up in an area over time. The tool aims to identify high quality blocks of habitat for multiple species, similarly to a multi-species Habitat Prioritization Tool (HPT) for Gunnison Sage-Grouse. The HPT will be incorporated directly for sage-grouse instead of replicating that effort. This tool would incorporate species and their habitats based on the species rarity, population trend, economic impact, specificity of the spatial data, and the species sensitivity to recreation. The maps can be produced by season (such as elk production versus critical winter range). They also have maps of existing human impacts which can be added together with the species maps to create a continuum of disturbed low quality habitat to undisturbed high quality habitat.

The tool can work in conjunction with and support agency policy. For example, it can be used by CPW for land use comments, federal agency recreation planning, county land use planning and code/resolution updates, etc. The map is available on CODEX for Lake and Chaffee Counties. Houck thought it could be useful for County land use planning, and Diamond agreed that the specificity of the layers was important so it could be used to identify species of concern at specific times of year. Catmur said Lake and Chaffee County are incorporating the use of the Wildlife Decision Tool into their land use planning codes.

Lake and especially Chaffee County did community surveys prior to designing the Wildlife Decision Tool, but Gunnison will be working on the tool and then STOR will do community surveys to determine how people want to see the tool used and what updates are important for the future. Chaffee, Lake, and Durango counties are working on or have completed similar Wildlife Decision Tools and Gunnison is expected to finish around mid-June. Smith thought it was important to have public education and outreach.

LEK COUNT UPDATE

Prior showed the third count period report. So far, the 2nd count period was the highest male count of the first 3 count periods with 517 males, likely the peak of breeding. The highest high male count (HMC) at any lek was 104 at Teachout in Ohio Creek. The HMC for the year is the highest HMC per lek, so the HMC for the season should be higher than any individual count period. Access was not a problem this year. Several people asked about Sapinero leks given the significant increase in traffic on County Road 26 during the peak of breeding season, so the Committee looked at the numbers for all 5 active leks in the area. Any detrimental impacts to counts are more likely to occur in next year's lek counts, which will demonstrate any avoidance response or population level impacts from removing the road closure.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

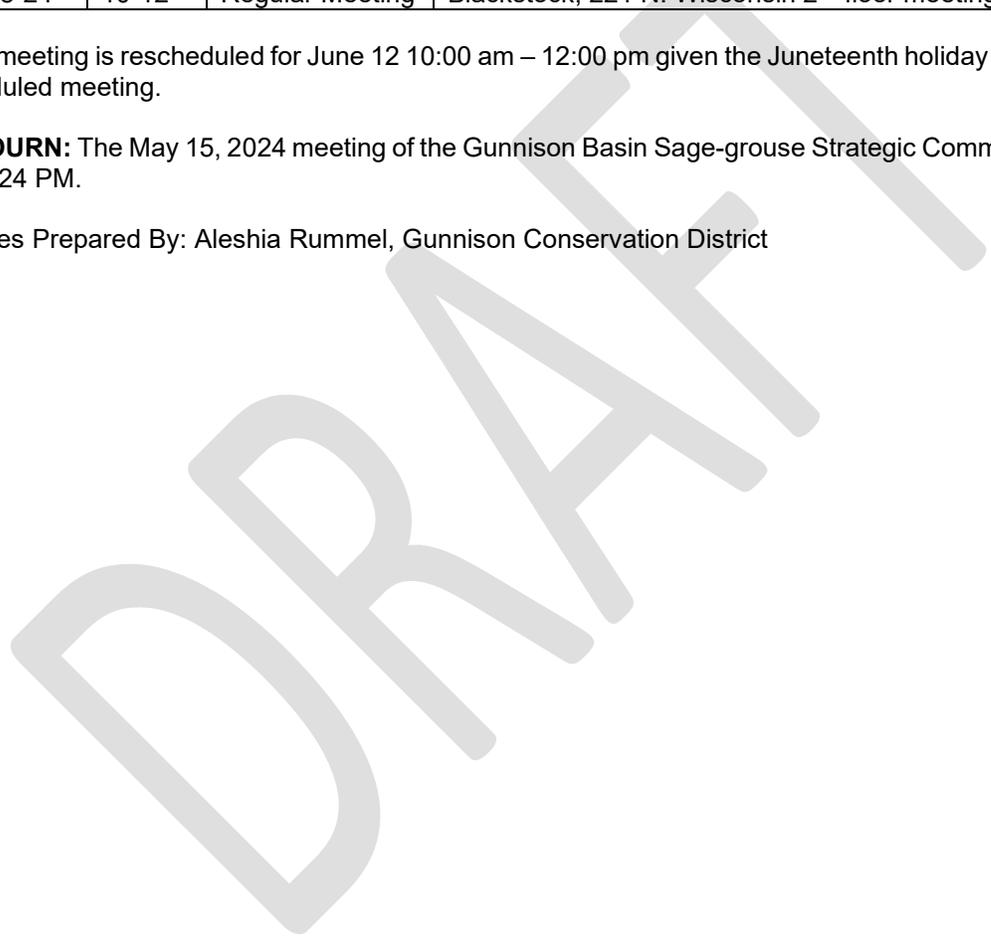
FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2nd floor meeting room and by Zoom online meetings, unless changed for a specific reason.

06-12-24	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

June meeting is rescheduled for June 12 10:00 am – 12:00 pm given the Juneteenth holiday on the regularly scheduled meeting.

ADJOURN: The May 15, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:24 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District



**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
June 12, 2024**

The June 12, 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)
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large (Gunnison Trails)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Petar Simic, Research and Education At-Large
Matthew Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

Non-Voting Members

Jessica Frey, National Park Service (NPS)

Others in the Audience:

Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Aleshia Rummel, National Park Service (NPS)

Staff Members Present:

Ben Prior, 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 June 12, 2024, meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:10 AM.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Seward confirmed that a quorum was not present. Only seven voting members present.

AGENDA APPROVAL: Moved: Agenda approved. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF APRIL 17, 2024, MEETING MINUTES: Edits to meeting minutes:

Page three, 1st paragraph, road will not be opened till Friday, May 17th.

Page three, 3rd paragraph, 2nd sentence, change wording to “would be a loss of Gunnison sage grouse conservation support”.

Page three, 3rd paragraph, last sentence, “They had several outraged citizens plowing County Road 25 and trying to get through seasonally locked gates”.

Have to wait to approve meeting minutes until next meeting in July.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Seward was in a call with Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) personnel on Friday, May 31st regarding mitigation for County Road (CR) 26 reopening. During the call they discussed potential impacts and disturbances to Gunnison sage-grouse (GUSG) during the 2024 breeding season. These impacts included increased noise levels due to traffic and work on CR 26. Disturbance to lekking. Seward thanks the NPS for comments on leks along CR 26. A formal consultation between CDOT and USFWS regarding CR 26 is occurring and some form of mitigation will likely occur. Some form of mitigation will occur along CR 26. Mitigation ideas discussed included: spraying cheat grass along CR 26, wet meadow restoration work in the areas around CR 26, juniper removal in the area. Acquiring private land and/or establishing conservation easements on private land parcels adjacent to CR

26 sage-grouse leks was not discussed. These could be options depending on mitigation budget. Mitigation budget was not discussed. Next step is to measure noise levels at leks along CR 26 while traffic is going by to determine how much noise levels increase compared to ambient noise levels. This will give a good metric to determine disturbance amount to leks along CR 26, since there is scientific literature that shows increased noise influences sage-grouse.

Seward discussed the 2024 CR 26 lek counts. Two lek count periods occurred before the bridge closure and two lek count periods occurred after the bridge closure. After the bridge closure, two leks saw an increase in high male counts (HMC), two leks decreased in HMC, and one lek had no HMC change. Seward believes the HMCs observed are not a good metric to demonstrate the CR 26 traffic disturbance impact on GUSG, but still needs to consider them as an indicator. During lek counts along CR 26 it was observed that birds would hunker down in response to traffic and would flush due to dust from traffic. Next step is for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and USFWS to monitor noise levels. No set dates on when this will occur.

Simic asked about monitoring nesting and successful brood rearing in the general CR 26 area. Nate said there is not a direct way to do so. The only way is with GPS transmitters on GUSG hens. May not be socially acceptable to the community. Must spotlight at night to capture birds and attach transmitters. This causes a fair amount of disturbance to GUSG. Seward did not want to go that route due to public reception. Next spring's lek count numbers will give some idea to 2024 brood rearing success.

Simic asked if chicks would use same lek that their parents used. Seward said chicks will commonly come back within 100 meters to nest in same areas where they were hatched. There is seasonal generational learning among GUSG.

Simic asked how many years it would take to see the impact on the population from one year of foreign nesting success. Seward said one bad nesting year would show its effect on the population quickly. The uranium mine clean up traffic did impact grouse population in area where the mining project was occurring. The traffic lasted multiple years and the Chance Gulch leks decreased in bird use and never fully recovered. This occurred over 25 years ago, and no rebound has occurred for the Chance Gulch leks. Landfill and residential development near the Chance Gulch leks also have an impact.

Vasquez asked if an extended closure on CR 26 for next year is part of the mitigation discussion. Seward said this is an idea for mitigation. Frey asked about keeping BLM side roads closed along CR 26 until 2024 hunting season. Seward said BLM would like concrete jersey barriers placed in front of BLM side roads. Frey said it may be a bad year to conduct wet meadow projects in the CR 26 area due to large disturbance amount already occurring from traffic. Seward agreed and said those projects should be postponed this year.

Vasquez observed that people aren't thinking about the impact of CR 26 traffic has towards wildlife. People are saying the road is nice, etc. Vasquez said that messages to the public regarding the impact on wildlife by CR 26 traffic need to be continued to increase awareness that wildlife is being affected and why it is important.

Navy said she asked Gunnison County at another meeting what would happen to CR 26 once the bridge is repaired. The county told her they would roughen CR 26 up a bit to make it harder to drive on. Seward said the condition of CR 26 has noticeably decreased the last couple of times he has used it. Seward explained that during the CR 26 mitigation call CDOT was planning on addressing CR 26 road erosion.

Simic asked if CDOT would implement grass restoration along CR 26 to offset current impacts. Seward said that is being discussed through the formal consultation process regarding CR 26 mitigation. Seward said that CDOT increasing their carcass removal efforts along CR 26 was mentioned during the May 31st call. He said he would like more emphasis put on direct GUSG habitat restoration projects instead.

Vasquez said the GMUG's revised forest plan is scheduled to be signed Friday, June 14th and goes into effect three weeks after, around July 14th. It has taken seven years to get to this point. The wildlife management areas designated by the plan applies to 28% of GMUG, roughly 334,000 acres. These wildlife

management areas often overlap with GUSG critical habitat. Wildlife management areas within GMUG help maintain habitat connectivity, maintain migration corridors, and cap route densities and new trail development. The plan has a standard that commits the forest service to following the recovery limitation strategy for GUSG.

Vasquez said he submitted a request for \$75,000 from the Mule Deer Foundation for wet meadow restoration work. The funds would help support existing wet meadow sites within the Gunnison and Grand Valley ranger districts. The Mule Deer Foundation has a keystone agreement with the forest service and funds from this agreement can be applied for by individual forests. The \$75,000 would contribute to continued contracting with BioLogic, purchasing rock for wet meadow projects, crew support, and setting up events related to wet meadows.

Frey said the National Park Service (NPS) has keystone initiative for sagebrush preservation. Gunnison Basin is considered a priority landscape, Frey and NPS looking for collaborative projects. This keystone initiative wants partner projects. Projects need to be proposed in the next couple of weeks. The deadline is June 22nd. Frey also said there is already 1.1 million dollars coming to parks in the west for sagebrush ecosystems. The NPS has a grazing management plan in the works for Black Canyon and Curecanti. Frey introduced Rummel as the new environmental protection specialist for the NPS.

CHEATGRASS COORDINATOR HIRING

Simic said Cheatgrass Coordinator will be replaced. Updated contract/job description. Don't know when it will be posted to the public. Seward said Liz wants to run the position past the board of county commissioners meeting on June 24th.

Simic said Cheatgrass Pull Day was a success. Around 50 people attended and 575lbs cheatgrass pulled across Gunnison. Simic said he will spray pulled areas. Noticed cheatgrass was not present in sprayed areas from last year.

Simic mentioned a contract with Oregon based company Silhouette to treat private land in the Gunnison Basin this fall. The contract includes land to treat on Pinecrest Ranch, Bob Robbin's ranch, and Double Heart Ranch. Bob Robbin's ranch has a large amount of cheatgrass to treat. Contract with company in Oregon to treat land in the fall. Did not see much cheatgrass on Double Heart. Some questions on the open range map accuracy. Good year for cheatgrass, seen a lot of it lately. Red Creek project on bid for BLM spraying.

UPDATE SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Executive Subcommittee: Nate Seward as chair, Liz Smith as vice chair, Liz Width as secretary

Technical Subcommittee: Vasquez recommends someone else to take the position of chair. Maybe Aleisha Rummel? Needs approval from supervisor. Suzie Parker: gone, Liz Width will stay, Kathy Brodhead will stay, Tara is gone, Nate Seward will stay, Thersa Childers will stay, Pat McGee will stay, John Scott will stay, Aleisha Rummel will stay, Witt Blair is gone. Matt Vasquez is willing to stay as chair if needed. Vasquez would like to stay on the subcommittee. Vasquez said Sarah Lowe and/or Ilam Duggin could join the subcommittee. Vasquez will talk with them first and they will need approval from Dale.

I and E Subcommittee: Jessica Young said she wants to step back, doesn't want to be chair. Kugler might be able to chair the subcommittee, would like to meet with subcommittee members. This subcommittee hasn't met in years. Navy said maybe make more outreach related things happen through this subcommittee. The NPS has full education staff, some staff might be interested. Seward said the subcommittee can work on motorized road closures and GUSG educational poster. Next festival/summit. Navy said GUSG Summit was two years ago. Rummel nominated Liz Smith and Ben Prior as members. Ben Prior accepted. Reach out to Jessica Young for new chair possibilities. This subcommittee doesn't meet too often. Busy when a sage grouse summit/festival is scheduled. Navy will stay on committee.

No quorum can't finalize subcommittee members today. Next meeting will finalize committees.

LEK COUNT UPDATE

Prior gave update on the 2024 lek count season. The 2024 Crawford lek counts had a HMC of nine, which up from 2023 HMC of six. The 2024 Crawford high female count (HFC) was eight, up from five in 2023. The 2024 Crawford GUSG population estimate is 44. This is an increase from 28 in 2023. The Crawford population is still trending downward.

For the Gunnison Basin 83 leks were visited in 2024, resulting in a HMC of 646, a decrease of 159 from the 805 males counted in 2023. The HFC was 216, a decrease of 139 birds from the 355 females counted in 2023. Population estimates for the Gunnison Basin were calculated using formulas presented in the Gunnison Basin local conservation plan (1997) and the Gunnison Sage-grouse (GUSG) Rangewide Conservation Plan (RCP 2005). Based on the local conservation plan formula, the minimum population estimate for the Gunnison Basin population is 2,583, a decrease of 637 birds from 2023. Based on the RCP 2005 formula, the minimum population estimate for the Gunnison Basin is 3,169 birds, a decrease of 780 birds from 2023.

The three-year HMC moving average for 2022–2024 is 744, a 0.81% change from the 2021–2023 HMC moving average of 738. Total number of active Lek Areas in 2024 was 37 with an average of 17.5 males per active Lek Area, down from 32.2 males in 2023. Male lek attendance peaked during the second count period (11-20 April). Female lek attendance peaked during the first count interval (1-10 April). The Doyleville, Gold Basin, Ohio Creek, Lost Canyon, and Spinero zones decreased in total numbers of males and females compared to 2023. In 2024, HMCs increased on 19 leks, 4 leks had the same number of males, and 31 leks decreased in the number of males observed compared to 2023. The HMC decreased 20.7% from 2023. Possible reasons for decrease, many new lek counters for 2024 season and grouse likely more disbursed during 2024 season compared to 2023.

SETH OWENS' LEK PHOTOGRAPHY

Seward shared grouse photos taken by photographer Seth Owens. Seward took Seth Owens to several leks for grouse photograph opportunities.

End of January for photo applications 2025

RAVEN SUBSIDY SUBCOMMITTEE MEETIN SUMMARY

Seward gave a summary. The meeting was on May 20th. Talked about raven research with Emily Latta, looking at raven numbers in Crawford. Pat Magee doing bird point counts in Gunnison Basin with a grad student and getting transmitters on ravens to see travel throughout Gunnison Basin. Emily has money for a five-year project, funneling money through Texas A&M. Pat is keeping money at Western, and plans to start bird counts in fall. Green laser for Gunnison County landfill raven control is still a possibility. Meeting next Monday, 10 am at CPW office. Delta waterfowl membership will be discussed.

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.

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
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ADJOURN: The June 12, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District

DRAFT

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
 - Liz With, GCSA, Secretary

2. Technical Subcommittee
 - Aleisha Rummel (?), Chair
 - Sarah Lowe (?), USFS
 - Liz With, NRCS
 - Kathy Brodhead, BLM
 - Ilam Duggin (?), USFS
 - Nathan Seward, CPW
 - Theresa Childers, NPS
 - Pat Magee, WCU
 - John Scott, Public
 - Aleshia Rummel, NPS
 - Vacant

3. Information and Education (I&E) Subcommittee
 - , Chair
 - Ben Prior, GCD
 - Liz Smith (?), Gunnison County BoCC
 - Sue Navy, HCCA
 - Pat Magee, WCU/Sisk-a-dee
 - Nathan Seward, CPW
 - Tim Kugler, Recreation Community At-large
 - Vacant

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