

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
September 18, 2024**

The September 18, 2024 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was conducted in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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)  
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)  
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large  
Paul Mowery, Gunnison County Stockgrowers  
Matthew Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)  
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large (Gunnison Trails)  
Dayle Funka, USFS

**Non-Voting Members**

Jessica Frey, NPS  
Liam Duggan, USFS  
Aleisha Rummel, NPS  
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies  
Angela Trnka, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Others in the Audience:**

Pat Magee, Western Colorado University (WCU)

**Staff Members Present:**

Misty Castillo, Gunnison County Community and Economic Development Department

Others present as listed in text.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson Seward called the September 18, 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:** Nothing to change. **Moved:** by Navy and seconded by Smith to approve the June 12, 2024 and July 17, 2024 agendas. **Moved:** by Kugler and seconded by Smith to approve the September 18, 2024 agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

**APPROVAL OF July 17, 2024 MEETING MINUTES:** **Moved:** by Navy and seconded Smith by to approve the June 12, 2024 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously. Changes for July 17, 2024 meeting minutes: Pg. one, name change for Aleisha Rummel and Whit Blair, change "BLM" to "USFS". **Moved:** by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the July 17, 2024 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

**SUBMITTEE MEMBERSHIP APPROVAL**

Marcela Tarantino, Sarah Lowe, and Liam Duggan are approved for the Technical Subcommittee. The Technical Subcommittee reviews and works on projects such as the Habitat Prioritization Tool and the Gunnison Basin prioritization sage grouse document. This subcommittee typically meets quarterly. The

Subcommittees are the Executive Subcommittee, Technical Subcommittee, Information and Education Subcommittee. Funka, would be good to have more BLM representation on some of the subcommittees.

Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site Subcommittee membership, Greg Peterson no longer wants to serve. Seward, this subcommittee might not be needed anymore. This subcommittee helped determine closure dates for the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site. Take Whit Blair off and possibly replace with Angela Trnka. Trnka, is open to joining subcommittee.

Cheatgrass Subcommittee, Petar Simic and Whit Blair are no longer able to be on this subcommittee. Trnka, is open to joining this subcommittee. Smith and Duggan will both be on this subcommittee.

Raven Subcommittee, Angela Trnka will replace Whit Blair. Andrew Stokes from BLM is added to this subcommittee. Recently, this subcommittee has been focusing on raven research in the Gunnison Basin, rolling out bear proof trash cans within Gunnison, and disposal of agricultural (i.e. cattle) and roadkill carcasses. Vasquez is interested in being on this subcommittee. Funka, supports Vasquez joining this subcommittee. Frey will ask other NPS staff if anyone is interested in joining the Raven Subcommittee. Mowery would like to be on the Raven Subcommittee since this subcommittee discusses carcass removal. Smith, Gunnison County trying to renew contract with CDOT for moving roadkill to landfill. CDOT is not committing currently since CPW guidance is to remove roadkill off road and allow to decompose naturally. Seward, CPW covering carcass removal costs in the Gunnison Basin for agriculture producers on CCAA enrolled properties. Seward is hoping to extend this service to all agriculture producers. Caloger asked about CDOT's current protocol for roadkill. Smith said the county was trying to renew their contract with CDOT for bringing roadkill to the landfill. CDOT decided to not renew their contract with the county last year, citing CPW guidance on managing roadkill. Seward, have CPW support at the local level to take roadkill to the landfill.

Smith, motion to approve standing subcommittee members and project based ad hoc subcommittees. **Moved:** by Seward and seconded by Navy to approve standing subcommittee members and project based ad hoc subcommittees. Motion carried unanimously.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS**

Smith, the job listing for the Cheatgrass and Habitat Restoration Coordinator position is up, and applications are coming in. Smith went out to the Red Creek area to observe cheatgrass treatment sites. A film crew from the 2023 Imagine workshop was filming footage of the cheatgrass treatments occurring at Red Creek. This film crew is producing a mini documentary about cheatgrass treatment across different communities. This crew stated that the Gunnison community was the most aggressive community in terms of cheatgrass treatments. Smith, much more work to be done regarding cheatgrass in the Gunnison Basin. The film crew interviewed Smith, Brian Stevens, Kathy Brodhead, and Jessica Young. Smith, documentary should be completed around April 2025. Possible job for the I and E subcommittee is to put on a watch party for this documentary.

Mowery, several ranches back in June got an aggressive letter about cheatgrass on private property. This letter was signed by Petar. The letter offered free cheatgrass treatment to private landowners. Mowery signed up his ranch, Crossfire Ranch, for a cheatgrass treatment. Mowery is wondering about the status of these treatments. Smith, there is a delay in treatments due to Petar leaving. Bradely Wiggins is fulfilling cheatgrass treatment contracts for private landowners that were setup by Petar. Silhouette, an Oregon based company, has also done several cheatgrass treatments both on private and public land in the Gunnison Basin. Their focus is on larger treatments, spanning 100s of acres. Rummel/Magee, Petar was building/updating a database with landowners for treatments.

Magee, a 30-acre treatment was conducted in the Signal Peak area close to Western's campus. Rummel, this treatment was funded through a Colorado Department of Agriculture/USFS grant. Magee, banner year for cheatgrass. BLM has gotten approval for aerial treatments next year. The job posting for the Cheatgrass and Habitat Restoration Coordinator position is open until September 26. Applications will be reviewed by October 1<sup>st</sup> and all interviews conducted by the end of October. Magee, cheatgrass field trip was conducted to look at cheatgrass sites and bring more awareness. Looked at the Smokey Bear Rd area along HWY

135 and Taylor Canyon. Magee, we are overall losing the battle and must keep going after cheatgrass in the Gunnison Basin. Caloger asked about potential natural controls of cheatgrass. Mowery can be controlled with grazing and fire if timed correctly. Magee, on federal lands it is harder to conduct cheatgrass control with grazing due to regulations/timing. Some efforts using bacteria and fungus to combat cheatgrass. Chemicals is likely the best option for now. Smith, the Palisade Insectory are doing some experiments going with cheatgrass but have not found anything that is effective. Rummel, trials have been done in Crawford and Montrose using herbicide alternatives, but the dry climates make these treatments less effective. Mowery, asked about foxtail barley. Seward, it's a nuisance but not as bad as cheatgrass. Funka, best time to graze cheatgrass is in the spring when its soft and green. Foxtail barely is best controlled by drying it out.

Navy, Wildland Restoration Volunteers was in the valley doing wet meadow restoration work over Labor Day weekend. Volunteers completed 42 rock structures on Black Sage Pass and Gold Basin. Backcountry Hunters and Anglers also hosted a wet meadow restoration workday back in July. Red Lady from being mined was saved so no major industrial traffic going up/down Ohio Creek Rd, and no toxic waste will be dumped into Carbon Creek. Vasquez, USFS will acquire some sage grouse habitat with that deal too. Baby sage grouse seen off Monchego Creek. Navy took 47 years to save Red Lady. The Monchego Creek property acquired by the USFS in the Red Lady deal is 160 acres and was formerly used for ranching. Homestake (old uranium mine) closed out several reclamation requirements last year. Looks great, lots of work as been done to restore the associated area. Navy, Red Lady celebration on October 4<sup>th</sup> on Elk Ave.

Frey, NPS received funding in joint proposal with BLM for \$1.5 million for the Sagebrush Keystone Initiative. This funding will go towards wet meadow projects, road decommissioning, and cheatgrass treatments. Rummel, grazing management plan public scope ends on September 20<sup>th</sup> and the fire management plan public scope ends on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Hoping to release the grazing management plan environment assessment (EA) for public comment in spring and the fire management plan environment assessment in December/January.

Kugler, Ben Prior and the Gunnison Conservation District treated roughly 30 acres in the Signal Peak area for cheatgrass. Was able to see the treatment area with the blue dye. Over 20 people on the treatment crew and treatment was done in 2.5 hours. The treatment area included Gunnison Rising property, allowed for spraying on their property. Great to work with on this project. The contractor used was Silhouette. HPP funding supplied the Panoramic 2SL and Seward supplied the Rejuvra for the treatment. Mowery, asked about the herbicide differences. Both herbicides are considered pre-emergent, but Rejuvra is more effective against cheatgrass and has a longer effect. Seward, four quarts of Rejuvra was \$2300, and 4 ozs covers an acre. Rejuvra is good at targeting the cheatgrass seedbank. Smith, BLM still must do a local EA on Rejuvra use for BLM land.

Duggan, USFS has been spraying Rejuvra for over a week and have treated acres at Woods Gulch, Smokey Bear Rd area, and Fisher Basin. Vasquez is thinking of using Secure Rural Schools Act Title 2 funds to target cheatgrass treatments on Forest Service land. Vasquez is currently serving a detail as the GMUG's Renewable Resources Staff Officer, started in August and ends in mid-December. Still serving as point of contact for wildlife for GMUG.

Seward, CPW removed and relocate the Copper Creek pack. This pack had three pups. The male was casing depredation on a ranch in the Copper Creek area. The male was in poor condition. CPW relocated all individuals. The female and pups are in a holding facility. The male ended up dying. Another related wolf also died. Out of the 10 wolves released, 4 have died. CPW having hard time finding source of wolves to releases. The next release will occur in Grant County and 15 wolves will come from Canada. Mowery, if a wolf has chronically depredated it cannot be released back into Colorado. It is being proposed that chronic depredation occurs when a wolf depredates 3 times in a 30-day period. Seward, pack not large enough to sustain pups. Mowery, this pack had previously been targeting cattle in Oregon. Seward, if pack was larger, they would be able to target elk. CPW spent 2 months attempting to prevent the wolves from preying on the Copper Creek ranch, but these attempts did not work.

Seward, leaving for Durango to be the CPW Conservation Biologist in Durango. Will be starting this position on October 1<sup>st</sup>. He will be missing the Gunnison community and all the great work they have done for sage

grouse. His wife was able to sell her vet clinic and get a position as a veterinarian at clinic in Durango. By not owning her own clinic, she will be able to spend much more time with their children. This move was best for their family. The transition will be phased, and he will not be leaving the committee yet. Once someone is hired as the new Gunnison CPW Conservation Biologist, they will hopefully chair the committee. Vasquez asked Seward what he will be focusing on work wise in Durango. Won't be Gunnison sage grouse, has been 6-7 years since any have been seen in the Dove Creek population. Will be doing a mountain lion density study in the Durango area. Excited to learn the new country. Other species he will work with are New Mexico jumping mice, yellow bellied cuckoos, and southwest willow fly catchers. Smith, thanks Nate for his work and service. Mowery, thanks Nate for leading the CCAA project. Seward, will stay on as chair until new biologist is hired.

Smith, some potential projects for the technical subcommittee to go over. Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory trying to cultivate a massive amount of data. Might be good to incorporate into future HPT updates and other projects.

Seward, next project for technical subcommittee is updating the HPT. Hasn't been updated since 2018, should be updated every 2-3 years. The biggest update is updating overall lek statuses. Subcommittee should discuss other potential layers to add (i.e. conifer layer), increasing buffer zones around leks to 1 mile, and changing Tier 2 habitat to Tier 1. Vasquez, forest plan gives a 1-mile buffer around leks. BLM has proposed a 1-mile buffer around leks, but not finalized. Would be good to get the HPT data to the CWPP planning for wildfires, specifically the lek sites in the Gunnison Basin.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

**FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
07-17-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
08-21-24	10-12	Canceled	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
09-18-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
10-16-24	10-12	Canceled	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
11-20-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
12-18-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> 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 September 20, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District