



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

From: Misty Castillo

Date: December, 18 2024

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

December, 18 Agenda

November, 20 Draft Minutes

GUSG Newsletter Issue 6 – ROD – Approved RMPA

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

DATE: Wednesday, December 18, 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
 - Approval of November 20, 2024 Meeting Minutes
 - Agenda Approval for December 18, 2024 agenda

2. 10:10am
 - Committee Member Reports/Updates
 - BLM GUSG Resource Management Plan Amendment
 - Update on Possible Mitigation for County Road 26
 - CCAA Conversion to Conservation Benefits Agreements (CBAs)

3. 11:30am
 - Holiday Party

4. 12:00pm
 - Public Comments

5. 12:05
 - Future Meeting

6. 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.

Gunnison Com Dev is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee Meeting

Time: Nov 20, 2024 10:00 AM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Every month on the Third Wed, until Dec 18, 2024, 2 occurrence(s)

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Monthly: <https://gunnisoncounty->

[org.zoom.us/meeting/tZEKfuGspzwsGtVg7l5atEHosry4yUBJ_HPY/ics?icsToken=98tyKuGtpziiHt2SthmGRpwMHYr4WejxmGZdjbdrm0jpViFHRyv5JfBbZqtKMvLv](https://gunnisoncounty-)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://gunnisoncounty->

[org.zoom.us/j/85998497601?pwd=ZUxSVE1zY1lPV2wwYXFXaGZvaFo3Zz09](https://gunnisoncounty-)

Meeting ID: 859 9849 7601

Passcode: 754099

One tap mobile

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+14086380968,,85998497601#,,, *754099# US (San Jose)

Dial by your location

- **+1 719 359 4580 US**
- **+1 408 638 0968 US (San Jose)**
- **+1 669 444 9171 US**
- **+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)**
- **+1 253 205 0468 US**
- **+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)**
- **+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)**
- **+1 507 473 4847 US**
- **+1 564 217 2000 US**
- **+1 646 876 9923 US (New York)**
- **+1 646 931 3860 US**
- **+1 689 278 1000 US**
- **+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)**
- **+1 305 224 1968 US**
- **+1 309 205 3325 US**
- **+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)**
- **+1 360 209 5623 US**
- **+1 386 347 5053 US**

Meeting ID: 859 9849 7601

Passcode: 754099

Find your local number: <https://gunnisoncounty-org.zoom.us/j/k6ak7n8ZE>

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
November 20, 2024**

The November 20, 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)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Paul Mowery, Gunnison County Stockgrowers
Matthew Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Pat Magee, Research and Education At-Large (Western Colorado University, WCU)
Thersa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Andy Stokes, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large (Gunnison Trails)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Liz With, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
Angela Trnka, USFWS

Non-Voting Members

Jessica Frey, NPS
Liam Duggan, USFS
Sarah Lowe, USFS
Angela Trnka, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Brandon Diamond, CPW
Aleshia Rummel, NPS

Others in the Audience:

Brian Brown, BLM
John Scott, Private Consultant
Kathy Griffin, CPW
Cathie Pagano, Gunnison County
Mike Pelletier, Gunnison County
Jared Dunn, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute

Staff Members Present:

Misty Castillo, Gunnison County Community and Economic Development Department
Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District
Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the November 20, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:01 AM.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Moved: by Navy and seconded by Magee to approve the November 20, 2024 agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF September 18, 2024 MEETING MINUTES: Corrections for minutes pg.2 “Cross Bar”, pg.3 “3 have died”, pg.3 “Garfield, Eagle, and Pitkin counties” **Moved:** by Navy and seconded by Magee to approve the September 19 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Seward, reviewed 19 application for Gunnison CPW conservation biologist. Have narrowed down the 19 to 7 for interviews. None of these applicants have extensive experience with Gunnison sage grouse (GUSG), so whoever is hired will likely not chair this committee. Seward has asked and recommends Kathy Griffin to be the chair of the Gunnison Sage Grouse Strategic Committee. Griffin is open to being the chair in the interim and sees the committee as important. She will plan on being in person at most of the future meetings. Smith, elections for board members is scheduled for January but could do it in December.

Smith, thanks Magee for leading the hiring committee for the cheatgrass coordinator position. The job has been offered to Sarah Elzay, a professor at Ft. Hayes University. She has a strong agriculture research background and was deemed to be very qualified for the position by the hiring committee. She will be coming to Gunnison sometime in early February. Smith, temporary housing through the county is setup for Sarah and her family. Scott, thanks Pat for heading the hiring committee. Smith thinks the county funding for the position is solid for the next couple of years to sustain the position. The contract is a one-year contract for now, but funding is in good shape.

With, NRCS 2025 funding opportunities have been released. NRCS has a conservation practice to facilitate transportation of carcasses. This practice was primarily to address predator conflict. This practice will be an EQUIP contract with the NRCS, will have to go through the entire contract process. Must have an active contract that includes this practice. The producer would keep record of mortalities and receipts for dropping off at landfill. There is an established rate for carcass reimbursement. Smith, CDOT may not be able to remove carcasses for road side. With, the NRCS chief has allowed Colorado NRCS to fund projects related to animal migratory corridors within the state.

Vasquez, seasonal closure order for Flattop and Red Mountain area. This area is the biggest area of GUSG territory within Gunnison National Forest. The order will close the area to all human use from December 31 to July 15. This order is currently under review. Outreach will be important for the public, so they understand why this closure is happening. Livestock will still be allowed, will not affect grazing permits. The closure is for roughly 28,000 acres on Flattop and Red Mountain. It covers all GUSG critical habitat in these areas. Lowe, planning to put up signage to inform the public. Vasquez recommends trying to better inform the public of this closure. The shed season overlap will be challenging. Vasquez wants this first year to be an education year, but 2nd year would be more law enforcement heavy. Navy, asked about Smokey Bar Road and it being open. Vasquez confirmed that this road is part of the closure.

Habitat Prioritization Tool Overview and Discussion

Scott, 2011 was when this Habitat Prioritization Tool (HPT) was first talked about, and the development started from there. The technical subcommittee was meeting monthly to develop this tool during 2011 and they brought the tool forward to the committee in 2012. It was developed as “Gunnison County’s tool”. Many layers are included in HPT such as lek buffers, powerlines, etc.

The last HPT update was in 2018 and was mostly updated with soil data and official lek statuses. Lots of agencies were involved in the initial development. Pelletier, this tool is vector based rather than raster based. This allows one to see what layers are touching and the constraints, and what is affecting the score.

This tool been used extensively by the county to determine how development should be managed in GUSG habitat. Seward, every application for building sent to the county is being put through this system. It has been an important tool in helping mitigate development in GUSG habitat. Tier 1 designates the most critical GUSG habitat within this tool. Mike pulled up an example of a contested area, where a building application was denied. All the different layers are added together in the tool to determine habitat score. Scott, HPT development started with soil maps to determine habitat types. With, spatial information that covered entire Gunnison Basin was important. This tool is a predicative tool but must be validated in person. An update

plan should be put forward with what should be updated. Things to possibly update: Brood rearing habitat, tree layer reduction impact, updated soil maps. Soil maps are accurate and representative of what the habitat should be. Scott, slope and aspect were also considered along with riparian areas. The addition of open range mapping for cheatgrass contains information on grasses and bare grounds and could be incorporated into the tool. Mike, LIDAR available for updates as well. Smith, RUMBLE vegetation layers could be incorporated into the tool.

Scott emphasized the importance of field verification. Seward, the technical subcommittee needs to meet to determine HPT updates. Seward has passed on lek statuses to Mike and those have been updated. New one mile buffer around leks may be applied to the HPT to see how this would change scores. The current HPT buffer around leks is 0.6 miles. Scott advises being careful of increasing the buffer to minimize overreach on private property. Cathie, this new buffer could impact the county immensely and would be hard to implement on the ground. With, when tool was developed, they wanted a way to show high quality habit and how development could impact these areas.

Scott, Cam Aldridge suggested highways (i.e. HWY 50 and 149) should have up to a two-mile buffer, but this was not accepted for the tool. Scott explained the Gunnison Rising development. Scott determined that the Gunnison Rising developmental imprint towards GUSG habitat was limited due to existing development in the area. Griffin, 0.6-mile buffer zone was based on disturbance to lek area. New research suggests a one-mile buffer is better for disturbance mitigation to leks. Seward, always try to find a compromise with the landowner for developments in sensitive GUSG areas. This involves lots of education and trying to steer development to more distrusted areas. Maybe have the one-mile buffer be identified in the HPT. Seward would like to see the one-mile buffer identified in the tool.

With, further discussion should be had at the technical subcommittee meetings. Smith, recreation impacts might be good to include in tool update. Pelletier, lots of long driveways have been mapped for 911 purposes. The next update will include these driveways. New housing can be added relatively easily. Pelletier has not mapped new recreation differences from 2011 to present day. New roads aren't completely mapped but has improved.

Navy, any data to GUSG response to 0.6-mile buffer? Seward, no formal before and after disturbance review on 0.6-mile buffer. With, scientific literature was used to back why layers are what they are. It was decided that recreation values were left out in the initial version because it was hard to quality. Seward doesn't recommend adding in a recreation/seasonal closure layer. The primary purpose of this tool is to guide land use within Gunnison County, not so much guide recreation on public lands. Adding recreation and seasonal closure layers may make tool more complicated than it should be. Smith, adding recreation layer in might have an impact on quality of habitat.

With, an encompassing weed map for the entire basin wasn't found for the 2018 HPT update so weeds were not included. Smith, they are mapped now. Pelletier, these can all be added to the tool see how they overlay and affect scores. Pelletier, it was found that 88% of bird location data fell within this tool's habitat tier mapping. Might add newer bird location data in next update.

Scott, HPT is helpful tool for weed treatment areas and other scenarios. Especially Tier 1 areas. Griffin, this tool shouldn't have certain things within the tool. Smith, tool could be more used to assist with other projects. Seward used this tool to identify potential conservation easement areas. Used to identify ACEC areas. Pelletier, basin wide stats were applied to this tool. Smith, board appointment renewals/elections are coming up in January 2025. Rummel, two-year appointment for committee membership and most people were renewed last year. Smith, two different components to future HPT updates; the easy GIS updates that Mike Pelletier can add (driveways, new houses, etc.) and recommendations on how scoring can be updated. Stokes, possibly increasing number of tiers for the HPT.

With asked if BLM and USFS were using the HPT for their work. Vasquez does use the tool to see where areas are critical GUSG habitat areas. Pelletier, the two-tier system used in HPT was used to hide lek locations. Stokes, BLM has used it to identify unauthorized routes to decommission. Vasquez, maybe include the one-mile buffer in the update, so it is visible. Everyone agrees that the technical subcommittee should proceed in meeting to discuss HPT updates. Mowery, go forward with updating the tool with new data but

leave the 0.6 buffer. Smith, motion for tech subcommittee update. Sue, motioned for update to HPT. With, amend the motion to Technical Subcommittee discuss what needs to be updated and bring results to full committee before finalizing updates. Seconded by Caloger. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

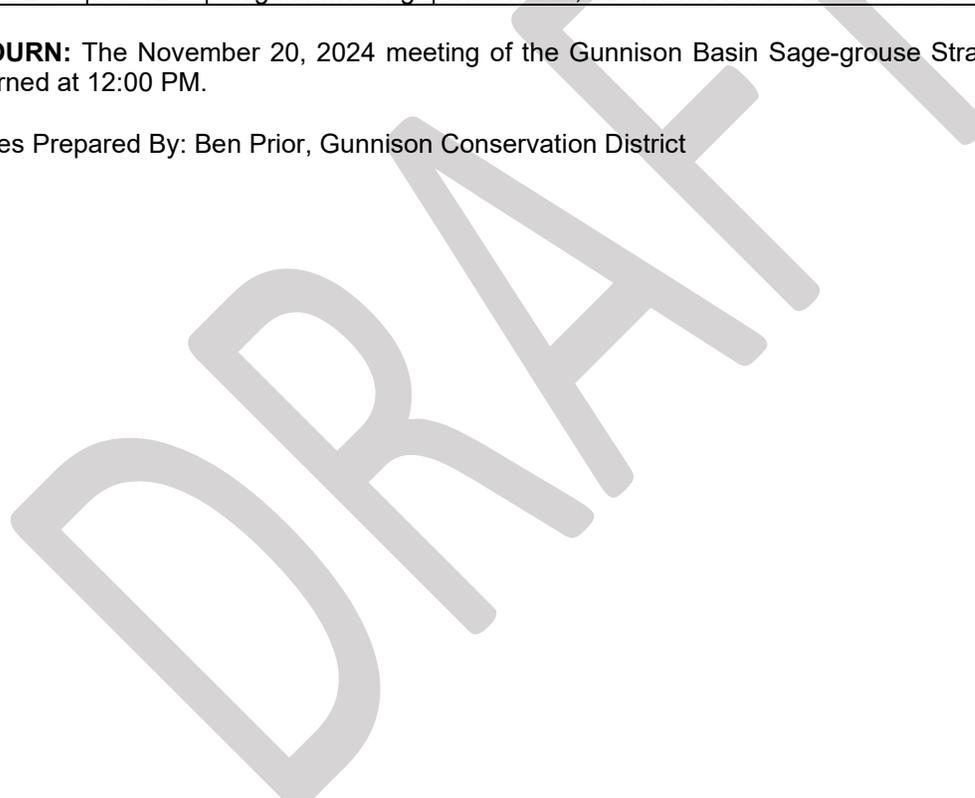
None.

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	Canceled	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	Canceled	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 November 20, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District





U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement

Newsletter • Issue 6 • October 2024



Record of Decision/Approved RMP Amendment Issued

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is pleased to announce issuance of the Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*). The Approved RMP Amendment will provide guidance for managing approximately 2,182,660 acres of BLM surface lands and 2,852,390 acres of Federal subsurface mineral estate in Colorado and Utah. The Gunnison sage-grouse is federally listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. §1531-1544). Eight Gunnison sage-grouse populations are scattered across 10 Colorado counties and two Utah counties—Delta, Dolores, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mesa, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, Saguache, and San Miguel in Colorado and Grand and San Juan in Utah.

The Approved RMP Amendment provides a framework to conserve and enhance habitat for the Gunnison sage-grouse in all BLM land use plans with occupied and unoccupied habitat and, as applicable, aligns with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2020 Final Recovery Plan. The landscape level management decisions in the Approved RMP Amendment provide habitat conservation and reduction of threats to Gunnison sage-grouse populations. They reflect a long-term commitment by the BLM and cooperating agencies to conserve the species by continuing protection, restoration, and enhancement of Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.

The Proposed RMP Amendment/Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was subject to a 30-day protest period that ended on August 5, 2024. The BLM received five unique protest submissions on the proposed planning decisions. The BLM Director considered and dismissed or denied all valid protest issues after concluding that the BLM Colorado and Utah State Directors had followed applicable laws, regulations, and policies and had considered all relevant resource information and public input. That decision becomes the final decision of the U.S. Department of the Interior. A copy of the Protest Resolution Report is available at: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/planning-and-nepa/public-participation/protest-resolution-reports>.



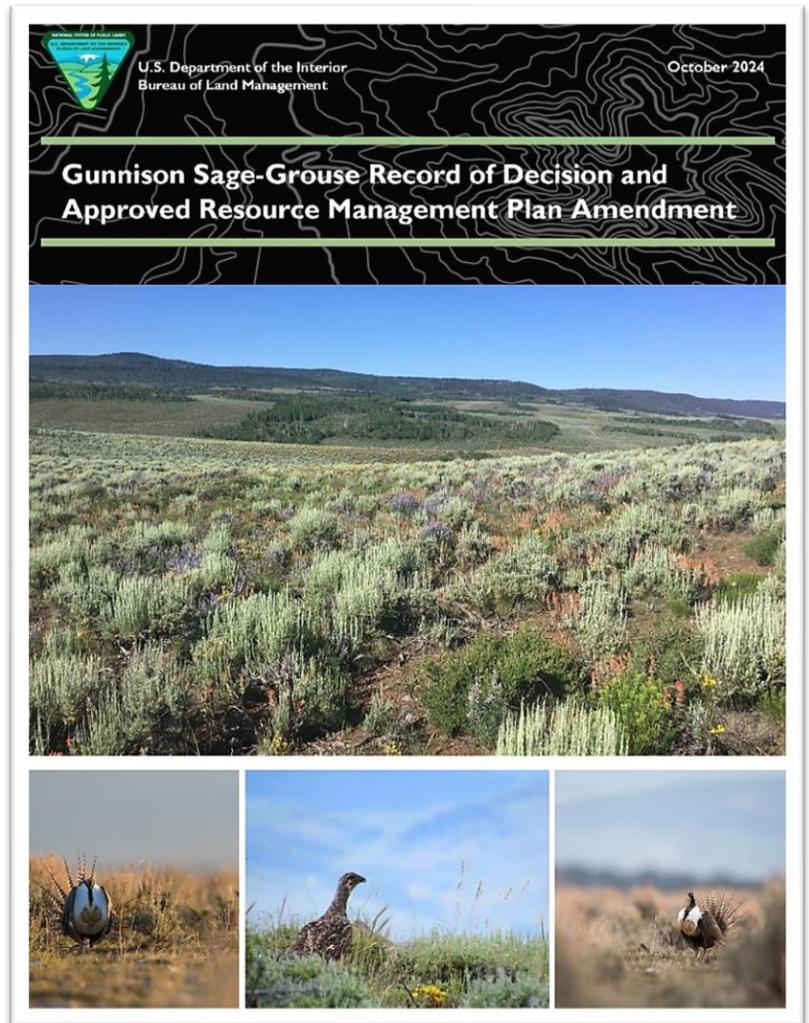
Photo: Kathy Brodhead

The 60-day Governor’s consistency review period for the Proposed RMP Amendment/Final EIS, which promotes consistency with State government plans or policies, concluded on September 3, 2024. The State of Utah identified potential inconsistencies with State policy, and the State Resource Management Plan. In response, BLM modified a travel management action and followed up with a response letter to address additional topics of concern. The State of Colorado did not identify any inconsistencies with state or local plans, policies, or programs.

The ROD and Approved RMP Amendment are available on the BLM website at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2019031/510>. Printed copies are available for public inspection at the BLM Grand Junction, Gunnison, San Luis Valley, Tres Rios, and Uncompahgre field offices in Colorado and the Moab and Monticello field offices in Utah.

The BLM greatly appreciates everyone who participated in this important planning effort for the Gunnison sage-grouse. This decision is rooted in the careful review of substantive comments from federal, tribal, state, and local governments, as well as input from the public, industry stakeholders, and the 30 cooperating agencies that engaged throughout the planning process. Your commitment and dedication throughout have played an integral role in shaping a comprehensive and effective plan. Thank you once again for your invaluable contributions.

Sincerely,
Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director



ROD/Approved RMP Amendment Highlights

Management direction outlined in the ROD/Approved RMP Amendment includes:

- **Mitigation:** The decision approves a 5:1 mitigation ratio, which uses minimization criteria to avoid, minimize, and compensate for any potential impacts. There will be additional opportunities to develop a range-wide mitigation strategy with cooperators.
- **Lek buffers:** The decision approves buffer protections for all lek statuses. No above ground development will be allowed within one mile of any lek.
- **Surface disturbance:** The decision outlines management to achieve the objective of no net increase in surface disturbance in order to conserve habitat in the Gunnison sage-grouse satellite populations outside of the Gunnison Basin. Resource use restrictions for Lands and Realty rights-of-way and renewable energy. Salable and non-energy leasable minerals are excluded within occupied habitat.
- **Fluid Minerals:** The decision closes all areas with no and low potential for fluid mineral leasing in both occupied and unoccupied habitat management areas, which is the majority of habitat.
- **Special Designation Areas:** Three new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and one new Backcountry Conservation Area were designated through the decision, specifically for the protection and enhancement of Gunnison sage-grouse habitat. In addition, management direction was updated for two existing ACECs.

