

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

The December 18, 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 Country 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
Angela Trnka, USFWS
Dale Funka, USFS

Non-Voting Members

Brandon Diamond, CPW
Aleshia Rummel, NPS
Amanda Aulenbach, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District

Others in the Audience:

John Scott, Private Consultant
Kathy Griffin, CPW
Nathan Darnell, USFWS
Jon Hare, High Country Conservation Advocates
Jared Dunn, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute
Steffanie Chain, Public at Large Alternate

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 December 18, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:07 AM.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Moved: by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the December 18, 2024 agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF September 18, 2024 MEETING MINUTES: Corrections for minutes: Angela Trnka listed twice, pg.2 change “mitigate” to “helping reduce impacts to GUSG habitat” and add “validate in person on the ground”, “December 1st through July 15th”, Pg3 second full paragraph, disturbed areas, “0.6 mile buffer using lek count data”, “quantify” **Moved:** by Smith and seconded by Peter to approve the November meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Trnka, Recovery Implementation Strategy (RIS) workshop for Gunnison sage grouse (GUSG) to occur on February 19th, 2025 from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. Five-year status review for GUSG is now completed, threatened listing was continued. As of 2024 GUSG is left in threatened status for the next five years.

Griffin, 2nd wolf release will occur in early January 2025. Wolves will be from Canada and 15 total will be released. Release location not disclosed yet. Having interviews for Seward’s replacement, hope to have decision by early January 2025. Number of new FTEs for range riding with CPW. This includes 12 total, fulltime seasonal riders and five fulltime conflict specialists.

Darnell, USFWS has proposed listing the monarch butterfly as a threatened species with 4D rule. The USFWS has also proposed listing the cuckoo bumble bee as an endangered species. These listings likely won’t affect Gunnison Basin.

Funka, Forest Plan signed in June. A guideline included in the Forest Plan for implanting a forest order for closing Flattop area. Big change, closed to all human entry from December 1st to July 15th. Not officially launched yet. Permit holders allowed; all rec traffic not allowed. This are houses 40 percent of GUSG in the area.

Pat, Seth Owens photographed leks this year. Put together stickers, proceeds go to conservation efforts. Sent Pat \$750 from the sticker sales. Money could be used to organize outreach event, possibly one with the Ute Mountain Ute tribes.

Smith, Sarah Elzay (new Cheatgrass Coordinator) starting in January 2025.

BLM GUSG Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA)

Stokes, BLM has made an offer for a detail for Kathy Brodhead’s position. RMPA was signed in October, guides GUSG management on BLM land. Splits habit into occupied and unoccupied areas. Differing management for these areas. Split up by Gunnison basin and satellite populations. New mitigation ratio is 5 to 1 ratio for surface disturbance. Example, one mile of new trail must restore 5 miles to mitigate. Annual monitoring report will still occur. No disturbances in occupied GUSG habitat from March 15 to July 15th. No above ground development or infrastructure within one mile of leks. Four new areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC) established. Two in Gunnison, Chance Gulch (13000 acres) Sapinero Mesa (17000 acres). These areas are closed to all human use from March 15th to May 15th for leking season. Chance Gulch is a forage reserve area; unlikely this area will ever be grazed again.

Record of decision signing for RMPA falls within timeframe for reversal by incoming administration under the Congressional Review Act. Not likely to occur due to support from Colorado governor, no governor protest was recorded for this plan. Greater sage grouse plan has not been signed but will be signed on January 12th. This plan has high chance of being reversed. Many states don’t like the plan and has been reversed in the past.

Seward was awarded the GUSG Stewardship Award for his dedication to GUSG conservation in the Gunnison Basin.

CCAA Conversion to Conservation Benefits Agreements (CBAs)

Griffin, the CCAAs was a Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) program that worked with private landowners on conserving candidate species not already listed species. In 2006, the DOW signed a CCAA with USFWS that provided the opportunity for private landowners to sign on to this agreement through a certificate of inclusion (CI) for the benefit of conserving this species. Formal, voluntary agreement between private landowner, CPW, and USFWS. The purpose behind this agreement was to provide conservation for GUSG on private property. These conservation efforts on private lands under this CCAA would hopefully help prevent GUSG from being listed as federally endangered.

Over the years Griffin and Seward entered landowners into these agreements. Over 40 landowners, 32 within the Gunnison Basin. Roughly 93,000 acres are under this agreement, with 54,000 acres in the Gunnison Basin. The CCAA provides a permit to a private landowner containing assurances that if GUSG becomes federally endangered, that the landowner doesn't have to implement any other conservation measures then what's already planned. Provides safety net for landowners if species becomes endangered.

This agreement was signed in 2006 and is a 20-year agreement, will end in 2026. The USFWS no longer offers CCAAs so there is no rollover to extend CCAAs. Trnka, there is allotted time for these CCAAs to be extended for short amount of time so that enrollment into Conservation Benefit Agreements (CBAs) can occur. These CBAs are the replacement for CCAA program. All properties will need to be resurveyed to enroll in a CBA. At the end of January, CPW and USFWS will meet to discuss how to proceed with these new CBAs. For the CCAAs, CPW would survey the properties every three to five years to make sure habitat within these agreements was still suitable for GUSG. Anyone at anytime can sign up for a CBA. Final guidance from USFWS on CBAs should be signed in next couple months. Good opportunity to enroll new properties in these new agreements. Seward, CPW has good budget to continue helping these agreements. CCAAs technically expire at end of 2026, but there is flexibility to extend while landowners are enrolling in CBAs.

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 December 18, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District