

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
April 16 2025**

The April 16, 2025 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:**

Liz Smith, Vice-Chairperson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)  
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)  
Matthew Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)  
Pat Magee, Research and Education At-Large (Western Colorado University, WCU)  
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large  
Sarah Elzay, Gunnison County Cheatgrass Coordinator  
Andy Stokes, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)  
Jessica Frey, National Park Service (NPS)

**Non-Voting Members**

Jon Hare, HCCA  
Nathan Darnall, USFWS

**Others in the Audience:**

Miranda Middleton, CPW  
John Scott, Private Consultant  
Amanda Aulenbach, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD)  
Ari Yamaguchi, UGRWCD  
Aleshia Rummel, NPS  
Matt Holloran, BLM

**Staff Members Present:**

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

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson Griffin called the April 16, 2025, meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:06 AM.

**DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:** Griffin confirmed that a quorum was present.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** Moved: by Navy and seconded by Caloger to approve the April 16, 2025, agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:** Moved: by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the March 19, 2025, meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

**COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS**

Smith sent the Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse Strategic Committee letter to congressman Jeff Herd. She is also continuing to have biweekly meetings with Sarah Elzay regarding her role.

Stokes, BLM seasonal road closures have passed the halfway mark. Working on better physical signage for these closures.

Caloger, has been in contact with a person from the development sector. He talked to them about the HPT update. This person may be interested in filling the development at-large seat on the committee.

Navy, still working on putting together several habitat projects for this year.

Elzay, new grant application submitted for the eastern part of Gunnison. Last Friday, a cheatgrass workshop was held. The cheatgrass pull day is on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Emma has three cheatmaps mapping events scheduled for May 17<sup>th</sup> (Hartman Rocks), June 7<sup>th</sup> (Almont Triangle), and a wet meadow event in July (TBD). Cheatgrass subcommittee was held on April 15<sup>th</sup>. During this meeting mapping layers for a new cheatgrass treatment prioritization map was discussed. Aerial spraying will be a primary focus for the next cheatgrass subcommittee meeting. Shared Google Drive is available for all cheatgrass subcommittee meeting materials. Few other grants in the work.

Vasquez, lek counts on USFS are going well. USFS still unable to hire seasonals. USFS Fire can hire some seasonals. Working on getting an internship program with Western started. There will be 10 to 12 interns from Colorado Mesa University. These interns will be working throughout the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests. GMUG is down 31 employees, which is 15% of total work force for permanent employees.

Stokes, BLM hiring two wildlife interns. Also hiring an AIMs crew and fire interns. Hiring is still frozen for BLM.

Frey, NPS can hire seasonals. Also counting sage grouse leks. Fire management plan being developed. Grazing management plan is also being worked on. It is in the internal review process. Water/wastewater treatment project is undergoing cultural resources survey.

Darnall, the last two Gunnison sage grouse working group meetings have been completed. No further updates on the Bill funding.

Middleton, lek count season has been going on for a couple of weeks. Count numbers appear to be higher than last year's count data. The approved photographer and videographer have both been taken to leks to get grouse footage. Both have agreed to share their photos/videos once finalized. Raven attractants at leks have been observed, counters should record any raven observations on count reports.

Ari, UGRWCD wet meadow sites project are planned for the field season. These are mostly old project sites. UGRWCD hired two techs, will be starting May 12. "Thinking Like Water" film screening this Friday.

Griffin, a new conservation easement was established along HWY 114. This easement is partially within Gunnison sage grouse critical habitat.

Rummel, discussed different layers for the HPT update including roads, soils, and lek statuses. Other possible changes include increasing the negative value for irrigated meadows to better reflect the habitat value of these areas and assigning a higher point value to historical leks. Rummel also discussed changing the 0.6-mile lek buffer to a 1.0-mile buffer. This change would impact about 50 parcels, in terms of parcels going from tier 2 to tier 1. Several of these effected parcels were on public land or already had established conservation easements. During the next strategic committee meeting there will be an in-depth presentation on the proposed update.

Scott, expressed concerns about potential legal ramifications and the need for stakeholder buy-in, emphasizing the importance of community considerations. Smith brought up the potential for unintended consequences from environmental groups if the new update is implemented. Smith will discuss these issues further with the Gunnison County attorney. The group discussed these topics further.

Mowery, asked about the renewal of the USFWS Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs). These CCAAs will be transitioning to a new form of agreement called Conservation Benefit Agreements (CBAs). Griffin, CPW and USFWS are slowly working out the details for the transition of the CCAAs to CBAs. This shift in CCAAs to CBAs for Gunnison sage grouse will be the first in the United

States. This means there will be a lot of discussion on what may need to change in the certificate of inclusions for the landowners enrolled in these agreements. CPW has some funding to help facilitate this transition.

**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.**

06-18-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
07-17-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
08-20-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
09-17-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
10-15-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
11-19-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
12-17-25	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room

**ADJOURN:** The April 16, 2025, meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:06 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District