

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
May 21 2025**

The May 21, 2025 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:

Kathy Griffin, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Liz Smith, Vice-Chairperson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Dayle Funka, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Sarah Elzay, Gunnison County Cheatgrass Coordinator
Andy Stokes, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Jessica Frey, National Park Service (NPS)
Paul Mowery, Stockgrowers
Tim Kuegler,
Angela Trnka, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Non-Voting Members

Brandon Diamond, CPW
Matthew Vasquez, USFS

Others in the Audience:

Miranda Middleton, CPW
John Scott, Private Consultant
Aleshia Rummel, NPS
Matt Holloran, BLM
Mike Pelletier, Gunnison County
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Dan Olsen, Natural Resource Conservation Service
Liam Duggan, USFS

Staff Members Present:

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

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Griffin called the May 21, 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 May 21, 2025, agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the April 16, 2025, meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Smith, cheatgrass pull day occurring on May 31st.

Stokes, wildlife intern started this week. The BLM road closures for Gunnison sage grouse have ended and all gates are now open.

Mowery, tail end of calving season and branding.

Middleton, lek counts are finished. Over 80 leks were counted with approximately 450 different counts taking place over the last two months. Visted four potential new leks during count season. At two of these new leks grouse were found at least once during visits. One historic lek had three male grouse and one female grouse. All data from this season is still being processed so no official count numbers are available yet. The first count period seemed to have the highest male count.

Diamond, three individual wolves have been in Gunnison County. Currently there are no wolves present in the county.

Navy, HCCA has over half a dozen stewardship projects for their 2025 agenda. All these projects are posted on HCCA's website. They will also be sent out in HCCA's coming newsletters.

Frey, field season is in full swing for NPS. Seasonal crew is large this season.

Olsen, NRCS has lost about 1/3 of staff statewide. Many engineers were lost. Due to engineer losses, NRCS is focusing implementing non-engineering practices such as ecological practices.

Funka, field season has started for USFS. No USFS seasonals were able to be hired for this field season (except for fire crew seasonals). Lots of work have been done on Gunnison sage grouse monitoring, wolf mitigation measures, and wet meadow restoration. Due to low snowpack, USFS will be keeping a close eye on water distribution across their landscape. There could be a strong monsoon season.

Vasquez, Liam Duggan will be leading sage grouse monitoring on USFS land. Working on a story about wet meadow restoration in the Gunnison National Forest, this is nearing completion.

Kuegler, Hartman Rocks Cleanup Day occurred on May 3rd. About 125 people showed up for this event. Back Country Hunters and Anglers had an event this past weekend and removed over seven miles of old fence across BLM land. This weekend is the big Hartman Rocks mountain bike race, over 700 people will be in attending.

Trnka, wet meadow work is underway with Upper Gunnison Water Conservancy District. The prioritization restoration sagebrush ecosystem tool (PRESET) from USGS is still being worked on and USGS will be reaching out to volunteers to review this tool. Please remember to enter conservation projects into the USGS conservation efforts database (CED). The USFWS sagebrush ecosystem team has recently been focusing on invasive annual grasses. A scientific paper has been published from this work and several tools are being developed. The raven subcommittee met on April 30th. The meeting focused on raven mitigation techniques. Trnka also met with Terry Holcomb who works on the recovery of desert tortoise in Nevada and Utah. Terry has used raven mitigation techniques to reduce raven populations and shared her work with Trnka.

Elzay, cheatgrass pull day is on May 31st. The cheatgrass subcommittee will be meeting this afternoon. There will be a presentation on cheatgrass treatment techniques.

Diamond, Back Country Hunters and Anglers had a good turnout for their annual Colorado Public Lands Dat in Gunnison. Over 160 people registered. Projects included fence removal, wet meadow restoration work, and cheatgrass mapping/pulling.

Griffin, Kathy Brodhead from BLM wanted to let the committee know that she had new kiosks and informational signs mad for several of the Gunnison BLM motorized closure gates. Kiosks and signs were made in 2023. Recently the Gunnison Wildlife Association received National Forest Foundation (NFF) funds to install these kiosks and signs. The NFF wants to make sure that Gunnison sage grouse strategic committee supports this project.

Navy, requested that the kiosks not be too tall so that they do not create a perching area for grouse predators (ravens, falcons, etc.). Kuegler, mentioned that proper sign placement is important.

Navy makes motion that this committee approve this new BLM signage. Seconded by Smith. The motion approved unanimously by committee.

HABIAT PRIORITIZATION TOOL (HPT) UPDATE

Smith provided her thoughts on the HPT update and commentary from the Gunnison County attorney regarding the county’s role in conserving Gunnison sage grouse and their habitat. In Gunnison County’s Land Use Resolution Section 11-106A2 (pg.210) states that the county will “preclude the need to up list or minimize the impact of listing of Gunnison sage-grouse as candidate species”. Since Gunnison sage grouse has been listed as federally threatened, the county now works to prevent the species from being uplisted to endangered. Smith expressed that the update needs to be balanced with both scientific and political considerations.

Griffin noted that in the technical subcommittee is tasked with using the best available science to address a question/project, such as the HPT update. The technical subcommittee conveys their findings to the strategic committee. The strategic committee then takes all aspects (science, social, political, etc) into consideration before making a decision. The strategic committee decision is then presented to the Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners for final approval.

Rummel presented on the HPT, the Gunnison County sage grouse building review process, and proposed technical subcommittee’s HPT updates. Please visit the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee webpage for access to this presentation (<https://www.gunnisoncounty.org/187/Gunnison-Basin-Sage-Grouse-Strategic-Com>).

- Presentation overview
 - The land use review process is the primary use of the HPT. The HPT helps determine which parcels are in important grouse habitat.
 - The HPT weighs positive habitat attributes against negative impacts.
 - Proposed HPT updates.
 - Spatial data for soils, roads, lek status/shape.
 - Score updates for historic leks, irrigated meadows, and a buffer from 0.6 to 1.0 miles.
 - Changes to Tier 1/Tier 2 acreage and parcels.
 - Minimal changes to acreage included in HPT shifting from Tier 2 to Tier 1.
 - Net loss in parcels overall in Tier 1.

Pelletier commented on the potential impacts that the HPT update could have on future conservation easements in the Gunnison Basin.

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.

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

ADJOURN: The May 21, 2025, meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:30 PM.
Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District