

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
September 17, 2025**

The September 17, 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), Chairperson
Liz Smith, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), Vice Chair
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Dayle Funka, Forest Service (USFS), USFS Regular
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large Regular
Sarah Elzay, Gunnison County Cheatgrass Coordinator, Research & Education At-Large
Brinnen Carter, National Park Service (NPS), NPS Regular
Paul Mowery, Crossbar Ranch, Stockgrowers
Angela Trnka, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), USFWS Regular
Tim Kuegler, Gunnison Trails, Recreation At-Large
Andy Stokes, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), BLM Alternate

Non-Voting Members

Matthew Vasquez, USFS Alternate
Nathan Darnall, USFWS Alternate
Jessica Frey, NPS Alternate
Stephanie Chain, Public At-Large Alternate

Others in the Audience:

Bailey Friedman, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD)
Ari Yamaguchi, UGRWCD
Nate Seward, CPW
Miranda Middleton, CPW
John Scott, Private Consultant
Matt Holloran, BLM
Sarah Lowe, USFS
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Staff Members Present:

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

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Griffin called the September 17, 2025, meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:02 AM.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Moved: by Navy and seconded by Caloger to approve the September 17, 2025, agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the June 18, 2025, meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

NOTE: Full meeting video recordings and transcripts are available at the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee webpage ([LINK](#)).

GUNNISON TRAILS GRANT PROPOSAL

Gunnison Trails will be applying for a CPW non-motorized trail grant and would like a letter of support from the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee. This grant is strictly for maintenance on non-motorized trails and would help Gunnison Trails fund a five-person trail crew. Trail work would be done in areas throughout the Gunnison Basin, including the Signal Peak area. Last year the Gunnison Trail crew installed new signage for the Signal Peak seasonal closure for Gunnison sage grouse (GUSG). They also stationed crew members at popular trail heads to inform the public about the GUSG seasonal closure. This grant will help continue these efforts.

UGRWCD GRANT PROPOSAL

UGRWCD will be applying to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Restore Grant and would also like a letter of support from the committee. This grant funding would help UGRWCD, and partners implement wet meadow restoration projects, cheatgrass treatments, and other water-based projects throughout several hydrologic unit codes (HUCs) within and around the Gunnison Basin. Many of these projects will take place in important GUSG habitat.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Caloger noted that a large bear has been seen roaming the alleys within Gunnison city limits. He expressed his concern about this and the need for more bear proof trash cans in Gunnison.

Navy, HCCA had a successful two day wet meadow restoration volunteer event along Gold Basin Road. Over 12 new rock structures were constructed and maintenance on existing structures also occurred. GUSG were seen in the project area during the event.

Elzay, working on several grant applications to help fund cheatgrass treatments. She will be partnering with UGRWCD on the Restore grant application. She has submitted a Rocky Mountain Elk Federation grant application for cheatgrass treatments on USFS lands. She also partnered with the Gunnison Conservation District in their Natural Disaster Mitigation Enterprise grant application. This application included funding for 400 acres of cheatgrass treatment throughout the Gunnison Basin on public and private lands.

Tarantino, there will be a wet meadow restoration workshop on October 3. The workshop will be half in classroom and half touring a wet meadow restoration site.

Frey, NPS is finishing up their grazing management plan. This plan had a public scoping in August and public comment period in June. They have also been doing riparian restoration work, installing beaver dam analogues and similar structures in the Red Creek area.

Yamaguchi, UGRWCD has built or done maintenance on over 50 low tech structures this year.

Stokes, BLM has recently had several Youth Corps crews conducting cheatgrass treatments and sagebrush plantings on BLM lands in the Gunnison Basin. BLM was able to secure funding to hire wildlife interns for next year. New BLM seasonal closure signage will be installed soon in the Gunnison Basin. The Gunnison BLM Field Office hopes to have their new weeds ecological assessment (EA) completed and signed by January 2026. This EA will allow for the use of indaziflam on BLM lands in the Gunnison Basin.

Mowery, Gunnison stock growers are concerned with the current grey wolf reintroduction plan and are worried about how grey wolves may negatively affect the Gunnison sage grouse population in the Gunnison Basin. Griffin, wolves have shown to be beneficial in some instances to greater sage grouse populations. Wolves can outcompete smaller predators (i.e. badgers, coyotes, foxes) resulting in a decrease in these other predator populations. This can help take predator pressure off of sage grouse.

Funka, USFS has completed monitoring on 34 allotments that have critical Gunnison sage grouse habitat. Monitoring has been successfully completed for five consecutive years. Maintenance on wet meadow restoration structures on national forest land is ongoing. The Gunnison National Forest recently lost their range technician, so weed spraying on national forest land may be impacted. USFS is working with partners to get funding to treat cheatgrass on USFS lands in the Gunnison Basin.

Trnka, September 30th is the end of the year for federal reporting. Any conservation activities related to Gunnison sage grouse and other wildlife that occurred this year should be entered into the Conservation Efforts Database by September 30th. This is a USFWS tool that is managed by the United States Geological Survey.

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE GROUSE 2025 POPULATION UPDATE

Middelton gave a presentation on the preliminary data from this year’s lek counting season. This is overviewed below.

- There were 40 lek counters from 12 different organizations this year.
- A total of 309 lek counts were conducted over 87 leks throughout the Gunnison Basin.
- Many different animals other than sage grouse were observed on leks. These animals included ravens, golden eagles, crows, red tailed hawks, coyotes, pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and moose.
- One photographer and videographer were able to capture photos and videos of sage grouse leking. This material will be shared with the committee once it is officially published.
- The sage grouse male high count for 2025 was 726, which is little higher than 2024’s high male count.
- The 2025 population estimate for the Gunnison Basin sage grouse population is 3,562 birds.

GUNNISON SAGE GROUSE 2025 SATELLITE POPULATION UPDATE

Griffin gave an overview of the Gunnison sage grouse satellite populations. The satellite populations are San Miguel, Pinyon Mesa, Crawford, Cerro Summit, Dove Creek, Monticello, and Poncha Pass.

- The San Miguel and Pinyon Mesa populations are doing well. The Pinyon Mesa population had the highest lek count numbers ever recorded.
- The Crawford population continues to struggle. This area has been in severe drought for a while.
- The Cerro Summit, Dove Creek and Monticello populations are all still at zero or one bird for their estimated populations.
- The Poncha Pass population has been bouncing back.

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.

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: September 17, 2025, meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:21 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Ben Prior, Gunnison Conservation District