

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
February 17, 2021**

The February 17, 2021 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was conducted by Zoom virtual online meeting, Gunnison, CO, 81230

**Committee Members Present:**

**Voting Members:**

Jonathan Houck, Chairperson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)  
Greg Peterson, Secretary, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)  
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large  
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large  
Sue Navy, High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA)  
Matt Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)  
Kathy Brodhead, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Alternate  
Brandon Diamond, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)  
Ann Timberman, US Fish & Wildlife Service (UFWS)

**Non-Voting Members**

Nate Seward, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Alternate  
Matt Reed, High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA)

**Others in the Audience:**

Pat Magee, Western Colorado University  
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies  
Allison Hearne, NRCS  
Susie Parker, Forest Service  
Thomas Carter  
Lucas Bare, ICF  
Ryan Kay, BLM  
John Scott, Scott Resource Management Services

**Staff Members Present:**

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District, Wildlife Biologist  
Rebecca Ricord, Gunnison County Community Development

Others present as listed in text.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson Houck called the February 17, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:04 A.M.

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

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** Agenda approved as presented.

**APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 16, 2020 MEETING MINUTES:** Moved: by Navy and seconded by Peterson to approve the December 16, 2020 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

**COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS**

Navy reported that they are moving ahead for their stewardship for the summer. They are in the process of hiring an intern. Reed reported that they hired a student from Western for the summer.

Kugler reported that they are working with an ecology class with Western to get more closure information up at Signal Peak. This year they are going to have the Growler and have seen a lot of interest, indicating that this year is going to be busy. It will be busy this summer with visitors.

Diamond reported that they have been working with Magee at the watchable Site at Waunita. If you get questions they do intend to allow public access but it will be modified due to COVID. They will not have the trailer wide open for big groups like they have in the past. They will need to go through Magee for the process. Houck stated that some of the requirements of accessing CPW land they will need to have a hunting or fishing license. Diamond clarified that is correct, if a person plans on going just one morning they can purchase a one-day fishing license. If a group is going with Sis-k-dee they would be covered under their permit.

Seward reported that they will have Western students there all 30 days doing a daily count to track the number of birds and where they see them. The trend has been them moving more to the Northwest. On the four days where they will do a coordinated count he hopes to have another count on the east side of the ridge.

Timberman reported that she spoke with Paul Jones and there is a potential for Fish and Wildlife funding and they discussed that it is difficult to set up a new meeting and will reach out to CPW to see if they can tie in together to have them run the grant. Seward reported that he talked with Jones and they touched based.

Vasquez reported that they are working on forest plan revision draft EIS and working on the analysis of their alternatives; no action and three other ones. They are hoping to have a draft done by early summer 2021. The forest service has a closure order for the Almont triangle and has been working with CPW on the dates. They modified the end date to April 30<sup>th</sup>. The closure order for the Flat Top Mountain Area. They have a road closure for motor vehicle use and goes from December 1<sup>st</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> and are working to update it. They have been seeing more interest in winter activities and want to maintain protection for big game and sage-grouse. Working on an internal proposal for requesting wet meadow restoration funds. There is going to be additional project dollars available this year and is getting read to receive funds. They want to keep the monitoring going as well. The Forest Service submitted their annual report under the CCA.

Peterson reported that they are talking about doing more monitoring work on their own and want to try and move forward on it. They have been in touch with BLM and Forest Service.

Broadhead reported that Waters was offered and accepted a position as the Northwest District Manger of the BLM and is gone. They are getting an acting filed manager, Brady Owens, and he will start on March 1, 2021. The BLM just submitted their annual report for the CCA. They are gearing up for the field season and collaborating with Seward to do juniper removal on Sapinero Mesa, near Ieks They have their wet meadow restoration gearing up. They will be doing illegal route closures in sage-grouse habitat. Houck asked how long Owens will be on. Broadhead reported that he will be there for 120 days.

Caloger reported that the word out of Washington is the mask mandates on "federal lands" and asked when it will be required and what the specifications will be. Houck stated that his understanding is that it was inside federal facilities, not outside on the lands. Kay reported that the executive order does include using masks on public lands and will be in line with CDC guidelines. It will be required if they can't maintain distance. If they maintain distance he doesn't believe they will need to. They are waiting for more guidance. It is more of an ask right now because they can't enforce it. Peterson asked how that will affect the Growler and if there will be an issue with that. Kugler stated they are working through the logistics at this time. They will maintain distance with waves, start with mask on at the starting line and asking them not to meet in groups.

Houck stated that they are coming up on the road closure program. Broadhead reported they are planning on closing gates on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Houck stated that within the community it has become a part of Spring and is now expected. They have had good compliance in the past but will see more outside visitors and they are working on making sure that it gets out there. Houck reported that there is a development committee

position that is open on the committee. At this time and in the past, they have struggled to get someone to cover that position and asked that if anyone knows of anyone to let him know.

#### **COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Houck doesn't have the information right now. They will put it on the next agenda to discuss at that time. Peterson asked that they have a document emailed to them so they can see all the prior members and to see if some of the subcommittees are still needed. They will also do the election of officers at that time.

#### **USFWS GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE RECOVERY PLAN AND RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY UPDATE**

Timberman reported that you can go to the ECOS website to look at all of the documents. The recovery plan is final. She owes a huge thank you to Pat Magee for his help and setting up the meeting. On February 24, 2021 they will talk about the plan and on the ground work.

The Gunnison Sage-grouse Biologist position is still open. Timberman is trying to cover Gunnison grouse and stated that if anyone needs anything to please reach out to her. They are working on a couple of lawsuits, CCA and Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan.

#### **GUNNISON RISING HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN**

Timberman reported that the Gunnison Rising HCP is at the regional office and is getting processed and will hopefully hit the federal register soon. There is a 60 day moratorium. Once the moratorium lifts it will move forward in the process.

Peterson would like to look at the document. Scott stated that he provided a copy of the HCP to the City of Gunnison last fall and it is posted on their website. It has changed since then but he hasn't seen it since the review at the regional office. Timberman reported that she will make sure she can share it and will send it out to the group.

#### **TOMICHI CREEK STATE PARK**

Houck gave a summary of what is going on and how it intersects with Gunnison Sage-grouse. One of the initiatives that Governor Polis is looking at the next generation of State Parks in Colorado and allowing people to bring ideas for new State Parks across the State. In the past, John Messner, prior commissioner, and Houck had worked on a concept on people's ability to access water and using the County's rivers and creeks for sporting and activities. They started looking at the resources that are in the Gunnison Valley and that's where the Tomichi Creek State Park took root.

They are seeing more visitors in the Valley who are coming for more developed activities, such as trails and water access and may not have outdoor skills or are not looking for a deep backcountry experience.

The land from the base of W Mountain that wraps around to the west and then to the south is all owned by the State of Colorado and Gunnison County. The concept is to look at the ability to see that section of land as a whole. The State has the Tomichi Creek State Wildlife Area to the east of W Mountain. The area of Tomichi Creek that goes through and below W Mountain has potential opportunities for habitat work that could benefit the stream. It is right next to town, conveniently located between Signal Peak and Hartman Rocks, heavily used recreational areas. The idea is to look at the opportunity to potentially have a State Park there and the development of a camping area there. The camping area would be north of the haul road and the observatory that is not encumbered by the FAA as far as development. Is that a good place that could handle the bigger RVs that are set for hookups. The unique aspect of this land from the State's perspective is that there is no need to purchase land. There are unique features around the area, between two BLM designated recreation areas, it's already connected to town with bike paths, it's close to white water park, next to the IBAR, next to the largest observatory in western Colorado and it's near town. It keeps people close to the amenities of town, provides the services visitors need to be able to functionally, safely and in a sanitary way have a camping experience. They are exploring it at this time but there are

things that could make it a problem, possibly sage-grouse or FAA rules and regulations . The County leases some of that area for agricultural use and believes that would continue. The idea is to take a cursory look at this time and see if the challenges could be addressed and have a community look. The STOR Committee is providing a letter of support for a tentative look, BOCC, and City of Gunnison also.

Navy asked how many acres it would be and said that Magee did a sage-grouse use study in that area and wanted to know if it would be good to redo that study. Houck stated that the acreage is expandable at this time. Right now, they are just looking at the concept and the idea.

Peterson asked how people would access from the camping area to the creek. Houck reported that there would be some type of developed access but will start with an assessment of what is there.

Reed asked what the process is. Houck stated that the first part of the process is high level questions for the area. If they get enough information they would then have discussions within the community. He isn't sure what the process is after that.

Diamond stated that the process is relatively open-ended at this time. At some point there will be enough nominations on the table to get more public input.

Magee stated that another group that may be really appreciative of this opportunity is the birding community. There are a lot of people that come the area to see the Gunnison Sage-grouse and want to camp but there really isn't a place to camp in April. There is also having the restoration piece and having feeders that could bring in world class birding opportunities.

**2021 PRE-SUMMIT WORKSHOP UPDATE**

Magee reported that it has been about a year since they were talking about another summit. They started planning it but that it will have to be a virtual event and decided to postpone it to 2022. In the meantime, they are trying to do something for 2021 and came up with the idea of the pre-summit. He got in touch with Timberman and they are coordinating it with the Recovery Implementation Strategy workshop. They put together a plan to have morning sessions February 24<sup>th</sup> doing the RIS workshop, which will be an update from Fish and Wildlife Service and CPW. Went over the tentative agenda for the morning. In the afternoon they will break out into groups to go over the priority one and two actions. Went over what each of the groups will go over and who will help lead.

Navy asked how many people have accepted their invite. Hearne reported that there are 84 responses at this time, 70 of those are interested in participating in the group. It will be fully virtual.

Magee reported that they are also working on doing a sage-grouse bumper sticker.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

**FUTURE MEETINGS:** Future meetings will occur by Zoom online meetings, unless changed for a specific reason.

3-17-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
4-21-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
5-19-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
6-16-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
7-21-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
8-18-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
9-15-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
10-20-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
11-17-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room

12-15-21	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor meeting room
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**ADJOURN:** The February 17, 2021 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 11:58 AM.

Minutes Prepared By: Rebecca Ricord, Gunnison County Community Development