AGENDA ITEM or FINAL CONTRACT REVIEW SUBMITTAL FORM

Agenda Item: Correspondence; US Fish and Wildlife Service; Requ

Action Requested: Discussion

Parties to the Agreement:

Term Begins: **Term Ends:** **Grant Contract #:**

Summary:

Please see the attached correspondence from the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Fiscal Impact: N/A

Submitted by: Katherine Haase **Submitter's Email Address:** khaase@gunnisoncounty.org

Finance Review: ○ Required ◉ Not Required

Comments:

Reviewed by: Discharge Date:

County Attorney Review: ○ Required ◉ Not Required

Comments:

Reveiwed by: Discharge Date: Certificate of Insurance Required

Yes ○ No ○

County Manager Review:

Comments:

Reveiwed by: Discharge Date: 12/15/2016

○ Consent Agenda ◉ Regular Agenda ○ Worksession Time Allotted: 5

Agenda Date: 12/20/2016

Revised April 2015

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Colorado Ecological Services

IN REPLY REFER TO:
FWS/R6/ES CO

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Mail Stop 65412
Denver, Colorado 80225-0486

Western Slope:
445 W. Gunnison Avenue
Suite 240
Grand Junction, Colorado 81501-5711

Received
County Administration
11/28/16

ES/CO: FWS/SSA/GUSG
TAILS 06E24100-2017-TA-0066

November 23, 2016

Jonathan Houck
Commissioner
Gunnison County
200 E. Virginia Avenue
Gunnison, Colorado 81230

Dear Commissioner Houck:

Please accept this letter as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service's) request for your agency's assistance as we develop a Species Status Assessment (SSA) for the Gunnison sage-grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*). The Gunnison sage-grouse was listed as threatened throughout its range under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in December of 2014. The SSA process will be improved if we are able to include the input and feedback of knowledgeable participants as "science advisors" (please see the attached project plan). Service biologists will ask the science advisors for any additional biological information they may have on the species; request reviews of draft documents; and, if needed, request specific science advisors to participate in an expert elicitation workshop. If we are able to collaborate with your organization and your staff, that will strengthen the SSA. We look forward to understanding how your agency would like to participate and who from your staff will be involved in the SSA.

As outlined in our attached project plan, we will use the Species Status Assessment (SSA) framework to guide our evaluation of Gunnison sage-grouse. This approach focuses on the species' needs or biological requirements at the scales of individuals, populations, meta-populations, and the entire species. We will apply the conservation biology principles of resilience, representation, and redundancy (collectively, the three Rs) to better understand Gunnison sage-grouse's current viability and the factors that may influence its future viability. The SSA is an explicit evaluation of current and potential trends in the species' viability based on biological conditions. The SSA is separate from the development of decision documents. The SSA produces the foundational information that informs all potential phases of species conservation. The SSA addresses:

1. The species biology and needs;
2. The current conditions relative to the species needs;
3. Existing, ongoing, and planned conservation measures; and
4. An examination of potential future scenarios.

The SSA provides the scientific background for future decisions made under the ESA, while also creating a clear, chain-of-logic that can be followed by biologists and non-biologists alike.

The development of the SSA will be led by Service biologists in close collaboration with a team of experts that includes our partners, subject matter experts, and stakeholders. The science advisors and stakeholders will not be asked to represent any particular agency position or to agree to group consensus. Experts are asked to participate by sharing their individual professional opinions to help us better capture and understand the biology and ecology of Gunnison sage-grouse. We seek broad representation and participation from science experts and stakeholders to ensure that we have the most comprehensive understanding of the species biology and ecology, of ongoing conservation efforts, and how differing efforts may influence future conservation scenarios. The collaboration process outlined in the attached project plan is flexible and will be adjusted as needed. For example, new members may be brought into the process if additional expertise or input is needed. Team members will be encouraged to contribute to the various teams as they are able.

Our goal is to be as inclusive as possible and we hope to have robust participation from science advisors in the SSA. However, we recognize staffing levels and workloads will dictate an individual's ability to participate. Therefore, science advisors will be welcome to participate in the SSA process to the degree to which they are able and willing.

Please be aware that any information provided will become a part of our record subject to potential public release (e.g., Freedom of Information Act). If your agency prefers to maintain certain information exclusively in your files, we would like to explore other options that would allow us to consider this data short of providing copies to the Service.

We expect you may have questions about the SSA, the project plan, and your participation. Please contact Drue DeBerry at 303–236–4774 or Gina Glenne at 970–628–7183 with your questions. We look forward to understanding how your agency would like to participate and which of your staff can or will be involved in the SSA process. If we've not heard from you by December 12, 2016, we will contact you to enquire about your participation and representatives.

Sincerely,

Drue DeBerry
Acting Colorado Supervisor

Enclosure(s)
Project Plan for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Species Status Assessment (SSA) Version 1

PROJECT PLAN FOR THE GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE SPECIES STATUS ASSESSMENT (SSA)
Version 1

INTRODUCTION

Gunnison sage-grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) are charismatic ground-dwelling birds known for their elaborate mating ritual where males congregate on leks (breeding grounds) and strut or "dance" to attract mates. The Gunnison sage-grouse is unique to seven populations in southwestern Colorado and a small portion of southeastern Utah. Like the closely related greater sage-grouse, the Gunnison sage-grouse is dependent on the sagebrush habitat that is found in this region. The Gunnison sage-grouse was listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under the Endangered Species Act on December 20, 2014. Critical habitat was also designated on December 20, 2014.

The Species Status Assessment (SSA) framework assembles the relevant scientific information about a species. The SSA provides an in-depth review of the species' biology and threats, an evaluation of its biological status, and an assessment of the resources and conditions needed to maintain the species' long-term viability, or the ability of a species to sustain populations in the wild over time. Viability is not a specific state, but rather a continuous measure of the likelihood that the species will sustain populations over time. The SSA framework produces an SSA Report that can be updated as new information becomes available. SSA Reports are used to support all functions of the Endangered Species Program - from candidate assessment to listing to consultations to recovery. As such, SSA Reports are living documents upon which other decision documents, such as petition findings, listing rules, recovery plans, and 5-year reviews, are based.

The information assembled through this SSA is intended to provide biological support in the near term for the Gunnison sage-grouse Recovery Plan Implementation (RPI, formerly Recovery Enhancement Vision (REV), recovery plan, Habitat Conservation Plans, and a General Conservation Plan. Importantly, the SSA itself is not a decision document. Instead, the SSA provides a review and analysis of the available information related to the biological status of the Gunnison sage-grouse. Recovery and conservation plan decisions will be made by the Service, based on the SSA and all relevant laws, regulations, and policies. The results of proposed decisions will be announced in the Federal Register, with appropriate opportunities for public input.

For the purpose of this SSA, we define viability as the ability of the species to sustain populations in sagebrush ecosystems over a biologically meaningful timeframe. Using the SSA framework, we consider what the species needs to maintain viability by characterizing the status of the species in terms of its resiliency, redundancy, and representation (together the 3Rs - Wolf et al. 2015).

- **Resiliency** is having sufficiently large and healthy populations for the species to withstand stochastic events (arising from random factors). We can measure resiliency based on metrics of population health; for example, birth versus death rates and population size, if that information exists. Resilient populations are better able to withstand stochastic disturbances such as random fluctuations in birth rates (demographic stochasticity), variations in rainfall (environmental stochasticity), or the effects of anthropogenic activities.

- **Representation** is having the breadth of genetic makeup of the species to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Representation can be measured through the genetic diversity within and among populations and the ecological diversity (also called environmental variation or diversity) of populations across the species' range. The more representation, or diversity, a species has, the more it is capable of adapting to changes (natural or human caused) in its environment. In the absence of species-specific genetic and ecological diversity information, we evaluate representation based on the extent and variability of habitat characteristics within the geographical range.

- **Redundancy** is having a sufficient number of resilient populations within each area of representation for the species to withstand catastrophic events (such as a rare destructive natural event or episodes involving many populations). Redundancy is about spreading the risk and can be measured through the duplication and distribution of populations across the range of the species. The greater the number of populations a species has distributed over a larger landscape, the better it can withstand catastrophic events.

To evaluate the biological status of the Gunnison sage-grouse both currently and into the future, we will assess a range of conditions to allow us to consider the species' resiliency, redundancy, and representation (the 3Rs). The SSA Report will provide a thorough assessment of biology and natural history and assesses demographic risks, threats, and limiting factors in the context of determining the viability and risks of extinction for the species.

COMPONENTS OF THE SSA REPORT

Species Biology and Needs – The species biology and needs will be evaluated and analyzed under the 3Rs at the individual level, for the seven populations, and at the species level.

Current Conditions – Current conditions will be evaluated under the 3Rs and will be analyzed at the individual level, for the seven populations, and at the species level. We will use existing information and are also hopeful that information from several ongoing modelling efforts will help inform our understanding of current conditions.

Conservation Measures Planned or Implemented – We will evaluate conservation measures that have been implemented or that are planned at the individual level, for the seven populations, and at the species level under the 3Rs. The SSA Report will identify and summarize all ongoing and planned conservation efforts including local working group efforts, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) efforts, county efforts (including the upcoming Action Investment Plan being developed by the counties), and others.

Potential Future Condition Scenarios – We will evaluate potential future conditions of the species by developing and analyzing several plausible, realistic future scenarios. We will employ scenarios to develop a range of potential future conditions; scenarios are likely to include varying levels of management and conservation actions. Scenarios will consider climate change projections, and protections included in the ongoing BLM Resource Management Plan Amendment, and other future conservation actions such as those being discussed through the upcoming Action Investment Plan. We are hopeful that modelling efforts currently in development will improve our understanding of the range of possible future conditions and the potential positive and negative impacts on the species.

PROJECT PLAN OBJECTIVES

Our intent with the SSA is to assemble a scientific document developed in close collaboration with a team that includes our partners and stakeholders. The purpose of the SSA Project Plan is to outline the expectations for the Gunnison sage-grouse SSA teams. The project plan outlines the overall approach that will be used to develop the SSA; the roles and responsibilities of participants; and identifies a preliminary schedule. The plan communicates an understanding of roles, expectations, and standard operating procedures in achieving the overall project goal. It also allows managers to understand the project schedule and agree to these expectations. **The plan will be updated, as necessary, during the SSA process.** The process is designed to be flexible and project plan updates will communicate any significant changes.

COLLABORATION WITH CONSERVATION PARTNERS

Using the SSA process, we will analyze scientific information within the context of, but distinct from, the Act's policy-guided decision-making process. We will follow a structured approach by analyzing and characterizing what the species had in the past, what the species has now, and what it will need in the future, at the individual, population, and species level. We will share results and products with all collaborators, as necessary or desired, throughout the process.

The development of the SSA will be conducted by Service biologists in collaboration with subject matter experts and stakeholders. The science experts and stakeholders will not be asked to represent any particular agency position or to agree to group consensus. Experts are asked to participate by sharing their individual professional opinions to help us better understand the biology and ecology of Gunnison sage-grouse. We seek broad representation and participation from science experts and stakeholders to ensure that we have the most comprehensive understanding of the species biology and ecology, of ongoing conservation efforts, and how these efforts may influence future outcomes. The collaboration process outlined here is flexible and will be adjusted as needed. For example, new members may be brought into the process as additional expertise or input is needed or becomes available. Team members are encouraged to contribute to the various teams as desired or as applicable.

The SSA staff work will be completed by the Core Team (see Table 1 for a list of all tentative team members) in cooperation with the Science Advisors Team, with additional experts and managers providing input and review as necessary. Coordination with external and internal partners will be provided by a Coordination team (initially comprised of members from the management and core team). Communication, including updates, will be conducted by the Engagement team which includes key members of the External Affairs program.

We expect as we move through the process, a Conservation Strategy Team will form to build on other efforts and evaluate ongoing and planned conservation efforts by different partners, including: local working groups, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Counties, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Action Investment Plan. The Conservation Strategy Team will help develop and analyze the potential future conservation scenarios.

The Management Team will provide management oversight and leadership direction throughout the status review process, including continuous outreach to partners. Updates will be provided to the Management Team every other month at the beginning of the regularly scheduled SSA call.

The Service will seek robust participation from conservation collaborators including CPW, UDWR, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the affected Counties, Academia, the National Park Service, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Other collaborators may include The Nature Conservancy, the Colorado State Land Board, the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), modelers, greater sage-grouse experts, state and local Cattlemen's Associations, agricultural producers, and others. We hope that collaborators will participate in the SSA process to the degree to which they are able and willing. Our goal is to be as inclusive as possible, allowing collaborators to contribute as little or as much as they are able. Conservation collaborators will be asked to contribute to and review all components of the SSA including the species biology and needs, current conditions, conservation measures planned or implemented, and potential future condition scenarios.

ROLE OF MODELLING

Ecological modelling will help increase our understanding of how Gunnison sage-grouse historically and currently utilize the sagebrush ecosystem and how individuals, populations, and the species may respond to conservation actions and threats in the future; and what the outcome of differing conservation strategies may be on future conditions. Current modelling efforts include CPW's seasonal habitat mapping for the Gunnison Basin, CPW and the Service "Combo mapping" that uses greater sage-grouse modeling approaches and treatment scenarios, USGS models under development, Colorado State University (CSU)/ CPW spatially explicit demographic modeling for the Gunnison Basin, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)/ Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV) sage-grouse and riparian/wet meadow area modeling. USGS has been retained specifically to support the SSA process and will be used to address specific SSA questions. We hope to incorporate all ongoing and past modelling efforts into the SSA.

PEER REVIEW

A draft of the Gunnison sage-grouse SSA Report will be peer reviewed by recognized scientific experts. Peer review will help ensure that we have properly used the best available information in conducting the assessment. Peer review is separate from the expert outreach discussed below, although there may be overlap in the individuals involved.

COMMUNICATION

We will include the viewpoints of the many interested parties in the SSA; therefore, transparent and regular communication is crucial for the success of this project. External communication is vital to the success of the shared conservation efforts underway for the conservation of the Gunnison sage-grouse. The Service is committed to providing the states, local governments, private landowners, Tribes, the public, media, and other partner updates and input related to the SSA and recovery planning. In Table 2, we indicate tasks and stages when we will reach out to key partners, including state conservation agencies, tribal partners, and federal agency partners, to be briefed and to provide input on certain tasks immediately prior to their completion. We will use multiple avenues for communication and coordination, such as: 1) in-person and virtual meetings with partners and stakeholders, and 2) data call and SSA participation letters to our state, local, and Tribal conservation partners.

PROJECT TEAMS

Table 1. List of people involved in the development of the Gunnison sage-grouse species status assessment and REV recovery plan. Collaborators are welcome to contribute on any team (except the core and management teams) as needed or desired. This table represents a conceptual plan only.

Type of Team/Group	FWS	Partners
Overall Project Coordination and Oversight	Gina Glenne with Ann Timberman and Drue DeBerry support	
Core Team	Mark Brennan – COFO Creed Clayton - COFO Gina Glenne - COFO Craig Hansen - RO Tara Nicolaysen - HQ Unknown (vice: Martini) – Utah FO Unknown (vice: Snider)– COFO	
Modelling Support		Cameron Aldridge, USGS and CSU

Type of Team/Group	FWS	Partners
		Sara Oyler-McCance, USGS Julie Heinrichs, USGS Jonathan Cummings - USGS
Science Advisors - members will be identified by agencies or counties, but our request will suggest names and emphasize the need for science (not policy) representatives	Lief Weichman Pat Diebert Kevin Doherty PFW – Heather Johnson, Bill Noonan and/or Corey Kanuckle	Pat Magee – Western State University Jonathan Cummings - USGS X and X - CPW X - UDWR X – BLM X - FS X - NPS X – NRCS Tribe X, X - County Representatives
Coordination Team	Members of the Core, Engagement, and Management Teams	Could include agencies when internal coordination is needed within an agency
Engagement Team	RO External Affairs (Serena Baker), Drue DeBerry, Ann Timberman	
Management Team	Ann Timberman - COFO Drue DeBerry-COFO New Supervisor - CO, KS Nicole Alt /Mike Thabault – RO ARD Seth Wiley - RO	
Other Expert Contributions (as needed)	Core Team will arrange with Engagement Team	TNC County biologists Other agency biologists Other modelers/PVA experts Greater sage-grouse experts
Conservation Strategy Team	Drue DeBerry, Ann Timberman, Mark Brennan, Gina Glenne	County and State representatives
Stakeholder Outreach	Core Team will arrange with Engagement Team	Stockgrowers/Agricultural Producers Counties Local Working Groups Other stakeholder groups

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The bulleted items below outline the responsibilities of each Team. The expert elicitation process and stakeholder outreach is also briefly described below.

SSA Core Team (Service Biologists)

- Attend and actively participate in SSA Team meetings and phone conferences.
- Commit to meeting all assigned deadlines for areas of responsibility and be willing to ask for assistance to ensure deadlines are met.
- Assemble data, construct conceptual models of 3R needs, identify and assess threats, conduct necessary SSA analysis in coordination with the Science Advisors, Modeling Support, and other teams.
- Prepare first draft SSA reports and documentation.
- Identify peer reviewers and prepare documents for reviewers.
- Review and prepare other documents, as needed (outreach materials, briefing papers, etc.).
- Coordinate with species modelling leads.
- Provide available data to modelling leads for model development and/or geospatial analyses.
- Keep FWS SSA Management Team informed of progress and issues.
- Coordinate and communicate with the Regional and HQ ES Staff.
- Immediately bring any issues of concern to the attention of the overall project coordinator and SSA Management Team.

Modelling Support

- Work with the Service to develop a project plan.
- Provide input to the SSA team (including participation in regular calls, when needed).
- Communicate the progress and timeline for completing models.

SSA Science Advisors

- Provide technical input to the development of the SSA.
- Review SSA products.
- Attend and actively participate in applicable meetings and participate in conference calls.
- Provide timely input into model development.

Coordination Team

- Invite Science Advisors.
- Coordinate and communicate with the Regional and HQ ES Staff.

Engagement Team

- Assist the coordination team.
- Coordinate and communicate with the Regional and HQ ES Staff.
- Assist in stakeholder and expert elicitation processes.

SSA Management Team

- Assist in facilitating the involvement of partners in the SSA process.
- Manage budgetary issues.
- Attend (or send a delegate to) SSA Team meetings or conference calls, as requested.
- Support Core Team as needed.
- Assist in timely resolution of any issues that arise within the SSA Core or Advisory Teams or with external interested parties.

- Review and surname SSA and REV recovery plan products.

Expert Outreach

- As we work through the process we will identify specific items needing further discussion or review by additional experts.
- We will determine if an expert elicitation workshop is needed or if experts can be consulted individually.

Stakeholder Outreach

- Stakeholder outreach will be conducted at critical steps in the process. For example when the recovery outline is completed, input is needed for modelling efforts, or when various components of the SSA are completed.
- The intent of this outreach will be to alert stakeholders to where we are in the process and to explain the science driving the process.

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Table 2. Schedule for SSA Development. We will provide an opportunity for key recovery partners, including state conservation agencies, tribal partners, and federal agency partners, to be briefed and to provide inputs.

SSA Activities/Products	FWS Lead	Task Manager	Expected Start	Expected Completion
Recovery Outline	Gina	Mark	1/2015	1/2017
Invite and Identify Science Advisors	Gina	Gina	10/2016	10/2016
BLM Resource Management Plan Amendment (included as a reminder)	Kurt	BLM with FWS review and input	3/2014	ROD expected late 2017
Species Needs	Mark			
Individual Needs		Mark	11/2015	1/2017
Population Needs		Mark	11/2015	1/2017
Species Needs		Creed	10/2015	1/2017
Species needs module/report, if needed				
Current Conditions	Mark			
Prepare threats table		Mark with core team assist	3/2016	2/2017
Prepare current condition summary report		Mark?	7/2016	2/2017
Conservation Measures Planned or Implemented *Summary Report*	Gina	Mark and Ann	Ongoing	Ongoing
Potential Future Condition Scenarios	Creed/Craig			
Future Projections / Modelling Products Needs				10/2016
Future Projections / Modelling Products			Ongoing	Ongoing
Modelling Products (separate project plan)				
Prepare future scenarios report			Est. 2/2019	
Peer review	Craig	Craig	TBD	

Timeline Disclaimer
Our intent is to move forward incrementally with the work associated with this planning effort by assigning work at each biweekly call. Dates in the above table are tentative and subject to change. This is a living working document that will be updated as the process continues.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP)

- We will conduct biweekly phone calls every other Thursday. On each call tasks will be assigned that need to be completed by the next biweekly call.
- We will share documents on our sharepoint site (https://doiportal.doi.net/fws/Portal/gsg/_layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Home.aspx?RootFolder=%2Ffws%2FPortal%2Fgsg%2FShared%20Documents%2FGUSG%20SSA%20REV&FolderCTID=0x0120006757A25E746FCD40850ED21AF651C40B&View=%7BA772E516%2D897B%2D40B8%2D8D8C%2D4E5A92487FCE%7D) and collaborate using these documents.
- All files will be named according to the Grand Junction Field Offices filing conventions (these are also found on the sharepoint site).
- Documents will follow Federal Register citations (including page numbers) and formatting, except documents will be single spaced (also posted on sharepoint).
- Emails relating to the project will include "GUSG SSA" at the beginning of the subject line.