AGENDA ITEM or FINAL CONTRACT REVIEW SUBMITTAL FORM

Agenda Item: Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) Federa

Action Requested: Motion

Parties to the Agreement:

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

Summary:

The attached letter was drafted by Jim Cochran.

Fiscal Impact: $25,000 match

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

Finance Review: (●) Required ( ) Not Required

Comments:
If approved, will have to add to 2015 budget amendment process.

Reviewed by: GUNCOUNTY1\lNienhueser Discharge Date: 7/31/2015

County Attorney Review: (●) Required ( ) Not Required

Comments:
ok db 7/31/15

Reveiwed by: GUNCOUNTY1\dBaumgarten Discharge Date: 7/31/2015 Certificate of Insurance Required Yes ( ) No (●)

County Manager Review:

Comments:

Reveiwed by: GUNCOUNTY1\khaase Discharge Date: 7/31/2015

( ) Consent Agenda (●) Regular Agenda ( ) Worksession Time Allotted: 10 minutes

Agenda Date: 8/4/2015

Revised April 2015

August 4, 2015

Elyse Ackerman-Casselberry
Northwest Regional Manager
Colorado Department of Local Affairs

Dear Ms. Ackerman-Casselberry:

Thank you for your discussion of this financial assistance program with our Wildlife Coordinator. As he explained, Gunnison County is a Cooperating Agency (CA) in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Gunnison sage-grouse Rangewide Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. That process, when completed could result in the amendment of nine Resource Management Plans (RMP's) in southwest Colorado and two in southeast Utah, across ten Colorado counties and two Utah counties.

Gunnison County is the focal point for Gunnison sage-grouse across the range of the species. Approximately 80% of the entire species is estimated to reside in Gunnison County on approximately 430,000 acres of occupied habitat, of which 67% is federal lands, primarily managed by BLM.

Gunnison County has been involved with Gunnison sage-grouse conservation since the first Local Work Group was formed in 1995. In 2005 Gunnison County created a stand-alone Gunnison sage-grouse conservation program staffed through a contract with a professional wildlife biologist, and supported by County administrative, legal, and GIS expertise. Gunnison County has invested well over $1 million in our sage-grouse program, which has included extensive coordination with the federal land management agencies, the other affected counties in southwest Colorado and southeast Utah, and the states of Colorado and Utah.

The Gunnison sage-grouse was listed as a threatened species in late 2014, which has necessitated considerable additional involvement by the County to address the issues the listing has created for our community. The BLM EIS process is, by definition, a comprehensive, extensive process, that if not participated in fully, with the necessary expertise, has the potential to negatively impact the residents and visitors of Gunnison County in significant ways. Potential impacts include restriction of uses of public lands for grazing by our ranching community, development of mineral resources and recreation on those public lands.

As the CA with the most land area involved and arguably, the most to lose if the EIS process is not completed in a sound, scientific, collaborative manner, Gunnison County has committed extensive resources to the process. Unfortunately, the expertise necessary to analyze and comment on all parts of the proposed EIS cannot, and does not, reside with one or two staff members and a single contractor. Therefore we are requesting financial assistance from your Federal Lands Coordination program to provide additional expertise to appropriately accomplish plan level analysis and comments, to provide more opportunity for Gunnison County to engage the public at our level in this process, and to

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collaborate with the State, other federal agencies and other stakeholders, including counties, in this process.

Specifically, while our primary contractor provides the wildlife expertise necessary for our participation in the process, we anticipate the need for expertise in rangeland conservation, grazing management, recreation, and BLM policies and regulations to provide accurate, concise plan analysis and associated comments to BLM. We also anticipate the need to work with our private stakeholders during our CA participation, but particularly when the draft EIS is made public early in 2016. We have made preliminary contact with several local consultants that we know have the attributes and experience we believe are necessary. They are interested in working with us if we can acquire the funding necessary. We propose to match grant funds with County funds paid to our primary wildlife biology contractor on a dollar for dollar basis.

As this EIS process is ongoing, and the BLM anticipates releasing a full CA EIS draft in mid-August for a 30-day review, we are requesting an Administrative Grant for $24,750 ($90/hour consultant fees X 275hrs). We would like to get these consultants on board and working with our staff by early August in order to accomplish a full and meaningful review of the draft EIS and provide comments to BLM accordingly.

Thank you for your attention to our request.

Sincerely,

Paula Swenson
Chairperson, Gunnison County BoCC

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