

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 19, 2022**

The January 19, 2022 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was conducted by Zoom.

Committee Members Present:

Voting Members:

Nathan Seward, Chairperson, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Liz Smith, Vice-Chairperson, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Greg Peterson, Stockgrowers' Association
Peter Caloger, Community At-Large
Jon Kaminsky, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Tim Kugler, Recreation

Non-Voting Members

Others in the Audience:

Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Jessica Young, Western Colorado University (WCU)
Whit Blair, US Fish and Wildlife Service (UFWS)
Brandon Diamond, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
John Scott, Scott Resource Management Service
Dayle Funka, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Jessica Frey National Park Service (NPS)
Amber Wilson, Saguache County
Suzie Parker, Forest Service
Daniel Olsen, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Staff Members Present:

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District, Wildlife Biologist
Shannon Frias, Gunnison County Community Development

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the January 19, 2022 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:02 A.M.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Agenda approved as presented

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 15, 2021 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved:** by Navy and seconded by Smith to approve the December 15, 2021 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Smith has been tracking the support that agencies and organizations have expressed toward the cheatgrass coordinator position. There is just a little more than \$31,000 committed. This illustrates great interagency support. Smith will discuss with the county manager where the county will come in. Smith feels

it is time to start looking at what this position will look like. Define the role and how they are going to pursue it. Hopefully in the next few weeks the logistical framework can be put together to get it off the ground.

Peterson asked Smith if the Stockgrowers offered financial support when she spoke with them. Smith stated that the letter from the Stockgrowers offered support and reinforced the importance of the coordinator position, no financial support. Peterson responded that he will speak to the Stockgrowers about financial support.

Blair talked to the committee about the infrastructure bill funding that would align well with the cheatgrass efforts. US Fish and Wildlife Service, our region specifically, have a potential for a good amount of \$ coming from the infrastructure bill for sage grouse habitat. Blair is working on a proposal. Blair is most interested in cheatgrass Gunnison Basin and range wide. Therefore, he wouldn't be able to provide money for the coordinator position but for the infrastructure around the position. Blair is interested in getting private land involved.

Seward asked Smith if she was able to look into the mural and adding sage grouse. Smith responded that she has not. Smith commented that she has it on her list this week.

Diamond asked the committee about the Waunita Watchable Site Subcommittee and if they need to meet in the short term. Seward answered that he believes they are ok in the short term. Seward suggested that they reach out to Magee. Seward believes that they will have some closure dates and it would be good to figure out those dates. Peterson believes they set 2-3 years of policy on closure dates.

Childers talked to her supervisor regarding the cheatgrass position. It is still unclear at this point. There will be in kind support.

Olsen mentioned that the Regional Conservation Partners Program may be able to assist with the coordinator position. Wanted to mention that they could look into technical services providers and support that position.

RAVEN DEPREDATION CARCASS MITIGATION

Diamond explained to the committee that last spring there was a conversation with Marlene Crosby on the disposal of big game carcasses. There was a need to have something in place for CDOT to dispose of carcasses. Created a low-cost option for CDOT to dispose of the carcasses at the landfill. County Commissioners were supported of the disposal to be at the landfill. Magee was interested in talking about this at the Sage Grouse Summit and have it as an agenda item. It will be a change on how we operate in the county. Disposal of game carcasses to the landfill to stop scavenger concentration in one area.

Seward summarized great opportunity to dispose of carcasses in landfill at a discounted rate. Through observations, predators are being subsidized from the carcasses. Peterson commented that this discussion is timely because of the attraction from wolves and where they may be released. Young commented that one of the first steps is to understand what works for ranchers in terms of how they prefer to deal with carcasses and if they are interested in partnering to help deal with the predators. Navy asked how the carcasses are managed at the landfill. Is it buried and how do they keep predators from getting to it. Diamond responded that Marlene Crosby has it set up well at the landfill to bury the carcasses. Peterson commented that from a rancher's view, timing is the most important issue. The removal of the carcass needs to be removed that day or the next due to logistics. Young asked Peterson what the normal practices are now. Peterson responded that most people take them to a dead pile, somewhere isolated. Seward let the committee know that properties that are enrolled in the CCAA agreement, the Parks & Wildlife does have funding to help with the cost of disposal. Seward is willing to draft a letter to CCAA participants to let them know that if they have a carcass and can take it to the landfill, Parks & Wildlife can cover the cost. Seward asked if Diamond could reach out to Jason Kibler with the City of Gunnison and invite him to the next meeting. Diamond asked if it is worth in getting someone else from the City of Gunnison also to touch

on a few more topics, ie. Predators, cheatgrass. It was suggested that it may be the new mayor of Gunnison who the committee meets with. Smith stated that she will reach out to the new mayor.

CHEATGRASS AND COORDINATOR POSITION UPDATE

Smith stated we are at a point that we need to define what our needs are and what the scope of the work is. Do we need a subcommittee? If we want to fill this position this year we need to map out what the needs are. Seward used the wetlands model as an example: he suggested that a small core group is used. Seward doesn't believe we need a subcommittee. Scott recommended that it is given back to the technical subcommittee meeting to create a scope of work. Seward agreed. Peterson would like to be a part of the coordinator discussion. Navy asked if the status of the Sage Grouse account was figured out and account if it can be used for the coordinator position. Smith responded that the county wanted to make sure they are not carrying this by themselves.

DEVELOPMENT FLOWCHART

Seward asked Rummel to walk the committee through the development flowchart. Last year discussed challenges on infrastructure development. A lot of steps involved. Shows the steps to take if a development is proposed in Sage Grouse range. The steps are different if you are on private or Federal lands. Rummell worked with Gunnison County to make sure she is capturing the complete process. The flowchart walks you through if you are developing on private or Federal land. The purpose of the flowchart is to let people know the process can be lengthy. But there are ways to decrease the timeline. Seward added that the chart is beneficial to help those developing to know the review process and what they can do to decrease the time. Rummel added that the flow chart will be available through the Community Development office. Young asked if the answer to one of questions should be something about the CCAA? Seward stated that was one of his early comments as well but it was decided to not add that wording specifically. Navy asked about the comment on the flowchart that states "The Federal Agency will provide you with the estimated length of time before the construction can begin." Does this mean that there is a guarantee that you will be able to build? Shouldn't there be an option for denial? Blair explained that they cannot use Section 7 to deny but can persuade with it. Maybe the language needs to be changed a little because the wording does imply that construction is going to happen.

GUNNISON COUNTY SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN DISCUSSION AND UPDATE

Seward stated that at the last meeting they completed action item #6.

Action Item #7 Programmatic Environmental Assessments for Habitat Projects. Objective: Habitat Monitoring & Reporting

Seward stated that under accomplishments: Development of Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA), should stay and stand alone. It was suggested to add RRP, Restoration Recovery Projects, specific to BLM. Blair will look into the RRP and get specifics. He will edit the document or email Rummel. Both Blair and Childers suggested that the RRP be looked at more in depth and added once wording is correct. Seward suggested leaving the remaining wording as is until the RRP can be looked at. Current Status will stay as ongoing. Ranking is currently High and Seward recommended it stay as is. The committee agreed.

Action Item #8 Manage Priority Areas. Objective: Habitat/Regulation & Incentives/Information & Education

Seward commented that the responsibility of the sub-projects listed in activity is unclear. Scott offered some historic perspective. This action item was a push from US Fish and Wildlife Service. It was all about prioritizing where development would occur. 8A-8E lead to 8F trying to prioritize. When the habitat prioritization tool was developed most of action 8 did not get followed through with. The habitat prioritization tool

lead toward helping with the County’s land use change permitting process.

Navy suggested that action item 8 could be marked as complete and a new action item #8 may be created with different language. The thought is that the sub-projects in action item 8 have been done but named something different. Seward asked Scott if he agrees the habitat prioritization tool accomplished action item 8. Scott responded, yes. Scott sent recommendation to the Seward and Rummel regarding the action description to action item #8. Rummel added the recommendations to the working action item plan. Seward suggested that due to the time and the information that was given the committee should take time to read through the recommendations outside of the meeting and come back with comments/suggestions. Smith shared the document with everyone and they should be able to add track changes or make comments.

Smith asked Seward if he had suggestions on how the committee members should think through action item #8 since there are a lot of recommendations. Seward commented that the current wording in action item 8 is a comprehensive view of all of the assessments and it is fine. He would encourage everyone to look at each assessment and provide feed back there. Seward said that he believes the habitat prioritization tool is an overarching accomplishment. It is time update that tool. Action item 8 is ongoing. Not a super high priority but more medium.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

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

02-16-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
03-16-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
04-20-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
05-18-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
06-15-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
07-20-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
08-17-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
09-21-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
10-19-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
11-16-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
12-21-22	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The January 19, 2022 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:42 PM

Minutes Prepared By: Shannon Frias, Administrative Assistant III, Community Development