

**GUNNISON COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, July 21, 2022**

The Gunnison County Planning Commission conducted a regular meeting in the Planning Commission Meeting Room in the Blackstock Government Center, 221 N. Wisconsin, Gunnison, Co. and on Zoom **Present:**

Chairperson- Laura Daniels	Director of Community and Economic Development-
Commissioner-Matt Schwartz	Cathie Pagano
Commissioner-Fred Niederer	Planner/ Manager of Administrative Services- Beth Baker
Commissioner- Julie Baca	Others present as listed in text

Absent: Commissioners Sovick and Appleton

ZOOM: Commissioner Baca

With a quorum present Chairperson Daniels opened the July 21, 2022 regular meeting of the Planning Commission.

Moved by Commissioner Schwartz seconded by Commissioner Niederer to approve the Planning Commission meeting minutes, dated July 7, 2022. The motion passed unanimously.

Unscheduled citizens: None

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) presented their most current data concerning wildlife migration corridors in Gunnison County, the effects of development in those areas, and other related information.

With a quorum present Chairperson Daniels opened the work session

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, terrestrial biologist, Kevin Blecha gave a presentation. He noted the Gunnison Basin has outstanding biodiversity and great significance in Colorado. It is partially due to sagebrush and lower elevations. It has been intensely cultivated for crops.

The Upper Gunnison Basin hosts several iconic species including elk, big horn sheep, moose, river otter, Gunnison sage grouse, Canadian lynx, beaver, and pronghorn. The hunting and harvesting of the free-range animals yield approximately 560,000 lbs. of meat annually.

The Department of the Interior order #3362 directs the states to maintain big game migration corridors.

The temporal distribution of the elk and deer population note a record fawn production.

Approximately 80% to 90% of the deer and elk populations migrate annually. The elk will move through Gunnison up to the Saguache Valley.

He said there are a multiple threats including, Nascent Cheat Grass, tourism, residential development, roads and increasing traffic, lack of wildfires, long term drought, and increasing pressure from recreation.

The agency has been using heat maps because they are more biologically realistic and socially acceptable. The comments are being used to reflect new big game spatial data.

He added conserving the Gunnison Basin is critical. Also, recognizing CPW is advisory and not regulatory.

CPW Brandon Diamond said post Covid, things are changing quickly. They are using the most informed science, and data driven information possible. The needs of wildlife are not always the same as the human population. Director of Community and Economic Development Cathie Pagano added the Community Development department has been having tough conversations with applicants in heavily traveled migration areas. Regulations concerning development in sensitive wildlife areas is included in the regulations.

Pagano explained 35-acre development in Gunnison County poses a challenge to meeting wildlife goals. We have limited influence over that development.

Blecha and Diamond discussed the construction of wildlife crossings over highways. There are no immediate plans for crossing structures. It is a CDOT issue. It could be a collaborative, and cost sharing issue. Gunnison County is not a high priority. The cost of an over pass is \$12 million dollars per over pass, some are higher than that. They are very effective, the wildlife deaths decreased from 100 animals to three using one crossing. They are trying to prioritize Gunnison County.

Diamond explained wildlife responds to humans. Deer and elk are in our backyards, and highways but they are small populations, and they are habituate. The sale of big game licenses provides funding for management.

Diamond added the best time to do projects are when other highway improvement projects are being done.

Diamond suggested developing a model similar to the Sage-grouse model. The County STOR committee is working on comparing and contrasting models for all wildlife. Chaffe county has been doing that work. A state grant to Chaffee, Gunnison and Lake counties is being used to provide better and improved data.

Commissioner Daniels asked what are the best opportunities going forward to fulfill the mission. Diamond said as we build a more comprehensive modeling tool, the long-term planning and strategizing will be done earlier. The data will continue to facilitate better outcomes.

The meeting of the Gunnison County Planning Commission was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

/S/ Beth Baker

Gunnison County Community and Economic Development