**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE**
**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**
**December 19, 2012**

The December 19, 2012 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was held in the Commissioners' Meeting Room in the Courthouse at 200 E. Virginia, Gunnison CO 81230.

**Committee Members Present:**
Voting:
Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson, National Park Service (NPS)
J Wenum, Vice-Chairperson, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW)
Eric Ferchau, At Large, Development Community
David Wiens, At-large Recreation Community
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Chris Bove, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Patty Gelatt, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), via conference call
Matt Vasquez, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)

Non-voting:
Charlie Sharp – US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Alternate, Via conference call
Allen Roper, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA) Alternate
Lee Spann, Public At-Large Alternate
Russell Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Alternate

**Staff Members Present:**
Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III

Others present as listed in text.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson Stahlnecker called the December 19, 2012 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:03 am.

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

**PUBLIC NOTICE CONFIRMED:** Stahlnecker verified that proper legal public notice had occurred.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:** No modifications to the agenda were requested. The agenda was approved as circulated. Cochran explained to the Committee an email on rescheduling because USFWS Director Ashe will be calling in to the meeting at 12:30 pm. Due to the weather he could not travel to Gunnison.

**ON THE PHONE:**

- Sam Staley, BLM
- Andrew Archuleta, San Luis Valley Field Office
- Luke Colbean, Norwood Ranger District

**IN AUDIENCE:**

- Kristy Murphy, BLM
- Pat Magee, Sis-ka-dee
- Warren Wilcox (Attended meeting for the USFWS discussion)
- John Scott (Attended meeting for the USFWS discussion)
- Allen Moores, Gunnison County Public Works Assistant Director

**APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 14, 2012 MEETING MINUTES:** **Moved** by Wenum to accept the November 14, 2012 meeting minutes as amended, seconded by Navy. Motion carried.

**Committee Report:**

**RANGEWIDE STEERING COMMITTEE:** Wenum informed the Committee that Griffin received the letter from the Committee and she will send out a doodle poll in late January to the Rangewide Steering Committee to start the process of scheduling a joint meeting with the Strategic Committee

**MOSQUITO CONTROL DISCUSSION UPDATE:** Cochran informed the Committee that a small group (J Wenum, Kevin Alexander, Eric McPhail, Chris Kruthaupt and Cochran) have been tasked by the BoCC to provide recommendations on mosquito control. There will be a series of meetings; the first meeting will be in January.

**CCA; BLM:** St. George informed the Committee that due to the weather, BLM will distribute the final CCA document electronically. St. George informed the Committee that there was a delay with the document due to the Biological Assessment (BA). Staley will send a final version to Sharp. Gelatt announced that the USFWS intends to return comments to BLM by the end of January, and in the meantime the USFWS will be in contact. After BLM receives/acts on the comments, the document will go back to the USFWS for conferencing, and then a formal conference will occur within 135 days.

**HABITAT PRIORITIZATION TOOL**: Keeping the tool current was discussed. Cochran informed the committee that the "keeper" of the "tool" is currently Gunnison County GIS Manager Mike Pelletier, because of software and GIS capabilities. The Technical Subcommittee developed the tool and Cochran recommended that they meet to review the tool, determine if updates are necessary and determine an update process.

**CPW; LETTER THAT THE COMMITTEE SENT:** Cochran mentioned the letter that the Committee sent to Brandon Diamond, CPW, regarding the Draft Mule Deer Management Plan. Cochran informed the Committee that this process is underway.

**CPW; COLORADO HABITAT EXCHANGE:** Wenum informed the Committee that there is a state wide program as a result of oil and gas extraction affecting the greater sage-grouse. The Committee was encouraged to read the packet materials provided on the program. This program is in the conceptual stage.

**CCAA COMPARISON:** Cochran informed the Committee that in the packet materials there is a comparison sheet created by Christina Santana to help clarify questions about differences and similarities with NRCS's Working Lands for Wildlife programs and the USFWS Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) and Safe Harbor Agreements (SHAs).

**CPW; HABITAT CONFERENCE**: This conference is statewide in January in Grand Junction. The Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) holds an annual conference to discuss common issues and concerns about what is going on "on the ground". Good opportunity for the Committee to attend.

**CPW; SEED WAREHOUSE:** There is a new warehouse in Delta, CO that is now a source of native seed. Wenum informed the Committee that the seed will be used for reclamation activities and restoration projects. Wenum informed the Committee that there is a large need for seed, especially during wildfire seasons. Wenum commented that it is nice to have a local entity that can provide seed quickly.

**USFS; SAGE-GROUSE REMOTE SENSING PROJECT;** Vasquez informed the Committee he will know if the effort was successful in July. If it was successful, the next step will be to apply the project to the entire Gunnison Basin.

**HANG GLIDING ACCESS:** Matt Brown, Local Hang Gliding Community was present for the meeting. Brown handed out paperwork to the Committee members to review. Brown explained that the Hang Gliding Community is attempting to get access on Big Mesa (County Road 32) while the road is closed. Brown gave a presentation to the committee, showing the access they are requesting. Brown informed the Committee that they know in advance when they will be heading up because they monitor the weather, and they will go up after the lek time in the mornings. Matt explained that they will take off and land within a 1 ½ acre area.

Cochran commented that other activities are restricted to performing their activities after 9am behind the road closures. Time of day is a good way to control the impact. This road had a mud closure on it before there was a sage-grouse closure. The road has to be dry, weather has to be good, and the number of trips can be limited. Cochran commented that the impacts are hard to measure now, yet over years they will be able to measure the impacts, and the road damage may need to be mitigated. The Committee discussed if they should recommend access. No action was taken.

**GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE FESTIVAL:** The Committee reviewed the packet materials regarding the Sage-grouse Festival. The Committee reviewed the budget and the resume submitted by Susan Bresney. Sharp researched that USFWS has some internal USFWS money to contribute towards the Festival. BLM has some money to contribute, and may also be able to provide office space. The Committee discussed that they do not want to lose momentum with

the success of the past Festivals. Ferchau announce that they have money with Remax for a student internship. Wiens informed the Committee that City of Gunnison Event Coordinator John Messner has experience and may be available. Wiens will mention this to Messner and see if he is interested.

The Committee agreed to apply for funding from the Landfill Mitigation Fund in the amount of "up to" $4,000 for hiring the event coordinator. Cochran will apply for the USFWS money and the Mitigation Fund on behalf of the Committee. Magee commented that Sis-ka-dee would like to contribute money to the Festival as well. **Moved** by St. George, seconded by Peterson to approve Cochran to write a grant to the Mitigation Fund, to not exceed $4,000 Grant to be written so that funds go to Gunnison Trails as the fiscal agent, if necessary. Chamberland and Navy abstained from the motion. Motion passed.

**CITY OF GUNNISON NON-MOTORIZED TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING**: City of Gunnison Director of Community Development Steve Westbay gave a presentation to the Committee. Westbay referenced a number of large maps he had on display during his presentation.

Westbay mentioned they are looking for organizational or managerial comments. The grid system that Gunnison is developed on was created in the 1880s. During Gunnison Rising it was discovered that Gunnison was about 80% built out. Westbay mentioned that there is roughly 20 more years of development left.

Westbay gave a presentation to the Committee regarding the future development planning for Gunnison and future trails for Gunnison. Westbay informed the Committee that there is a draft plan. The link to it on the City's website. Westbay asked the Committee to think about the habitat impact for future development in Gunnison. The Committee was asked to review the plan and provide comments. The City wants to get this finalized by early February.

**USFWS; PROPOSED & FINAL RULE:** USFWS Director Dan Ashe, USFWS Regional Director Noreen Walsh, and USFWS Deputy Assistant Regional Director Nicole Alt were present for the discussion via conference call. The final rule will be announced on 9/30/2013. What would life be like after the rule? The rule ensures that agencies do not disrupt the species.

The Gunnison Basin sage-grouse population is not the only population that needs to be conservation action, but it is the most significant. Director Ashe opined that if the Gunnison Basin population cannot be maintained and grown then the probability of conserving the species is diminished. The USFWS is focused on the Gunnison Basin population, and the goal is to preserve the species into the future. There was a discussion on why the USFWS is more focused on the Gunnison population and not satellite populations. The seven populations are highly fragmented; six of the seven are isolated and very small (<200 birds). The USFWS would like to work closely with the various agencies to encourage stabilization in those populations. After the listing the USFWS will develop a Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan will include recovery objectives. Ashe commented that if people are signed up in the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances program, they are exempt from the "take" requirement of the law. Ashe commented that in the next year it would be beneficial to increase participation in the CCAA.

Westbay asked the USFWS if they will address the mapping systems that are being utilized. USFWS commented that urban areas will be left out and exempt.

The data sets that are being used to designate critical habitat come from the Rangewide Conservation Plan and are using the GIS mapping system. The USFWS informed the Committee that they do not consider grazing a threat to the species. The Proposed Rule will be submitted to the Federal Register on 12/30/2012. The public comment period begins once published. There will be a 60 day review period. Local meetings will begin in Gunnison on 1/23/2013.

**ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMITTEE POST-LISTING:** Spann asked the Committee to think about what the role of the Committee will be after a listing. Spann commented that the Committee was created to assist in the preservation of the bird (Gunnison Sage-grouse). Cochran commented that if the bird is listed the role of this Committee will change, and then the BOCC has to decide on what the new roles will be, if any. Cochran commented that there is still time to have an influence on the final rule.

Gelatt commented that the Committee does have a very important role on whether the bird is listed or not. After the listing, the role of the Committee will have a more important role of enforcing preservation. The Committee discussed that they are "on the ground" and still critical in conservation implementation. Gelatt informed the Committee that once the bird is listed FWS doesn't just step in and take over.

The Committee discussed that building stronger commitment with the satellite populations is crucial. They also discussed the difference between threatened and endangered.

**GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE LEK ACCESS – 2013 SEASON:** The application period is open, and the application and process is on the County website. Cochran informed the Committee that he has received one inquiry from a tour group, not a photographer. The information on the County website is up to date and current.

**PREDATOR CONTROL:** Gunnison County Public Works Assistant Director Allen Moores announced that he is going to resign from the Predator Control Subcommittee until there is consensus on issues. Moores informed the Committee that Gunnison County is going to step up their control efforts at the landfill this spring on ravens.

**FUTURE MEETINGS:**

| *Date* | *Time* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|
| January 23, 2013 | 11a-3p | Regular Meeting |
| January 23, 2013 | 5p-7p | Meeting with the USFWS; Public Meeting in Gunnison |
| February | 10a-2p | Regular Meeting |

**ADJOURN:** **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The December 19, 2012 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:47 pm.

**CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL:**

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Ken Stahlnecker, Chairperson

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Greg Peterson, Secretary

Minutes Prepared By:

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Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III