GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
April 24, 2013

The April 24, 2013 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)
Sue Navy, High Country Citizens' Alliance (HCCA)
Phil Chamberland, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC)
David Wiens, At-large Recreation Community
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
John Murphy, United States Forest Service (USFS)
Linda Joseph, Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Saguache BOCC)
Patty Gelatt, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Brian St. George, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association (GCSA) (conference call)
Eric Ferchau, At Large, Development Community
Nathan Seward, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Alternate
Chris Bove, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Non-voting:
Alli Melton, High Country Citizens' Alliance Alternate
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) Alternate
Russell Japuntich, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Alternate
Elinor Laurie, Saguache County Alternate
Liz With, Natural Resources Conservation Service Alternate (Attended at 12:35)

Staff Members Present:

Jim Cochran, Gunnison County Wildlife Conservation Coordinator
Bobbie Lucero, Administrative Assistant III

Others present as listed in text.

In the audience:

- Pat Magee
- John Scott
- Theresa Childers, NPS
- Christina Santana, NRCS
- Paula Swenson, Gunnison County BOCC
- Jenny Nehring, Saguache County
- Wendy Maez, Saguache County (conference call)
- Mike Pelletier, Gunnison County GIS Department Director

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Stahlnecker called the April 24, 2013 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:01 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.

APPROVAL OF MARCH 20, 2013 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved** by St. George to accept the March 20, 2013 meeting minutes as amended, seconded by Navy. Peterson abstained because he was absent from the meeting. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS:

CPW; LEK COUNT NUMBERS: Seward reported on the spring 2013 lek counts. He informed the Committee that CPW does not have all of the data sheets in from the 1st two lek count periods yet. The following numbers for 2013 are not the final count, because they are waiting on the 1st two data sheets. Seward reported the lek count numbers for the 1st count period are as follows:

LEK COUNT	2011 FINAL	2012 FINAL	2013
Males	763	832	551
Females	233	138	128

Seward informed that he will provide the final lek count numbers by mid June and will also provide them to the USFWS.

SAGE-GROUSE FESTIVAL: The Committee discussed that there was a lower turnout to the Festival probably because the event offered the same events as last year. Although this was still a tremendous success, the Committee agreed that next year the Festival needs to offer something different. The Committee discussed if the Festival should be continued in the future, and the hopes that the community would come together to support the Festival in a manner similar to the Sand Hill Crane Festival in the San Luis Valley. There was discussion that the educational outreach and awareness with kids is very successful, and this Festival could possibly be adopted by the school since it is geared mostly towards kids and education. The Committee discussed if it is time to organize an upcoming Summit, because the informal agreement was to have a Summit every 3 years. There was discussion that it might be best to have the Festival when Hartman opens. The Committee mulled over ides such as having elementary school classes adopt a lek, and also having the raptor show in the schools that week of Festival, instead of having it at the Festival on the stage. The Committee agreed to place this item on an upcoming meeting agenda to discuss further.

WAUNITA HOT SPRINGS LEK: Cochran informed the Committee that Pat Magee informed him that the lek near Wauntia Hot Springs is being affected by the early morning use of the County Road probably due to parents transporting children to school buses at Highway 50. Magee was wondering if the County would consider a speed limit on that road, and if the Committee would like to recommend this to the County Public Works department. There was discussion about how the speed limit would be enforced. The Committee agreed that the first course of action is to see if the school bus stop can be moved up the County road from the lek, and if so, that might solve the issue. Houck volunteered to discuss this with school administrators.

CPW SIGNAGE AT THE ALMONT TRIANGLE: Melton reported to the Committee that she received a call that there were 3 hikers going into the Almont Triangle, and the hikers stated they did not see a sign. The Committee suggested Melton contact CPW with those issues. There was discussion that the CPW signs are old and covered by vegetation in the Almont Triangle area, and the County road opens before the human closure opens on that road.

RIPARIAN RESILIENCY BROOD REARING PROJECT: Cochran informed the Committee about the Riparian Resiliency Brood Rearing Project. USFS & BLM are working with CPW, TNC & landowners to expand this project out onto public lands.

CCA UPDATE; CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT UPDATE: St. George informed the Committee that the CCA was formally submitted to the USFWS on April 12th. Gelatt thanked Japuntich and St. George for all of their work on the CCA. She informed the Committee that the USFWS is anticipating a decision by mid July. St. George informed the Committee that he did not add an additional 90,000 acres (proposed Critical Habitat outside of mapped Occupied Habitat) to the CCA. Gelatt informed that the USFWS is also conferencing with NRCS and the Farm Services Agency (FSA) on their conservation practices. She anticipates that it might be complete before July. Gelatt commented that she doesn't envision restarting the clock if the USFWS wants to put the 90,000 acres in the CCA. Gelatt assured the Committee that the USFWS is committed to completing the CCA conferencing process by the end of September.

CCAA UPDATE: Seward distributed a CCAA update summary document to the Committee. He informed the Committee that originally CPW paid for 32 properties with baseline reports, and they have been working with these properties and getting them enrolled. He reported that CPW's priority is getting land owners signed up by the end of September. He informed the Committee that the number of acres enrolled out of 16 properties in Gunnison is 17,679 acres. There are two Certificates of Inclusion (CI) at the FWS. He reported that there are a few landowners who did not want to be involved in the program. The Committee discussed that the target acreage to get enrolled for the CCAA is 55,302 acres in the Gunnison Basin. Seward explained the document he provided to the Committee. He explained if CPW can get all the properties enrolled what percentage of the target goal they can reach. If four of the new, interested properties are enrolled, approximately 73% of the acreage goal in the CCAA will be achieved. If 10 or more of the new, interested properties are enrolled, the CCAA acreage goal may be exceeded by 22% (67,826 acres). Seward reported that CPW is trying their best to complete these by September.

CCI WESTERN COLORADO MEETING: BOCC Chairperson Paula Swenson was present for the discussion. She informed the Committee that Colorado Counties Incorporated (CCI) is putting on a Western Colorado Meeting on 5/9/13 from 10 am to 2 pm. She reported that CCI asked her to make a presentation on what Gunnison County has been doing regarding the conservation of the bird. Swenson asked the Committee if anyone would like to attend and participate in this. Joseph informed Swenson she will be attending for Saguache County. St. George informed the Committee that he is looking into attending with Lori Armstrong, BLM Southwest District Manager. Peterson and Wiens informed Swenson that they would like to attend. Swenson informed the Committee that the County Coalition for the Gunnison Sage-grouse (MOU Group)_is meeting immediately after the CCI meeting.

WASHINGTON D.C. MEETING REPORT: County Attorney David Baumgarten was present for the discussion. Swenson and Baumgarten informed the Committee they met with Senator Udall's Senior Staff, Congressman Tipton, Senator Orin Hatch's (Utah) staff, and Senator Bennet. She informed the Committee that they met with USFWS Director Dan Ashe, Regional Director Noreen Walsh (by teleconference) and their senior staff and discussed what is happening in Gunnison County and that the USFWS representatives were very interested and engaged in what Gunnison County is doing and they want to learn more. She informed that they explained to the USFWS the collaborative efforts with the CCA. She informed that there is a meeting this Friday with Regional Director Walsh, her staff, Swenson, Baumgarten and Cochran. Chamberland will be making a trip to Washington D.C. with Club 20 to discuss with the USFWS issues of concern on the Western Slope of Colorado.

Baumgarten thanked the Committee for the efforts of the different organizations. He summarized the meeting they had with Director Ashe:

- They explained to the USFWS the growth and populations of sage-grouse in the various populations.
- They informed the USFWS about the four peer reviews.
- They informed the USFWS about the efforts put forth by landowners and local regulatory efforts.
- Baumgarten stated to the USFWS that "the law, policy and evidence would not support a finding of endangered or threatened. Either finding would be challenged and that the challenge would be successful."

Joseph informed the Committee that Saguache County is struggling with its two separate populations. Their problem is there are no resources dedicated to the Poncha Pass population. Baumgarten suggested Saguache County adopt a resolution regarding the plus-35 acre parcels, and then entice agencies to collaborate on how this is going to be accomplished. Joseph informed that money and personnel are the problems.

The Committee discussed the similarities and differences in the Rangewide Conservation Plan (RCP) and CCA. Baumgarten suggested that the BLM add a paragraph to the CCA around the lines of, "even if the species is listed or not the CCA will be enforced in Gunnison County for the conservation of the species." The Committee discussed that the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard proposed listing rule was withdrawn because they had CCAs, CCAAs and other conservation measures that were put in place. Swenson informed the Committee that Cochran will email out

the summary of the D.C. trip. They will put together another summary after their trip to Denver this Friday.

There was a possibility for an Intergovernmental Agreement between Gunnison County and Saguache County, which was superseded by the eleven-county, two-state MOU.

REQUEST FROM PUBLIC TO MEET WITH USFWS REGIONAL DIRECTOR: Cochran informed the Committee that members of the public were wondering how to contact the USFWS. Cochran informed he has communicated with the citizens who requested this item.

COUNTY COALITION FOR THE GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE: Houck informed the Committee that the MOU was signed by all participating counties. He has been reaching out to BOCC in surrounding counties regarding engaging their communities about the proposed listing and looking at their current policies, procedures, rules and regulations. He reported that these counties are looking into moving forward in a more formal way toward using their authority to best benefit the bird and help landowners at the same time. These counties are going to take advantage of the fact that the Strategic Committee has been working on this for years. Houck has met with these county commissioners and has stressed the opportunity for counties to adopt resolutions to express their commitment to what they will do for the conservation of the bird. He informed the Committee that there was discussion to create working groups in these communities. The Committee discussed how unique this group is in that it is majority rule agreement and not consensus-based like most working groups.

GUSG PROPOSED RULE: Gelatt thanked everyone for the comments received. The USFWS received 1,300 comments and 10,000 from members of the Audubon Society. She informed that the USFWS did receive some unsubstantive comments. Gelatt informed the Committee that in the Final Rule they will have the USFWS responses by subject, eg. predation.

Gelatt gave an update on the Economic Analysis. The USFWS is expecting to receive a draft for internal review the end of May. They anticipate the public hearings and comment period will be in July. Gelatt informed the comment period will be 30 days. The public hearings will be in Gunnison and Dove Creek or Monticello, Utah during the public comment period.

The Committee discussed what next action items need to be accomplished, and that the possibility of creating a CCA for the outlying populations is very unlikely right now. St. George informed the Committee that BLM is looking at other possible options, yet it does not seem likely that anything will happen between now and the final decision. Gelatt reported that USFWS recommended to BLM to extend the CCA region-wide, yet BLM did not due to the timeframe of the proposed rules decision. The Committee discussed that it's one thing to have regulations and it's another thing to have community buy-in with the regulations.

HABITAT PRIORITIZATION TOOL (HPT): Cochran informed the committee that CPW ran their grouse radio collar data points against the HPT. He explained that when looking at overall habitat, 79% fell within Tier I habitat, and 96% fell within habitat with a score of 0 or greater. Cochran reported that the model actually works. He is working with Mike Phillips to make the HPT better. Nesting habitat models very well. The brood rearing habitat model seems to be off,

possibly due to a time-of-day bias in the data. Childers informed that NPS needs to revise their information and numbers because some park facilities that are classified in Tier I are actually Tier II but they are showing up under Tier I. Pelletier will work with NPS on making corrections to their infrastructure information in the HPT. NPS is concerned because of the use of the HPT in the CCA and the different conservation measures associated with Tier 1 and Tier 2 habitats.

The Committee discussed revising the RCP with updated information. The Committee discussed that the Habitat Prioritization Tool (HPT) is the foundation for the CCA. Saguache County may look into taking this first step toward creating a CCA for the Poncha Pass population by creating a HPT. There was discussion that a HPT could be created in the next 4 months. Pelletier opined that it took a lot of education and was created in a group setting. It would possibly take more than 4 months to create the HPT if they followed the Gunnison County approach. The Committee agreed to move the HPT to the next level.

Gelatt informed the Committee about the Yellow Billed Cuckoo. She reported that the USFWS will be addressing this species soon. The USFWS expects to have a proposed listing rule available by the end of September. Proposed Critical Habitat will include areas upstream of Blue Mesa Reservoir and on the North Fork of the Gunnison River.

FUTURE MEETINGS:

Date	*Time*	*Notes*
5/15/2013	10-2	Regular Meeting
6/19/2013	10-2	
7/17/2013		Public Hearing for USFWS will be the same day?
8/22/2013		

ADJOURN: **MOVED** by Stahlnecker to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. The April 24, 2013 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 2:00 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