

**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 21, 2024**

The February 21, 2024 Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee meeting was conducted in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2nd floor meeting room, located at 221 N. Wisconsin #D, Gunnison, CO, 81230. The meeting was also available on 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)
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large (Gunnison Trails)
Whit Blair, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Matt Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Patrick Magee, Research and Education At-Large (Western Colorado University, WCU)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Amber Wilson, Saguache County

Non-Voting Members

Jessica Frey, National Park Service (NPS)

Others in the Audience:

Ari Yamaguci, Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD)
Cheryl Cwelich, UGRWCD
Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Kathy Griffin, CPW
Paul Rivera, WCU Center for Public Lands
Petar Simic, Happy Habitats Gunnison
Sabrina Lucero, WCU
Clayton BonDurant, CPW

Staff Members Present:

Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District
Misty Castillo, Gunnison County Community and Economic Development Department

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the February 21, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:02 AM.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Moved: by Caloger and seconded by Smith to approve the February 21, 2024 agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF JANUARY 17, 2024 MEETING MINUTES: Moved: by Smith and seconded by Kugler to approve the January 17, 2024 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS / REPORTS

Smith reminded agencies to submit their letters to reappoint regular and alternate members and at-large members need to reapply. Simic asked about applying for the Research and Education At-Large regular membership and Magee would reapply for the alternate. Jessica Young will step down from Research and

Education At-Large membership and her position on the I&E Subcommittee. Smith said they will do an out-of-cycle appointment for at-large memberships because the application period has closed. Caloger was reappointed. Peterson will step down from his position in the Strategic Committee and the Gunnison Stockgrowers have not yet submitted a letter for their representation on the Committee.

Seward had presented on wet meadow restoration work and the vegetation response at the Colorado Chapter of the Wildlife Society meeting. Simic also gave an IGNITE presentation on cheatgrass eradication and maintaining high quality habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse.

UPDATE ON CPW HUMAN-BEAR CONFLICT REDUCTION GRANT

BonDurant said the City of Gunnison was awarded the grant around July/August, but some of the funding in the grant was federal funds and those were delayed until December. BonDurant sent off an updated Scope of Work to the CPW grant administrators and they are working on a purchase order for the City to get trashcans by March 12. Because the grant is reimbursable and the purchase order is over \$50,000, the City will discuss the grant at the next City Council meeting. Madelon Van DeKerk (WCU) is working with Lucero (WCU MEM student).

Originally the grant application included more dumpsters and fewer individual trashcans, and the revised scope of work includes 120 individual trashcans, and 15 dumpsters. There is also \$15,000 for an MEM student stipend and supplies for education and outreach. Simic asked how the trashcans would be distributed, and BonDurant explained that previous monitoring showed the west side of town had high bear activity and there would be a few neighborhoods selected where everyone in the neighborhood would receive a trashcan. BonDurant pointed to the Sunspots/North 7th Street area and the Palisades neighborhood might have more conflict. Magee asked about the research components of the grant, and BonDurant explained that there is a lack of reporting so this might include a survey to look at participants' history with bear conflict, or QR code stickers for people to submit bear conflict reports easily as they walk in the alley. QR code stickers could be for people with and without bearproof trashcans on the west side of town to compare conflict levels. Rummel asked about submitting reports of neighbor's trashcans, and how it could be sensitive but maybe QR codes could be linked to each trash can and those could be linked in a database to the associated address. Magee said community based social marketing principles suggest that positive incentives tend to work better than shame or disincentivizing people from participating, so it might be good to have stickers to recognize conflict-free trash cans or addresses. Magee asked about bear cameras, and Frey said she has one in their alley and they catch a lot of foot and vehicle traffic. BonDurant said they have discussed cameras but also are considering the possibility of theft and that they need willing landowners.

Seward asked if the cans and dumpsters replaced City trash collection receptacles, and these would. Waste Management and Golden Eagle also operate in the same western portion of town, and this grant would not address any bear conflict issues they have. One objective is to map out where conflict occurs with those other waste management companies, and potentially reach out to them for the future. Additional partners could include residents outside of City limits, especially in Dos Rios and Bevington Road. Smith said the County is exploring licensing short-term rentals, and there could be some distribution of information during the licensing process, that could be required to be distributed to renters. Short-term rentals and temporary workers (such as RTA and Gunnison Valley Health) may not understand bear conflict and prevention, so there could be an opportunity to provide educational materials to those companies.

Caloger asked about just putting out trash in the morning, and BonDurant explained that the City does have an ordinance that trash should be secured in or near your house and only set out for pickup between 6:00-8:00 am on the morning of trash pickup day. However, this ordinance is rarely followed.

RAVEN SUBSIDY SUBCOMITTEE MEETING UPDATE

January 29 was the first Raven Subsidy Subcommittee meeting which included Seward, Kugler, Mark Loller (CDOT), Cinnamon Levi-Flinn (CDOT), Blair, Garrett Konet (NPS), Hannah Kersting (CSU-Extension),

Caloger, Andrew Stokes (BLM), Kathy Brodhead (BLM), Emily Latta (BLM), Gwen Harris (BLM), Tarantino, and Magee. They shared experiences with raven abundance and distribution, and shared literature and research on raven impacts to other species. Delta Waterfowl might be a good organization to reach out to for more information and resources, and possibly for a presentation during a subcommittee meeting. They also wanted to reach out to Peter Coates for a future meeting, who might have more information on predator control and has been researching corvid impacts to sage-grouse for years.

They also talked about Magee's research with point counts years ago to look at raven distribution and abundance in the City and nearby areas. Magee found ravens at all sites, all times of day, and all times of year. They tended to nest in rocky crevasses near sagebrush rather than the urban environment, and Magee observed low flying corvids in sagebrush environments regularly; ravens are opportunistic and may follow hens who are taking a recess from nesting back to their nest and depredate the nest. Magee has a graduate student starting this fall who would like to investigate raven distribution across BLM lands (working with Brodhead), and this may include telemetry and will include point counts.

Simic talked about roadkill being a subsidy, and Seward mentioned that Rivera is working on a project to assess roadkill distribution and reporting. Seward said CDOT usually only picks up carcasses if they are a hazard or if they have time, but CDOT does not have a discount at the landfill for disposing carcasses, so Seward wants to work with CDOT biologists to address that. Magee wondered if there was a financial impact to the County to just allow all agencies to drop off carcasses for free. Smith said the County has approved the agreement to allow CPW to drop off carcasses for free for CCAA holders. CDOT will not sign a similar agreement, because CPW has a statewide policy that CDOT should drag carcasses off the road and out of view, and it is CDOT's preference to follow that guidance because it is easier. Seward suggested a more local approach because of the concerns specifically related to Gunnison sage-grouse, potentially including Diamond and Cory Chick (CPW SW Regional Manager). The CDOT representatives attending the subcommittee meeting thought that roadkill carcasses in the entire range of Gunnison sage-grouse, not just the Gunnison Basin, should be removed from the landscape.

Griffin suggested to be careful with words, to refer to "predator management" (which can include things like subsidy removal) instead of "predator control" which the public may consider to only be lethal control.

Next steps for the subcommittee (next meeting Monday March 25, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm at the CPW office) may include inviting Delta Waterfowl researchers, Brandon Diamond and Cory Chick, Rivera, and discussing the financial impacts to different agencies and to the landfill for roadkill removal.

Rivera reported that he had seen 42 roadkill mortalities since January 1.

There was a discussion on responsibility of carcass removal, and there is not a clear assignment of who should remove roadkill when it is reported. Frey pointed out that even within an agency, sometimes it is unclear which division is responsible for carcass removal (e.g. at NPS, if it is resources, maintenance, law enforcement, etc.).

SOUTH BEAVER CREEK ACEC MANAGEMENT AND HERBICIDE USE COMMENT LETTER SUMMARY

Seward and Simic drafted a letter for the BLM Resource Management Plan Amendment public input. They wanted to illustrate that herbicide use could be a positive impact in the South Beaver Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Without herbicide, land managers may allow cheatgrass to proliferate and outcompete skiff milkvetch. The Committee recommended adopting the language from Alternative D as related to herbicide use. The public comment letter was submitted by the deadline and Rummel would distribute the final draft to the Committee.

LEK ACCESS PHOTOGRAPHY APPLICATION(S)

The last Strategic Committee meeting did approve Seth Owens as a photographer. He works for Pheasants Forever and wanted to do a coffee table type of book to highlight grouse conservation. Owens will likely come for a 3-day visit (at least 2 mornings in a blind on a lek) in mid-April. Owens is willing to share his writeup to the Committee, who can review and provide input on factual accuracy of the draft.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

FUTURE MEETINGS: Future meetings will occur in the Gunnison County Blackstock Government Center, 2nd floor meeting room and by Zoom online meetings, unless changed for a specific reason.

03-20-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
04-17-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
05-15-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
06-19-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
07-17-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
08-21-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
09-18-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
10-16-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
11-20-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room
12-18-24	10-12	Regular Meeting	Blackstock; 221 N. Wisconsin 2 nd floor meeting room

ADJOURN: The February 21, 2024 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 11:52 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District