



Gunnison County, CO
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To: Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee Members

From: Shannon Frias, Administrative Assistant III

Date: April 18, 2022

Included in your packet for the Wildlife Conservation Strategic Committee Meeting:

April 20, 2022 Agenda

Draft of March 23, 2022 Minutes

GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

DATE: Wednesday, April 20, 2022

PLACE: Planning Commission Meeting Room, Blackstock Government Center OR via Zoom meeting, Meeting ID: 853 0130 6796 (see Teleconference Information below)

1. 10:00am
 - Call Regular Meeting to Order; Determination of Quorum; Verify Public Notice of Meeting
 - Agenda Approval
 - Approval of March 23, 2022 Meeting Minutes

2. 10:05
 - Committee Member Comments/Reports

3. 10:40
 - Gunnison Sage-Grouse Summit Recap

4. 11:00
 - Coordinator Position Update and Technical Subcommittee Meeting Recap

5. 11:20
 - Carcass Removal Update

6. 11:25
 - Gunnison County Sage-Grouse Conservation Action Plan Discussion and Updates (https://gcco-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/eksmith_gunnisoncounty_org/EY1eWfqyoEhNm85WMizB81QB0ATqzfTAHIQp2YbY4uKRfw?rtime=hUp3MRYB2kg)

7. 12:00pm
 - Public Comments

8. 12:05
 - Future Meeting

9. 12:10
 - Adjourn

NOTE: This agenda is subject to change, including the addition of items up to 24 hours in advance or the deletion of items at any time. All times are approximate. Regular Meetings, Public Hearings, and Special Meetings are recorded and **ACTION MAY BE TAKEN ON ANY ITEM**. Work Sessions are not recorded and formal action cannot be taken. Two or more Gunnison County Commissioners may attend this meeting. For further information, contact the County Administration at 641-0248. If special accommodations are necessary per ADA, contact 641-0248 or TTY 641-3061 prior to the meeting.

Teleconference Information:

Zoom meeting, Meeting ID: 853 0130 6796

Passcode: 666794

<https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fus06web.zoom.us%2Fj%2F85301306796%3Fpwd%3DL0NrbTIPWmZZSFN0VmV5VXFob1BQdz09&data=04%7C01%7C%7C3ada72096b634e1a836808da17f0552b%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637848618346509204%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6IjEhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C2000&data=gX8WuKyWMjutuuKJYUK4%2FX9KDTxKrXc9P3sSWNkuUKc%3D&am;reserved=0>

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**GUNNISON BASIN SAGE-GROUSE STRATEGIC COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
March 23, 2022**

The March 23, 2022 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)
Theresa Childers, National Park Service (NPS)
Sue Navy, High County Conservation Advocates (HCCA)
Amber Wilson, Saguache County
Tim Kugler, Recreation At-Large
Greg Peterson, Gunnison County Stockgrowers Association
Whit Blair, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Peter Caloger, Public At-Large
Matt Vasquez, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Jon Kaminsky, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Non-Voting Members

Dayle Funka, USFS
Kathy Brodhead, BLM
Steffanie Chain, Public At-Large
Brandon Diamond, CPW
Virginia Adams, Saguache County

Others in the Audience:

Marcella Tarantino, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
Jess Young, Western Colorado University (WCU)
Tobias Nickel, Western Colorado University (WCU Center for Public Lands)

Staff Members Present:

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

Others present as listed in text.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Seward called the March 23, 2022 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee to order at 10:05 A.M.

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

AGENDA APPROVAL: Agenda approved as presented.

APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 16, 2022 MEETING MINUTES: **Moved:** by Smith and seconded by Navy to approve the February 16, 2022 meeting minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously. Peterson abstained.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/REPORTS

Navy learned that Carly made 300 patches with a sage-grouse design, and Navy invited her to bring them to the Summit.

Smith said the BoCC discussed the addition of the WCU seat and the roles of stakeholders, and decided to create a Research and Education At-Large seat. This provides flexibility where people without WCU affiliations could fill that role if WCU did not have an appropriate and interested faculty member to fill that seat in the future. Smith said as long as there is institutional knowledge in the BoCC that the seat was originally designed with WCU in mind, that can help guide BoCC appointment decisions.

Smith also said that she and La Plata are still planning to meet and discuss raven depredation issues.

Brodhead said the BLM has restarted the process of incorporating sage-grouse conservation measures into their Resource Management Plan. There will be a notice of intent (NOI) in the Federal Register in early summer, which will begin a public comment period, and then BLM will build a team to complete the Environmental Impact Statement. BLM will use the 1992 Resource Management Plan and amend it for all field offices within Gunnison sage-grouse habitat. The process is expected to take 2 years.

Brodhead also reported that road closures began March 15 and will last until May 15. Several roads were closed early given muddy conditions. There is a complete area closure on Signal Peak trails Chicken Wing, Rasta, Ridgeline, and Shoelace (no foot traffic). Kugler reported that Gunnison Trails put up their last sign this last week for the area closures in Signal Peak.

Seward said lek counts will begin March 25 for a subset of early lek counts, and he has received reports of up to 30 birds already displaying activity on one lek. Lek counts will continue through May 10. Seward also said there was a paper recently published by Apa et. al in 2022 in The Wildlife Society Bulletin, detailing results from trap and transplant programs. Younger age classes of sage-grouse seemed to stay better when transplanted and were more adaptable. In the USFWS Recovery Plan, there is a target threshold that the Gunnison Basin subpopulation must be above to consider trap and transplant programs in the future, and the Gunnison Basin subpopulation is currently below that threshold, and unlikely to be above the threshold until fall 2023 at the earliest. Shed antler collection is closed starting January 1, and will reopen May 1.

Diamond updated the Committee on the wolf reintroduction. In March 2019, USFWS started the process to delist wolves. In November 2020, Proposition 114 passed and mandated CPW to reintroduce wolves by December 2023. A few weeks after Proposition 114 passed, the final wolf delisting rule passed and CPW had complete state regulatory authority over wolves. In January 2021, lawsuits were filed challenging the delisting. In February 2022 the delisting rule was vacated, and wolves were back to being federally listed, including listed as threatened in Colorado. By December 2022, CPW internal groups will review a draft reintroduction plan and conduct regional public outreach. By May 2023, CPW will have a final plan approved and would begin planning logistics of the reintroduction process. There is also concurrently a federal approval process for an Environmental Impact Statement that CPW will pay for (will cost \$0.5 million - \$1 million) and will draft, including the reintroduction plan. A 10J rule would identify wolves in CO as an experimental population, which would give more authority to the State for hazing techniques and addressing depredation. If no 10J rule is applied, CPW would rely on USFWS and APHIS for management. The CPW Commission passed an emergency regulation to allow hazing of wolves, but the federal listing trumps that and only allows non-injurious hazing. Conversations are occurring on introducing wolves in sage-grouse range and concerns on possible predation, and how to prioritize listed species. Peterson was concerned about CPW staffing being able to address some of the issues that will arise from wolves. CPW is currently hiring wolf researchers, a wolf conflict coordinator with the Game Damage Program, and a wolf reintroduction program manager.

Seward also explained that Governor Polis is supportive of reintroducing wolverines to Colorado. CPW considered reintroduction of wolverines in 2010. Wolverines do not typically cause game damage issues. In 2010, wolverines were not federally listed. CPW has hired a contractor to review the 2010 reintroduction plan and update it, looking at possible habitat with long lasting snow.

Seward also said there is a local research project to trap and GPS track mountain lions. Their goal is 25 mountain lions, and their goal is to get a better population estimate. The hunting quota is 18, and that took longer to fill this year, which delayed trapping efforts. They currently have about 15 adults with GPS collars and about 5-6 kittens with ear tags. They will later lure mountain lions to a game camera (with distress

calls), and they will be able to identify the lions with collars and ear tags and compare to the percent of unmarked lions that come to the cameras as part of a mark-resight study. They will also be considering survival, movements, home ranges. Diamond said there was a bill introduced in the last session to ban mountain lion and bobcat hunting, and having the best available science locally will be valuable. Diamond said that CPW will be mindful of closures but still attempting to trap mountain lions into spring with any new snow. Please report mountain lion sightings and carcass caches to CPW for them to be able to trap those locations.

Childers said the East Elk Creek area is closed for bald eagle nesting. The campground will remain closed until the nest is vacant (likely August), but NPS is considering allowing administrative access for NPS, BLM, and CPW. There is a temporary Natural Resources supervisor for 2 months while Kim Hartwig is on detail.

Rummel reported that the County's development flowchart is finalized and available on the Community Development website. She did work with Pagano to finalize some language on the County side to encourage people to do a pre-application conference request rather than first submitting a building permit.

Vasquez reported that the USFS Forest Plan Revision is underway, and they are responding to public comments and revising the draft as appropriate.

Chain introduced herself as a Crested Butte resident interested in sage-grouse.

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE SUMMIT UPDATE

Tobias Nickel is the new Associate Director for the Center for Public Lands and helping prepare for the Summit. The Summit will be April 4 and 5. Young thanked people for submitting nominations for the Stewardship Award, with nominees including Navy and HCCA, Rummel and Tarantino, and Gunnison County. Sisk-a-dee will announce the award recipient on Monday night.

Young said Western is also considering the Summit as their Spring Symposium and focusing on collaborative conservation. There will be special events for students, and emphasis on the keynote.

Registration is \$50 per person but free for students and landowners. If the cost is prohibitive, please talk to the organizing team. The Clark School of Natural and Environmental Sciences is paying for food. Young thanked organizations that have provided financial support for the Summit. They currently have 78 paid registrants and about 50 students (86 in person, the rest online). The registration deadline is Monday March 28. They would like photos for a slideshow including research, sagebrush restoration, etc. Organizations can have tables out if they reach out to Tobi in advance.

Please refer to the CPL website for the Summit for the updated agenda, submitting to the slideshow, tabling, registration, and more.

CARCASS REMOVAL UPDATE

Seward will talk with Marlene Crosby about expanding the discount at the landfill. The BoCC had a discussion on carcass removal when Smith was out of town. There is an organization in Montana (Big Hole Watershed Committee) that encourages landowners to dispose of carcasses properly because they also attract wolves and grizzly bears. With the upcoming wolf reintroduction, there will be more incentive for landowners to dispose of carcasses properly. The Big Hole Watershed Committee covers the cost of having an employee visit the ranch, collect the carcass, and drop it off and they have been doing this for about 5 years.

Recommendations were made to potentially have a separate site to dispose of carcasses at the landfill, and have that site be covered daily to avoid attracting corvids to the landfill. There is potential for composters, incinerators, etc. but each has limitations.

CHEATGRASS AND COORDINATOR POSITION UPDATE

Smith was anxious to get things moving and finalize the Scope of Work. Vasquez is reaching out to a few people on next steps for the Technical Subcommittee. There is currently just over \$50,000 from external funding, and the County is prepared to fund the remainder. The position is likely to be a contractor position, with a proposed salary range around \$75,000 plus benefits (\$100,000 needed) for a candidate with a MS degree and experience. Seward suggested an HPP grant for partial funding for the position. Funka and Diamond asked about logistics with vehicles, certified applicator licensing, and authority on public lands. Blair will need to know about contractor versus County because he thought it would be easier through USFWS pathways to send money to the County. Blair was including a minimum 2-year lease for a truck for at least the beginning of the position.

Seward thought the next action would be to reconvene the Technical Subcommittee, finalize the Scope of Work and have the Committee approve the Scope of Work. Vasquez would work to reconvene the Technical Subcommittee (and perhaps Marlene Crosby).

GUNNISON COUNTY SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN DISCUSSION AND UPDATES

Tabled to the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

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

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 March 23, 2022 meeting of the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee adjourned at 12:05 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Aleshia Rummel, Gunnison Conservation District