



“Voice of the Western Slope Since 1953”

A coalition of individuals, businesses and local governments

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06-3 NR 1

Gunnison Sage Grouse Conservation

WHEREAS the Gunnison Sage Grouse’s current range extends across just two states (southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah) and a handful of counties with viable populations (Gunnison, San Miguel, Montrose, Mesa, Saguache, Dolores and Delta), although its historic range once stretched from across large parts of Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico; and

WHEREAS specific areas of occupied habitat have been identified in various Gunnison Sage-Grouse Conservation Plans developed by local working groups in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW); and

WHEREAS a Range-wide Conservation Plan (RCP) has similarly been developed for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse; and

WHEREAS the Gunnison Sage-Grouse is listed as a Candidate Species (Category 2) under the Endangered Species Act and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is preparing a Proposed Rule for listing determination, scheduled to be published in the Federal Register by March 31, 2006, with a 60-day comment period and a 1-year evaluation period; and

WHEREAS the Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) was published in the Federal Register on March 18, 2003 and identifies criteria to be used in evaluating conservation efforts and whether they contribute to improving species habitat and survival; and

WHEREAS locally developed conservation plans – often written prior to PECE policy objectives and in need of clear direction, implementation and not just a range of options – along with the RCP, based on PECE policy objectives and written by BLM, CDOW, and the USFS and with input from an outside science team, the local working groups and other stakeholders, offer a possible voluntary scenario for Gunnison Sage-Grouse management, rather than federal regulatory listing under the Endangered Species Act, and

WHEREAS such locally-developed conservation plans have local support and recognize local environmental, cultural and institutional opportunities and challenges, and

WHEREAS a number of traditional natural resource uses in western Colorado have traditionally occurred in occupied and historic Gunnison Sage Grouse habitat, such as grazing, hunting and hiking; and

WHEREAS we recognize that in addition to good intentions and cooperation amongst all stake holders it will require a significant financial commitment to both limit habitat loss and to improve remaining habitat;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

CLUB 20 opposes listing the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act; however

CLUB 20 recognizes that listing may occur, and urges the USFWS to use the Secretary of Interior's 4 C's policy (communication, consultation and cooperation, all in the service of conservation), as well as sound science and on-the-ground land management experience, in considering the listing of the Gunnison Sage Grouse; and

CLUB 20 encourages all activities on behalf of state and local governments, as well as private parties, that benefit the Gunnison Sage-Grouse and supports those activities that may lead to precluding the need to list this species or to its rapid recovery if listing occurs; and

CLUB 20 urges the USFWS to utilize locally developed conservation plans as well as the Range-wide Gunnison Sage Grouse Conservation Plan (RCP) to manage Gunnison Sage Grouse and its occupied habitat; since local conservation efforts could be more effective than actions forthcoming from listing; and

CLUB 20 recommends the adoption of local conservation plans and the RCP for all regulatory and management activities by local, state and federal entities on public and private lands with the range of this species; and

CLUB 20 requests all actions under Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation plans address, in addition to habitat issues, these five (5) ESA listing factors:

- 1) Present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range,
- 2) Over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes,
- 3) Disease or predation,
- 4) Authorities and inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms,
- 5) Other natural or man-made factors affecting its continued existence; and

CLUB 20 requests that all Gunnison Sage-Grouse conservation plans be flexible and outcome-based, focusing on adaptive management to achieve end products; and

CLUB 20 believes that all Gunnison Sage-Grouse plans should work cooperatively with existing land uses to the greatest extent possible; and

CLUB 20 believes that Gunnison Sage Grouse conservation goals must mesh with the social, cultural, and economic lives of the citizens of western Colorado, as grouse and humans are mutually dependent upon the same habitat; and

CLUB 20 encourages the State of Colorado, the Colorado Wildlife Commission and CDOW to adequately fund and prioritize the completion and implementation of the RCP, as well as local plans where CDOW participates; and

CLUB 20 encourages the Secretary of Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, and Congress to devote funding and direct grants to state and local entities to assist in implementation of Gunnison Sage Grouse Conservation Plans, including adequate and approved predator control if deemed necessary and appropriate by local conservation plans; and

CLUB 20 encourages local governments, specifically counties with occupied Gunnison Sage-Grouse habitat, to adopt locally adopted working group plans, as well as the RCP into their land use regulations; to work with local Gunnison Sage-Grouse Working Groups as referral agents on new development proposals in occupied Gunnison Sage-Grouse habitat; to enact temporary/seasonal road closures and other measures they see fit to provide additional protections to sensitive habitats (leks, nesting areas, critical winter range, etc.); to initiate and utilize purchase-of-development-rights programs, such as Gunnison and San Miguel have done, to preserve the occupied habitat of Gunnison Sage-Grouse, in cooperation with the Greater Outdoors Colorado program; and to pursue any other local programs beneficial to the continuing survival of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse; and

CLUB 20 recommends, when acceptable to the landowner, speedy exchanges of like value between public and private lands for the protection of leks and sensitive habitat areas for Gunnison Sage-Grouse; and

CLUB 20 supports CDOW's Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) program as appropriate "safe harbor"-type protections, encouraging all landowners and public land users to participate, and

CLUB 20 suggests that such CCAA contracts, as well as the RCP and local conservation plans, be treated as credible and legally enforceable documents; and

CLUB 20 supports federal agencies cooperating with private landowners to manage Gunnison Sage Grouse habitats by promoting and entering into voluntary stewardship contracts that allow and encourage landowners through incentives to aid in the management of Gunnison Sage-Grouse populations, as in some cases private landowners provide crucial nesting and chick-rearing habitat integral to Gunnison Sage-Grouse survival on public lands; and

CLUB 20 recommends locally-adapted best management practices regarding Gunnison Sage Grouse, and those included in the RCP, be used by all land users in Gunnison Sage Grouse habitat.

Adopted March 31, 2006