**Moffat County Greater Sage Grouse Habitat Program Committee**

**March 13, 2025**

**Meeting Minutes**

Colton Murray, CFCD GSG subcommittee Chairman called the meeting to order at 2:06 pm.

Roll Call was performed with the following members of the MC GSG WG in attendance:

Colton Murray, CFCD GSG chair Nick Charchalis, CFCD GSG member

Stephen Hinkemeyer, CFCD GSG member Desa Ausmus – BLM Wildlife Specialist

Kacey Green, CFCD GSG Administrator Nicky Boulger – CFCD DCT

Mark Lowrey, CFCD GSG Project Manager Junior Kawcak – Frontier Station

Cassie Lamb, CFCD GSG Contractor Brian Holmes – Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Rebecca Burton – NRCS

Future emails for this committee will come from **cfcdsagegrouse@gmail.com**

**Review and Approval of Minutes**

The meeting minutes were reviewed and discussed. A motion was made to approve the minutes as written by Brian Holmes, seconded by Desa. Minutes were approved unanimously.

**Grant Compliance and Financial Review**

There is over $2,000,000 to spend on habitat improvement and several hundred thousand dollars on pinyon/juniper removal projects. CFCD did receive a reimbursement for expenses incurred to date, but most of the money remains.

**Project Planning and Approval Process**

Mark went over his sagebrush habitat and sage grouse habitat maps and talked about the two main areas he initially developed at the start of this program. Brian made a comment about the accuracy of the sagebrush habitat map, in that there is more good core sagebrush habitat than what is on the map. The sage grouse habitat maps are much better at defining action areas. Mark talked about his threat map as well, mostly from cheat grass invasion and large fire burn areas. The defined areas by Mark did include the areas most of the group thought was where projects should be funded.

**Committee Action Items: Projects**

**Vermillion Sage-grouse Habitat Project – Application deemed incomplete**

The first grant discussed was a habitat project in Cold Spring/Vermillion Basin area. There was a WHIP project done there in 1990. The project was not done during the time that Brian has been in his position. The landowners want to spray sagebrush in a mosaic pattern to eliminate patches of thick sagebrush. The thought was to aerial spray the sagebrush and alternate turning on and off the spray controls to create a patchwork. It is unclear what and where the mesic meadows come into play for this project. A discussion was held concerning spiking sagebrush. The committee was not sure where the lands were (4,000 acres within 11,500 acres of total private, state, and federal lands. The committee needs to know more about the different land types, and could the project be done in phases, where private lands would be first, followed by projects on state or federal lands as different project phases.

Brian talked about spraying big blocks of sagebrush was detrimental to sage grouse. If sagebrush is too tall (chest high) or too dense (40% cover) sage grouse will not use the landscape. In this area the sagebrush is probably not too tall. Right now, there is probably a greater number of sage grouse than ever in the Cold Springs area. Before any sagebrush is treated, a review on the ground should be done for how dense the sagebrush is. Some thoughts of doing line intersects through the sagebrush or trying to determine

BLM has a lot of hoops to jump through including an EA for their lands. The thought would be to break the project up into phases. BLM does have AIM data from near the project site.

This project will probably not be approved today as not enough is known about it and there needs to be some on-site determination to look at the project. It may need to be a multiple year project. There may be a conservation easement on this property as well. We do not understand the implications of that and how the State BLM office will be handling that.

A motion was made to delay this project until more is known about it. A motion was made to deny that application by Desa and seconded by Brian. The motion passed unanimously.

**White Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Project – Application needs modification**

Zane White had an application to do some habitat improvement involving old wheat fields from 15 or 20 years ago. He has been working on his own over the last several years and has several acres of land that have been reworked. Some of this property has been drilled and planted before. He has been putting in ponds and wet meadows.

This property is near elk springs and fire area and very close to the ROW corridor for the powerline(s). He is asking for monies to improve 700 acres of (4,700 acres property total) habitat using a no till approach when replanting. His plan is to plant multiple types of perennial grass, then once established plant some legumes intermixed with the grasses. He has a seed mix in mind that will need to be reviewed and approved. The project will be $90,000, with a grant ask of $76,000 and in-kind costs for seeding of $14,000 which is the seeding costs, and all his contribution.

Due to the early spring this year they are trying to get ahead of weeds which may need to be sprayed in early April. Deferred grazing must be a part of this project. If work commences this spring no grazing should occur until July 2026 or later. This project may have to be reconfigured to do two years on one-half the acreage and then two years on remaining fields. There are at least 5 fully fenced fields. On the 700 acres in question.

Zane has asked for help in the last several years and has had CFCD, CPW and others out to the site looking at the property. Brian Holmes with CPW was on-site and said he did not have any idea birds were here on this property to the extent he saw them. Every bird caught last year near here spent the summer on this property. The property is like a list of “Whose Who” of awful weeds. Yet birds love to spend time here in the summer. There are a variety of weeds including Canadian and Musk Thistle, Gum Weed, Cheat Grass, Japanese Brome, Leafy Spurge, and Music Weed. Brian said he would love to get some broadleaf seed plants on-property, not a pure grass stand in this area when they go back with seed. Fire restoration has been done near this area previously. There are Mormon Cricket problems on this property as well.

The landowner has tried various approaches to solving the weed issues on this property. He is running cows on property but not in great numbers. Brian thought grazing was July through October on this project but says we need to check with the landowner. Delaying the mesa (project area) for the first year would be a problem Brian thought. Brian thinks it is a great project overall.

The property is consistent terrain and doing part of property may allow weeds from the other half to overrun the ½ that is being worked on. Taking 700 acres out of 4700 acres would be about 15% of property being rehabilitated. The initial spray costs for 700 acres are $15,400.

If the delay in grazing for 1 and ½ years growing season is not acceptable (until after June 2026) we will amend the project timeline rescind the committee approval and look at how the project can be worked on phase at a time instead of all at once.

Do we want to approve this project and send it to the CFCD Board for approval? A motion was made for a conditional approval of this project at $76,000 as may be amended by Nick, seconded by Desa. The vote was in favor of the conditional project. Steve voted against the project due to its conditional nature. If conditional approval (grazing) is not accommodated, the project approval would be rescinded. As a committee we will have to figure out how to do that should we need to!

Brian says the landowner may have a potential pinion/juniper removal project as well and will get with him to discuss when Cassie and Mark to look at the property.

**Peroulis Lands Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Project** **– No Application has been filled out**

This project would be a pilot and demonstration project on land that is not involved with any grazing activity. The project area would be a 450-acre stand of sagebrush with little grass growth currently. The manufacturer of Rejuvra herbicide would provide $4,000 to project for chemical plus $2.00/acre if “Rangeview” software is used to monitor the results. The beauty of this project is we could get something on the ground this early summer and be able to have 5 years of data, testing the results of Rejuvra and Nitrous (microbial). The America the Beautiful Grant Program could provide 250 acres and $12,000 of grant money for this project if the CFCD board agree. This would be a good project to connect core areas together along the Little Snake, near the Aranbel Ranch. Brian says it is a great spot for Sage Grouse, but Peroulis does not let them on their property to count grouse. That will have to be addressed before this project can go forward as CFCD needs to have access to the site and to records for the site.

The total project cost would be $69,000 less $4,000 in chemical costs (Reguvra) less $12,000 if an America the Beautiful grant is awarded. There may be additional monies from the farm bill that would be able to be used in a project like this. Total cost for this project from the NFWF grant may only be $40,000 to $50,000 range after the landowner match.

The stipulation from Reguvra manufacturer is they will only give us the chemical if we use Rangeview on this project for monitoring. Some discussion was held on what version of Rangeview monitoring should be used, a $2.00 per acre, $3.00 per acre or $5 per acre. Each has slightly different deliverables as far as monitoring, satellite imaging and how much reporting detail is received. The $5 per acre would include satellite imagery monitoring and full reporting on each prediction level and a cheat grass guarantee. Junior (Frontier Station) said he would cover the additional cost to do the $5 per acre versus the $2.00 per acre deliverables. Frontier Station would become a cooperator on this project.

A motion was made to continue working on this project to create an application and develop costs was made by Nick and seconded by Brian. The motion passed unanimously.

**Open Discussion: What happens to Applications once they are approved by the CFCD Board**

Kacey will send a copy of the project to the State BLM just to keep them informed so that when projects get to the reimbursement phase it should help streamline payments from NFWF. Kacey also discussed keeping open communication with LSFO on what types of projects are being funded. If there are grey areas (projects that are borderline in terms of being qualified under the grant guidelines) she will clarify them with LSFO to make sure they are eligible.

**The next meeting of the MCGSG meeting will be Tuesday, April 8, 2025, from 2:00 TO 4:00 pm at the NRCS office conference room.**

**Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Desa and seconded by Junior. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned.