

STATE OF COLORADO

Bill Owens, Governor
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE
AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Bruce McCloskey, Director
6060 Broadway
Denver, Colorado 80216
Telephone: (303) 297-1192



*For Wildlife-
For People*

27 April 2005

Dear Landowner:

You have received this letter because you may own property that provides, or historically provided, habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse. As you may know, there is concern about the long-term welfare of this species. The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), would like to offer landowners the opportunity to participate in a voluntary program which aims to maintain private land rights and help conserve the habitats of Gunnison sage-grouse. This opportunity is part of what is known as a **Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA)** program. This program is voluntary and designed to maintain or improve habitat for Candidate species like the Gunnison sage-grouse, while also providing landowners with assurances that no further actions (beyond those listed in the agreement) would be required on the part of the landowner to protect Gunnison sage-grouse should this species be designated as "Threatened or Endangered" under the Endangered Species Act in the future. The background on the Gunnison sage-grouse, the candidate species process, and the CCAA is more than can be covered here. However, the meetings discussed below will provide the opportunity to fully discuss and answer questions about the parts of this proposal.

Current Status of Gunnison Sage-Grouse

The Gunnison sage-grouse is currently listed by the USFWS as a "Candidate Species" for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This means that while full protection under ESA rules may be warranted, other priorities have precluded a formal listing. As a candidate species, the USFWS is required to perform annual reviews in order to evaluate the status of Gunnison sage-grouse. If sufficient threats are identified to the long term survival of the species, the USFWS may elect to extend the full protection of the ESA to the species by designating it as "Threatened" or "Endangered". The USFWS is presently conducting a status review of Gunnison sage-grouse and a preliminary ruling on whether to list the species as Threatened or Endangered is expected by September 30, 2005, with a final ruling expected in September of 2006.

Potential Impacts of ESA Listing

In the case of the Gunnison sage-grouse, the impacts of a decision to list are not clear. However, it could mean that some current activities on both public and private lands would need to be reviewed to determine their impact on Gunnison sage-grouse. The review, which would be completed by the USFWS, could conclude there are no negative effects or the effects are insignificant or discountable. In that case, those activities would proceed as currently being conducted. A negative finding from the review results in further reviews and application of different rules and regulations under section 7 and section 10 of the ESA. Some activities might need to be changed or modified in some way to meet the regulatory requirements. Often the changes needed are minor, but in some cases the changes to the proposed actions can be major. The CCAA provides a way for landowners to establish that their actions are not harmful to the species and if a decision to list is made, to be provided advance agreement that their management is not a concern and they will not be required to take further actions so long as they continue the CCAA agreement.

Why a CCAA Agreement?

Under a CCAA, non-Federal property owners voluntarily agree to manage their land in a way that removes potential threats to the candidate species. In return, the property owner receives assurances that their activities will not result in any future regulatory obligations in excess of those they agree to at the time they enter into the agreement. Activities approved under the CCAA may continue, even if the species is eventually listed under the ESA.

To help conserve the grouse, and to give landowners a commitment that regulations won't change for them in the future if the grouse is listed, the CDOW and the USFWS have worked together to create a "programmatic" CCAA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, Russell George, Executive Director
WILDLIFE COMMISSION, Jeffrey Crawford, Chair • Tom Burke, Vice Chair • Ken Torres, Secretary
Members, Robert Bray • Rick Enstrom • Philip James • Claire O'Neal • Richard Ray • Robert Shoemaker
Ex Officio Members, Russell George and Don Ament

for Gunnison sage-grouse. The CDOW expects to be issued a permit implementing the CCAA which will be in place for 20 years. Individual landowners can participate in the CCAA by completing an agreement called a **Certificate of Inclusion (CI)**. The grouse will benefit through protection and improvement of important habitat. Landowners will benefit by knowing the protections they are providing to Gunnison sage-grouse and they can continue to manage their land as described in the Certificate of Inclusion without needed further reviews or modifications if the species is listed. Efforts to conserve the grouse, including habitat protections under the proposed CCAA, will be considered by the USFWS when they make their final listing decision. A large sign-up under this program may in fact help avert the need to list the species.

Meetings to Describe the CCAA Program

The CDOW and the USFWS will be holding a series of public meetings to describe the CCAA program and answer specific questions about the CCAA and how to participate. We urge you to attend if you think you may have an interest in participating in the CCAA. Dates, times and locations of the meetings are:

<u>Town</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Start time</u>
Norwood	<u>Norwood Community Center</u>	<u>Weds. May 18</u>	<u>6:30 PM</u>
Gunnison	<u>Fred R Field Western Heritage Center (Multi Purpose Building)</u>		
	<u>Gunnison County Fair Grounds</u>	<u>Mon. May 23</u>	<u>7:00 PM</u>
Dove Creek	<u>Dove Creek Community Center</u>		
	<u>225 W 7th</u>	<u>Tues. May 24</u>	<u>7:00 PM</u>
Hotchkiss	<u>Cantina Room, Memorial Hall</u>		
	<u>1st and Main</u>	<u>Weds May 25</u>	<u>7:00 PM</u>
Glade Park	<u>Glade Park Community Center</u>	<u>Thurs. May 26</u>	<u>6:00 PM</u>
Montrose	<u>Holiday Inn Express</u>	<u>Tues. May 31</u>	<u>6:30 PM</u>

Additional Information

This letter is being sent to over 7,000 landowners in southwestern Colorado. We expect you and others will have questions about the CCAA process and how it will be implemented. These meetings will provide you an opportunity to have those questions answered. Additionally, we are posting more information and maps on the Internet for those who have access at home or at their library or community center. The internet address is:

http://wildlife.state.co.us/species_cons/Gunnison_sage_grouse/CCAA.asp

If you are interested in the program but are unable to attend one of the public meetings, an information packet with a landowner application will be mailed to you upon request. A response form is attached if you would like to receive the information packet in the mail. Just complete the included form and mail or fax it to the address listed to receive the packet.

In Closing

CDOW realizes this letter may come as a surprise to you. Our intent is to inform you of an opportunity to learn more about the Gunnison sage-grouse and the CCAA process. The CDOW priority is to both provide information to affected landowners and apply the resources available to the highest priority conservation actions. You are encouraged to investigate the information on the web site mentioned above or attend one of the meetings at locations we hope are near you. The Colorado Division of Wildlife and USFWS would like to thank you for your understanding and patience as we start the CCAA process and especially for your help in maintaining and improving the habitats of the Gunnison sage-grouse.

We hope to visit with you at one of the public meetings.

Sincerely,



Robert K. Towry
Wildlife Conservation Section



REQUEST FOR GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT WITH ASSURANCES (CCAA) INFORMATION

Please complete this form and return it by MAIL OR FAX to:

**Gary Skiba
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Southwest Region Service Center
415 Turner Drive
Durango, CO 81303- 7922
FAX number: 970-375-6705**

I may be interested in including my land in the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for the Gunnison sage-grouse. Please send me more information and contact me to discuss the possible enrollment of my land.

Name: _____

Address 1: _____

Address 2: _____

City _____, **Colorado.**

Zip Code _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address, if available: _____

WHAT SPECIFIC INFORMATION DO YOU NEED ?
