

**BLM Utah Resource Advisory Council**  
**Conference Call Meeting Minutes**  
**May 25, 2021**

**Meeting attendees**

Utah Resource Advisory Council (RAC) members: Chad Baker, Joan Hayes, Callee Butcher, Clif Koontz, Jay Tanner, Rick Draney, Troy Forrest, Tom Adams, Ralph Bohn, Tyler Thompson, Bill Cox, Frank White, and Mike Worthen.

BLM employees: Greg Sheehan, Lola Bird, Christian Venhuizen, Kent Hoffman, Shered Mullins, Pete Ross, Abbie Jossie, Kelly Orr, Harry Barber, Gary Torres, Mike Gates, Reggie Swenson, Ben Gaddis, Keith Rigtrup, Gloria Tibbets, and Graydon Bascom.

Members of the public: Shea Owens, Kya Marienfeld, Laura Peterson, Leslie Fonger, Dr. Andrew Eatchel, Dillon Hoyt, Cindy Smith, Neal Clark, Nancy Merrill, and Reid Persing.

**BLM Utah Priorities**

Presenter: Greg Sheehan, State Director

- Thank you to RAC members for your efforts on the RAC and in sharing information with the public.
- Statewide Utah RAC: we currently have 14 members and one vacancy. Six of the 14 members have terms that expire on June 6. On Oct. 17, three additional members have terms that will expire.
- The call for nominations package has been advanced to BLM Headquarters and Department of the Interior. We look forward to hearing back on appointments.
- We need to wait until we have a quorum to schedule the next meeting.
- Other advisory committees in Utah include the San Rafael Swell Recreation Area Advisory Council, Bears Ears National Monument Advisory Committee, and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Advisory Committee.
- A large percentage of the state is in drought condition. This affects livestock grazing, wildlife, wild horses and burros, etc. Working with permittees some grazing AUM numbers have been voluntarily and temporarily reduced until drought conditions subside.
- Last year, BLM Utah removed 2,500 horses from the range.
- There is an upcoming gather in the Onaqui Herd Management Area (HMA). The current population is two to three times above the appropriate management level. BLM Utah plans to remove approximately 300 horses from this HMA.
- BLM Utah is prepared for fire season. There have been several fires in Utah already this year. The fire season is becoming the fire year.
- BLM Utah received funding to convert some career seasonal employees to permanent employees.
- BLM Utah is working on travel management plans. Two are completed and there are 10 remaining.

- A priority of the administration is renewable energy – wind, solar, and geothermal. Most renewable energy is located in southwest Utah. We will be offering solar energy and geothermal leases later this year.
- Another priority is Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful with a goal to conserve 30 percent of America’s lands and waters by 2030.
- Watershed Restoration Projects: partners have continued to work with the BLM on landscape restoration projects.
- The Pine Valley Water Supply Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is in progress.
- The BLM wants to listen to and learn from the public on public land management.

RAC member discussion:

- RAC vacancies: there is currently no native American representation on the RAC. We expect to have a tribal representative in this next round of appointments. We want to have diverse representation on the RAC. RAC members are encouraged to share vacancy information with those who may be interested.
- Bears Ears National Monument: Secretary Haaland visited southeast Utah conducting meetings and touring the Bears Ears National Monument. A number of groups attended these meetings. We have not heard when a decision will be made. BLM Utah will be responsive to any decision that will be made.

**Renewable Energy**

Presenters: Kent Hoffman, Deputy State Director for Lands and Minerals and Shered Mullins, Acting Branch Chief for Lands and Realty

- BLM Utah is moving forward on processing renewable energy applications. There are pending projects in the areas of solar, wind, geothermal, and transmission lines directly supporting renewable projects.
- In 2012, a solar energy programmatic EIS was completed. It designated three solar energy zones in Utah – Milford Flats South, Wah Wah Valley, and Escalante Valley.
- The focus is currently on Milford Flats South. The proposed project involving approximately 4,836 acres could impact four permittees and up to 144 animal unit months.
- The REBU/Red Butte Solar Energy Project could involve up to 7,200 acres of BLM land.
- The Milford wind development is a 306-megawatt wind farm north of Milford that provides power for the equivalent of approximately 60,000 homes.
- The proposed Orion/Clear Spot Project has the potential for 400-600 megawatts on approximately 46,000 acres. An EIS is currently in progress.
- Geothermal: Utah has a 20-year geothermal energy development potential of 620 megawatts.
- Current geothermal production in Utah: Cove Fort (ENEL North America) and Blundell (PacifiCorp) totaling 63 megawatts on 8,578 acres.

- December 2020 geothermal lease sale: 11 parcels were sold competitively, 16 were sold non-competitively, and one parcel was unsold.
- A geothermal lease sale is planned for later this year. BLM has received 11 expressions of interest.
- Transmission lines authorized: TransWest Express and Gateway South. Four additional projects are pending: TransCanyon Cross Tie, Zion Solar LLC, Quicksilver Solar, and Hornshadow Solar LLC. These projects support renewable energy projects.
- Renewable energy challenges: military test range, lack of power purchase agreements, eagles (wind), grazing habitat (solar), cultural sites, threatened and endangered species, and rapidly changing technology.

RAC member discussion:

- What about fires in relation to solar panels? Permittees are responsible to put fire mitigation in place.
- With the current planned projects, will goals be met? This depends on the demand of industry. The BLM processes applications as they come in.

### **Great American Outdoors Act Update**

Presenter: Pete Ross, Acting Deputy State Director for Support Services

- The Great American Outdoors Act was signed into effect on Aug. 4, 2020. The funding comes from energy development.
- Deferred maintenance is postponed activities such as repairs on real property in order to save on costs. Capital improvements are new structures.
- Utah's deferred maintenance needs include roads, trails, campgrounds, recreation sites, and administrative sites.
- BLM Utah had to compete with other BLM states for funding and focused on projects that are "shovel ready," working with recreation, fire, and engineering staff.
- BLM Utah tried to make sure that each district received some of this funding.
- Challenges: lots of funding all at once, contracting officers with construction experience and the right warrant levels, and contractor bids are a moving scale with material cost and availability.

RAC member discussion:

- BLM Utah fared very well with funding. This is a five-year program. Funding may be given to states that have projects ready to go. Utah is proactive and has projects ready.
- Who determines projects? Cache inspections look at facilities for safety and security for needed improvements and proposals are then submitted to the State Office.
- Interested in information on the number of projects and locations for a future meeting.

### **Recreation Strategy**

Presenters: Abbie Jossie, Deputy State Director for Natural Resources and Kelly Orr, Branch Chief for Outdoor and Heritage Resources

- BLM Utah developed a vision for the BLM Utah recreation program which will help us respond to and plan for future demands.
- Recreation is one of the main activities that takes place on BLM Utah public lands. We want to encourage the public to recreate responsibly.
- BLM Utah recreation statistics: 22.8 million acres of public lands across five districts and 11 field offices, 508 developed recreation sites, 80 special recreation management areas, 1,200 special recreation permits issued annually, \$9 million spent on labor in FY '20, and \$3.6 million spent on operations.
- Vision: To develop first class recreation experiences on public lands in Utah, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will carefully consider what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. To better meet our public trust obligations and responsibilities, the BLM will consider the recreation goals of local government entities and other community stakeholders when evaluating how we can contribute to a holistic strategy for sustainable recreation. This strategy anticipates how we can respond to changing and increased recreation in Utah over the next 10 years, as well as how we can explore new opportunities to guide recreation use into appropriate places.
- Leaders intent: The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal and major uses for BLM-managed public lands (43 U.S.C. 1701(a)(8)). In support of the BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mandate, BLM Utah's Recreation Program will promote responsible recreation. BLM Utah will strive to meet the public's recreation needs in a sustainable manner while adding value to the economic portfolio and growth plans for local communities. Through all that we do, BLM Utah will emphasize opportunities that: promote diversity and inclusion; demonstrate mindfulness of how experiences may differ based on cultural affiliation; and consider the needs and abilities of individuals with disabilities. While considering all of the above, BLM Utah will focus on developing sustainable and innovative sites, embracing technology, strengthening external partnerships, and establishing a stewardship mindset.
- Desired outcomes: goals are focused on development, technology, partnerships, and education and outreach.
- Development: improve the visitor experience by promoting diversity and inclusion at all sites, considering use patterns and potential carrying capacity to distribute recreational use appropriately throughout the state, and developing new recreation experiences and updating existing sites in a way that more fully considers sustainable life-cycle maintenance and operation costs.
- Technology: embrace existing technology and invest in new technology that is easy for the public to use and access, while creating cost and management efficiencies.
- Partnerships: broaden and strengthen partnerships with local, county, state, and other federal agencies, tribes, and industry groups and other organizations in the private sector, to expand BLM's reach and ability to provide positive recreation experiences for members of the public at a time when local communities are ready and able to embrace those recreational opportunities.

- Education and Outreach: create a community of knowledgeable, self-sufficient, and responsible recreationists and stewards of public lands that feel a sense of duty to protect sites and leave them better than when they arrived, thus helping the BLM reduce management costs.
- Goals: BLM Utah came up with 112 ideas across the four goal areas. Once ideas were developed, they were prioritized.
- Next steps: consider how to implement the ideas. Follow up with state office and field office staff, partners, and others.
- Accomplishments: Ponderosa Grove campground expansion, marking and signing the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, Sage Advice Mountain Bike Trail, repairs and shade shelter at Lower Onion Creek group site, services provided by park rangers for 9,800 visitors, installation of 52 wilderness portal signs, Red Fleet Down Hill Flow trail system and trailhead, vaulted toilet at Lava Tubes, and implemented online reservations at Knolls SRMA, Simpson Springs, and Little Creek Campgrounds.

#### RAC member discussion:

- Why was the trail in Beaver County constructed? Beaver City reached out to the BLM on this trail. Beaver County is working to increase tourism in their area. There is a lot of interest in mountain bike trails.
- Use the term people with varying abilities.
- We have seen lots of vandalism in the last few weeks.
- Partnerships: the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation is a great partner.
- The Salt Lake Tribune did a story about reservations on rec.gov. How does the BLM make sites available? Not a lot of sites are available on rec.gov. We are working on a balance between sites that are reservable and first-come, first-served.
- The vision could be expanded to cover making sites more durable and prepare visitors to recreate responsibly.
- Chad baker can provide contacts for the National Ability Center. Recommend making trails wider; hasn't seen conflicts with all-terrain vehicles.
- Training should be provided to field offices on the recreation strategy, goals, etc.
- Field offices provided input in developing the recreation strategy.

#### **Recreation Dispersed Camping**

Presenters: Harry Barber, District Manager for Paria River District and Gary Torres, District Manager for Canyon Country District

#### Paria River District

- In the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM), dispersed camping is allowed only in previously disturbed areas along designated routes until travel management planning is complete.
- In the Kanab Field Office, dispersed camping is limited to camping within 150 feet of designated routes.

- The Paria River District manages 2.4 million acres of public land. Visitation continues to increase.
- Designated dispersed campsites are currently being considered.
- Developed sites help decrease the burden on dispersed camping, but the more we build, the more we must maintain.
- Improvements have recently been made in the Ponderosa Grove Campground and at Wire Pass.
- Calf Creek project: we are working to improve public safety and accessibility to enhance the visitor experience. Project features include parking lot expansion, trail bypass segment, bridge replacement, new restrooms, and a communication fiber line.
- GSENM recently announced a new dinosaur discovery found in the Rainbows and Unicorns site. There has been a lot of media interest in this new discovery.

RAC member discussion:

- One of the challenges is the popularity of trailheads.
- Can routes to popular sites be marked? The Wave has 4x4 wood post markings and maps to help visitors navigate. Wire Pass has a ladder to get up and down.
- Challenges with increased recreation – what is the approach to address these challenges? We have met with counties to work together on this. We are working to provide more education signing. Funding is also a challenge.
- Are you considering limiting access to reduce the numbers of visitors? We have discussed the idea of a permit system for certain areas.

Canyon Country District

- Dispersed camping is one component of the big picture of visitation.
- Grand County visitor numbers are nearly 2.5 times the number of residents.
- Dispersed camping is the most common type of camping on BLM lands.
- In areas such as Moab, designated dispersed camping is needed to meet the demand. Pressure from use has grown.
- The BLM has only four campgrounds in San Juan County. We are working with Utah State Parks on a project in the Goosenecks area.
- The Canyon Country District manages 3.8 million acres of public land.
- There is no formal way to track dispersed camping.
- Reasons that visitors choose dispersed camping: solitude, campground site not available, and the visitor is seeking free camping.
- Annual campground maintenance costs: trash contract - \$100,000, toilet pumping - \$100,000, and toilet paper - \$15,000.
- Working with partners is important. We work to provide quality recreation experiences and the challenge is how to do that.

RAC member discussion:

- How much more demand is there than the supply available? Bears Ears National Monument visitation has grown 30-40 percent. All campgrounds are sold out non-stop. All reservable sites available are booked and first-come, first-served sites fill up quickly.

### **Recreation High Desert Trail (from Washington County to Tooele)**

Presenters: Mike Gates, District Manager for West Desert District and Reggie Swenson, Assistant Field Manager for Fillmore Field Office

- The trail is proposed to run from St. George to Tooele. BLM Districts involved include West Desert and Color Country. Counties include Tooele, Juab, Millard, Beaver, Iron, and Washington.
- The BLM is receiving proposals from each individual county.
- Existing trails systems: Prospector, Cricket Mountain, Amasa Basin, Conger, Burbank Hills, and Pahvant Valley Heritage Trails.
- The West Desert District is focusing on county Class B roads.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the counties and Forest Service.
- Signage and kiosks were approved in 2019.
- Fillmore Field Office: The Millard County portion will be approved for signage this summer pending Memorandum of Understanding approval by the counties. Juab County - waiting on refinements based on the Tooele County approach.
- Salt Lake Field Office: Tooele County – received proposal but waiting on edge mapping. Juab County – concern received about location of trail connection.
- Cedar City Field Office: The BLM is identifying which routes will require new cultural inventories and is coordinating with Beaver and Iron Counties to conduct the surveys.
- St. George Field Office: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 required preparation of a travel management plan that considers the High Desert Trail. Coordination is ongoing with Washington County and others to prepare the travel management plan for public review.

RAC member discussion:

- For Iron County and Washington County, who are the main entities? The counties are the ones taking the lead on this effort. Michelle Evans is the point person for Iron County. Off-highway vehicle riders in Iron County prefer two-track routes.
- The primary value of these routes is ensuring consistent connectivity of the routes. Connectivity is lacking in the two-track and single-track routes.

### **Recreation Annual Passes Around the State**

Presenters: Abbie Jossie, Deputy State Director for Natural Resources and Mike Gates, District Manager for West Desert District

- Receipts generated from America the Beautiful pass sales stay with the local office. This \$80 pass does not cover everything. It is for sites that require an access fee.
- We could look at a pass for BLM Utah sites.

- What sites would be involved? Individual Special Recreation Permit sites. We could work with partners on this.
- How would funds from a statewide pass be used? Funds could be spread equally across all offices.
- Should money be used for new sites? Money could be put into a new development fund.
- Would fee collection discourage new Individual Special Recreation Permits? Need to be aware of potential unintended consequences.
- BLM Headquarters does not encourage implementation of an annual pass.
- Current fees for West Desert District annual passes: Little Sahara Recreation Area \$120, Knolls \$80, and Fivemile Pass \$50.
- West Desert District would have to re-evaluate current business plans and look at visitation before moving to a three-area pass. They would also need to look at fee structures for the three sites. A challenge would be fee allocation. We want to continue to provide quality customer service. Passes sold last year: Knolls 26 passes, Fivemile Pass 20 passes, and Little Sahara Recreation Area 1,870 passes.
- We could start with a pass that includes Knolls and Fivemile Pass.

RAC member discussion:

- Currently, there are Individual Special Recreation Permits in the West Desert District and Cedar Mesa in the Canyon Country District.
- The next business plan proposal coming up is for the Cedar City Field Office.
- Many visitors would like to have one pass that covers Knolls, Five Mile Pass, and Little Sahara Recreation Area.
- Fivemile Pass: on track for implementing the \$50 annual fee recommended by the RAC.
- There are lots of factors at play for consideration of combined annual passes. It is worth continuing to look at a combined annual pass. At a statewide level, there is still more legwork to be done.
- Glad to see the annual pass for Fivemile Pass. See value in a multi-site pass. Both a single-site pass and a multi-site pass could be offered.
- If the fee for a multi-site pass is right, it could be beneficial. Please continue looking into the multi-site pass.

**Back Country Air Strips in Resource Management Plans**

Presenter: Ben Gaddis, Acting Branch Chief for Planning

- There are 333 backcountry airstrips in Utah. Approximately 111 are located on BLM-managed land.
- Approximately 71 percent of the airstrips are located in San Juan, Garfield, Uintah, Wayne, and Emery Counties.
- Management takes place in four ways: Resource Management Plan (RMP) decisions, travel planning, realty authorizations, and special recreation permits.



- RMP decisions: There are 19 active land use plans for all BLM districts in Utah. There are decisions about use of backcountry airstrips in four plans: Price RMP, Richfield RMP, Kanab RMP, and the Bears Ears National Monument Management Plan.
- RMP decisions can allow for aircraft to use existing backcountry airstrips. Airstrips fall under travel planning as implementation-level decisions.
- Travel planning: 77 open, three limited, seven closed by decision, and 26 not addressed.
- Realty authorizations are necessary for extended use (usually commercial) of a backcountry airstrip.
- Special recreation permits: issued to authorize use for commercial, competitive, and organized group use; provide resource protection measures as conditions of permits; and a separate special recreation permit is required even when a commercial or organized entity has a BLM-issued right-of-way for other commercial purposes at an airstrip.

RAC member discussion:

- Pilots seem to land in various locations. Are they allowed to land anywhere? Use of airstrips is considered a motorized activity and should be limited to designated routes. The Federal Aviation Administration also controls use and they are supposed to land in specific locations. Don't think aircraft should be classified as motorized.
- Are these emergency landing airstrips? Emergency use is not addressed in RMPs.
- Are the airstrips delineated on the ground? Some airstrips get regular use and some that are not used as much may be grown over.
- Can all types of aircraft use these airstrips? Small fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters are the types of aircraft that use these airstrips.
- In special recreation permits, resource protection measures may include things like season of use.
- Who maintains the airstrips? The BLM is working on the question of maintenance. For those that have a realty action such as a right-of-way, it is the right-of-way holder.

**Recreation Management by the BLM and State of Utah in Red Cliffs Zone 6**

Presenter: Keith Rigtrup, Field Manager for St. George Field Office

- The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Zone 6 totals 6,813 acres: 3,471 acres BLM, 3,226 acres School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), 70 acres Utah Department of Transportation, and 46 acres private land.
- The BLM and SITLA are signatories to the habitat conservation plan (HCP) implementation agreement. The BLM will seek to acquire state and private inholdings through willing seller acquisitions.
- The RMP amendment prioritized management of threatened and endangered species habitat.
- This area is closed to the following activities: dispersed camping, recreational target shooting, paintball, physical geocaches, campfires, and motorized or equestrian events.
- Potential new facilities could include trailheads, information kiosks, restrooms, etc.

- The HCP allows for a total of 50 miles of routes within Zone 6 (BLM and SITLA), no more than four miles of motorized and 35 miles of non-motorized roads and trails on BLM-managed lands.
- Will identify locations to construct wildlife-friendly boundary fencing on BLM lands. An environmental assessment will need to be completed for the fencing.

RAC member discussion:

- A private landowner in the area may be willing to sell.
- Fencing on SITLA – working with the Washington County Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee.
- Washington County patrols this area. There will be an increased law enforcement presence. There is good monitoring that takes place during events.
- Climbing areas – groups are willing to work with the BLM on these areas.

### **Recreation Business Plans Update**

Presenter: Graydon Bascom, Acting Utah Recreation Program Lead

- The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) is the authority for charging recreation fees.
- BLM Utah held a business plan writing workshop. Once developed, business plans are posted for public comment. The Cedar City Field Office business plan is coming next.
- BLM develops the fee proposal, makes the plan available for public review and comment, and then presents the plan for RAC review and recommendation.
- FLREA authorizes five agencies to charge and collect recreation fees on federal lands and has been extended to Oct. 1, 2022.
- Fees may only be established when: fees are appropriate with the benefits and services provided, the effects of fees to users and service providers have been considered, comparable fees charged by the public and private sectors have been considered, applicable public policies and management objectives have been considered, and input is received from recreation RACs.
- Expanded amenity recreation fees may be charged when certain amenities are provided.
- Fees cannot be collected for entrance fees, standard amenity recreation fees for people under age 16, parking along roads and trails, overlooks and scenic pullouts, and pass-through travel.
- Funds may be used for visitor services, habitat restoration, visitor reservation services, law enforcement, costs of collection, and repair, maintenance, and facility enhancement.
- The public must have the opportunity to participate before agencies establish new fees or change existing fees.
- Notice must be published in the *Federal Register* six months before establishing a new fee site.
- Recreation RAC duties: make recommendations to the agencies on the business plans as proposed for modifying existing fees or establishing or eliminating fees.

- General public support: it is the substance of the comments that matters most, not the volume. Comments are very valuable to the BLM.

#### RAC member discussion:

- What is policy on fire rings? Use of existing fire rings is acceptable. The public is asked not to create new fire rings.
- The RAC can recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of a fee proposal.

#### **Public Comment Period**


- Neal Clark, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA): appreciates the BLM focusing on recreation issues and taking it seriously. There has been exponential growth over the last 10 years and the last 15 months with the pandemic. This is something that SUWA is trying to wrap their head around to help agencies manages these issues. We want people to have a good experience when recreating.
- The following public comment was received from BK via email and was shared with RAC members for their review prior to the meeting: this meeting is very important to attend so how do you attend? there are many issues with national land in utahthat need to be observed for protedtin of nature from profiteers who want to turn everything into a profit forthemselves with moral and mortal danger to nature we need to ban all grazing on utah lands which are owned by the people of this nation,m all 355,000,000 of us.national land is not utah land. it is land owned by people int he 50 states. citizens. govt of the oepeople by thepeople and that includes all of us in the other 49 states and that is national laand. the wild horses need that land.they are being killed becaues selfish greedy profiteers in utah want to use national land for destructive cattleraising. that needs to stop. we also need to stop hunting and trapping on national lands. wildlife needs peaceful places to live free from insanemen with guns. national land should not be burned up or treated with chemicals. and napture needs clean water for the wildlife nad trees. we need to stop having chemical put on national land. we need to respect nature and protect and preserve it. when we dont we kill ourselves. this comment is for thepublic record., please receipt.

#### **RAC Member Wrap-up Discussions**

- From State Director Greg Sheehan: thank you to the RAC members for your service. I am impressed with how familiar you are with the resources that the BLM manages. I have a strong belief in public processes and appreciate feedback from the public. Thank you to all who care so much about our public lands.
- Vacancies: it can be a lengthy process to get positions filled.
- Recreation: partnerships are important – work with the new Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation. There are many different groups to partner with to get work done and garner public support.
- The BLM works to take advantage of partnerships and funding opportunities.

- State Office staff coordinate with field staff on these opportunities.
- Provide email updates to RAC members on current issues.

The next Utah RAC meeting will be scheduled once new members are appointed and a quorum is established.

Approved:   
Troy Forrest (Jul 21, 2021 10:56 MDT)  
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Troy Forrest, Chairperson