



Town of Castle Valley

Letter to BLM regarding wedding event at base of Castleton Tower.

To: David W. Pals, dpals@blm.gov and Jennifer L. Jones, jljones@blm.gov and Keri A. Nelson kanelson@blm.gov and Porebski, Matthew R" <mporebski@blm.gov>

As you are aware, the wedding of Emma Waldron and Andrew Chen that took place on September 2, 2023, near the base of Castleton Tower created an extensive and disruptive visual impact for four days leaving copious trash that the BLM ultimately had to remove. Photographs evidencing the damage were sent by email to the BLM and posted by disturbed residents on the Castle Valley Facebook website. Before the planned event Jennifer Jones sent an email to Mayor Duncan to advise the Town and its residents that the approved request was for a small event at sunset with a small white tent that might be visible. A map with a marker showing the location of the event appeared to be closer to the Loop Road (not Castle Valley Road as stated in the email). The BLM concluded that a special recreation permit was not needed for a wedding ceremony and reception. Instead a letter of agreement was issued to Waldron and Chen, copy of which was also attached to that email.

Unfortunately, the Waldron/Chen wedding that transpired was not as represented in the letter agreement. They agreed that they would not have any businesses but they hired Found Rental Co, a wedding designer, a floral designer, a caterer and toilet facilities at the event. The couple withheld the fact that they would have a large generator or that they would set up a catering service with tables and chairs for 20+ dining guests. They said they would have a small white tent, not that they would erect a 24 foot cabana that included a serving bar and contained large stuffed chairs and ottomans. They did not tell the BLM that they would place groups of glass candles all along both sides of the dirt road for over 150 feet or that they would need a large moving truck to set up and remove the cabana and all the furniture and decorations they had hauled up the narrow dirt road. And they did not disclose that they and their wedding items would occupy the area from early Saturday morning until Tuesday morning when the last of the refuse was removed by BLM Rangers ... not just at sunset on Saturday as they represented. They occupied the base of Castleton Tower and effectively excluded the public for the entire Labor Day weekend. Had they been truthful and disclosed these plans to the BLM, we believe that the BLM would not have issued its letter of agreement. People will often mislead or outright lie so that they can do as they please and, maybe, ask for forgiveness after the fact.

What we are concerned about is future requests such as this. The beauty of the public lands in the Moab vicinity are well publicized on the internet by wedding photographers and others. It is reasonable to anticipate there will be more requests for weddings at this location in the future. And it is reasonable to anticipate that misunderstandings or misrepresentations will occur unless there are clear restrictions and consequences for such misrepresentation. The Town of Castle Valley would like the BLM to revise its internal procedures to address our concerns about future requests.

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First, we don't think it is appropriate to give permission for any wedding ceremonies and receptions at the coordinates 38.63792, -109.36608, which is at the base of Castleton Tower. The BLM does not allow camping in that area and it should not allow the erection of any size tent there. Most importantly, it is a reasonable expectation that a wedding reception means guests will be provided with food, tables for the food, equipment for the preservation and serving of that food and other amenities such as comfortable seating, etc... all of which can easily expand in the minds of a wedding couple into the Waldron/Chen extravaganza. The result is that the public is prevented from the enjoyment of that same public land for hours (or days) while wedding reception paraphernalia is set up and removed. Unless the BLM has a way to ensure that this will not happen, no permission should be given. Obviously, there is nothing to prevent small groups from having a simple wedding ceremony at the site, if there is no reception, and no permission is necessary.

Second, if the BLM is compelled to give permission for weddings and receptions, we request that more stringent requirements and restrictions be included along with the other BLM requirements such as:

1. Time limitations for an event should be clearly specified. For example, if the wedding is scheduled to take place at sunset, specify a block of time for set up before and clean up after. A simple outdoor wedding should not take more than 3-4 hours maximum.
2. No fires or glass candles. The fire hazard in this area is a real health and safety concern and broken glass is extremely difficult to clean up.
3. No commercial or paid contractors organizing or providing services in connection with the wedding (other than religious officiants.) If the BLM must permit the use of businesses, they should be required to provide evidence of licenses and liability insurance and should sign an agreement making them liable for damages.
4. No tents, no generators, no furniture such as dining tables or chairs other than portable camp chairs, no vehicles larger than common 4x4 trucks.
5. Require deposits and fines for damages and violations of the permit.

Thirdly, there needs to be consequences for violations of the terms of the letter of agreement. We understand that the BLM has limited personnel and resources to ensure that the requesting couple abide by their agreement. Accordingly, we would like to see the addition of a deposit and a fine for the violation of the agreement. We have been told that it was the BLM rangers who had to remove the trash and abandoned property left days after the wedding. Not only is it a waste of the valuable time of those skilled rangers to be trash collectors, public funds should not have to be spent to collect the trash of private partygoers. A deposit in a sufficient amount to cover personnel time and BLM resources should be required. This would not create a hardship for wedding couples as all wedding venues require deposits that will be refunded if there are no damages.



Lastly, we were advised that your office, in partnership with BLM Law Enforcement, would be following up with the couple to work towards improving their understanding of what was described, what was agreed upon and what actually happened. Also that you would be following up with Found Rental Co, the company that transported all the furniture to and from the site. Tire tracks made off road were not raked and are still visible. We would like to be advised as to what information was discovered and what, if any, consequences resulted from those two follow ups.

The Town of Castle Valley has enjoyed a good working relationship with the BLM and we want to continue to cooperate with and assist the BLM in any way we can. We very much appreciate that the BLM provided the Town with the information it had in July about the planned September 2, 2023 wedding. Continuing to provide information about scheduled events that includes the location and a copy of the permit or letter of agreement is very important for the Town of Castle Valley and its residents. We hope that we can avoid a repeat of the negative impacts like this past event created.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and suggestions. We look forward to hearing how the BLM will proceed.

Town of Castle Valley Mayor Jazmine Duncan



And Council Members: Pamela Gibson, Tory Hill, Harry Holland and Robert O'Brien