

**MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL WASATCH COMMISSION (“CWC”) STAKEHOLDERS COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT SYSTEMS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023, AT 1:30 P.M. THE MEETING WAS CONDUCTED BOTH IN-PERSON AND VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM. THE ANCHOR LOCATION WAS CWC OFFICES LOCATED AT 41 NORTH RIO GRANDE STREET, SUITE, 102, SALT LAKE CITY UTAH.**

**Committee Members:** Kelly Boardman, Chair

Dan Zalles, Co-Chair

Carl Fisher

Caitlin Curry

Megan Nelson

Patrick Shea

John Knoblock

**Staff:** Lindsey Nielsen, Executive Director

Samantha Kilpack, Director of Operations

**OPENING**

1. **Chair Kelly Boardman will Open the Public Meeting as Chair of the Environment Systems Committee of the Central Wasatch Commission Stakeholders Council.**

Chair Kelly Boardman called the Central Wasatch Commission (“CWC”) Stakeholders Council Environment Systems Committee Meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. and welcomed those present.

1. **Review and Approval of the Minutes from the November 13, 2023, Meeting.**

**MOTION:** Carl Fisher moved to APPROVE the Environment Systems Committee Minutes from the Meeting Held on November 13, 2023. Dan Zalles seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Committee.

**REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF COMMITTEE PURPOSE AND GOALS**

1. **Committee Members will Discuss the Proposed Vision, Purpose, and Goals of the Committee.**

Chair Boardman reported that there was a desire to discuss the purpose and goals of the Environment Systems Committee. She also wanted to discuss the results of the survey that was distributed. After the first meeting, CWC Staff prepared a survey inquiring as to what areas of expertise the Committee Members have and the vision for the Committee. There were four responses to the survey.

Chair Boardman reported that the purpose of the Environment Systems Committee was to support the vision of the Mountain Accord and build a consensus that would result in responsible stewardship of natural resources. Preservation of quality recreation experiences, establishing an environmentally sustainable transportation system, and contributing to a vibrant economy were all goals outlined in the Mountain Accord. Chair Boardman noted that in the Idealized Environmental Systems document from the Mountain Accord, the following six goals were listed:

* Protect, maintain, and improve the watershed health, water supply, and water quality;
* Protect and improve air quality for the purpose of public health, environmental health, and scenic visibility;
* Protect and restore functioning and connected aquatic and terrestrial habitats and ecosystems;
* Preserve additional lands to avoid loss of critical conservation values and restore existing degraded lands;
* Mitigate the severity of climate change and develop adaptive capacity to reduce vulnerabilities to local climate change impacts; and
* Develop legal, regulatory, financial, and integrated governance structures that provide long-term and sustainable support for achieving the environmental system goals.

Carl Fisher thought those goals were important and perhaps more important than when the Idealized Environmental Systems document was initially drafted. Chair Boardman agreed. She believed one of the questions was whether the CWC as a whole still agreed with that statement. Executive Director, Lindsey Nielsen, agreed with what had been shared. The Mountain Accord was still accepted by CWC Staff and the CWC Board as the guiding document for the work of the organization. The four major focus areas of the CWC were still recreation, environment, transportation, and economy. All of the work done so far by the CWC was intended to move the Mountain Accord forward.

Mr. Fisher reported that during the Mountain Accord process, he was part of a team that did some aerial surveys. It had been possible to see connectivity patterns for wildlife that way. An attempt had been made to map some of those and a hand-sketched map was included as part of the Systems Report at one point. He thought there might be some opportunities for the CWC to collaborate with Sageland Collaborative and other organizations to re-examine some of the wildlife monitoring and see what had changed since the Mountain Accord process. Some data gaps needed to be addressed. He suggested focusing on obtaining funding to fill in those existing data gaps. Once the data gaps are addressed, it will be possible to know which areas need additional protection.

Co-Chair Dan Zalles asked if there were any endangered species identified in the Wasatch that would fall under the Endangered Species Act. Mr. Fisher noted that wolverines had recently been listed and there were wolverine sightings in the Wasatch. Wolverines were not listed as endangered when the Mountain Accord was first drafted. Ms. Nielsen pulled up the Environmental Dashboard for reference. How this topic could potentially be framed within the CWC scope of work would be to take an audit of what was listed on all of the pages of the Environmental Dashboard. The Environment Systems Committee could compile a list of areas where the data gaps were and discuss how to potentially address those data gaps. For instance, there could be a page that lists the endangered species in the Wasatch or there could be information shared about the wetlands.

Co-Chair Zalles asked what the process was for data gathering. It sounded like the Environment Systems Committee would need to ask the CWC to approve the gathering of additional data. He believed a proposal could be submitted to the CWC Board, and if that was approved, the CWC could partner with some local researchers to seek funding for research projects. Ms. Nielsen reported that there was a team behind the Environmental Dashboard at the University of Utah. During the Mountain Accord, which was when the Environmental Dashboard concept was created, there was an Environmental Dashboard Steering Committee. Most of those Steering Committee Members were still working and involved in the community. The Environment Systems Committee could compile a list of data gaps to outline information that should be in the Environmental Dashboard. She felt that would be the best place for the Environment Systems Committee to start. It was important to think about what kind of data was necessary to motivate people to protect land and whether that kind of data existed in the Environmental Dashboard already. That work would be a good starting point.

Ms. Nielsen explained that the Environmental Dashboard collected all of the existing data and put it all into one accessible location. The team at the University of Utah made sure all of the data was easy to understand and accessible to all. She clarified that the data included in the Environmental Dashboard was not newly collected. The team at the University of Utah networked with scientists and organizations that were national and local to Utah. There was a significant network already established. The Environment Systems Committee did not need to worry about doing that networking, because the University of Utah team was already in place. What the Committee could do was the initial research work to determine what data gaps existed. From there, it would be possible to take that information to the Stakeholders Council and the CWC Board for consideration. If there was support from the Stakeholders Council and then support at the CWC Board level, it would be possible to initiate a data collection process with the team at the University of Utah. Ms. Nielsen shared information about when different sections of the Environmental Dashboard were updated.

Co-Chair Zalles questioned how much the CWC could rely on the University of Utah team to go out and collect data if existing data sources were not available. Ms. Nielsen had full faith in the team that built the Environmental Dashboard. She did not have any hesitations about the abilities or expertise that the team had to offer. When it came to new data collection, that would likely involve a different team that was assembled by the team the CWC had worked with at the University of Utah. For example, there could potentially be a subcontract with Sageland Collaborative or another entity. Mr. Fisher echoed the comments made about the expertise of the team at the University of Utah. He noted that approximately one year ago, an email was received from Jim Ehleringer about a human impacts workshop as it pertained to the environment in the Wasatch and human interactions.

Mr. Fisher reported that he attended a meeting with the U.S. Forest Service that morning with a regional coalition he had worked to build. There had been discussions about putting a planning rule in place for ski area development at the Forest Service level. The regional forester and her team were interested in working to advance that policy. Some things could be done on an administrative level to address some of the existing issues. If there was a point person from the CWC who wanted to be engaged in those conversations, he could make sure that person was included. Mr. Fisher shared additional information about the people who were part of that regional coalition.

Ms. Nielsen shared the human element of the Environmental Dashboard. She explained that it included the data that was collected through the Visitor Use Study. The Environment Systems Committee could brainstorm other types of data and information that could be displayed there. There was a lot of work that could be done by the Committee that was specific to the Environmental Dashboard. She encouraged all Committee Members to review the Environmental Dashboard further.

Patrick Shea did not believe the Visitor Use Survey took into account that people were prone to going off the trails. It might be possible to create some sample areas and monitor them to obtain some of the missing data. Mr. Fisher stressed the importance of local governments obtaining an Open Space and Land Acquisition bond to acquire inholdings. The last Salt Lake County open space initiative and bond was in 2006. It passed with approximately 80% of the popular vote and was $24 million for open space and $24 million for parks and recreation facilities. Summit County and Park City did good work on funding for open space and he felt this particular area was behind in seeking out those kinds of opportunities. Ms. Nielsen pointed out that it could be a Committee focus.

Co-Chair Zalles reported that there had been previous discussions about having someone from one of the land trusts attend a meeting and share information. Mr. Shea believed Wendy Fisher from Utah Open Lands would be willing. Additionally, someone from Friends of Alta could come and present. Co-Chair Zalles thought it would be informative for the Committee to learn about those processes. Mr. Shea shared information about some of the work that was done within Friends of Alta. Mr. Fisher believed that between Utah Open Lands and Friends of Alta, it would be possible to schedule an informative presentation. However, a potential action item would be to push for open space funding. Megan Nelson shared information about the Nature Conservancy and Summit Land Conservancy. The Committee discussed the difference between what had been done in Summit County and Salt Lake County. Mr. Fisher noted that Summit County and Park City had bonded in the recent past.

Co-Chair Zalles wondered what could be done with the Big Cottonwood Canyon and Little Cottonwood Canyon ski resorts. Mr. Shea noted that the ski resorts there were surrounded by Forest Service land. The private lands were old mining claims. Mr. Fisher pointed out that Park City and Summit County were very different from Big Cottonwood Canyon and Little Cottonwood Canyon. The resorts in Summit County were all privately owned whereas the Cottonwood resorts were Forest Service leases. Approximately two-thirds of the State skier visits went to Summit County.

**FEDERAL DESIGNATION DISCUSSION**

1. **Committee Members will Discuss Potential Land Designations for the Central Wasatch and the Implications of Pursuing Different Types of Designations.**

Chair Boardman noted that the next item on the meeting agenda was a discussion about potential land designations in the Central Wasatch. She asked for information about the Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area (“CWNCRA”). For instance, what the history was and why the National Conservation and Recreation Area had been selected. She wanted to understand the benefits of those designations in comparison to some of the others that had been suggested, such as a National Scenic Area. It was important to think about both the strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Fisher was not certain how well he could speak to the strengths and weaknesses of a National Scenic Area. He explained that during the Mountain Accord, there was an exhaustive process where different designations were explored. The result was support for a National Conservation and Recreation Area.

During the Mountain Accord process, different National Conservation Areas and National Recreation Areas were explored. There were National Recreation Areas across the country that had ski areas in them already or ski areas nearby. When talking about designations, there were varying levels of comfort and discomfort based on the title and name. Ms. Nelson shared additional information about the Mountain Accord process. She explained that many possible land designations were examined to determine what made the most sense. There was a desire to have something that encapsulated all of the needs rather than micro-designations, to ensure that there would be some level of cohesion. There was consensus for the Conservation and Recreation Area as opposed to another designation type.

Mr. Fisher pointed out that it was important to pick a designation that was comfortable for whoever would be the sponsor of the bill. Mr. Shea thought it would be interesting to see whether Salt Lake, Summit, Wasatch, and Utah County would pass similar ordinances, which would essentially create a Master Plan at the County level about how the interests should be managed. He understood the Forest Service was the entity that had the largest say in that. Mr. Fisher believed that kind of idea was outside the scope of the CWC work. Co-Chair Zalles referenced the letter that had been forwarded from the Stakeholders Council to the CWC Board. It might be useful to consider what the main problems were that the CWC was trying to solve in the Central Wasatch. Once there was consensus about the issues with the greatest urgency, it would be possible to make decisions about the next steps.

Co-Chair Zalles understood how the National Conservation and Recreation Area arose, but felt it was a confusing designation. That could potentially create problems as it continues to move forward. He referenced comments that John Knoblock had shared previously in regard to National Scenic Areas. Co-Chair Zalles explained that it was not fully settled in his mind what the appropriate designation would be. He believed the CWC Board needed to confirm that the CWNCRA work was a priority and then it might be possible to determine some of the details. Ms. Nelson pointed out that there were very few land designations that came with mandatory land management prescriptions. Part of the reason the decision had been made to have a National Conservation and Recreation Area was because the prescriptions within the actual bill were more important than the actual name chosen. Ms. Nielsen reported that if the CWNCRA was sponsored and was eventually introduced, there would be edits and redrafts done. It likely would not have the same name at the end of the process.

Additional discussions were had about the CWNCRA. Mr. Fisher shared information about the previous Mountain Accord discussions. Ms. Nielsen reported that the CWNCRA would not change the management. The management of the area would remain with the Forest Service. Mr. Fisher pointed out that the CWC had already addressed some of the issues with the previously proposed land exchanges. There was some language in there related to adaptive management that needed to remain. That language would make it possible to deal with climate impacts, which was one of the goals.

Mr. Shea discussed land exchanges and noted that Summit County had been successful in getting the patchwork Federal lands transferred on an exchange basis. Summit County or Park City would have ownership of those as opposed to BLM or the Forest Service. In Salt Lake County alone, there were over 2,000 acres of orphan properties. Those were usually three or four acres. That might be an interesting approach in Cardiff and other places. Co-Chair Zalles asked how the CWNCRA would handle land exchanges as currently written. Ms. Nielsen noted that there had been a presentation on the CWNCRA recently at the Stakeholders Council Meeting. The CWNCRA only impacted public land, not private land, and the land exchanges had been removed from the latest CWNCRA version.

Co-Chair Zalles asked Mr. Knoblock to explain why the National Scenic Area designation might be preferred for areas that had both private and public ownership. Mr. Knoblock stated that the only thing he had seen about the National Scenic Area designation was that it could draw a perimeter around the whole zone, which would put Wilderness Areas, private lands, and Special Management Areas within one boundary, creating a cleaner boundary. Ultimately, the Forest Service would still be the agency that would manage the area. Ms. Nelson noted that in a different iteration of the legislation, there was a complete boundary, but there was pushback as there was not a desire to have private lands within the boundary given the fact that the CWNCRA did not apply to private lands. Mr. Fisher confirmed that there was a lot of resistance from both the industry and individuals.

Chair Boardman thought the CWNCRA-focused conversation had been beneficial, especially for Committee Members who were newer to the CWNCRA discussions. The National Conservation and Recreation Area seemed to be the best fit for what was desired. Having an adaptive management plan in place was important for water and wildlife. She asked for any closing comments. Mr. Fisher noted that entities like Salt Lake City had water authority and Federal law directing them to provide clean drinking water to people in the Salt Lake Valley. Those entities were supportive of the CWNCRA. There were national conservation and recreation organizations in support of the legislation as well. If too many changes were made to the draft, there was a risk of losing that support.

**CLOSING**

1. **Chair Boardman will Call for a Motion to Adjourn the Environment Systems Committee Meeting.**

**MOTION:** Kelly Boardman moved to ADJOURN the Environment Systems Committee Meeting. Carl Fisher seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.

***I hereby certify that the foregoing represents a true, accurate, and complete record of the Central Wasatch Commission Stakeholders Council Environment Systems Committee Meeting held Tuesday, December 12, 2023.***

**Teri Forbes**

Teri Forbes

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Minutes Secretary

Minutes Approved: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_