

**MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL WASATCH COMMISSION (“CWC”) STAKEHOLDERS COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT SYSTEMS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024, AT 2:30 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:** Dan Zalles, Co-Chair

 Adam Lenkowski

 Maura Hahnenberger

 John Knoblock

 Patrick Shea

**Staff:** Lindsey Nielsen, Executive Director

Samantha Kilpack, Director of Operations

**OPENING**

1. **Co-Chair Dan Zalles will Open the Public Meeting as Chair of the Environment Systems Committee of the Central Wasatch Commission Stakeholders Council.**

Co-Chair Dan Zalles called the Central Wasatch Commission (“CWC”) Stakeholders Council Environment Systems Committee Meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. and welcomed those present.

1. **Review and Approval of the Minutes from the December 12, 2023, Meeting.**

The Environment Systems Committee Meeting Minutes from December 12, 2023, were not voted on.

**REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL DASHBOARD**

1. **Committee Members will Discuss the Environmental Dashboard within the Context of the Environmental Goals of the Mountain Accord and Potential Improvements to the Dashboard.**

Co-Chair Zalles hoped everyone present had taken time to look at the Environmental Dashboard. Ahead of the meeting, he had written out a list of items he felt were missing from the Environmental Dashboard. John Knoblock had also put together a document outlining how the Mountain Accord directed the Stakeholders Council to look at certain issues and challenges, such as overuse and risk factors to the environment. The Environmental Dashboard did not necessarily have information about those kinds of risk factors, though there was a lot of useful data available. If there was a way to focus on some of the risk factors, such as degraded roads, that would be beneficial for all users.

Co-Chair Zalles believed there were two challenges related to adding risk factors to the Environmental Dashboard. The first was whether the CWC had access to that data and whether it was possible to obtain that data. The second challenge was how to present that kind of data on the Environmental Dashboard. Executive Director, Lindsey Nielsen, reported that the Environmental Dashboard was a project first considered under the Mountain Accord. Previously, a group of experts that came to be called the Mountain Accord Environmental Dashboard Steering Committee, was formed. Many of those Steering Committee Members were now members of the Stakeholders Council, such as Patrick Shea and Kirk Nichols. A lot had changed since that time. What was originally contemplated for the Environmental Dashboard was a static paper report. Over the years, the capabilities increased, and it shifted to a dynamic resource that could be accessed online by people of all education levels.

The Environmental Dashboard work included Jim Ehleringer from the University of Utah and his team, in partnership with many research groups in Utah. A cataloguing was done of all of the data that was available. That data was then presented to a wide variety of users. Ultimately, the University of Utah team made decisions about what would be included in the Environmental Dashboard. If there was a desire to add something to the Environmental Dashboard, she believed the existing team, including Mr. Ehleringer and Pheobe McNealy, were fully capable of handling those additions. The Environment Systems Committee could identify the gaps and ask the team which ones would be easiest to collect data for. She clarified that some of the gaps existed because the data was not easy to collect. It was always the intention to reconvene the Environmental Dashboard Steering Committee to determine what would be included in the human element. Currently included in the human element was the trails data collected through the Visitor Use Study. While that was a good start, it was not comprehensive, and more could be added in the future to that specific section.

Mr. Knoblock referenced the Mountain Accord, which mentioned monitoring the degraded conditions in the Central Wasatch to ensure that those were addressed. That kind of information would likely not be continuously monitored, but it could be done quarterly or on a semi-annual basis. Having that information would make it possible for the CWC to determine the impacts. It could essentially be used as a management tool to make sure conditions were being monitored appropriately. Mr. Knoblock thought it would be worth asking the CWC Board what their priorities were with respect to a management tool. It might also be worthwhile to see what the U.S. Forest Service thought were the most important indicators of ecologic health. There could be discussions with the Salt Lake City Watershed Manager as well. It was possible to determine the best measures and obtain that data.

Ms. Nielsen reported that all of the groups mentioned by Mr. Knoblock had been involved in the process from the beginning. She shared the Environmental Dashboard with those present, specifically the Data Resources subtab. It outlined all of the agencies and organizations that the team at the University of Utah had partnered with during the process. When talking about data gaps, she recommended speaking directly to the people who had developed the Environmental Dashboard. The team understood what was easiest to collect and what would be the highest priority for future collection. Additionally, it would be possible to find out what the data collection would cost.

Co-Chair Zalles wondered what the best strategy was to start that communication process. Ms. Nielsen reported that there was regular communication with Ms. McNealy because there were constant updates taking place on the Environmental Dashboard. Since she had an open line of communication there, it might be best for her to reach out to the team and initiate that conversation.

Mr. Shea explained that the difficulty with a database was keeping it current. He thought the soil and geology information covered the area that Mr. Knoblock had expressed concerns about. The real question was who would provide current monitoring and prioritization. One potential path forward was to ask the Brigham Young University or University of Utah geology departments to conduct a survey. However, he pointed out that it would likely cost money to have a survey like that conducted.

Mr. Knoblock shared information about the recent CWC Board Retreat. One priority was the implementation of Phase I from the Utah Department of Transportation (“UDOT”) Little Cottonwood Canyon Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”). There was a desire to reduce traffic congestion and roadside parking. Those goals would arguably impact the environment in Little Cottonwood Canyon. It would be possible to look at the monthly average vehicle counts up the canyon and the average amount of roadside parking. That was one way to monitor the activity and consider impacts.

Mr. Shea suggested speaking to Laura Briefer to see whether a stream survey could be conducted on an annual basis. The survey could be done from the headwaters down to the Little Cottonwood treatment plant. Ms. Nielsen reported that the data included on the Environmental Dashboard was updated whenever there was new data. Co-Chair Zalles believed there was consensus that it made sense to reach out to those who may be able to fill in some of the existing data gaps to find out whether that was feasible. Data was a useful way to persuade others to take action. There might be a way to set up some milestones in data collection or data monitoring. It was now a matter of reaching out to others to start those discussions. Mr. Knoblock noted that a lot of the data existed in the Environmental Dashboard already. It might be a matter of shifting the format and presentation so that was better understood. For example, looking at the last decade of average vehicle counts to understand trends. Ms. Nielsen noted that the Environmental Dashboard graphs were interactive.

Adam Lenkowski asked whether there was a traffic counter for Big Cottonwood Canyon. This was confirmed. Ms. Nielsen indicated where that data could be found on the Environmental Dashboard. Co-Chair Zalles acknowledged that there was a lot of solid traffic data, but the human condition data still had some existing gaps as did the data related to road conditions. Ms. Nielsen confirmed that the human element was the least built-out element of the Environmental Dashboard. There was the most opportunity for growth there. Co-Chair Zalles read data suggestions submitted by Mr. Knoblock:

* Number of un-reclaimed mine sites;
* Percent of hardened land surface;
* Stream e-coli average concentration;
* Number of road-killed megafauna;
* Acres of invasive weeds;
* Wildfire risk (acreage).

According to Mr. Knoblock, there were six sets of data that did not currently exist on the Environmental Dashboard that could be added. Mr. Knoblock explained that there could be a summary report or summary page that could be established as a more useful management tool. Mr. Lenkowski believed a presentation needed to be put together that included a summary of the changes that the Environment Systems Committee wanted to see. That could be presented to the Stakeholders Council for consideration and then could potentially move forward to the CWC Board for consideration. Ms. Nielsen confirmed that the Environment Systems Committee could create a list of data gaps. That list could be sent to Ms. McNealy to see what her initial thoughts were about those. She was willing to bet there was a reason for some of the data gaps that currently existed. A list could be submitted to the development team to determine what was or was not feasible. From there, the next steps could be taken with a presentation to the Stakeholders Council and then the CWC Board.

Mr. Knoblock suggested speaking to Ms. Briefer, Patrick Nelson, and the Forest Service to determine what they wanted to see included on the Environmental Dashboard. It did not make sense to spend time and money on something if it would not be beneficial to the people who utilized the tool. If others saw value in addressing certain data gaps, it might be worthwhile to pursue that data collection. Discussions were had about who used the Environmental Dashboard and the importance of public education. Ms. Nielsen reported that the newly founded CWC Youth Council had self-selected into an Environmental Dashboard Education Committee. That subcommittee of the CWC Youth Council had not met yet, but if there was work done in the Environment Systems Committee on the Environmental Dashboard, that could tie into the subcommittee of the CWC Youth Council. The focus of that subcommittee was to develop a standard curriculum around the Environmental Dashboard that could be introduced to outdoor education classrooms and grade school classrooms.

Mr. Lenkowski shared some suggestions to improve the Environmental Dashboard, which included making the graphs larger and adding hyperlinks with additional information. Ms. Nielsen thought one of the first projects the Environment Systems Committee could tackle was to create a list of suggested additions to the Environmental Dashboard to identify the data gaps. From there, it would be possible to determine which data gaps were the easiest to fill and could be pursued. The memo that was written by the Committee could be sent to the development team directly. If the Committee ultimately determined that there was a desire to address a specific data gap, that would be the point that the suggestion would move forward to the Stakeholders Council and then the CWC Board.

Co-Chair Zalles thought it was a good idea to forward a memo to the development team. However, after that point, he thought it made sense to share that with the Stakeholders Council to let them know what was happening at a Committee level. It would also be possible to ask Council Members for additional input and suggestions. There could then be another memo submitted for additional feedback. Ms. Nielsen thought this was a worthwhile project for the Environment Systems Committee to take on. She reiterated that there was potential to reconvene the Environmental Dashboard Steering Committee for a human element workshop if that was something there was support for in the future. The human element was the least robust of all the elements currently included in the Environmental Dashboard. There was an opportunity to make additions there.

Mr. Knoblock stressed the importance of the Environmental Dashboard being used as a management tool for the CWC Board. The data shared there could impact the decisions made at a Board level. He thought it was necessary to reach out to other entities to determine their data priorities. Co-Chair Zalles believed a rough plan of action had been determined. He offered to put together a draft of the memo that included the previous suggestions from Mr. Knoblock as well as the data gaps he had noticed. Any suggestions from Committee Members could be emailed to him following the meeting.

Ms. Nielsen thought the creation of the memo should be collaborative with suggestions from all. She noted that Committee Members could further review the Environmental Dashboard to look for gaps. If all of the prep work was done ahead of the next Environment Systems Committee Meeting, then the memo itself could be drafted at the next meeting. There was support for that approach. The review document previously drafted by Co-Chair Zalles would be put into a Google document.

**REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF VISITOR USE STUDY**

1. **Committee Members will Discuss the Visitor Use Study and Possible Supplements to the Study.**

Co-Chair Zalles explained that the next item on the agenda related to the Visitor Use Study and whether possible supplements were needed. There had been some previous discussions about potential inaccuracies or limitations with the data. Mr. Knoblock thought the Visitor Use Study would provide a summary of all of the visitor use in the Central Wasatch, but it turned out to be a lot of detailed data about trail use. There was some data about ski resort use included, however, the numbers seemed off. It was important to make sure that all of the numbers included in the study were accurate.

Ms. Nielsen reported that the resorts were classed through the data collection protocol as proxy sites. The project team received an updated data set specific to use in those proxy sites. The team was updating those numbers, so an updated Visitor Use Study would be released with those updated proxy site numbers. Beyond that, there was no additional work being done on the Visitor Use Study. Theoretically, there could be additional phases to the Visitor Use Study as time passes.

It was noted that there was still time left in the meeting. Co-Chair Zalles wondered whether there were any other issues that Committee Members wanted to discuss. For instance, there had been previous discussions about purchasing private lands and the Federal Designation. Ms. Nielsen reported that the second part of the CWC Board Retreat took place yesterday. The first part was held in December 2023. The CWC Board did goal-setting and prioritization exercises during the second part of the retreat to create a 2024 Strategic Plan. The bulk of the discussion centered around transportation and transit issues in the study area, which would be in service of moving the Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area (“CWNCRA”) forward. Many of the issues in the study area were interconnected. As a result, when there were discussions about environmental protection, those discussions also included transportation, recreation, and the economy. That was the approach of the CWC Board and that approach was reaffirmed during the CWC Board Retreat. There was a desire to primarily focus on transportation in 2024, in service of furthering the CWNCRA.

Co-Chair Zalles asked for additional details about how transportation fed into the CWNCRA work. He wanted to understand the mindset of the CWC Board. Ms. Nielsen explained that the Federal Delegation and State Delegation had explicitly stated that support for something like the CWNCRA was dependent on figuring out the transportation issues in the area. Without addressing the existing transportation issues in the canyons, it was unlikely that the CWNCRA would move ahead. During the last Stakeholders Council Meeting, there was a presentation on the history of the CWNCRA. The bill itself would remove the 4(f) requirements, which was an incentive to have parallel efforts between transportation and legislation. 4(f) requirements related to environmental protections. Removing those requirements through the bill would essentially remove an additional layer of bureaucracy, which was important, as it would help facilitate transportation and transit improvements in the area.

The Phase I work, which was related to the UDOT Little Cottonwood Canyon Record of Decision (“ROD”), was the focus of the CWC Board currently. There was a desire to make sure the Phase I efforts were effective, but there was also a desire to define how to measure effectiveness and success. Ms. Nielsen encouraged Committee Members to listen to the CWC Board Retreat audio at some point. It was available on the Utah Public Notice website. Director of Operations, Samantha Kilpack, reported that she had previously sent an email to the Stakeholders Council with instructions about how to sign up for automatic alerts whenever something regarding the CWC was posted on the site.

Co-Chair Zalles wondered whether the CWC Board mentioned Big Cottonwood Canyon or Millcreek Canyon. He knew that Little Cottonwood Canyon had been a significant focus recently. Ms. Nielsen clarified that there had not been specific discussions about those canyons. That being said, large-scale transportation solutions would impact all of the canyons. She noted that a Special Transit District had been discussed by the Transportation Systems Committee. Something like that would essentially serve all of the canyons. While that would be a significant endeavor, it was an idea that was currently being discussed by that Committee. While the other canyons were not specifically discussed during the CWC Board Retreat, any transportation work would impact those canyons.

Co-Chair Zalles discussed private land acquisition. There had been some discussions about contacting organizations that did that work to brainstorm with them. It might be possible for the Environment Systems Committee to bring certain matters to the attention of the CWC Board. He believed there was a suggestion made about a catalog to determine what parcels were for sale. Mr. Knoblock reported that during the CWC Board Retreat, he shared a suggestion about inventorying all of the private parcels in the canyons. It did not receive a lot of votes, because that was a challenging task, but it was an issue that he had raised at a CWC Board level. Inventorying every parcel would be difficult, but there were resources out there that could be utilized. It would also be possible to make a list of the priority parcels and that list could be added to over time. There were likely half a dozen or more priority parcels that were out there that should be monitored on some level in the future.

Mr. Knoblock referenced a parcel on the southwest corner of Silver Lake that was previously for sale. He did not like that it had been purchased by a private landowner who could build a house there. Someone should have been prepared for that kind of scenario and worked to protect the land. As for the 18-acre parcel at the base of Millcreek Canyon, there had been enough discussions about it that it appeared protective measures were moving forward. However, the only reason those protective measures were being prioritized was because of the robust discussions there had been. Having a list of priority parcels would make those kinds of discussions easier and could simplify the process.

Ms. Nielsen confirmed that the CWC Board had considered the suggestion Mr. Knoblock made during the CWC Board Retreat. There was not a lot of enthusiasm about allocating CWC Staff time to compiling a catalog of available parcels, but she thought it was important and could be addressed at a subcommittee level. Even if the CWC Board did not want to prioritize that themselves, it was still possible for the Environment Systems Committee to prioritize that. She suggested that Co-Chair Zalles attend one of the future Millcreek Canyon Committee meetings. It would be possible to combine efforts between the Environment Systems Committee and Millcreek Canyon Committee on that work. There was a Millcreek Canyon Committee Meeting scheduled for next week. Ms. Kilpack showed Committee Members how to find meeting information on the Utah Public Notice website and the CWC website. She also showed the Committee how to sign up for the email alerts.

Co-Chair Zalles wondered whether there were other topics Committee Members wanted to discuss at future meetings. Mr. Knoblock thought the Environment Systems Committee might want to pay attention to the type of bug that was killing the fir trees. It would be worthwhile to be educated about those kinds of issues as they directly impact the environment in the Central Wasatch. Another matter to pay attention to was the fire risk reduction work that was taking place within the study area.

Co-Chair Zalles reported that the Forest Service was planning on introducing an amendment to their forest policy document to specifically protect old growth and to set in motion a series of steps that would nurture mature trees. That followed an Executive Order from the President last year. He explained that an amendment would be put together, which would include a set of standards that all of the Forest Service wildfire projects would be beholden to. That could potentially impact how the work was done in the future. He did not believe there would be a significant impact in the Central Wasatch, but the amendment would likely impact other areas more heavily based on the practices there. Co-Chair Zalles believed the trimming being done in the Wasatch was likely well-intentioned and thought through carefully. He was not concerned about the amendments proposed.

Mr. Knoblock pointed out that the Unita-Wasatch-Cache National Forest website had a project page. It was possible to look at different projects by Ranger District. He noted that the Committee could review the project list occasionally and determine whether something was appropriate for the Environment Systems Committee to weigh in on. Co-Chair Zalles liked that suggestion and thought it was something that the Committee could do in the future. Additional discussions were had about Forest Service wildfire mitigation. Mr. Knoblock noted that there were a lot of different projects that ended up on the Forest Service project page. There were usually half a dozen or so projects that related to the Central Wasatch listed. He offered to share the link to the website in the Zoom chat box.

Co-Chair Zalles reminded Committee Members to look at the Environmental Dashboard before the next Environment Systems Committee and contribute to the Google document. During the next meeting, a memo will be drafted to address the existing data gaps. Ms. Nielsen added that it was possible that the Environmental Dashboard Steering Committee would reconvene in the future for a human element workshop. Additionally, there could be a collaboration between the Environment Systems Committee and the Millcreek Canyon Committee to work on a catalog of available parcels.

**CLOSING**

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

**MOTION:** Adam Lenkowski moved to ADJOURN the Environment Systems Committee Meeting. John Knoblock seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 3:51 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 on Tuesday, January 9, 2024.***

**Teri Forbes**

Teri Forbes

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Minutes Secretary

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