



# BOARD OF THE DIVISION OF STATE PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

*Minutes Of The Meeting Held on November 2, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.  
Hybrid Meeting via Google Meet  
Anchored at Anasazi State Park  
Streamed Live on YouTube*

## ATTENDEES

### Board Members Present:

Corey Cram (chair)  
Leshia Coltharp  
Brent Boswell  
Falyn Owens  
Joan Hammer  
Jack Draxler  
Russ Steadman  
Elaine Gizler  
Lisa Meerts\*

### Host:

The Department of  
Natural Resources

### Guests

### Department of Natural Resources:

Jeff Rasmussen  
Scott Strong\*  
Devan Chavez  
Melanie Shepherd  
Laurie Backus  
Shane Stroud\*  
Chris Haramoto\*  
Wayne Monroe\*  
Megan Blackwelder\*

*\* online participation*

Audio/video recording of this meeting is located at:

<https://youtube.com/live/lzPcyF-L2r4>

Minutes were approved February 8, 2024 by the State Parks Board

---

## TIME      AGENDA ITEM AND SUMMARY

---

0:00

### 1. WELCOME

#### 1.1. Call to Order

Board Chair Corey Cram called the hybrid meeting to order and presided. Melanie Shepherd recorded the minutes. A quorum of Board members were present and the meeting proceeded with business.

#### 1.2. Attendance and Introductions

Chair Cram gave a recap of yesterday's visits to Kodachrome State Park and Escalante State Park. Chair Cram took attendance of the Board members present. He acknowledged the members of the Division of State Parks present, and led introductions.

#### 1.3. Approval of Agenda

Chair Cram reviewed the agenda, and asked that it be approved. The agenda stands approved as presented.

**JOAN HAMMER MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS  
DISTRIBUTED. JACK DRAXLER SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT  
CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

#### 1.4. Approval of August 10, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Chair Cram presented the minutes of the August 10, 2023 Board Meeting and asked that they be approved. The minutes stand as presented.

**LESHA COLTHARP MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM AUGUST 10, 2023. BRENT BOSWELL SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

---

## 5:25 2. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

Chair Cram welcomed Elaine Gizler to our Board and asked her to introduce herself.

Elaine Gizler reported that she and her husband visited ten of the State Parks, not including the ones visited yesterday. Elaine was formerly in Grand County so she did a lot of work and support for Dead Horse Point State Park, and was there when they started planning Utahraptor State Park. She is currently in San Juan County now and loves working with Chris Hanson. They did an Eclipse event, which was amazing with people from all over the world. She is heading to Edge of the Cedars for a Night at the Museum event tonight. She feels honored to be on the Board of the Utah State Parks. She is the Economic Development and Visitor Services Director for San Juan County.

Chair Cram opened the meeting for Board reports.

Russ Steadman reported that he did the exact same trip that we did yesterday back in September.

Joan Hammer reported that it has been a crazy quarter for her and that she was only able to get to the three parks she is over: Willard Bay State Park, Hyrum State Park, and Bear Lake State Park. She reported that there is a new park manager at Willard that she is excited about and looking forward to Fantasy Christmas lights at the Bay.

Brent Boswell reported that he had the opportunity to stay at one of the cottages at Gunlock, which was amazing. Brent commented that he met a couple last night that came to the park for two days and loved it so much that they ended up staying five days. Brent commented that there are no road signs that have Gunlock State Park up ahead. He suggested that those signs be added.

Falyn Owens welcomed everyone to Garfield County. She reported that she was not able to get to any of the parks during this quarter.

Jack Draxler reported that he had been to this part of the state before as a legislator. He reported that he regularly looks in on the three parks closest to him: Bear Lake State Park, Hyrum State Park, and Willard Bay State Park. He has had an opportunity to participate in the Bear Lake Watch Group, which has spearheaded an effort to do an in-depth study of Bear Lake and how to preserve the beauty of it, water quality, and visitor experience. It is headed by Utah State University and is needed because of the skyrocketed visitation. Jack was also able to attend the Bison Roundup with his grandson.

Lesha Coltharp reported that she visited Antelope Island State Park for the Bison Roundup, which was really cool to see the roundup end of the event. It was super

organized and she was really impressed. Kudos to everyone for all their time putting it together. While attending the tourism conference in September, she took her staff biking in Snow Canyon State Park. Construction is still happening at Red Fleet State Park. She is crossing her fingers that it will be done for the Summer. The Field House is bringing back their kids program, which will be great for the kids to get in there and do some hands-on stuff.

Chair Cram reported that he was able to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for Utahraptor State Park and is excited for all the humanities and the history that this park will capture. He also attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for Quail Creek State Park's new campground. Candace worked with their camp host to put on a fun, unique [ribbon cutting ceremony](#). At Sand Hollow State Park Jason Booth left and Candace Smith, from Quail Creek, has moved over and will be taking care of operations there. He went to Coral Pink a couple of times. It has clean bathrooms and themed showers.

Lisa Meerts reported that she was able to get to Goblin Valley State Park for a hike. She will be camping in Moab for Thanksgiving, in the Willow Springs area. She is looking forward to seeing everything that has been going on at Utahraptor State Park.

---

**29:20 3. DIVISION REPORT**

The Deputy Directors and Director of the Division of State Parks gave a brief report regarding the Division's recent activities.

**3.1. Business Report**

Chair Cram invited Scott Strong to discuss recent business operations. Mr. Strong commented on the great staff that we have and how the State Parks would not be the incredible places they are without them.

Mr. Strong had a chance to take some of the Governor's staff on a tour of some of our State Parks. The guests gave positive comments about their experience, the parks, and the staff at the parks.

Mr. Strong reported on the building block requests:

- Asphalt for the parks.
- Camp Floyd general fund request for a new museum.
- A new campground at Wasatch Mountain State Park, replacing our current campground.
- Current expense, which includes everyday costs such as: garbage removal, paper, cleaning supplies, etc.
- Golf request to go in and update the architecture at Wasatch Mountain Golf Course.
- Expanding the lodging, which includes new cottages, seasonal housing, etc.
- Additional staff members, primarily maintenance staff, and increase wages.

ParksPass is a collaborative project that State Parks has with Southern Utah University and Utah Tech University. Mr. Strong is working with ParksPass on an app to try to get everything on one platform: purchasing annual passes, day-use passes, participating in events, special use permits, communication with visitors, and eventually camping and lodging reservations.

Russ Steadman asked Scott about the Friend of Utah Park Pass that was offered in the past? Mr. Strong responded that we have done away with our Friends Sponsorships. We

have a new sponsor going forward, Solo Stoves and Solo Brands, that have supported a collaborative effort.

Mr. Strong is currently working with the universities to solidify the finances and amend their contract. We are also working with ParksPass to build a camping reservations platform. With the app we are hoping to be able to validate and track passes, such as where they are being used and how often they are being used. Chair Cram asked if Quagga could be built into this process. Mr. Strong answered yes that we are hoping to build that into the process. Elaine Gizler commented that it would be good for her to be able to push out on her social media that these passes are available. This will be eventually coming to the App Store, but is not available yet.

Chair Cram asked if there were any further questions and thanked Mr. Strong for his report.

### **3.2. Operations Report**

Chair Cram invited Deputy Director Laurie Backus to report on the Division of State Parks operations.

Ms. Backus expressed her appreciation to the Board for their service and for the time they spent yesterday visiting some of the State Parks. She looks forward to these meetings and spending time with the Board.

Ms. Backus reported on staffing changes since our last meeting:

- There have been no retirements in the last couple of months, but we have four upcoming retirements: Joe Hamby from Rockport, Natalie Harmon from Jordanelle, Terri Jeter from the Salt Lake Office, and Sherri Petersen from the Salt Lake Office.
- We had three resignations/terminations.
- We had five promotions: Ben Meraz as Park Manager of Willard Bay State Park, Cade Pies as Park Manager of Echo State Park, Candace Smith as Park Manager of Sand Hollow State Park, Chase Christensen was hired as the Assistant Park Manager of Palisade State Park, and Mercer Owens was reclassified as the Park Manager of Lost Creek State Park.
- We have had two people in POST. Chad Tarr graduated from POST and will be going to Sand Hollow State Park. Hollie Suisse is still in POST and will be going to Echo State Park.
- We have eight vacancies at the moment: a position at Sand Hollow State Park, Assistant Park Manager at East Canyon State Park, Park Manager at Quail Creek State Park, Buildings & Grounds at Escalante State Park, ranger at Jordanelle State Park, ranger at Deer Creek State Park, journey maintenance at Jordanelle State Park, and a ranger at Rockport State Park.

We had lots of events over the last three months. Some of the highlights were:

- Annular Solar Eclipse, Ring of Fire events. All went really well.
- Walleye Classic at Fred Hayes at Starvation State Park.
- Trail Hero and UTV Takeover at Sand Hollow State Park.
- Several events at our Heritage Parks, such as Anasazi's farmer's markets on Saturdays. Ghosts of Camp Floyd was sold out every single time.
- The Bison Roundup at Antelope Island State Park.
- Military Appreciation Day was in August.

Upcoming events:

- Fantasy at the Bay for Christmas lights at Willard Bay State Park.
- Holiday light wagon rides at Jordanelle State Park.
- Iron Mission Days.
- Bear Lake Monster Fest.

All the parks are in the process of updating their park plans. Three of the plans are ready for administrative review.

We have our employee van tour next week. It will be at Fremont Indian State Park, Piute State Park, Otter Creek State Park, Kodachrome State Park, Escalante State Park, and Anasazi State Park.

Law Enforcement got new optics for handguns and training has begun. We have had some significant injuries over the past couple of months. There were four critical injuries, but it looks like everyone is going to be able to heal from their injuries and come back to work. The law enforcement rangers have responded to several critical incidents, which included some fatalities, and have really gone through a lot and have dealt with them in a professional manner. We have had a couple of Search and Rescues where they had good results. We have signed a Peer Support Policy and enacted it to help our staff deal with these critical incidents. We also have Blomquist Hale that helps staff with mental health counseling. We reach out and take care of each other.

Chair Cram asked Jamie Skidmore, Park Manager of Anasazi State Park, to introduce herself. Jamie introduced herself and also showed the Board the plans for the Anasazi State Park remodel.

### 3.3 Director's Report

Chair Cram invited Director Jeff Rasmussen to report on the Division of State Parks operations.

Director Rasmussen commented on how great it was to spend time with the Board at the two parks yesterday. He welcomed Jack Draxler, Falyon Owens, and Elaine Gizler to the Board.

Director Rasmussen reported that we have been having Military Appreciation Day in August. This year we were hosting the follow up "Follow the Flag" organization. They hang a huge flag in strategic locations throughout the state. It will be hanging above Snow Canyon State Park just before Veteran's Day for that week. The flag is 150 feet long by 78 feet wide. There will be a flag ceremony on Veterans Day, November 11.

Director Rasmussen gave an update on ribbon cuttings. State Parks has had over \$250,000,000 over that last four legislative sessions for expansions. \$200,000,000 was out of general fund money and approximately \$50,000,000 was out of our restricted account. Ribbon cuttings included:

- A new campground at Sand Hollow State Park.
- An archery range at Antelope Island State Park.
- Multi-use trails and trail improvements at Fremont Indian State Park.
- A complete remodel at Echo State Park, which included a new boat ramp and day-use area, along with a cabin village.
- A new campground at Deer Creek State Park.
- A new day-use and beach area at Rockport State Park.
- A new campground at Quail Creek State Park.

We had two groundbreaking, one for Utahraptor State Park and one for Red Fleet State Park.

Most of our lakes were full this year, with the exception of Yuba State Park. There was a safety upgrade on the dam this year, resulting in low water levels. It was an exceptional year for our water parks. Our visitation continues to go up. We are back up over 11,000,000 visitors this year and our parks are busy.

We had a DNR employee satisfaction survey. Some things that came out of the results of that survey we really took a look at and focused on three main things: employee communication, offering better and increased training opportunities, and providing better support from our administrative side. To help improve communication, Scott, Laurie, and Jeff each take a week to send out an update to all staff, we held an employee training conference to help staff get to know each other and have training, we have been holding regular training meetings on important topics such as ParksPass and accounting, and we have tried to get out into the field and have one-on-one conversations with staff to know what is going on at the parks. We are going to continue to look for opportunities to improve training.

Law Enforcement: Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted a study and are wanting to combine all the Division Law Enforcement into one Division. State Parks have had their own law enforcement for many years. The biggest reason they are looking at this is because of liability issues and training of officers so they are ready to respond to critical incidents. Our law enforcement officers wear many hats, not just law enforcement. DNR wants proficiency and consistency within the law enforcement because each Division does their law enforcement differently. They want to make sure evidence is properly handled, have consistency in how we access private information, make sure there is a direct line of supervision, and achieve accreditation. We have asked our Park Managers to come up with a new staffing plan because law enforcement is currently such a big part of our staff. We will still need to pay for law enforcement in our parks and need to figure out how to pay for that. We need to decide when we need law enforcement scheduled at a park. There will be more to come. Brent Boswell asked when it would go into effect. Director Rasmussen answered that it will be a four year implementation and fully functional by July 1, 2028.

#### Construction Update:

- At Antelope Island State Park we are building an IMAX theater and a visitor center expansion. We are hoping to start construction next Spring.
- At Goblin Valley State Park we are working on a power line project. Right now Goblin Valley State Park is run off solar and with the park tripling in size the power lines are needed. We are hoping to have construction start this Spring.
- At Great Salt Lake State Park the water line needs to be replaced. We just got the funding last session and hope to start construction next year.
- At Lost Creek State Park the drilling for water has been unsuccessful. We are having a hard time finding good water there.
- At Red Fleet State Park the new campground is underway and we are hoping to have it completed by early Spring to mid-Summer.
- At Bear Lake State Park marina it is in the works with getting environmental clearances and permitting that are required. We are hoping to start construction this Spring.
- At Bear Lake State Park Rainbow Cove we are building a new campground, day-use area, and beach access. This project is in the works.
- At Jordanelle State Park Rockcliff area we are building a new campground. This project is going along well and we are hoping to have it completed by Fall 2024.

- Projects that are finished that we will be doing Ribbon Cuttings next Spring are:
  - A new campground at Escalante that the Board saw yesterday.
  - Jordanelle State Park on the Ross Creek side of the Park. We added a bunch of parking, shelters, and beach access.
  - Bear Lake State Park at North Eden it has a new campground.
  - Green River State Park has a new campground and a cottage village.
  - Willard Bay State Park has a new campground and entrance road.
  - Wasatch Mountain State Park has a new campground at Soldier Hollow.

The Legislative Session will start in January. Director Rasmussen is hearing lots of talk about more investment in recreation in State Parks. There is also talk of a couple new state parks. There are some bills that we are sponsoring. One would allow us to keep the interest earned on our restricted fund money, which would be close to about half a million dollars. There is a bill to cleanup some of the things that happened from our Division split from Recreation. There is a bill to formalize State Park access to some of our new and existing State Parks, identify the access roads in code so we can tap into UDOT funding for improvements on those roads. There is talk of reduced or eliminated fees for certain groups to State Parks, but we are not funded with taxpayer money. It will take work on our part to educate the legislators that we are self-funded.

Elaine Gizler asked if there is a way to get signage for Edge of the Cedars State Park. Megan Blackwelder commented to Elaine that she would get together with her to work on some possibilities. Also, Elaine would like to have the Park enlarged and put some amenities there. She has been working on increasing visitation to the Park. Director Rasmussen commented that we are working with BLM to acquire more property there to expand the Park.

Chair Cram asked if there were any other comments for Director Rasmussen.

---

**2:18:07 4. RULES TO APPROVE**

Attorney General Shane Stroud and Ms. Backus presented one rule to be amended and two rules to be repealed that will be moving to the Division of Outdoor Recreation.

**ELAINE GIZLER MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMENDMENT TO RULES R651-633 - SPECIAL CLOSURES OR RESTRICTIONS. RUSS STEADMAN SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**FALYN OWENS MOVED TO REPEAL RULE R651-801 - SWIMMING PROHIBITED. BRENT BOSWELL SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**JACK DRAXLER MOVED TO REPEAL R651-802 - SCUBA DIVING. FALYN OWENS SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

---

**2:26:15 5. OTHER BUSINESS/SET NEXT MEETING DATES/ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Cram expressed his appreciation for the Director, Deputy Directors, regional managers, all the park managers, and the staff who make the difference in our park experiences.

The next meetings of the Board will be held:

- February 8 in Salt Lake City at the DNR building.
- May 8 and 9 in Washington County.
- August 14 and 15 in the Palisade/Huntington/Millsite/Scofield area.

The Board having no further business, Chair Cram sought a motion to adjourn.

**JOAN HAMMER MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN. LESHA COLTHARP SECONDED THE MOTION. IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY AND THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED.**

---

2:27:55 6. LUNCH BREAK