



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

Minutes Of The Meeting Held on February 8, 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

Hybrid Meeting via Google Meet

Anchored at the Department of Natural Resources Building

Streamed Live on YouTube

ATTENDEES

Board Members Present:

Corey Cram (chair)
Lesha Coltharp
Brent Boswell
Natalie Randall
Falyn Owens
Joan Hammer
Jack Draxler
Russ Steadman

Host:

The Department of
Natural Resources

Department of Natural Resources:

Scott Strong
Devan Chavez
Melanie Shepherd
Laurie Backus
Shane Stroud
Susan Zarekarizi
Chris Haramoto
Wayne Monroe*
Megan Blackwelder*
Nathan Schwebach

** online participation*

Audio/video recording of this meeting is located at:

<https://youtube.com/live/AK3i6YOO9tY>

Minutes were approved April 16, 2024 by the State Parks Board

TIME AGENDA ITEM AND SUMMARY

0:05

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 took attendance of the Board members present. He acknowledged the members of the Division of State Parks present, and led introductions.

1.3. Swear in New Board Members

Deputy Director Nathan Schwebach gave his appreciation to the Board for the service that they provide for the State Parks. He then proceeded to swear in new Board member Elaine Gizler.

1.4. Approval of Agenda

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

BRENT BOSWELL MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS DISTRIBUTED. JACK DRAXLER SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

1.5. Approval of November 2, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Chair Cram presented the minutes of the November 2, 2023 Board Meeting and asked that they be approved. The minutes stand as presented.

LESHA COLTHARP MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 2, 2023. RUSS STEADMAN SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

7:32 2. RULES TO REPEAL

Attorney General Shane Stroud presented R651-301 State Recreation Fiscal Assistance Programs and R651-634 Nonresident OHV User Permits and Fees to be repealed, which will be moving to the Division of Outdoor Recreation.

RUSS STEADMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE REPEAL OF RULE R651-301 - STATE RECREATION FISCAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. ELAINE GIZLER SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

RUSS STEADMAN MOVED TO APPROVE REPEAL RULE R651-634 - NONRESIDENT OHV USER PERMITS AND FEES. BRENT BOSWELL SECONDED THE MOTION AND IT CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

14:10 3. BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

Chair Cram opened the meeting for Board reports.

Chair Cram reported that the people we have in our parks make the difference. When he was looking online at blacksmithing equipment, he came across a story of a full-time blacksmith that started doing business because of his visit to This is the Place State Park. He appreciates all the good people we have at the parks.

Lesha Coltharp reported that she echoes what Corey said about the people at the State Parks. We were able to pull off one ice fishing tournament at Steinaker State Park this year with the Tightline Fishing Group, which was a huge success. She also pulled into the Red Fleet remodel project. It is looking really good. Fingers crossed that the project will come together. They are doing a story on smalltowncomeback.org that will be featuring Red Fleet State Park. Red Fleet will be a park that will really change her community. Lesha drove past Fred Hayes at Starvation State Park and it is looking good. Lesha gave a brief construction update of what has been done so far at Red Fleet State Park.

Elaine Gizler reported that November was busy with the Annular Eclipse. She had a table at Goosenecks State Park with eclipse glasses she had made with their logo on them. It was an amazing day with people from all over the world attending. She had a Base Camp Summit at Edge of the Cedars, where the night before she was given a backroom

tour by Chris Hanson. She visited Scofield State Park, which is an amazing reservoir. She is hoping to get Chris Hanson on a podcast to talk about his parks.

Russ Steadman reported that he hasn't been able to visit any State Parks since our last meeting. He expressed his appreciation for the visits to Kodachrome, Escalante, and Anasazi State Parks at our last Board meeting. It is nice to be a part of the Board and take time out of his regular schedule to visit the State Parks.

Brent Boswell reported that had the opportunity to go to Scofield to do some ice fishing. The fishing was lousy, but it was a great day. He also visited Palisade State Park for Jeff's retirement where he saw the camaraderie among employees.

Joan Hammer reported that she visited Antelope Island and Willard Bay State Parks. Willard Bay is starting to look less like a construction site and more like a park. She is excited to see the improvements of the new entrance and campgrounds. Fantasy at the Bay gave her a vision of what it is going to look like once everything is done at Willard Bay. Joan requested that Devan come up with a super fun ribbon cutting for Willard Bay State Park.

Jack Draxler reported that things are going well at Bear Lake State Park. He reported that Senate Bill 55 was presented this legislative session. It classifies Bear Lake as a treasure worth protecting. The bill is currently on hold because we want to balance all the water, fish, wildlife, and sovereign land concerns. This bill will be a good thing.

Falyn Owens reported on her visit to Snow Canyon State Park during the Follow the Flag. It was an amazing experience. In December she went to Frontier Homestead State Park to check out the Christmas lights. Inside they had the Twelve Days of Christmas, and other exhibits. They did a great job with all the Christmas stuff there. She visited Coral Pink State Park and met with Patrick the Park Manager, where she got to see the SandSquatch.

Chair Cram commented that he appreciates everyone's time and board reports.

37:00 4. DIVISION REPORT

The deputy director of the Division of State Parks gave a brief report regarding the Division's recent activities.

4.1. Operations Report

Chair Cram invited Laurie Backus to discuss recent operations. Ms. Backus reported that she had a lot of fun with the Board at the November Board activities and meeting.

Staffing changes since November:

- Six retirements - Jeff Rasmussen, Sherri Petersen, Natalie Harmon, Terri Jeter, Joe Hamby, and Jeremy Shaw.
- Five resignations or terminations.
- Eleven promotions or transfers.
- Nine vacancies, plus five ranger vacancies. We are not able to hire for the ranger vacancies at this point with the forthcoming Law Enforcement unification.
- We are moving as fast as we can to fill positions.

Events that we have had since our November meeting:

- Fantasy at the Bay Christmas lights at Willard Bay State Park.
- Holiday light wagon rides at Jordanelle State Park.
- WinterFest events at multiple parks.
- Bear Lake Monster WinterFest, where 350 people took the plunge in the cold water.
- Utah Lake Frigid 5K and Penguin Plunge, they estimate about 2,000 people attended.
- Wasatch BigFoot Snowshoe Festival race.
- Christkindlmarkt at This is the Place Heritage State Park.
- Christmas Camps throughout several parks.
- First Day Hikes at several parks.
- Mirabilities tours at Great Salt Lake State Park.
- And more.

Snow, ice, and grooming - lots of reservoirs didn't have ice to hold their ice fishing tournaments. Snow grooming is going well. Our reservoirs are really full and there is a potential for flooding at some of our parks.

Law Enforcement updates - House Bill 469 was presented at the legislative session for the creation of the Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement. Plans for the new Law Enforcement Division have started and timelines will be assigned soon. Staffing plans have been submitted to DNR and we are going through the State Parks staffing plans now to determine what our parks will look like after this unification.

Ranger school was held this past week in the Hurricane area, where they were able to get their core training done. They also did winter skills training and Stop the Bleed training.

Rangers had 212 critical incidents, 57 Search and Rescues, 33 medicals (seven of them being deaths), over 2,500 reports, and over 1,100 citations.

They have added a Peer Support team to help staff and family members deal with incidents. We have also received grants for mental health training, recording equipment, and mobile cameras.

We had one ranger graduate from POST, TJ Hughes, assigned to Fred Hayes at Starvation State Park. We also had a major theft incident at Utahraptor, where the investigation revealed it was one of our seasonal employees.

Upcoming:

- DFCM audits, which are to check on our parks to see if they are following the rules. The North Region is all complete, the East Region is next, followed by the Southwest Region.
- Annual park meetings, region meetings, and planning for van tours.
- Super Staff in the fall for Park Managers and Assistants.
- Employee Conference in 2025.

We have 23 major construction projects going on right now.

Jack Draxler expressed his concerns about the Law Enforcement consolidation. The Board had a discussion about the Law Enforcement consolidation.

Chair Cram asked if there were any further questions and thanked Ms. Backus for her report.

4.2. Business Report and 4.3 Director's Report

Chair Cram invited Interim Director Scott Strong to report on the Division of State Parks operations.

Mr. Strong expressed his appreciation to the Board members and staff for their dedication and time. He also expressed his feelings of what great places our parks are to visit and enjoy.

Chair Cram asked for a report on the staff injuries that were reported in the last Board meeting. Ms. Backus reported that the two staff injured in the OHV training—the thumb injury and the lung puncture—are both back working. We had a chainsaw incident and that person is back to work. Charity is back to work, but not in full-duty at this time, just light-duty and is expected to have a full recovery.

Mr. Strong commented that when you are out at the parks, to look at the good things and ask the question of why do we do things the way we do, why do things look the way they do, and then funnel those statements or questions back to us. We love to hear all the feedback, positive and negative. The Board commented on how quickly our staff respond to comments and get timely answers.

Mr. Strong reported on the legislative session.

- We have made a change to our annual pass to go back to the rolling 12-month pass. Representative Hall had drafted some legislation to encourage us to make this change, but since we are already making the rolling 12-month change, Representative Hall pulled her drafted bill.
- Butch Cassidy State Monument: Mr. Strong has been working with Representative Albrecht on this. It moved really quickly and he feels this one will pass the House and Senate. State Parks would not have a lot of responsibility.
- Golden Spike State Monument: This bill has support from the county and the city. It is 43 feet and would be across from the Bird Refuge.
- Bear Lake State Park Marina: we made a request for appropriations to help with the added costs of this project. It is not likely to happen, so we may have to look at using State Park restricted fund money.
- East Canyon State Park land purchase in partnership with the Division of Wildlife Resources: This request came through for \$9,500,000 from the general fund, half from State Parks and half from Wildlife.
- Senator McCay is running a bill for reporting water usage on state golf courses, as well as creating a State Parks Advisory Panel for golf.
- We are working with Representative Eliason on a State Parks campground bill. We are being asked to come up with a list of potential places to have future campgrounds. Probably dry camping with minimal services.
- Senate Bill 108: Senator Kwan is the one hosting this bill. This is a bill for veterans. Anyone who has served in the military and been honorably discharged would qualify for an annual state pass. There are 135,000 veterans that live in the state, which does not include the gold star members. Senator Kwan is requesting appropriations of \$200,000, which would only pay for about 1,600 passes. We would have to figure out how we would distribute the 1,600 passes.
- House Bill 120: Representative Brooks is running this bill. It would allow State Parks to retain the interest on their accounts. This could calculate to about \$700,000 per year in interest. There has been a lot of positive support. The second part of this bill is a cleanup piece that refers to the boating program, which is no longer a part of State Parks.
- Funding requests included:
 - Compensation for our staff and hiring a couple new maintenance staff - \$850,000 as a supplemental request and ongoing of \$1,500,000.
 - Operational expenses - \$700,000 as a supplemental request and ongoing of \$700,000.
 - Road maintenance - one time money of \$1,500,000 and ongoing of

- \$1,000,000.
 - Seasonal housing - \$500,000 as a supplemental request and ongoing is \$500,000
 - Visitor lodging - \$500,000.
 - Campground at Wasatch Mountain State Park - \$5,000,000 request.
- House Bill 469 - Unification of our Law Enforcement: We are working on plans for State Parks needs.

Mr. Strong moved into the business section of his report. Our visitation continues to grow. Last year we saw a 2% growth over the previous year. We went from about 10,700,000 visitors to just over 11,000,000 visitors last year. Last year the State Parks hosted more visitors than the Mighty Five Parks. Also, we are up in our operating profits from last year, when he pulled from a handful of parks.

Mr. Strong reported on our staff members and some of those going through losses. Mr. Strong suggested reaching out to those you know are going through a hard time to let them know you are thinking about them. Mr. Strong spotlighted a few staff members:

- Matt Harris, Dave Harris' son. He works at Yuba State Park. He is quiet and one who just gets things done. He is so optimistic and positive and solves problems.
- Brian Jensen does maintenance at the golf course and within Palisade State Park. JD had great things to say about Brian and his proactive approach of fixing things and taking care of issues. Brian helps to make equipment last longer by doing repairs. He is a self-learner. He installed solar powered lights in the bathroom.
- Phenix Johnson from Snow Canyon does an Instagram page and posts fun, exciting, and educational 15 to 20 second posts. She does a great job.
- Lee Ann Burrill works at Antelope Island State Park in the gift shop. She does an incredible job organizing and making the gift shop an inviting place to be. And she has increased sales at the gift shop. They did over \$500,000 worth of sales.
- Devan Chavez our Public Information Officer. He has helped Mr. Strong immensely over the past few weeks while he is covering the Director and Deputy Director jobs.

Mr. Strong commented on what a great leader Director Rasmussen was for State Parks. He thanked everyone who reached out to Director Rasmussen with kind words for his retirement and those who attended his retirement.

Mr. Strong commented that the Governor started off his State of the State Report by mentioning three of our State Parks and that they are amazing. Mr. Strong reiterated that it is because of our staff that we have such great State Parks. It makes our visitor experiences great. He expressed how grateful he is for our staff and our Board.

Devan Chavez shared our annual video with the Board. The Board gave positive comments on the video.

Chair Cram expressed his appreciation to Mr. Strong and Ms. Backus for their reports.

2:12:40 5. OTHER BUSINESS/SET NEXT MEETING DATES/ADJOURNMENT

Chair Cram asked if there was any other business to discuss. Chair Cram confirmed that our next Board meeting will be May 8 & 9 in Washington County (hosted by Corey Cram and Wayne Monroe).

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

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

2:14:00 6. LUNCH BREAK