

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING

Public Lands Policy Coordination

May 1, 2025

MINUTES

Attendees:

Members:

Chris Merritt, SHPO, *Chair*
Jan Morse, OGM
Jodi Gardberg DWQ
Conner Peterson, UDAF
Heather Merritt, UDOT
Daniel Olson, DWR
Breanne Emery, FFSL
Mark Stanford, DWRi
Steve Bowman, UGS

Invited Federal Agencies:

Jessica Wade, BLM

Guests

Laura Ault, DOG DTS AGRC
Kathy Davis, AG Section Director, PLPCO
Mark Boshell, PLPCO
Dillon Hoyt, PLPCO
Dan Adams, Langdon Group
Camile Johnson, Utah Office of Tourism
Emma Patterson, SHPO Intern

Staff:

Sindy Smith, PLPCO

Welcome and Introductions

Chris Merritt, *Chair*, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. After introductions, Chris welcomed everyone.

Approval of Minutes

With a unanimous vote, RDCC representatives approved the draft minutes from February 6, 2025.

How Can We Help You? UGRC's Products and Solutions

Laura Ault, *Director, Utah Geospatial Resource Center, Division of Technology Services, Department of Government Operations*, reported on the effective application of geospatial information and technology in Utah, highlighting its pervasive presence and potential for integration into various workflows. If you need geospatial assistance or would like feedback on a project, feel free to reach out. Visit the Utah Geospatial Resource Center website for more information: <https://gis.utah.gov/>.

Laura addressed questions and comments.

Please find attached a copy of the slide deck for your reference.

Agency Reports

- Jessica Wade reported the following from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).
 - Jessica's temporary assignment ends on May 2nd, and she will return to her role at the BLM Salt Lake Field Office.
 - The federal government is undergoing significant restructuring, including two rounds of early retirement offers and incentives for departures. While probationary positions have seen layoffs, we anticipate layoffs for permanent staff next week. Proactive planning is challenging given the uncertainty.
 - BLM's resource allocation is shifting to prioritize oil, gas, and mining initiatives.
 - BLM continues to collaborate on Utah's greater sage-grouse plan and Travel Management Plans (TMPs), though TMPs are temporarily paused.
 - BLM is currently working to manage the expedited comment periods and timelines for the energy emergency projects.
- Dillon Hoyt reported the following from the Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO).
 - The **Glen Canyon ruling** has led to the reopening of previously closed roads.
 - The broader implications for **national monuments** and their management remain uncertain.
- Brienne Emery reported the following from the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FFSL).
 - FFSL is currently revising the Comprehensive Management Plans for both the Great Salt Lake and Utah Lake. This effort also includes an ongoing study specific to Utah Lake.
 - FFSL is actively preparing for the upcoming wildfire season. FFSL is coordinating closely with the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service to ensure a unified and effective response.
 - To combat the invasive phragmites around the Great Salt Lake, FFSL is conducting extensive prescribed burns. This proactive management helps reduce the spread of the invasive plant.
- Christopher Merritt reported the following from the Utah State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO).
 - SHPO is currently grappling with the implications of the Trump administration's **Energy Emergency Declaration**. This declaration presents a unique challenge

because it equates the pursuit of energy independence with natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, or floods.

- A key consequence of this declaration is the directive for agencies to utilize special procedures outlined in regulations to expedite projects. This effectively condenses the standard **cultural compliance process** from four steps to a single step. However, the declaration lacks clear guidelines on how this condensed process should be implemented, creating significant ambiguity for agencies.
- All eyes are now on the **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP)**, the national organization that provides guidance for the **Section 106 process** (a crucial part of cultural compliance). The ACHP is currently reviewing its guidelines this week, and the SHPO, along with other stakeholders, is eagerly awaiting their updated recommendations to better understand how to navigate these expedited procedures while still ensuring appropriate historic preservation.
- The Department of the Interior (DOI) has established procedures for handling **emergency declarations**. If a project proponent wants to use these emergency procedures, they must complete a form justifying why their project qualifies. The relevant agency then shares this justification with **Tribes** and **State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs)**, who have a **7 to 14-day window** to provide comments on the proposal.
- So far, our state has seen four projects attempt to use these emergency procedures:
 - Two projects had already been inventoried, so there were no cultural concerns.
 - One project, which involved building a hydroelectric plant at a personal home on unsurveyed land, was denied by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) under emergency procedures.
- Currently, there's a lot of uncertainty about how these emergency procedures are being implemented.
- If your agency is permitting projects under an emergency declaration, the SHPO will likely want an **inventory** conducted before any work begins. The **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation** supports this requirement. We believe an inventory should always happen before work commences, and we'll certainly let you know if that changes.
- From an operational standpoint, the SHPO's funding has been zeroed out. Keep in mind that 60% of our staffing comes from federal grants. We're currently using last year's grant to keep our staff employed. While Congress approved the new grant, it's been held up for about six weeks due to a reorganization within the DOI.
- If this nationwide grant doesn't come through, some SHPOs could be forced to close their doors by next month, which would undoubtedly create significant disruption throughout the entire system.
- Heather Merritt reported the following from the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT).

- UDOT is proceeding with its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) assignment under the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), a process that remains stable and unaffected by current developments.
- UDOT is navigating and implementing adjustments required by recent policy and procedural changes from both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Other Business

The next RDCC meeting is on August 7, 2025.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:50 a.m.