

Meeting Minutes
Emery County Public Lands Council
Nov 4, 2025
10:00 AM

PLC: Rod Player, Ben Grimes, Les Wilberg, Sherrel Ward, Bruce Wilson, Ray Petersen, Leon McElprang, Varian Allen, Kim McFarlane

EXCUSED: Travis Richards

PL STAFF: Jim Jennings (ECPL), Jan Olsen (Assistant)

VISITOR: Commissioner Jordan Leonard, Commissioner Dennis Worwood, Nicole Nielson (PLPCO), Julie Johansen (ETV), Dal Grey (DOGM), TJ Cook (DWR), Bryan Torgerson (SITLA)

Electronically: Joel Brown (Senator Lee), Mike Olsen (EC Attorney), Larry Ellertson, Ron Dunn (Kennedy)

1. Welcome

Chairman Rod Player opened the meeting by urging the council to familiarize itself with the draft of the county's new General Plan, noting that many sections address public land, water, and resource issues. He explained that the plan, originally written in 2016, requires rewriting and updating due to the Dingell Act legislation.

The updated plan is being written by Bio West, and the final copy is expected soon. Once available, it will be open for public comments, followed by a public hearing. The current draft is available online at Emery.Utah.gov.

In other business, the council discussed the upcoming end of terms for several members. Applications have been received and will be reviewed and appointed by the commissioners. The new members are expected to begin serving on January 1, 2026.

2. Approval of Minutes for October 7, 2025.

Varen Allen motioned to approve the October meeting minutes, and Ray Petersen seconded the motion; the motion passed.

3. Agency Reports and Council Member Comments

- **Utah State Department of Agriculture**
- **Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation**

- **Division of Water Rights (DWRi)**
- **Utah State Parks**
- **Manti-LaSal National Forest (MLNF)**

- **Trust Lands Administration (TLA)**

Bryan Torgerson is providing a summary of the latest updates regarding local energy projects:

- The Cedar Mountain uranium mine lease has not been renewed, meaning the site is open for new leasing opportunities.
- The Bronco Mine is currently awaiting new contracts.
- The North American Helium mine has successfully renewed its operating permits.

Regarding the inquiry about solar farm permits on Trust Lands north of Huntington near Poison Springs, Bryan stated he would look into the matter and provide an update.

- **Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR)**

T.J. Cook reported

- General Deer Hunt: The season has concluded with reports of a good harvest.
- Youth Pheasant Hunt: The hunt at the Huntington Research Farm was successful, with 24 youth participating.
- New Hire: Hal Guymon, a resident, has been hired as a wildlife biologist.
- Mule Deer Sighting: A sighting event is scheduled near Cisco on November 15.
- Book Cliffs Bison Plan: The plan is currently up for review.
- RAC Meeting: The next Regional Advisory Council (RAC) meeting is scheduled for November 19, 2025.
- Coyote Bounty: Following reports of coyote killings, the bounty in mule deer management areas has been increased from \$50.00 to \$100.00.

- **Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining (DOGM)**

Dal Gray reports

- Class VI Carbon Sequestration Permit: This permit is nearing completion and is ready for the required EPA public comment period.
- Velvet Mine: The mine is now operational and producing.
- Bronco Mine: This is currently a high-priority topic. A cessation order has been issued due to the mine's failure to meet required bonding specifications.

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

- **PLPCO**

Nicole Nielson summarizes two key points from our recent discussion regarding county resources and public lands:

1. confirmed that their office is monitoring the vacant allotments currently under review by the BLM and Forest Service. She stated that there will not be a net loss of AUMs (Animal Unit Months) as a result of this process.

2. Lithium Battery Hazards: A discussion was held concerning the potential fire danger posed by the large lithium batteries being transported for the new solar farms. We determined that Emery County needs to adopt a Disaster Expense and Training Plan to manage this risk.

- **Washington Delegation Staff**

-Ron Dunn mentioned that Government agencies are still in a shutdown, but he is enjoying the opportunity to be out of the office.

He referenced the "velvet ribbon cutting" scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 6, at 11 a.m.

He also spoke about a bill being proposed that would withhold pay for all government employees during a shutdown. He noted that they are choosing not to take their wages during this time to avoid taking money out of the hands of those who are struggling.

-Larry Ellertson wanted to provide an update on the current legislative priorities.

We are seeking co-sponsorship for legislation that would recognize and bring credit to fusion technology development.

Additionally, we are exploring a co-sponsorship opportunity with the USDA to relocate from the Department of Energy (DOE) and partner with Utah State University (USU) for funding that benefits small businesses.

-Joel Brown reports that the Senate is working diligently on discussions regarding the upcoming government shutdown.

Second, we are beginning the academy interview process for young people interested in joining the Air Force, Marines, Army, or Navy. These academies offer tuition assistance, and applicants must have competitive SAT scores. They must also secure recommendations from senators.

Julie Johansen, regarding your question about the Colorado River Compact and the potential government shutdown:

No agreement has been reached yet. Negotiations are still ongoing, and we have not finalized a resolution.

4. Commission Comments on Public Land Items

Commissioner Jordan Leonard discussed the General Plan and requested assistance from both the board and local community members. We ask that you provide comments and input to help us refine the plan toward our desired outcome.

Regarding solar energy, the commissioners expressed a preference against its continued widespread growth in our area. However, we recognize that private landowners maintain the right to install solar on their personal property.

The board inquired about the progress on Long Street. Mike Olsen reported that the litigation process in the civil procedure is still ongoing.

He anticipates the winding-up phase will conclude by December, to move forward at the beginning of the new year.

Please note that the gate was opened at the designated time, but was not removed after opening.

Mike has confirmed that mitigation is required for the Cleveland Reservoir project. We are currently working on scheduling this, and I hope to have it finalized within the next few weeks.

5. Additional Issues from Council Members'

Safety concerns were raised by Varen Allen regarding the solar panels and battery storage systems. We need to ensure we have clear protocols in place for emergency scenarios.

1. Emergency Management Plan: Do we currently have an emergency management plan specific to incidents involving these solar panels and batteries?
2. Local Agency Training: Are our local fire departments and emergency responders trained on the specific risks associated with these batteries, particularly lithium-ion batteries, and the appropriate response procedures if a fire occurs?
3. Battery Safety and Type: What safety information have the solar companies provided? Can you confirm if these are lithium-ion batteries?
4. Environmental and Infrastructure Risk: What are the risks of environmental contamination, specifically to the water system, in the event of an accident? What recovery plans are in place?
5. Placement and Responsibility: What determines the placement of the batteries, and who is ultimately responsible for them? Could there be a risk of explosion?
6. Future Mitigation: What steps can be taken to prevent these types of emergencies in the future?

7. Private Landowner Responsibility: Is there an established policy or plan regarding the liability and responsibility of private landowners should an incident occur on their property?

Kim McFarlane motioned that the General Plan be updated to include sections on safety and disaster planning within the county. Specifically, the plan should incorporate:

1. A pollution plan addressing hazardous waste and water contamination.
2. An actionable emergency response plan.

Furthermore, under the section for Solar Power, the General Plan needs to address hazardous materials and conditional use permits concerning safety plans.

Ben Grimes seconded the motion; the motion passed.

We recommend that the commission get with PLPCO and put together an emergency plan and training for all those involved.

6. Concerned Citizens with Emery County Related Issues

The potential risks associated with the solar panels and our strategy for managing them.

Do we have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges we might face with these solar panels, and what is the established procedure for addressing any problems that may arise?

7. Adjourn