Emery County Public Lands Council

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: February 3, 2026
Time: 10:00 A.M.
Location: Emery County Courthouse, Canyon Conference Room
https://zoom.us/j/4353813570?pwd=NWduRlZzRCtGNUdnd1d0NkNNdmxlZz09#success

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Public Lands Council: Rod Player, Varian Allen, Les Wilberg, Leon McElprang, Ben Grimes, Patrick Sundstrom, Brad Richman
Absent: Craig Johansen, Sheriff Tyson Huntington & Kim McFarlane (excused).
Administration: Jim Jennings, Jan Olsen
Commission: Keven Jensen, Dennis Worwood, Jordan Leonard
Agencies: Kyle Beagley, Jaden Mead & Nick LaFazio (BLM), Tifnie Hansen (State Parks), Dal Gray (DOGM), Colton Taylor & Daniel Olson(DWR), Bryan Torgerson(TLA), Darren Olsen & Coco Vandenbergh(USFS), Jaron Hansen (UFBF)
Washington: Larry Ellertson (Sen Curtis), Joel Brown (Sen. Lee), Ron Dunn & HD Sanderson (Cong. Kennedy)
Public: Don & Terri Bennett, Wayne Ludington, Dale Wharram (SRBCH), Ray Petersen, JR Bird

1. Call to Order / Welcome

- Rod Player, Chairman, calls the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Minutes

- Prior meeting: January 6, 2026, Regular Meeting
- Motion by: Varian Allen Seconded by: Brad Richman Vote: Unanimous

3. Drunkards Wash Solar Project Presentation

- **Presenter: Danniel Olsen**
- There is formal opposition to the proposed 4,000-acre Drunkard's Watch solar project located five miles north of Huntington, Utah. While the project has been in development by Nadara since 2021, significant concerns have been raised regarding its impact on local wildlife and land use.

- - Wildlife Impact: The DWR estimates a loss of 4,000 acres of crucial winter habitat for mule deer and elk, exacerbated by 14 miles of fencing. The current deer population is already 25% below objective levels. While the DWR prefers project relocation, they have recommended a 4:1 compensatory mitigation estimated at $6.5 million.

- - Agricultural and Grazing Concerns: Local stakeholders and ranchers have expressed strong concerns regarding the loss of grazing land, increased fees, and the shift from traditional multiple-use land policies to single-use solar development.

- - Lack of Transparency: There is significant criticism regarding SITLA's process, specifically a perceived lack of public engagement, insufficient environmental studies, and inadequate local input before leases were signed.

- -The council is calling for improved transparency, enhanced public engagement, and better state energy planning. Additionally, a request has been made for SITLA to attend the next meeting to explain their environmental impact evaluation process. We are also discussing the possibility of a binding ordinance to prohibit future projects on public and state lands in Emery County.

4. Discuss / Approve / Deny Recommendations for Drunkards Wash Solar

- Consequently, the Council opposes further solar development at this site, and Pat Sundstrom motioned to submit a formal letter to the county commissioners, and Varian Allen seconded the motion; the motion passed.

5. Discuss / Approve Board Member Assignments

*Access, *Water Resources, *Domestic Livestock & Grazing, *Recreation, *Tourism and *Historical, *Hunting-Fishing & *Wildlife, *Industry, *Planning-Zoning & *Economic Development.

AWARD San Rafael Backcountry Horsemen received the BLM National Outstanding Volunteer Group Award for Stewardship, project planning, and grant funding.

6. Agency Reports

- **Utah State Department of Agriculture:**
  No one in attendance

- **Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation**
  No one in attendance

- **Utah Division of Water Rights (DWRe)**
  No one in attendance

- **Utah State Parks**
  - Tifnie Hansen reports she just finished her training to become an ice rescue instructor.
  - Successful ice fishing event (350 participants)
  - New shower house at Huntington Park
  - Hiring for seasonal positions.

- **Manti-La Sal National Forest (MLNF)**
  -Cleveland Reservoir land trade
  - gravel pit and stream restoration projects,
  - Skyline timber project decision
  - year-round wood permits,
  - limited seasonal hiring.

- **Trust Lands Administration (TLA)**
  -Grazing fees increase annually based on national averages
  - Concerns have been raised about affordability for young ranchers
  - solar project impacts.

- **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR)**
  - Watershed Restoration Initiative meeting
  - Turkey relocations
  - Beaver management in San Rafael to protect native fish
  - A partner biologist position is open.

- **Utah Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining (DOGM)**
  - Carbon sequestration regulation pending
  - EPA approval proposed Ferron disposal well
  - A1 Lithium project on hold
  - Skyline mine water mitigation is ongoing.

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**
  - Coal exploration north of Muddy
  - Title V rights-of-way for county roads
  - Bellevue Flat trailhead improvements
  - Upcoming Hanksville-Goblin Valley power line going out for public comment.

- **Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO)**
  The RDCC process allows state agencies one month to comment on proposed projects; public notification mechanisms exist, but are seen as inadequate.

- **Washington Delegation Staff**
  Congressional updates: Focus on multiple use of public lands, permitting reform, Colorado River Compact deadline Feb 14, appropriations requests encouraged.

Utah legislative updates: HB 444 (state land access, Class D roads recording), HB 376 (Utah Forest Restoration Institute for wildfire research).

Senate Bill S90 (Historic Roadways Protection Act) may halt BLM funding for San Rafael travel plans until RS2477 road claims are resolved.

7. Commission Comments on Public Land Items

Find a way to change the relationship we have with SITLA. Wildfire structure report: This is going to add additional fees on those in high-risk fire zones. Commissioner Worwood.

8. Additional Issues from Council Members

Assignment of Board members: Craig Johansen, Water Resources
Brad Richmond - Wildlife, Livestock, Forestry, Pat Sundstrom - Industry

9. Concerned Citizens

No comments

Public comment on Emery County–related public lands issues.
(Comments may be limited by time at the discretion of the Chair.)

10. Adjourn