DIVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Meeting Minutes

Minutes Of The Meeting Held on April 30, 2026, at 8:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.
Virtual

HOST: ***Utah Department of Natural Resources***
Division of Outdoor Recreation
Bryce Canyon Grand Hotel: Ponderosa Room
30 N 100 E
Bryce Canyon City, UT 84764
(Virtual meeting)

IN-PERSON ATTENDEES: Mike McCandless, Scott Strong, Erin O'Brien, Tom Adams, Russell Steadman, Des Barker, Evan Glenn, Jake Deslauriers, Betsy Brynes, Jason Curry, Lance Syrett, Jorge Vazquez, Patrick Morrison, Noemi Molina, Tara Mckee

VIRTUAL ATTENDEES: Ty Bailey, Mayor Beach, Maureen Casper, Mike Chambers, Kelly Chappell, Darwin Cook, Joshua Dallin, Cameron Diehl, Nicole Hanna, Brock Jackson, Kathy Maxwell, Emily Meadows, Tracy Meier, Alexa Oldham, Bonnie Roberts, Jeffrey Rosenbluth, Aaron Spencer, Dalton Vaughn, Joanna Wheelton, Kathryn Floor, Shane Jones.

MEETING MINUTES:

(22:22) Call to Order: Chairman Jason Curry opened the meeting at Ruby's Inn and established a quorum through introductions.

(23:24) Host Welcome: Lance (Ruby's Inn) welcomed the board to Bryce Canyon. He noted the importance of holding meetings in rural Utah, sharing an anecdote about the historical difficulty of getting Wasatch Front-based boards to travel to Southern Utah.

(24:51) Grant Updates: Tara McKe introduced the grants team and announced that two new grant programs will launch in Summer/Fall 2026.

(29:33) Motion to approve the meeting minutes of the previous pre-scoring meeting. Erin O'Brien made the motion. Mike McCandless seconded the motion.

(30:26) Review of Evaluation Materials The committee reviewed printed evaluator score sheets organized by county. Staff clarified that pink highlights on the documents indicated minor scoring omissions (high/medium/low) by evaluators. A block funding breakdown was also provided outlining funding scenarios for different tiers of project rankings.

(31:30) Impact of AI on Grant Applications The Chair initiated a discussion regarding the prevalence of AI in recent grant applications. Key observations included:

- **Identification:** Members noted that while AI makes applications more professional, it often results in "wordy" responses that lack specific project details or clearly defined phases.
- **Reviewer Efficiency:** Some reviewers utilized AI tools (e.g., Claude) to summarize lengthy applications, finding it helpful for catching nuances but noting that "AI detection" by human reviewers is often more accurate than software.
- **Future Training:** There was a consensus on the need for "AI Training" for applicants to teach them how to use the tool to reduce redundancy rather than just generate bulk text. The Attorney General's office offered to share tools and training materials to help differentiate AI content.

(39:39) Budget and Eligibility Standards The committee noted that $20 million is available for distribution out of approximately $45 million in total requests. Due to the program's growth, staff implemented stricter "budget compliance" standards this year, resulting in the disqualification of roughly 20 incomplete applications.

(41:15) Policy Discussion: Funding Diversity and Regional Parks

- Members discussed the desire to see a more diverse mix of federal, private, and state funding rather than "state-on-state" funding.
- A conversation occurred regarding the funding of city parks. While some members argued cities should fund their own local amenities (e.g., picnic tables), others highlighted that the CPR category was specifically designed to help growing communities build large-scale regional parks that drive economic development.

(48:01) Youth Engagement & Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) Funding Staff requested an increase in the EKO grant allocation from $750,000 to **$850,000**. Highlights included:

- **Successes:** Recent family camping trips at Sand Hollow State Park and the integration of outdoor recreation into school PE curriculums.
- **Impact:** The program targets low-income youth and "first-time" campers to improve physical and mental health.

(56:37) Motion: EKO Grant Allocation Lance Syrett moved to increase the Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) grant funding to $850,000 for the current year. The motion was seconded by Tom Adams. The motion passed unanimously.

(57:12) Chairman Jason Curry emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between urban and rural funding. The board will prioritize projects that drive economic development and tourism in rural communities while meeting the infrastructure needs of local management agencies.

(57:47) Staff presented a live dashboard outlining the current grant cycle's statistics:

- **Total Requests: $29.8 million** for **127 applications** across **27 counties**.
- **Total Project Costs:** Reaching **$87 million**.
- **Rural vs. Urban: $16 million** in requests originated from rural counties. **Utah County** led with **$6.2 million** in requests, followed by Salt Lake and Davis. Washington County has been re-categorized as rural for this cycle.
- **Category Breakdown: Regional Assets** make up **45% ($26.6 million)** of requests, followed by **CPR** at **18.9%**, **Tier 1** at **8%**, and **Mini Grants** at **0.5%**.

(1:00:07) Review Procedures & Efficiency The Chair reminded the board of the administrative rule that "all but the lowest-ranked projects" must receive a review. Because the board has the budget to fund roughly two-thirds of the requests (approx. $20 million of the $29.8 million requested), they will use groupings for high-ranking projects to maintain efficiency.

(1:00:56) Project Tabling Rules The board clarified that they do not have the authority to "negatively exclude" an application. Projects are either added to the funding list or left "on the table." Applications remaining "on the table" at the conclusion of the process are officially excused.

(1:03:01) Partial Funding Discussion The board reviewed six mini-grant applications. Staff noted that while the team asked for partial funding thresholds, not all applicants responded. The board will use available data to award partial amounts where necessary to stay within the total budget.

(1:03:33) Mini Grant Deliberation: Back Country Horsemen Discussion focused on a specific mini-grant project in Eden involving a shelter for horse trails. While the organization is reliable, concerns were raised regarding a $10,000 grant from Washington that is not yet guaranteed and a $400 donation of labor/materials lacking a formal letter of support.

(1:09:00) Des Barker made the motion to add all six mini grant applications to the funding list. Mike McCandless seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously among in-person and online attendees.

(1:22:45) Presentation: Silo Slopes at Bastion Agricultural Center Staff from the Bastion Agricultural Center presented a proposal for a 4-acre multi-use bike and snow sports park in South Jordan.

- The park includes progressive bike topography with a 50 ft vertical runway, pump tracks, and skill courses. A key feature is the synthetic snow surface that allows for year-round tubing, skiing, and snowboarding, even without natural snowfall.
- **Capacity:** Designed for 35,000 annual visits, the facility is built to handle high volumes, including school groups via the USU Extension and 4-H programs.
- **Accessibility Discussion:** In response to member questions regarding ADA access, the presenters confirmed that the budget includes specialized rental equipment for all abilities and staff will be trained to assist individuals with disabilities.
- **Fee Structure:** The center aims for minimal entrance fees. To ensure accessibility for underserved populations, they plan to offer free passes through local libraries and 4-H programs.

(1:37:12) Presentation: Timpanogos Diversion & Recreation Enhancement Engineers presented a project to replace an aging, unsafe diversion structure on the Provo River.

- The project will move the diversion upstream to allow for fish passage and create a whitewater park suitable for tubing and kayaking.
- Funding and support are coming from Central Utah Water, Trout Unlimited, and various state and federal wildlife agencies.
- **Board Concerns:** Members questioned the seasonality of the water. Presenters clarified that while flows can be low in late summer, a new water treatment plant in Provo will help maintain adequate levels for recreation from spring through fall.

(1:49:17) Presentation: Salina City Motocross Track Salina City presented a regional "all-wheels" facility located near the Blackhawk Arena.

- The project includes a motocross track, a mountain bike course designed to NICA standards, and camping infrastructure.
- **Discussion:** Board members questioned the sustainability of the "no-fee" model for practice riding. Salina City plans to use municipal equipment and staffing from the Blackhawk Arena to manage grooming and maintenance.
- **Planning Issues:** The Chair noted that this project was recently denied funding by other grant boards due to unresolved noise and dust concerns from a neighboring landowner.

(2:04:38) Presentation: Farmington City All Wheels Park Farmington City presented the "JetStar Hills Park," a $5 million relocation and expansion of their existing skate park due to I-15 expansion.

- The park features repurposed sections of the decommissioned Jet Star roller coaster donated by Lagoon.
- **Funding:** The city has committed $4 million and is requesting $1 million from the grant program to complete the vision.

(2:15:18) Presentation: North Davis Bonneville Shoreline Trail (BST) & Bridges A proposal for 5.25 miles of trail and two 75 ft bridges spanning Bear and Shepard Canyons.

- **Impact:** The project connects existing trailheads and is within 25 minutes of 1.5 million residents.
- The Executive Director of the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation confirmed their involvement in the NEPA requirements and long-term stewardship.

(2:32:27) Presentation: Parowan Canyon Regional Trail (Phase 1) Parowan City proposed a $3.2 million project that stacks recreation infrastructure on top of an existing $2.2 million drinking water pipeline project.

- Includes 8,000 feet of trail, two bridges, and a trailhead with a restroom and pavilion near a fishing pond.
- The board discussed how this connects to the Utah Trails Network and future phases intended to link Parowan to Brian Head.

(2:44:20) Presentation: St. George Santa Clara River Trail St. George city officials presented a project to complete a "missing link" in the regional trail system.

- The trail must go through the Sunbrook Golf Course, requiring significant engineering for erosion control and safety fencing.
- **Budget:** Costs have increased to over $7 million. The city is using $30 million in bond funds but requested grant support due to the high technical costs of this specific section.

(3:00:56) Presentation: Morgan City Community Fishery Morgan City presented a $2.1 million plan for a 3-acre community fishery and park extension.

- Only 4% of land in Morgan County is public, making this a critical local project.
- **Funding:** The city has saved impact fees for 7 years and received a $500,000 private donation.

(3:22:16) Motion to forward Regional Asset Projects: Des Baker moved to include the following projects on the list of finalists for funding consideration:

1. North Davis BST (APP-005539)
2. Farmington All Wheels (APP-005558)
3. Santa Clara River Trails (APP-005218)

The motion was seconded by Russell Steadman and passed unanimously.

(3:24:45) Legislative & Funding Updates Cameron Diehl informed the board of an additional $11 million in federal funds for rural Utah recreation infrastructure coming later this summer through UDOT. Patrick Morrison also noted a remaining $226,000 in the Shoreline Trail fund available for appropriate projects.

(3:35:58) Des Barker made a motion to include the Parowan Canyon Regional Trail Phase 1 on the list of potential finalists. The motion was seconded by Russell Steadman and passed unanimously.

(3:37:43) Group breaks for lunch.

(4:05:04) Group returns from lunch.

(4:05:13) Following the break, the committee reconvened to analyze the CPR category. Jason Curry directed the board to a portrait-oriented data sheet detailing various funding scenarios based on evaluator rankings. The board reviewed several metrics for the 61 eligible applications:

- **Average and Above Average:** 28 applications totaling $3.22 million.
- **"All High" Rankings:** 11 applications totaling $1.1 million.
- **Top Half (50%):** 31 applications totaling $3.79 million. Patrick and Jason noted that because the CPR category is only in its second year, there is still a significant need for better communication with applicants, as many "city park" style requests do not fully align with the intended regional focus of the program.

(4:07:35) Policy Debate: A robust discussion occurred regarding the board's role in funding municipal park infrastructure. Several members expressed "park overload," noting that while local playgrounds are valuable, the program's primary goal should be regional recreational draws.

- Tom Adams and others argued that for small, rural towns like those in Wayne County, these "small" grants are their only resource for any recreation development.
- The board debated whether to fund only those projects that received no "Low" scores from any evaluators to ensure a higher standard of quality.

(4:12:36) Des Barker made a motion to move forward all CPR projects above 86.67 that don't have a low score. Lance Syrett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Impact:** This initial "big bite" included 13 projects totaling $1.58 million.
- **Procedural Note:** Cameron clarified for the record that "advancing" does not guarantee funding but simply moves the projects into the final phase of consideration where budget cuts and partial funding will be determined.

(4:21:40) Discussion: Strawberry Reservoir Visitor Center

- **Maintenance Concerns:** Members questioned why a state-managed facility lacked a maintenance fund for rebuilding and if the grant would be "state funding state."
- **Rehabilitation Need:** Scott Strong and others clarified that the facility is a high-traffic regional asset where the current wood structure is deteriorating. The

(4:27:52) Motion made by Lance Syrett to move forward from RRI 86.67 and above. Russell Steadman seconded. The motion passed.

(4:29:07) Discussion: Richfield City and Project Maturity The board reviewed a $67,000 request from Richfield City for a 1,700-foot trail overlay.

- **Connector Value:** While some initial scores were "Low" due to the project being a simple repaving, members argued its importance as a critical connector to the wider trail network.
- **Technical Quality:** It was noted the current trail is a 20-year-old double chip seal in rough shape, and an asphalt overlay would significantly improve safety for school children and regional cyclists.

(4:41:02) Des Barker made the motion to move forward from RRI 81.67 and above. Lance Syrett seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

(4:42:55) The board shifted focus to **Tier 1 applications**, looking at everything that scored **76 or higher**.

- **Regional Asset Criteria:** The board agreed to reject projects that were too narrow in scope, such as a Washington County charter school project that failed to show how it would serve the broader public beyond school families.

(4:48:26:) Tom Adams made the motion to advance the 18 applications in Tier 1 that met the 76-point threshold or higher. Scott Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

(4:59:44) Lance Syrett made the motion to approve Tier 1 Archery projects APP-005225 and 005173. Russell Steadman seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Members highlighted Grand County's massive contribution to the state's tourism tax (TRT) and noted the archery range project had been refined since a previous "turn-back" to find a more suitable location away from residential noise.

(5:04:12) Jake Deslauriers made the motion to move forward Central Park Restroom Project (APP-005319) CPR. Scott Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Community Necessity:** Jacob and others noted that in remote areas like Blanding, a restroom facility often serves as a primary community hub and a site for cross-cultural exchange between the city and tribal nations.

(5:10:37) Lance Syrett made a motion to move forward Rose Park (APP-005330) CPR. Cameron Diel seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- **ADA Focus:** Cameron Diehl and others praised the application's focus on ADA accessibility and community engagement, noting that Price is an older city dealing with significant infrastructure aging.
- Questions arose on what materials would be used for the playground to make it accessible and safe. Certain materials would make it difficult to be material.

(5:15:09) All-Abilities Playgrounds The committee analyzed three "All-Abilities" projects.

(5:28:53) Des Barker made the motion to pass the Bicknell Town (APP-005174) Meadows Park (APP-005183), Bluff Ridge (APP-005574) and Ashley (APP-005633) CPR. Tom Adams seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

(5:31:28) Tom Adams made the motion to move forward Ashley Gorge (APP-005230) and Glendale Park Pump Track (APP-005346) Regional Asset. Des Barker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

(5:46:19) Motion made by Tom Adams to move forward Daggett Co Centennial, Kingston Community, Orgill Lighting Juab, Big Dill Millard, Beaver Civic Center. CPR. Lance Syrett seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

(5:50:24) Motion made by Lance Syrett to Motion to move forward APP-005530 Panguitch City Baseball Complex Pavilion - CPR. Des Barker seconded. Motion passed.

(6:01:45) As the meeting drew to a close, the board reflected on the evolution of the grant program.

- Staff (Patrick and Jason) emphasized their "Service First" approach, committing to one-on-one calls with every denied applicant to review evaluator comments and help them prepare for the 2027 cycle.
- The board discussed targeting the 6–7 counties that rarely apply or score low for specific grant-writing workshops.

(6:06:14) Scott Strong made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Erin O'Brien seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was passed.