

Emery County Public Lands Council

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: May 5, 2026

Time: 10:00 A.M.

Location: Emery County Courthouse, Canyon Conference Room

<https://zoom.us/j/4353813570?pwd=NWduRlZzRctGNUdndld0NkNNdmxlZz09#success>

Public Lands Council: Rod Player, Varian Allen, Les Wilberg, Ben Grimes, Patrick Sundstrom, Brad Richman, Kim McFarlane, Craig Johansen, Sheriff Tyson Huntington

Absent:

Administration: Jim Jennings, Natalie Olsen

Commission: Jordan Leonard, Keven Jensen

Agencies: Kyle Beagley, Nick LaFazio (BLM), (State Parks), Dal Gray (DOGM), Colton Taylor, Elam Rees(DWR), Darren Olsen, Daniel Luke (USFS), Brian Torgerson (SITLA), Colton Taylor, Chris Wood (DWR), Nicole Nielson (PLPCO)

Washington: Larry Ellertson (Senator Curtis)

Public: Wayne Ludington, Ed Geary, Tom Hansen, Ray Petersen, Jaron Hansen, JR Bird

1. Call to Order / Welcome

- Rod Player, Chairman, called the meeting to order. The Chair welcomed those in attendance and noted the agenda would begin with approval of prior meeting minutes.

2. Approval of Minutes

The Chair reviewed key items from the April meeting minutes:

- A letter of support for the Pinyon Juniper (Pinyon J) Study was completed and submitted, recommending County Commission support.
- Follow-up items scheduled for this meeting included:
 - Mountain Dew Trail discussion
 - Forest Service road maintenance
- Law enforcement discussion with the Forest Service was postponed and remains pending.
- Previous discussions included updates on Electric Lake and Wedge Campground.

A clarification was made that Cash Stallings is associated with Water Rights (DWRe), not DWR.

Varian made a motion to approve the April 7th, 2026 meeting minutes with a second from Les. Voting was unanimous, motion passed.

3. 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: Nathan**

No one in attendance

- **Manti-La Sal National Forest (MLNF) Darren**

Presenter: Daniel Luke, Forest Engineer

Road System Overview:

- Approximately **2,230 miles of forest roads**
- About **290 miles are gravel surface**
- Emery County maintains approximately **90 miles annually** under Schedule A agreements
- Total forest road maintenance completed last year: **~224 miles**

Funding & Staffing:

- Annual maintenance budget: approximately **\$500,000**
- Only **4 of 10 operator positions filled (40% capacity)**
- Hiring freeze has been in place for approximately **2–3 years**

Maintenance & Improvements:

- Limited funding available for improvements; primarily secured through:
 - Timber sales
 - External funding proposals
 - Counties perform a significant portion of routine maintenance

Current & Ongoing Projects:

- Spring City Canyon road reconstruction (in-house work)
- Millport Canyon post-fire repairs
- Joe's Valley Campground upgrades (completion anticipated June)
- Continued timber sale support and road preparation

Upcoming Projects:

- ~\$1.5 million project on Skyline Drive and surrounding roads
- Culvert replacements and road improvements tied to timber sales

Additional Discussion:

- Coordination with counties and BLM highlighted as beneficial
- Council expressed concern about staffing shortages and asked about potential advocacy options
- Forest Service noted hiring limitations are tied to broader federal workforce constraints

Additional MLNF Updates From Darren

- **Resiliency Project:** Forest-wide habitat and prescribed fire planning effort underway
- **Habitat Projects:** Middle Mountain, Sanpete, and Beehive projects focused on mule deer habitat improvement
- **Forest Plan:** Cooperative agency meetings expected in June
- **Gate Openings:** Earlier than usual due to low snowpack
- **Fire Outlook:** Fire restrictions expected early (possibly June)

- **Prescribed Burns:** No burns planned for summer due to current conditions and grazing impacts
- **Trust Lands Administration (TLA) Bryan Torgerson**
No major updates provided. He will be available for follow-up questions if needed
- **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Chris**
 - Upcoming **Mule Deer Working Group Meeting:**
 - May 14, 2026, at 5:30 PM in Price
 - Includes field tour and agency collaboration discussion
 - **Fuller Bottom Wildlife Management Area:**
 - Working with Emery County to relocate road access away from river bottom to protect habitat
 - **Turkey Season:**
 - General season currently underway
 - **Regulatory Updates:**
 - Proposal to restrict public use of lethal traps for cougar harvest
 - New Wildlife Management Area (WMA) access requirements:
 - Future requirement for hunting/fishing license or free access permit
 - Implementation in Emery County begins **July 1, 2028**
- **Utah Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining (DOGM) Dal**
 - Application submitted for **carbon sequestration (Class VI well)** in Emery County; awaiting EPA approval
 - Skyline Mine:
 - Water pumping operations ongoing at multiple locations into Electric Lake
 - **Bond Release – Deseret/Trail Mountain Area:**
 - Approximately **1.86 acres** under consideration for release
 - Area currently used as a turnaround
 - Clarification provided that no new coal transport tunnel project is proposed at this time
- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Kyle Beagley**
 - **Quarry Site Construction:**
 - Active construction underway; quarry area temporarily closed
 - Visitor center and trails remain open Thursday–Sunday
 - Estimated completion: October
 - **Special Recreation Permits (SRPs):**
 - Events such as Burning Man camping group and Watermelon Crawl reported as successful
 - Improved coordination noted this year
 - **Mountain Dew Trail:**
 - Evaluated by BLM staff
 - Approximately one-third currently designated
 - Will enter formal review and prioritization process
 - **Staffing:**
 - Field office currently operating at approximately **50% staffing levels**

Road Maintenance:

- Class B road funding primarily administered through UDOT
- BLM relies on grants and internal funding for other maintenance

Travel Management Reassessment

- BLM announced upcoming public input process for reassessment of San Rafael Desert and San Rafael Swell travel management plans.
- Approximately 20 miles in the desert area and over 200 miles in the Swell area are being reviewed for possible route openings.
- Public comment period expected to remain open for approximately 30 days.

Millsite Golf Course Land Sale

- BLM opened public review periods for the Millsite Golf Course Environmental Assessment and Federal Register notice.
- Proposal would allow Ferron City to purchase approximately 157 acres associated with the golf course.
- Discussion included future management flexibility, protection of rights-of-way, and importance of public comments.
- Public Lands Council plans to consider a formal support letter at the next meeting.

- **Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO) Nicole**

State Resource Management Plan (SRMP):

- Updated State Resource Management Plan becomes effective the following day
- Plan updated annually with approval from the Utah Legislature
- SRMP outlines Utah's priorities regarding public land management
- Hard copies made available; searchable PDF available online
- Council members encouraged to review and suggest updates for future editions
- County and state resource plans noted as important tools during federal planning processes
- Nicole requested sheriff input regarding the law enforcement section of the plan
- Wild horse management section highlighted for additional review and feedback

Solar Development & Grazing:

- Plan includes policies discouraging net loss of grazing AUMs or forage due to solar development or other projects

Public Participation:

- Public encouraged to provide comments on BLM travel management reconsideration efforts
- PLPCO plans to distribute information and potentially provide a public comment letter generator

- **Washington Delegation Staff Larry Ellertson**

Federal Issues Update:

- Larry provided updates on behalf of Senator Curtis's office.
- Senator Curtis supports the President's actions regarding Iran while emphasizing congressional responsibilities under the War Powers Act.

- Ongoing tensions in the region continue to be monitored.

Small Business Support:

- Senator recognizes small businesses as vital to the national economy
- National Small Business Week acknowledged
- Small Business Expo scheduled for May 11 at Davis Technical College

Committee & Legislative Work:

- Senator continues work on
 - Energy and Natural Resources Committee issues
 - Small Business Support
 - Financial Literacy and education initiatives
 - Foreign relations matters
 - Western Hemisphere issues

Retirement Announcement:

- Larry announced plans to retire in June or early July
- Expressed appreciation for participation in Public Lands Council meetings and working with the group

4. Commission Comments on Public Land Items

Data Center Discussion-Commissioner Leonard

- Discussion held regarding increasing interest in locating data centers on public and private lands.
- Discussion on potential impacts including land use, fencing, water usage, fiber optic infrastructure, and economic benefits.
- Discussion referenced possible projects in Carbon County, Duchesne County, and other areas of Utah.
- SITLA representatives confirmed they have received inquiries from companies interested in potential data center locations statewide.
- Officials noted that access to fiber optic infrastructure is a primary requirement for many proposed projects.
- Concerns were raised regarding water usage and balancing energy development with agricultural interests.

Zoning Discussion

- Discussion held regarding zoning requirements related to large-scale projects such as data centers.
- Emery County officials stated county lands are generally zoned under agriculture, mining, industrial, or mountain zone classifications.

5. Council Members Comments

Rod-

- The Travel Bureau presented a 2025 Events Community Report summarizing county events and estimated economic impacts.
- Many listed events were noted as occurring on public lands.

6. Concerned Citizens

No comments

7. Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned.