Emery County Public Lands Council

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: June 2, 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, Patrick Sundstrom, Brad Richman, Kim McFarlane, Craig Johansen
Absent: Rod Player, Ben Grimes
Administration: Jim Jennings, Natalie Olsen
Commission: Keven Jensen, Dennis Worwood, Jordan Leonard
Agencies: Kyle Beagley, Tom Heinlein & Elijah Waters (BLM), Nathan (State Parks), Dal Gray (DOGM), Colton Taylor, Elam Rees(DWR), Darren Olsen, Myron Jeffs(USFS), Brian Torgerson (SITLA), Chris Wood, Cash Stallings (DWR), Dana Dean, Karin Madsen, Dal Gray, Todd Miller & Kendra Hinten (DOGM)
Washington: Larry Ellertson (Senator Curtis)
Public: Don & Terri Bennett, Wayne Ludington, Ed Geary, Tom Hansen, Trent Young, Kenzie Young, Bill Fasselin,

1. Call to Order / Welcome

- The meeting was called to order by, Varian Allan, Vice-Chairman, in the absence of Chairman Rod Player who was away on family business. A quorum was initially not present but was established shortly after the meeting began.

2. Approval of May 5th, 2026 Meeting Minutes

- Motion by: Craig Johansen Seconded by: Les Wilberg Voting was Unanimous

3. Discuss/Approve/Deny: Letter Supporting the purchase of BLM Land at Millsite.

- Council members reviewed the draft letter supporting the proposed sale of BLM property at Millsite to Ferron City. Members expressed support for the letter and the concept of transferring federal land ownership to local jurisdiction.

Discussion included:

- The letter accurately reflected the Council's position.
- Support for local ownership and management of the property.
- Reminder that the Emery County Commission would also need to approve the letter.

Craig made a motion to approve and endorse the letter supporting the sale of the Millsite BLM property to Ferron City with a second from Les. Voting was unanimous.

Council members were reminded that the Federal Register comment period remains open through **June 15, 2026**, and additional comments may still be submitted.

4. Presentation from Mistie Christiansen regarding the Emery Town/Muddy Creek Irrigation Company.

- Mistie Christiansen presented information regarding drought conditions and water supply concerns facing Emery Town and the Muddy Creek Irrigation Company.

Key points included:

- Emery Town faces significant challenges due to limited water storage capacity.
- Current drought conditions have heightened concerns regarding future culinary water supplies.
- A collaborative planning meeting has been scheduled for June 18, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. at the Emery Recreation Center.
- The Governor's Office, Conservation District, elected officials, and agencies will be invited to participate.
- Discussion will focus on both immediate drought response and long-term water storage solutions.

Additional discussion included:

- Concerns regarding maintaining culinary water supplies through the remainder of the year.
- Potential development of additional water storage facilities.
- Previous feasibility studies for the proposed Morris Bend Reservoir site.
- Existing infrastructure improvements, including pipeline projects that have reduced water losses.
- Possible rehabilitation of existing reservoirs and improvements to Spinner Reservoir.
- Historical reservoir studies and prior funding efforts.

Mistie encouraged participation from agencies and elected officials and requested assistance in identifying funding opportunities and long-term solutions

5. Discuss/Approve/Deny Action of Presentation.

- Council members discussed ways to support Emery Town's efforts to secure additional water storage and improve long-term water reliability.
- Council members agreed to work with Mistie Christiansen and county representatives to draft a formal support letter.

Kim made a motion to support Emery Town in exploring and securing options and funding to increase water storage capacity with a second from Leon. Voting was unanimous.

6. Agency Reports

- **<u>Utah State Department of Agriculture:</u>**
  No one in attendance to report

- **<u>Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation</u>**
  No one in attendance to report

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

- **Utah State Parks:**
  No one in attendance to report

- **Manti-La Sal National Forest (MLNF): Myron, Scott (Law Enforcement), Darren**
  Myron provided an overview of the Forest Service's proposed campground recreation fee updates.

  Highlights included:
  - Recreation fee updates occur approximately every 8–12 years.
  - The last fee adjustment occurred in 2017.
  - Public comment period will run from **June 15 through August 15, 2026**.
  - Information will be distributed through letters, newspaper notices, campground signage, and an online Story Map.

  Proposed changes include:

  Single Campsites
  - Standardized fee proposed at **$15 per night**.
  - Joes Valley Campground proposed at **$20 per night** due to significant recent improvements.

  Double Campsites
  - Standardized fee proposed at **$20 per night** across the forest.

  Guard Stations
  - Proposed increase to **$75 per night**.

  New Fee Sites Proposed
  - Chicken Creek Campground.
  - Ferron Canyon Campground at the base of the Dugway.

  Discussion included:
  - Open range and livestock grazing considerations around campgrounds.
  - Recommendations to include signage notifying visitors that campgrounds are located within grazing allotments and livestock may be present.
  - Concerns regarding fencing responsibilities and campground development within active grazing areas.

  The Forest Service encouraged all interested parties to participate in the public comment process.

  Manti-La Sal National Forest – Law Enforcement Update (Scott)

  Scott provided an overview of the U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement Program and current staffing challenges.

  Key discussion points included:
  - The Forest Service is authorized for approximately 1,000 law enforcement officers nationwide but currently employs only about 300 officers.
  - Utah is authorized approximately 18 officers but currently has several vacant positions, including leadership vacancies.

- Dave DeVries is the assigned Forest Service Law Enforcement Officer for the northern portion of the Manti-La Sal National Forest, including Emery County.
- Officer DeVries covers approximately 700,000 acres extending from White Mountain north to Highway 6 and west into portions of Juab County.
- Due to staffing shortages, law enforcement efforts are largely complaint-driven, with officers responding to reported incidents rather than conducting routine patrols.
- The Forest Service maintains a public reporting system utilizing a QR code that allows the public to report law enforcement concerns.
- Strong cooperation continues between Forest Service law enforcement personnel and the Emery County Sheriff's Office.
- Discussion occurred regarding challenges associated with policing recreation use, off-highway vehicle activity, accidents, and fire-related incidents across such a large geographic area with limited staffing.
- Fire restrictions for 2026 are being coordinated statewide among all national forests in Utah, including updated guidance regarding propane fire pits and other approved devices.

Council members discussed:

- Increasing recreation use since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Limited staffing resources among all agencies.
- Continued coordination between federal, state, and county law enforcement agencies.
- Assistance provided by Emery County Emergency Management and other partners in addressing incidents on public lands.

Manti-La Sal National Forest – Forest Management Update (Darren)

Darren provided several updates regarding Forest Service operations and ongoing projects. Topics discussed included:

National Trails Day Projects

- Little Creek Bike Trail bridge construction project.
- Ferron Canyon cleanup project with planned travel through Twelve Mile Canyon.

Livestock Grazing

- Livestock turnout onto summer grazing allotments is expected between early June and July 1.
- Permittees were asked to voluntarily reduce grazing use by approximately 10 percent due to drought conditions.
- Most permittees complied through reductions in livestock numbers, grazing duration, or a combination of both.
- Significant concern remains regarding reduced spring flows and water availability across the forest.

Road and Gravel Pit Projects

- The Forest Service recently completed authorization of several gravel pit projects to support road maintenance efforts.
- Ongoing work continues to improve road infrastructure throughout the forest.

Fuels Reduction and Watershed Projects

- Fuel reduction projects remain ongoing.
- Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) stream restoration components have been added to certain projects to improve watershed health and water retention.

Noxious Weed Management

- Forest Service personnel continue weed treatment efforts throughout the forest.
- Coordination continues with the Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), which conducts weekly weed treatment activities on both public and private lands.

Muddy Creek Drainage and Water Storage Discussions

- Forest Service representatives expressed support for collaborative efforts addressing water storage and delivery concerns in the Muddy Creek drainage.
- Discussion included Spinner Reservoir, ditch maintenance concerns, and opportunities for cooperation with Emery Town, irrigation companies, and other partners.
- Forest Service representatives emphasized their willingness to assist where possible while working within existing regulatory requirements.

Road Relocation Project

- The Forest Service has completed environmental review and authorization for relocation of a road affected by an active slide area in the Muddy Creek drainage.
- Funding, staffing, and equipment availability remain the primary obstacles to construction.
- Discussion included opportunities to coordinate road work with future reservoir and irrigation infrastructure improvements.

Forest Plan Revision

- A Cooperating Agencies meeting is anticipated during June.
- The Forest Plan Revision process remains on schedule.
- Formal objection opportunities are expected to begin in mid-July and continue through September.

Wood Permits

- Firewood, post, and pole permits are currently available through Forest Service offices and online.

- **<u>Trust Lands Administration (TLA):</u> Bryan and Rachel**

  Bryan from the Utah Trust Lands Administration provided updates on several pending projects and lease actions within Emery County.

  Green River Uranium Lease Area

  - TLA recently converted existing mining claims acquired through the Dingell Land Exchange into mineral leases for future uranium exploration and development opportunities near Green River.
  - No active development is currently occurring, but the leases allow future exploration activities.

  Emery Area Mining Lease Application

  - TLA is processing a mineral lease application near Emery Town involving exploration for various mineral resources.
  - Council members were informed of the location and status of the application.

Gas Pipeline Easement

- TLA is reviewing an easement request associated with gas pipeline infrastructure intended to connect existing facilities.
- The project is expected to move through the Development Coordinating Committee (DCC) review process.

Poison Springs Solar Project

- The project developer will host a public open house on June 10, 2026, to provide information and answer questions regarding the proposed solar development.
- The event is intended to encourage community outreach and public engagement.

- **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR): Chris**

  Chris from DWR provided updates on recreation, wildlife management, and habitat projects.

  Key updates included:

  - Steglow Trailhead in Grand County opened May 1 and continues to provide access to the Book Cliffs area. Users accessing tribal lands are reminded that permits are required from the Ute Tribe.
  - Water continues to be hauled to the Steglow Trailhead, although availability may vary depending on visitation levels. Memorial Day weekend saw significant visitor use.
  - Utah's Free Fishing Day will be held on June 6, allowing anglers to fish without a license.
  - Antlerless hunting applications open June 9 and remain open for two weeks, with drawings scheduled for early July.
  - Work continues on rerouting a road at the Fuller Bottom property within the Upper San Rafael Wildlife Management Area. Cultural resource clearances have been completed, mowing is planned, and Emery County will assist with construction activities.
  - The annual Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) field tour is scheduled for July 8. The tour will include habitat restoration projects in Huntington Canyon, stream improvements, beaver relocation projects, and work near Scofield. Public participation was encouraged.

  Council discussion included recommendations regarding road design and drainage improvements associated with the Fuller Bottom road relocation project.

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

  Dal provided updates regarding mining activities and water management efforts.

  Key updates included:

  - Crews successfully accessed the mine workings at the Bolliger Mine and are enlarging access points to allow installation of pumping equipment.
  - Dewatering operations continue, with water being pumped toward Electric Lake.
  - Additional pumps remain operational, although current pumping volumes were not available at the time of the meeting.

- Discussion occurred regarding exploratory drilling activities in the Muddy Creek area by SEFCO and the potential for several exploration holes to be drilled during the coming weeks.

Council members discussed the value of having a mining geologist or hydrologist attend a future meeting to address questions regarding groundwater movement, mining impacts, and subsurface hydrology.

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Kyle Beagley**

Kyle provided updates on several ongoing projects and planning efforts.

Goblin Valley State Park Power Project

- BLM recently signed the decision authorizing a power line extension from Hanksville to Goblin Valley State Park.
- The line will generally follow existing road corridors, including Mulligan's Castle Road, to minimize impacts.
- The project is intended to provide reliable electrical service to park facilities, including visitor services, residences, water systems, and future campground improvements.

Discussion included:

- Potential future communications and radio infrastructure opportunities in the Goblin Valley and Little Wild Horse Canyon area.
- Existing use of Starlink technology by Emery County Search and Rescue and Emergency Management personnel to improve communications in remote areas.

Millsite Land Sale

- Public comment period for the Millsite land sale closes June 15, 2026.
- The Governor's Consistency Review concludes June 30, 2026.
- If all requirements are met, the sale to Ferron City could be finalized during July.

Hunter Power Plant Property Sale

- BLM continues work on a proposed sale of approximately 200 acres adjacent to the Hunter Power Plant.
- The property would be used for reclamation activities associated with coal combustion residual disposal areas.
- Planning and evaluation for the project have been ongoing for approximately ten years.

Nine Mile Canyon Operations

- Wapiti's operations on the West Tavaputs Plateau have been acquired by High River Energy.
- BLM is working through transfer of permits and associated authorizations to the new operator.

Rights-of-Way Fee Increases

- BLM representatives reported significant increases in rights-of-way, permit, and lease fees throughout Emery County.
- Several irrigation companies have reported annual costs increasing substantially, in some cases nearly tripling.
- BLM is investigating the cause of the increases and encouraged affected entities to utilize the appeals process available through their billing notices.

Planning and Travel Management

- The Travel Management Plan reassessment remains open for public comment through June 8, 2026.
- Proposed changes include consideration of approximately 220 additional miles of routes in the San Rafael Swell and 20 miles in desert areas.
- The San Rafael Swell Recreation Area Plan Amendment is currently in a public review period and Governor's Consistency Review process.

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

Nicole and Clay provided updates regarding the San Rafael Swell Recreation Area Cooperative Management Agreement and other public lands matters.

San Rafael Swell Cooperative Management Agreement

- The State of Utah and BLM have finalized a cooperative agreement authorized under the Dingell Act.
- The agreement establishes:
    - Additional state law enforcement presence within the recreation area.
    - Support from Division of Outdoor Recreation trail crews.
    - Enhanced coordination and communication between state agencies and BLM.
    - Greater participation by the State of Utah in management discussions affecting the recreation area.
    - Opportunities for Emery County participation on project-specific efforts.
- A formal signing ceremony is scheduled at the Utah State Capitol with participation from the Lieutenant Governor and invited stakeholders.

RS-2477 Updates

PLPCO reported several recent legal successes involving RS-2477 road rights:

- Garfield County prevailed in litigation involving improvements to the Hole-in-the-Rock Road, confirming the county's authority to conduct maintenance activities, including chip sealing.
- Similar legal success occurred regarding Sand Dunes Road near Zion National Park, supporting county authority to improve and maintain the roadway.
- Officials noted these decisions may reduce long-term maintenance costs while minimizing resource impacts caused by frequent grading.

Federal Minimization Criteria

- PLPCO noted recent federal actions rescinding previous minimization criteria guidance.
- Additional information is expected as implementation details become available.

- **Washington Delegation Staff**

Rresentative Larry Ellertson from Senator Mike Lee's office provided a legislative update.

Topics discussed included:

- Ongoing international affairs matters being addressed through the Senator's work on the Foreign Relations Committee.
- Discussion regarding prediction markets and gambling, noting that Senator Lee views prediction markets as a form of gambling, though future legislative action remains uncertain.

- Clarification that there is currently no vacancy on the United States Supreme Court. However, Senators Ted Cruz and Mike Lee have been mentioned publicly as potential future candidates should a vacancy occur.
- Notification that Governor Cox has issued a statewide drought declaration. It was noted that Emery County's existing drought declaration extends beyond the state declaration.

A council member raised concerns regarding water storage and infrastructure needs on the Muddy River, noting that previous investigations into potential reservoir sites had been conducted but funding was unavailable to move projects forward.

The member asked whether Senator Lee would support efforts to secure federal funding or earmarks for water storage development on the Muddy River.

Representative Larry Ellertson responded that Senator Lee would be interested in helping address the issue and committed and would relay the council's concerns regarding the need for long-term water solutions.

7. Commission Comments on Public Land Items

Nothing to report

8. Additional Issues from Council Members

- Council members were informed that an upcoming meeting on Emery's water previously scheduled at the Recreation Center had been moved to the Senior Citizens Center. The meeting is scheduled for June 18 at 4:00 p.m.
- Larry announced plans to retire effective July 15 and indicated that he may attend one additional meeting before his retirement.
- Sheriff Tyson Huntington provided an update on the development of a new Emery County Sheriff's Office app.

Highlights included:

- The application will provide public access to sheriff's office information, jail information, inmate services, and other resources.
- The Sheriff proposed adding a Public Lands section to the application that could provide information, alerts, announcements, and other public lands-related content.
- The application may also be used for tourism information, public surveys, notifications, and distribution of important community updates.
- Council members expressed interest in reviewing the application as development progresses and exploring ways public lands information could be incorporated.

Livestock Theft Awareness

A council member requested assistance from law enforcement agencies, public land agencies, and the public in monitoring potential livestock theft activity.
Key points included:

- Increased cattle prices may create incentives for livestock theft.
- Individuals observing suspicious livestock loading activity, particularly during nighttime hours, were encouraged to record license plate numbers when possible.
- Law enforcement confirmed that livestock theft incidents are already being investigated and emphasized the importance of public awareness and reporting suspicious activity.

9. Concerned Citizens

10. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.