RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING

Public Lands Policy Coordination Office

May 7, 2026

MINUTES

Attendees:

Members:

Christopher Merritt, SHPO, *Chair*
Rachel Shilton, DWRe, *Vice Chair*
Jodi Gardberg DWQ
Conner Peterson, UDAF
Tommy Platero for Daniel Olson, DWR
Sarah Ward, DEQ
Steve Bowman, UGS
Kate Novak, FFSL
David Allison, DERR
Brian Speer, WMRC
Mark Stratford, DWRi
Brandon Weston, UDOT
Natasha Ballif for Jan Morse, OGM
Collet Cox, GOEO
Lindsey Mayer for Jake Garfied, OED
Russell Seeley, for Nathan Lunstad, Drinking Water

Guests

Stephanie McGinnis, DWRe
Brett Ostler, FFSL
Redge B. Johnson, PLPCO
Dillon Hoyt, PLPCO
Ben Marett, DWRe
Brianne Emery, FFSL
Talia Gluch, SHPO Intern
Savannah Ririe, SHPO Intern
Brooklyn Mercuvio, SHPO Intern

Staff:

Sindy Smith, PLPCO

Welcome and Introductions

Chris Merritt, *Chair*, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. After introductions, Chris welcomed everyone.

Approval of Minutes

The February 5, 2026, draft minutes were unanimously approved.

Updating Utah's State Water Plan

Stephanie McGinnis*, State Water Plan Manager, DWRe*, provided an in-depth presentation on the upcoming State Water Plan, a strategic framework that guides Utah's water resource management.

- The update process began in January 2025, and a final draft is slated for completion in December 2026. Following the passage of House Bill 280 in 2024, the state is legally required to update the plan at least every 10 years. However, the division's internal goal is to update it every 5 years to keep pace with rapid environmental shifts affecting the Great Salt Lake and the Colorado River. A public comment period is planned for July 2026.
- Stephanie noted that water planning has evolved significantly since the first document in 1948. Early plans focused purely on engineering and water storage, whereas modern plans prioritize conservation, climate science, ecological health, and preparedness for extreme weather events.
- Utah is currently battling severe dry conditions, with over two-thirds of the state in extreme drought and record-low snow coverage recorded in the previous December. Acknowledging the declining levels of the Great Salt Lake and historic lows at Lake Powell, the new plan shifts its focus toward risk, responsibility, and resilience. Instead of pitting the economy against the environment, the plan's chapters focus equally on healthy watersheds, vibrant communities, and productive agriculture, and explore innovative solutions such as water reuse and aquifer storage.

Stephanie addressed questions and comments.

Fire Season 2025 Re-Cap and 2026 Predictions

Brett Ostler*, State Fire Management Officer, FFSL,* delivered a presentation reviewing the devastating 2025 fire season and outlining the state's readiness for the 2026 season.

- Last year was one of the most challenging fire seasons on record, forcing a declared state of emergency in August. Utah experienced 1,161 wildfires, costing the state an estimated $10 million in suppression efforts. While the state successfully contained 92% of fires at under 10 acres, the remaining 8% caused massive damage. Most notably, the human-caused Monroe Canyon fire burned over 73,000 acres.
- Humans caused 60% of the state's wildfires in 2025, burning a total of 105,000 acres. Despite the "Fire Sense" prevention campaign, roadside fires remain a critical issue. Brett emphasized that these are rarely caused by discarded cigarettes; instead, they are heavily driven by poor vehicle maintenance, such as dragging chains, exploding bald tires, and

failing catalytic converters that drop chunks of metal at 3,000 degrees onto dry grass. Escaped agricultural burns are also a primary cause of spring wildfires.

- Facing extreme drought and high fire risk for the upcoming summer, the State is expanding its tactical resources. This includes deploying a third Type 1 helicopter and launching a Multi-Mission Aircraft (MMA) capable of detecting and mapping lightning strike hotspots from 40,000 feet. The State is also heavily utilizing a growing drone program for infrared mapping and aerial ignition.
- Brett and Redge Johnson highlighted that the Monroe Mountain fire was successfully contained in areas where the Forest Service had conducted proactive forest management, such as prescribed burns and mastication. The committee discussed the need to continue this active fuel-reduction management to prevent catastrophic wildfires, even when it generates public complaints about seasonal smoke.

Brett addressed questions and comments.

Other Business

The next RDCC meeting will be held on August 6, 2026.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:22 a.m.