

Emery County Public Lands Council

Meeting Minutes

DONE

Meeting Date: July 7, 2026

Time: 10:00 A.M.

Location: Emery County Courthouse, Canyon Conference Room

<https://zoom.us/j/4353813570?pwd=NWduRlZzRCtGNUdndld0NkNNdmxIZz09#success>

Public Lands Council: Rod Player, Varian Allen, Ben Grimes, Brad Richman, Kim McFarlane, Leon McElprang

Absent: Les Wilberg, Craig Johansen, Sheriff Tyson Huntington, Patrick sundstrom

Administration: Jim Jennings, Natalie Olsen

Commission: Jordan Leonard, Keven Jensen, Dennis Worwood

****Agencies:** Nick LaFazio (BLM), Tifnie Hansen(State Parks), Dal Gray (DOGM), Colton Taylor(DWR), (USFS), Brian Torgerson (SITLA), Nicole Nielson (PLPCO) Jeremy Lake, AJ O'Neil (ECSO), Cash Stallings (DWRi)

Washington: Larry Ellertson (Senator Curtis)

Public: Tom Hansen, Ray Petersen, Jaron Hansen, JR Bird

1. Call to Order / Welcome

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

2. Approval of Minutes

The June 2, 2026 meeting minutes were reviewed.

Corrections included:

- Larry was incorrectly identified as representing Senator Mike Lee. He represents Senator John Curtis.
- The spelling of "SUFCO" was corrected.

Motion: Brad Richman made a motion to approve the June 2, 2026 meeting minutes with the noted corrections with a second from Varina Allen. Motion carried unanimously.

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): Cash**

Fire Suppression Water Rights

- Reminded agencies and the public that existing water rights remain in effect during wildfire suppression.
- Firefighting agencies must coordinate with water right holders before using water unless the Governor has declared a statewide fire emergency.
- Water used for firefighting should be compensated through state or federal programs when applicable.
- A county emergency declaration alone does not suspend water right requirements.

Colorado River Update

- Basin states have not reached an agreement regarding post-2026 Colorado River operations.
- The Bureau of Reclamation is expected to release a Draft Environmental Impact Statement within the coming weeks followed by a Record of Decision in mid-August.
- Litigation is anticipated regardless of the federal decision.
- Lower Basin states continue discussing potential Compact litigation before the United States Supreme Court.
- Utah's State Engineer has indicated tributaries such as those in Emery County will continue operating under existing water rights unless directed otherwise through an interstate agreement or court order.
- Current operations at Lake Powell are expected to remain at the power pool through reduced releases and supplemental water from Flaming Gorge.

Emery Town Water Supply

- The Division continues assisting Emery Town with emergency water planning.
- Temporary emergency applications are being processed while long-term solutions continue to be evaluated.

Colorado River Adjudication

- Water rights adjudication continues in Grand and San Juan Counties.
- Carbon and Emery County adjudications have already been completed.

Groundwater and New Water Rights

Cash reviewed Utah's current Colorado River groundwater policy:

- Permanent new appropriations remain limited.
- Larger quantities may be issued as fixed-term (10-year) water rights.
- Existing water rights may also be purchased and changed to new uses.
- Drilling a well does not authorize water use without obtaining a water right.
- Groundwater development in Emery County can be challenging due to deep shale formations.

• Utah State Parks: Tifnie Hansen

Millsite State Park

- Campground occupancy has remained high despite low reservoir levels.
- Boat docks were not installed this season due to limited water.
- OHV use remains strong.

Huntington State Park

- The reservoir is approximately 56% full.
- Heavy recreational use continues each weekend.
- Parking has become limited due to increased boating activity.
- New restroom and shower facilities are under construction and expected to be completed this fall.

• Manti-La Sal National Forest (MLNF) Matthew Meccariello

Fire Activity

- Stage 1 Fire Restrictions are currently in place.
- Stage 2 restrictions are expected shortly depending upon conditions.
- The Babylon Fire exceeds 100,000 acres with approximately 1,200 personnel assigned.

Timber Sales

- Logging operations continue throughout Potter Canyon and Spring City areas.

- Additional operators are relocating equipment from Beaver fire areas.
- Industrial Fire Plans allow timber operations to continue under stricter safety requirements.

Grazing

- High-elevation allotments are experiencing water shortages.
- Forest personnel continue working with permittees to address drought conditions.

Exploratory Drilling

- Mineral exploration continues near Cairn Mountain.
- Water withdrawals are being conducted under approved water rights.
- Helicopter and truck operations remain active.

Grazing Action Plan

Matt discussed new direction from the U.S. Department of Agriculture intended to:

- Streamline grazing permits.
- Evaluate vacant allotments.
- Potentially reopen previously closed allotments.
- Increase opportunities for new grazing permittees.

• **Trust Lands Administration (TLA) Bryan Torgerson**

- Minimal Trust Lands acreage has been impacted by recent wildfires.
- Approximately 1,000 acres have burned in the Cottonwood Fire and another 1,000 acres in Iron County.
- No Trust Lands have been impacted by the Babylon Fire.
- Rehabilitation and reseeding efforts will begin when conditions allow.

• **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Colton**

- Elk classification surveys on the Manti began July 8.
- Dove banding started July 1 to improve migration data.
- Fire restrictions are active on all Wildlife Management Areas in southeastern Utah.
- The Watershed Restoration Initiative field tour is scheduled for July 8.
- Bull Hollow Bottom road reroute planning continues with Emery County.
- The San Rafael River remains extremely low due to drought conditions.

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

- Skyline Mine has resumed coal production.
- Borehole work continues near Bolger Reservoir to improve dewatering operations.
- The Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program plans to begin sealing openings associated with the Wattis mine fire during late August or early fall.

• **Bureau of Land Management (BLM):**

Fire Preparedness

- Stage 2 Fire Restrictions remain in effect.
- Additional firefighting resources have been pre-positioned including engines, a bulldozer and water tender.

Law Enforcement

- Hiring efforts continue for additional law enforcement rangers.
- One experienced officer position will be posted soon.
- Additional hiring is anticipated following federal training availability.

Wild Horse Management

- The Muddy Creek Horse Gather is scheduled for November.
- Current herd estimates exceed Appropriate Management Levels.
- Approximately 245 horses are expected to be gathered.
- Additional gathers are anticipated over the next several years.

Millsite Land Sale

- Environmental review is nearly complete.
- Additional U.S. Fish and Wildlife review is required due to recent court decisions.
- BLM expects completion before the end of August.

Jurassic National Monument

- Construction of the new protective building continues ahead of schedule.

Recreation Area MOU

- Initial coordination meetings with Quipco and local partners begin this week.
- Priorities will include law enforcement, recreation maintenance and trail management.

Grazing Regulations: BLM continues evaluating:

- Vacant grazing allotments.
- Streamlined permitting processes.
- Reduced National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) timelines.

Mountain Dew Trail

- Cultural resource surveys are underway.
- Project approval is expected within approximately one month.

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

- Reported the first coordination meeting for the San Rafael Recreation Area MOU with the BLM, State, and Emery County is scheduled for Thursday.
- The meeting will establish priorities for law enforcement, trail maintenance, and other recreation projects outlined in the agreement.
- Announced that PLPCO will assist the Town of Emery with emergency water planning. The first virtual emergency water coordination meeting is scheduled for **July 16 at 12:00 p.m.** and will focus on both short-term and long-term water supply solutions.

• **Washington Delegation Staff**

Larry Ellertson (Senator John Curtis Office)

- Senator Curtis continues emphasizing respect, charity and religious freedom as foundational principles.
- National support for Israel continues to shift politically.
- Concerns remain regarding data centers, particularly related to water use, land requirements and community impacts such as noise.

- Senator Curtis is sponsoring legislation allowing Medicare recipients greater flexibility to change plans when physician availability or prescription costs change.
- Larry announced his retirement and thanked Emery County officials for their partnership.

Joel Brown (Senator Mike Lee Office)

- Amy Haas recently testified before the Senate regarding Colorado River challenges.
- Senator Lee continues working with western governors and congressional representatives on Colorado River negotiations.
- Land conveyance efforts continue for a proposed reservoir project in Carbon County.
- Mobile office visits were recently conducted throughout southeastern Utah.

4. Commission Comments on Public Land Items

Commissioners thanked Larry for his years of service.

Discussion followed regarding proposed data center development associated with small modular nuclear reactor proposals.

Commissioners noted:

- No formal proposal has yet been submitted to Emery County.
- Current discussions involve only a small demonstration-scale facility.
- Closed-loop cooling systems would significantly reduce water consumption.
- Any future projects should provide measurable benefits to Emery County residents.
- Concerns remain regarding electrical demand, water use and long-term community impacts.

Additional discussion compared larger data center proposals elsewhere in Utah and their associated infrastructure requirements.

5. Council Members Comments

Council members discussed:

- Potential impacts of future data center development.
- Small modular reactor proposals.
- Water demands associated with future industrial development.
- Ongoing coordination between county, state and federal agencies.

6. Concerned Citizens

No comments

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned.