

Emery County Public Lands Council

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: August 4th, 2026

Time: 10:00 A.M.

Location: Emery County Courthouse, Canyon Conference Room

<https://zoom.us/j/4353813570?pwd=NWduRlZzRCtGNUdndld0NkNNdmdmxlZz09#success>

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

Absent: Patrick Sundstrom,

Administration: Jim Jennings, Natalie Olsen

Commission: Keven Jensen, Dennis Worwood, Jordan Leonard

Agencies: (BLM), Nathan Martinez (State Parks), (DOGM), Colton Taylor (UDWR), Darren Olsen (USFS), Brian Torgerson (SITLA), Chris Wood, Cash Stallings (DWR), Nicole Nielson (PLPCO)

Washington:

1. Call to Order / Welcome

- The meeting was called to order by Rod Player

2. Approval of July 7th, 2026 Meeting Minutes

- Motion by: Leon McElprang Seconded by: Kim McFarlane Voting was Unanimous

3. Agency Reports

- **Utah State Department of Agriculture:**

No one in attendance to report

- **Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation**

No one in attendance to report

- **Utah Division of Water Rights (DWRe)**

No one in attendance to report

- **Utah State Parks: Nathan Martinez**

A report was given on current activities, including golf course operations, campground activity, and upcoming events. Activity had been somewhat slower due to the extreme heat. Preparations were underway for upcoming golf tournaments, and staff were working to ensure sufficient golf carts were available. Updates were also provided regarding activities at Goblin Valley, including relatively low Search and Rescue activity.

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

An update was provided on the Black Canyon Fire. The fire was started by lightning and grew rapidly due to extremely dry conditions and strong winds. Resources were focused on protecting structures, water facilities, and other important values in the area.

The fire had spread to both sides of Black Canyon and was estimated at approximately 1,100 acres at the time of the meeting. Approximately 170 personnel were assigned to the incident, with support from local, state, BLM, and Forest Service personnel.

Discussion was held regarding the existing Black Canyon timber contract. Logging had been completed in portions of the upper area, which has helped reduce fuels and improve firefighting conditions. The steeper portions have not yet been completed due to the loss of specialized logging equipment by the contractor. The contract remains in place but is approaching the later stages of its term.

The Forest Service discussed efforts to continue timber and fuel reduction projects using stewardship contracts. They are looking at their first stewardship contract, timber wise, which is kind of the southern end, Muddy, Ferron, and some of those places. They are calling it the "Lake Timber sale". It would allow the value of timber to be offset through road work and other improvements completed by the contractor.

Concerns were also discussed regarding potential loss of public access through Meeting House Canyon. A new property owner reportedly intends to restrict access through private property at the mouth of the canyon. Members discussed the long history of use of the road and the possibility of prescriptive easements or other legal rights that may protect continued public access.

The Council also discussed potential water storage projects for the Town of Emery, including possible repairs to Henningsen Reservoir and Spinner's Reservoir. LIDAR imagery has identified evidence of an old ditch that may have historically supplied water to Spinner's Reservoir and could potentially be restored or maintained.

- **Utah Trust Lands Administration (TLA): Bryan Torgerson**

An update was provided regarding the County's application for an easement for the Rattlesnake South Cotton Road near Cutwood Wash. Research showed that the road existed prior to Trust Lands ownership, and the easement will be processed for Emery County.

An update was also provided on work with the BLM to improve the parking area at the Buried Forest Trailhead.

Trust Lands also reported receiving a proposal for a mineral lease for lithium brine exploration in the Green River area. The proposed lease includes approximately 300 acres in Emery County and approximately 3,000 acres in Grand County. The project is currently in the exploration stage. Council members requested additional information and mapping regarding the proposed project area.

- **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR): Colton Taylor**

DWR reported that staff have been working with other agencies on rehabilitation planning following recent fires.

Due to the ongoing drought conditions, wildlife staff have received an increased number of nuisance bear calls. Bears have been trapped and relocated when appropriate.

The aquatic section recently completed fish monitoring in the Muddy Creek drainage and moved to the Huntington drainage. Monitoring includes identifying fish species and estimating fish populations throughout the drainage.

An update was also provided regarding the proposed **Drunkard's Wash Solar Project**. DWR reiterated its preference that the project be relocated due to impacts on important deer and elk winter habitat. If the project remains in its proposed location, DWR has requested mitigation funding. Discussion included clarification regarding mitigation funding and tax revenues associated with solar and wind development.

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

No one in attendance to report

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

No one in attendance to report

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

Updates were provided regarding ongoing efforts to assist the Town of Emery with identifying funding and potential solutions for water storage needs.

Discussion was also held regarding the roadless rule and the continued lack of direction regarding how changes to the rule will be implemented. Members discussed the need to reduce barriers that prevent timber management and other forest health projects from moving forward.

- **Washington Delegation Staff: Lynn Sitterud (Senator Curtis's office)**

4. Commission Comments on Public Lands:

Commission members discussed ongoing efforts to assist the Town of Emery with water storage and funding options.

Additional discussion was held regarding the Black Canyon Fire and concerns about potential flooding, debris flows, sediment, and other impacts that could occur following the fire. Members discussed the importance of preparing for potential post-fire flooding and determining whether any permits or mitigation measures should be pursued.

The Council was also updated on the upcoming Longstreet access hearing. Members discussed the importance of locating historical users and gathering maintenance records and other documentation that may support the County's access claims.

5. Council Members Comments

Council members discussed continued concerns regarding public access to Meeting House Canyon and other areas where private ownership could potentially restrict historic access to public lands.

The importance of preserving historic access routes and gathering documentation to support public rights-of-way was emphasized.

6. Concerned Citizens

No additional comments were made.

7. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.