DIVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DRAFT

Meeting Minutes:

Minutes of the Meeting Held on July 14, 2026, from 5:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Virtual

HOST: ***Utah Department of Natural Resources***
Division of Outdoor Recreation
1594 W. North Temple
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116
(Virtual meeting)

ATTENDEES: Wade Allinson, Evan Beitsch, Maureen Casper, Jason Curry, Mike Innes, Carly Lansche, Tara McKee, Mike Thomas, Rachel Toker, Nicole Hanna, Jason Whittaker, Todd Royce, Jason Blankenagel (Chair), Brody Johnson (Vice-chair), Russ Cazier, Mike Cook, Sheriff Nathan Curtis, Brett Davis, Dean Harris, Dave Jacobson, Nicole Nielson, Laci Werner, Scott Wheeler, and Brett Stwart

MEETING MINUTES:

(0:00) Chairman Jason Blankengel called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. and welcomed new council members Dean Harris and Laci Werner. Everyone in attendance virtually and in person introduced themselves.

(4:34) Review of Meeting Minutes from June 17:

- Scott Wheeler requested a correction at timestamp 1:36:07 regarding comments attributed to him about the fuel tank in Logan Canyon that he did not make. Wade Alllinson and DOR Staff made those comments. The minutes will be amended.

(7:14) Brody Johnson moved to approve the minutes as amended; Scott Wheeler seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously (with new members Dean and Laci abstaining).

(8:32) Heavy Equipment Trail Crew Update & Discussion: The division presented a proposed course correction for the state's newly funded heavy equipment trail crew operations.

- **(9:56) Original Plan:** Form a single, centralized heavy equipment crew consisting of two new full-time employees based in Richfield traveling statewide.
- **(10:21)** The costs and concerns with the original plan were presented and discussed.
- **(11:38) New Plan:** The region crew supervisors would be the heavy equipment operators. This would mean that the four part-time region supervisors would be made full time by using the funding from two proposed full-time positions.
- **(12:50) New Plan Benefits:**
    - Allows supervisors to run heavy machinery while a crew lead manages hand crews on separate projects simultaneously, doubling output capacity.
    - Drastically cuts ongoing travel expenses and per diem costs.
    - Provides a better work-life balance for employees, lowering burnout and improving retention compared to constant travel.

(15:08) Staff discussed that the funding for new equipment would come from ongoing funding and also a one time funding. Hoping to use some of the money to purchase new equipment to minimize sharing.

(16:00) Brody Johnson sought clarification on whether off-season heavy equipment work would be paused due to training. Mike Innes clarified that equipment work will continue, but this season's off-season will specifically be used to train the newly appointed region supervisors to run heavy equipment.

(18:34) Brody Johnson asked about the heavy equipment crew being used on anything non-motorized. Staff clarified that out of the $460,000 legislative appropriation, $380,000 came from the OHV restricted account and $80,000 from the Outdoor Adventure Fund. Staff assured that work will remain almost exclusively motorized, and hours are meticulously tracked.

(20:19) Scott Wheeler and Mike Cook expressed concern that 20 minutes was insufficient time to fully review a programmatic shift of this scale.

(20:44) Mike Cook raised concerns with getting close to mixing motorized and non-motorized with the majority of the funding coming from the OHV restricted fund.

Mike mentioned that separating crews into motorized and non-motorized groups would make things easier to see where the money is going.

(23:19) Jason Blankenagel asked about what type of training the team has looked at and what will be needed to operate on federal lands. Staff confirmed they are partnering with the Fish Lake National Forest to certify operators, alongside leveraging annual training with the Weber Basin Job Corps. BLM does not require any further certifications.

(24:40) Carly Lansche mentions that the Division of Outdoor Recreation does a great job of capturing all of the work that the trail crews do. The DOR is confident that we can say be strategic in the way we plan out the season ahead to match the two different funding sources. She mentioned that we can do and impact more with the funding allotment that we have been awarded in our current operations.

(26:16) Wade Allinson mentions that he thinks the model could work, but the accountability piece needs to be in place. He has concerns that the funding should be focused on motorized work as the spirit behind it originally suggested.

(27:08) Jason Curry states that the DOR sought the council's advice on the heavy equipment crew for this upcoming legislative session. It was laid out as a single crew based in Richfield. As the team looked at it, there was a different approach and the intent of the meeting is to seek the council's advice. How can the original plan work better from an efficiency standpoint? Jason also mentions that the goal is to get good heavy machinery operators out of this effort.

(29:35) Scott Wheeler asks if there is a chart that shows where the trails are that would need the heavy equipment. Carly Lansche explains that one side of the trails team is on the ground and the other side is in the GIS and mapping analytics experts. The team has been measuring outdoor recreation trends and has been relying on counties to help lead the way and guide. Mike Thomas mentioned that the region supervisors will form partnerships with counties and will be able to coordinate and collaborate on needs.

(34:02) Jason Curry summarizes by stating that at this point the team will stick with Plan A as originally planned. He asks what the council's advice would be when we have this decision in front of us.

(35:37) Jason Blankenagel asks for clarification on which plan staff feel would give more maintained trails out of these two options. Mike Innes states that the regional approach would be the best use out of tax payer dollars. We would get many more

projects out of the newly proposed plan. This funding is meant to be all over the state, not just in one region. Option B would be the best use of funding.

(39:53) Mike Thomas provides history with how the trailcrew is organized today.

(42:24) Brody Johnson states that the biggest concern has come from the fires and the damage that they have done to the trails. The heavy equipment crew could be focused on repairing these trails. Nicole Nielson mentions that it will take a couple of years for the fire damage to stabilize and that will give some time to go repair those trails. She acknowledges the point that Mike Innes stated regarding trail crews having a work life balance and having to travel a lot does result in burnout.

(45:31) Dean Harris asks about how the equipment will be allocated. Mike Innes clarifies that the supervisors are putting their schedules together and will know what projects they have on the schedule for the entire year. They will plan accordingly with the equipment. Discussion continues.

(49:49) Jason Blankenagel summarizes by stating that the main concern is to make sure that the funding is allocated to motorized projects and that we are collaborating with the local communities and those that have trail equipment with heavy machine operators. Dollar for dollar, the trail crew is recommending the new plan to get the most out of the money.

(50:52) Brody Johnson offers advice to not lock yourself into one idea. Give it a year or two to see how it works. Discussion continues about the logistics of either plan. Staff thank the council for their advice, questions, and comments.

(57:00) The division addressed trail damage caused by recent wildfires (e.g., the Silver King fire). Director Jason Curry noted that the full extent of trail stabilization needs won't be completely clear until the following year. A future discussion will determine whether to hold back some fiscal funds for subsequent wildfire rehabilitation. Due to severe economic impacts on outdoor recreation in hard-hit areas like Beaver County, the division is adding a prioritization metric into grant applications to favor projects submitted by fire-affected counties.

(58:49) Rachel Toker announced that the following grant applications officially open tomorrow:

- Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Grant
- Outdoor Recreation Mitigation Grant (targeting search and rescue and infrastructure damaged by high rural visitation)

(59:37) Brody Johnson moved to adjourn the meeting; Mike Cook seconded the motion. The meeting officially adjourned at approximately 6:02 p.m.