MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL WASATCH COMMISSION ("CWC") SPECIAL BOARD MEETING HELD TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026, AT 8:00 A.M. THE MEETING WAS CONDUCTED BOTH IN-PERSON AND VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM. THE ANCHOR LOCATION WAS THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH GUEST HOUSE AND CONFERENCE CENTER, ALPINE ROOM. 110 FORT DOUGLAS BOULEVARD, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, 84113.

Board Members:	Christopher Robinson
	Bev Uipi
	Mayor Scotty John
	Mayor Gay Lynn Bennion
	Bill Ciraco
	Mayor Roger Bourke
Special Advisors:	Jack Stauss
	Amber Broadaway
Staff:	Lindsey Nielsen, Executive Director
	Sam Kilpack, Director of Operations
	Will McKay, Director of Public Affairs
Others:	Dani Poirier
	Dave Fields
	Mike Maughan
	Dave Hirasawa
	Mike Doyle
	John Adams
	Tom Ward
	Laura Briefer
	Ryan Mecham
	Chris Cawley
	Jessica Reimer

OPENING

1. Chair Erin Mendenhall will Call the Meeting to Order and Welcome CWC Board Members and the Public.

In the absence of Chair Erin Mendenhall, Commissioner Christopher Robinson called the Central

Wasatch Commission ("CWC") Special Board Meeting to order at approximately 8:00 a.m. Commissioner Robinson explained that Chair Mendenhall had to deal with an emergency, but asked Commissioner Robinson to run the CWC Special Board Meeting in her absence. There was a roll call conducted of the CWC Board Members, CWC Staff, and others present at the meeting.

INTRODUCTION AND EXPECTATIONS

1. Chair Mendenhall will Invite Stakeholders to Introduce Themselves.

Commissioner Robinson explained that the purpose of the CWC Special Board Meeting is to give some of the stakeholders an opportunity to share comments about the Central Wasatch National Conservation and Recreation Area Act ("CWNCRA"). It is possible to share opinions, concerns, and comments. Time has been allotted so different municipalities and representatives can speak.

Those present at the meeting introduced themselves, including the Director of Operations, Sam Kilpack. Dani Poirier explained that she is the Director of the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance. Dave Hirasawa is the General Manager of Alta Ski Area, Mike Maughan is the President of Alta Ski Area, and Special Advisor, Jack Stauss, is the Executive Director of Save Our Canyons. Mayor Scotty John is the Mayor of Brighton; Commissioner Robinson is the Treasurer of the CWC and is on the Summit County Council; Mayor Gay Lynn Bennion is the Mayor of Cottonwood Heights; and Laura Briefer is the Director at the Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities. It was noted that Jessica Reimer is also present. Mike Doyle explained that he is the General Manager of Brighton Resort. John Adams stated that he is on the Stakeholders Council. Dave Fields is with Snowbird, and Tom Ward and Ryan Mecham are with Sandy City. Executive Director, Lindsey Nielsen, and Director of Public Affairs, Will McKay, introduced themselves to those present.

2. Chair Mendenhall will Give an Overview of Expectations for the Day and Provide the Rules of Engagement.

Ms. Nielsen thanked those present for attending the CWC Special Board Meeting. The CWC convened a CWC Board Retreat in August, and the CWC Board agreed to a strategy for a redraft of the CWNCRA and potential reintroduction to Congress. Municipalities contiguous to or next to the proposed CWNCRA will speak about their interests during this meeting. In addition, representatives of the environmental system and recreation system will share comments. There are also representatives present from the Cottonwood Canyons ski resorts, who represent the economy.

3. CWC Staff will Give an Overview of the Current State of the CWNCRA.

It was reiterated that the intention is to redraft the CWNCRA for potential reintroduction.

STATEMENTS OF INTEREST

1. Town of Alta (Municipality Contiguous to or within the Proposed NCRA Boundary).

It was noted that Chris Cawley has information to share about the Town of Alta, but is running

late to the Special CWC Board Meeting. As a result, some of the other agenda items were heard first. After arriving at the meeting, Mr. Cawley shared information about the Town of Alta.

Mr. Cawley reported that he serves as the Town Manager of the Town of Alta. It was noted that Mayor Roger Bourke, the Mayor of Alta, is attending the meeting virtually. Mr. Cawley explained that he has been with the town for 12 years. He shared information about the work he has been involved in. The Town of Alta has been a proud participant in the Mountain Accord and the CWC.

The Town of Alta is geographically a keystone of the Central Wasatch region. Mr. Cawley shared additional information about the Mountain Accord process and the CWNCRA work that has been done so far. The town wants to be part of a consensus solution because it is important to be proactive and get ahead of various possibilities. There is an eagerness to continue to participate in this process. He reiterated that there is a desire to support a consensus solution that makes sense.

Mayor Bourke noted that it is important to consider what might happen if the CWNCRA does not move forward. Inevitably, there will be more encroachment on the land and more development. The longer everyone waits to move something forward, the more likely that is to happen. This is not a situation where doing nothing will leave everything in the same state. Mayor Bourke explained that not taking action could result in changes that are not necessarily positive.

2. <u>Town of Brighton (Municipality Contiguous to or within the Proposed NCRA Boundary).</u>

Mayor John expressed support for the proposed Legislation. However, he wanted those present to be aware that there are a handful of residents in his community who are not supportive of the proposed CWNCRA boundaries extending into town. It is important for residents to be aware that this would only apply to public lands in the town and not private lands. He reiterated his support for the CWNCRA and pointed out that this is something the country has done historically. It is meaningful to preserve land, but he also supports the ski areas and recognizes their interests.

Mayor John shared comments about water and noted that there are additional conversations scheduled. While he is not speaking for the Town of Brighton on this matter, he personally supports the request that has been made for additional water for snowmaking at the ski resorts.

3. <u>Save Our Canyons (Representative of the Broad Environmental and Recreation Interests of the Central Wasatch Mountains).</u>

Special Advisor Stauss prepared a statement to read at the CWC Special Board Meeting. He acknowledged that there are negotiations taking place and clarified that his support is contingent upon the outcomes of those negotiations. Save Our Canyons exists to protect the beauty and wildness of the Wasatch. One of the best tools available to accomplish that mission is Federal Designation. He asked those present to think about what the Wasatch would look like without the Lone Peak, Twin Peaks, and Mount Olympus Wilderness areas. Those designations ensure that the areas will remain the same in the future. Special Advisor Stauss shared comments about the watershed. In the past, the mountains were over-mined and over-timbered. Eventually, strong protections were established, and smart management was able to protect the watershed.

Everyone in the room is likely supportive of clean water and wild forests. Those are two of the reasons that people choose to live in the area. Special Advisor Stauss pointed out that the forests and the watershed are inextricably linked. As for the reason the CWNCRA discussions are taking place when there are already three established Wilderness areas, there are certain layers of protection needed for the land. Development pressures, climate change, and population growth have all intensified over the years. The Mountain Accord process resulted in the establishment of the CWC. The idea was to work collaboratively to solve various problems in the Central Wasatch.

Special Advisor Stauss noted that a lot of transit work is moving forward. The transit infrastructure could add immense economic value to the ski resorts. He pointed out that there have been a lot of good-faith efforts to ensure this is a reality. He shared comments about what the proposed CWNCRA will do. In its current state, it will somewhat satisfy the different system groups. There is a certain amount of give and take proposed, which is needed for a meaningful compromise.

Special Advisor Stauss felt the bill should be focused on current Federal public lands. He would like to see the outcome of the bill help lift the hiring ceiling for the U.S. Forest Service so it is possible to do the work needed to protect the forests and watershed. He would also like to see this be a roadmap for stakeholder engagement, restoration, conservation, and recreation projects. It would also be meaningful to see this provide some tools to better manage the crowds in the area.

Everyone in the room initially wanted something in the bill that is not currently included. For example, there are items that Save Our Canyons wanted included that are not in the current draft. However, there is something in the bill that each system group can support. He stressed the importance of compromise during this process. It is necessary to remain focused and move the CWNCRA forward. Special Advisor Stauss explained that when different situations occur, Save Our Canyons often needs to respond or react. This is a situation where it is possible to be proactive and ensure that there are certain protections in place. The public will know that there are protections within the CWNCRA boundary, and the ski resorts and Forest Service will be able to plan ahead. Stability and predictability are needed in the Central Wasatch, which this can provide.

Special Advisor Stauss explained that wild and undeveloped land is a benefit to the ski resorts. People come to the area to enjoy the ski resorts, but they also come to the Central Wasatch for a sense of place. It is not possible to build a sense of place. Protected land means there will be a stable neighbor and predictable boundaries. Special Advisor Stauss asked those present to support a bill on Federal land that balances conservation and recreation needs both now and in the future.

Special Advisor Stauss shared language from Terry Tempest Williams. He recited the following: "The eyes of the future are looking back at us, and they are praying that we might see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come. To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle. Perhaps the wildness we fear is the pause between our own heartbeats, the silent space that says we live only by grace. Wilderness lives by this same grace. Wild mercy is in our hands."

4. <u>Wasatch Backcountry Alliance (Representative of the Central Wasatch Mountain Recreation Interests Pertinent to the Agenda).</u>

Ms. Poirier reported that she serves on the Transportation System Committee. She shared background information about her role with the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance. It was explained that the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance is a non-profit organization that advocates for the backcountry community. The intention is to protect undeveloped terrain, preserve public access, and provide education to members and stakeholders. It is important for backcountry interests to have a seat at the table during discussions like this. She is grateful for the opportunity to share comments about the CWNCRA and speak on behalf of the thousands of backcountry users.

The CWNCRA is a locally driven, consensus-based bill, and there is optimism that it is possible to work together to reach a consensus-based solution. Ms. Poirier explained that the CWNCRA provides a unique opportunity to protect the Central Wasatch. It is something the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance would like to see succeed. The organization wants to make sure that the tight political timeline does not result in a whittled-down version of the CWNCRA that loses important aspects of the bill. The Wasatch Backcountry Alliance has been part of this conversation since the inception. The volunteer Board participated in the Mountain Accord process. Over the last decade, the organization has tried to understand the various issues and contribute productively to a solution. She took a moment to acknowledge the importance of the ski areas to the local economy. While the backcountry does not show up neatly on a balance sheet, it still has value. Many people move to the area to access both the ski resorts and the undeveloped terrain.

Ms. Poirier explained that it is important not to diminish the economic value of the open land. It is necessary to acknowledge the benefits of a thriving outdoor community where there is world-class resort skiing adjacent to world-class backcountry terrain. This can be supported through the CWNCRA, so it is possible to attract and retain a talented workforce as well as visitors to the area.

Ms. Poirier pointed out that climate change is detrimental and threatening to the ski resort business model. The same thing that challenges the ski resorts also challenges the backcountry community. Through the various CWC meetings, it has been made clear that the ski resorts want to retain their privately owned lands to remain competitively viable in the future. From a business standpoint, she understands that perspective, but she hopes that is not the only long-term path to collective success. It is possible to work together to find a solution. Ms. Poirier noted that, based on recent CWC meetings, one of the significant changes is that land exchanges are no longer part of the bill. While the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance understands that rationale, there is still disappointment, as this is a significant change from the initial version of the bill that was presented.

Based on the discussion during the CWC Board Retreat, the ski resorts are most interested in water for snowmaking. However, backcountry skiers are not able to make snow or create additional backcountry terrain. As a result, the skiable area is limited to the high-elevation terrain. Ms. Poirier explained that the backcountry community would like additional clarity about the Special Use Permits. She reviewed the CWNCRA boundary overlay with those present at the meeting.

The valuable terrain for the backcountry community is the high-elevation terrain. Ms. Poirier pointed out different areas that are 9,000 feet and above. She highlighted several locations and pointed out the skiable terrain. The ability to backcountry ski is somewhat limited in this bill, as there are only small pockets where it is possible. Special Advisor Stauss noted that for backcountry skiing, the focus is not only on the elevation, but on being able to recreate in non-avalanche terrain. Ease of access is also something important to consider. Ms. Poirier shared the Wasatch Backcountry Skiing Map with the meeting attendees and explained that it shows where the concentrated runs are. This map highlights the accessible and skiable terrain. Ms. Poirier stated that water is the future for skiing and high-elevation terrain is the future for backcountry users.

There are conversations about water happening as the CWNCRA discussions continue to move forward. Ms. Poirier noted that it might be possible to tie positive branding and marketing to each of the resorts. For instance, there could be a Snowbird Conservation Area or Alta Conservation Area. There is a lot of momentum behind conservation areas right now. It could be an appropriate time to purchase certain parcels, similar to what was done in Bonanza Flat. Ms. Poirier explained that she is present to represent the robust backcountry community. There is a desire to be a constructive partner. She appreciates that the CWNCRA is intended to be consensus-based.

Before the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance will make a statement on the bill, there is an eagerness to see the final maps and review the language. There is also a desire to review additional details about the Management Plan. Ms. Poirier hopes it will be possible to continue to engage in these conversations to ensure that the CWNCRA is a bill all of the different systems are excited about.

Laura Briefer asked for clarification about a comment made about the CWNCRA negotiation process. Ms. Poirier explained that after the CWC Board Retreat, she understood that the ski resorts would be receiving water for snowmaking in exchange for their support of the bill. In order for the bill to move forward, there likely needs to be some level of ski resort support. Ms. Poirier wondered whether it would be possible to provide something so valuable to the ski resorts that there would be interest in a voluntary acquisition. She understands that some pieces of land might be higher value than others. Mr. Maughan asked what the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance would support. Ms. Poirier shared comments about private-to-private connections and noted that there are concerns about it crossing over public land. There are some concerns about Special Use Permits within the broader structure of the CWNCRA. She wanted to know if avalanche protection zones will be written into the ski area permitted boundary or if those will be a separate line item.

5. Other Commissioners of the CWC.

There were no additional Commissioner presentations.

DISCUSSION

There was discussion about the CWNCRA and the CWC Board Retreat. Ms. Nielsen reported that the bill still aims to lock the Special Use Permit boundaries on public land. Special Advisor, Amber Broadaway noted that the Forest Management Plan was supposed to be updated a decade ago, but it has not been updated. This Legislation would lock the plan from 2003 when it really needs to be updated. Ms. Nielsen asked for clarification about that statement. Special Advisor

Broadaway explained that based on the way the draft is currently written, it enshrines the 2003 version of the Forest Management Plan. Ms. Nielsen clarified that the CWNCRA would result in a new Management Plan. The Legislation has always been a catalyst for a Management Plan that is area-specific. The 2003 plan would remain, but if the bill passed, it would also require the creation of a specific Management Plan. That has been part of this bill since the Mountain Accord.

Special Advisor Stauss noted that at the CWC Board Retreat, there was a discussion about both private lands and public lands. Ms. Briefer stated that during the retreat, she heard the conversation about private lands, but did not recall a conversation about public lands. The reason Salt Lake City wants the NCRA to not have more ski area expansion on Federal lands. If there is an openness to expand on additional Federal lands, that means there will need to be additional negotiations, because there is not a willingness to provide more water to the ski areas if the intention is to leave the boundaries open. Ms. Nielsen clarified that during the CWC Board Retreat, the discussion was about private land. There was not a discussion about public lands.

Special Advisor Stauss asked the ski resorts for clarification about what they have compromised on. It is important for all parties to give and take during the CWNCRA process. Ms. Nielsen shared a map with those present at the CWC Special Board Meeting. She explained that this is an unofficial interactive map that displays the different elements that would be enacted with the CWNCRA. The outer black border line is the border of the CWNCRA. The green shades are the existing Wilderness areas in the Central Wasatch mountain range. The Legislation will only impact Federal lands. The lighter green shade on the map is the NCRA designation on Federal lands. The purple sections on the map represent the non-Federal land parcels within the NCRA.

Ms. Nielsen clarified that non-Federal land includes private land, personal property, and land owned by municipalities. This bill will only impact Federal Forest Service land. She pointed out the White Pine Watershed Management Area on the map, which is a land designation described in the Legislation. It would enact protections for the special watershed qualities that exist there. She wanted to make it clear that the Special Use Permit boundaries of the Cottonwood Canyons ski resorts are unshaded. That means there is no impact to the Federal land or private land within the Special Use Permit boundaries for the ski resorts. The dashed red line shown on the map represents the Special Use Permit boundaries that each of the four resorts has with the Forest Service.

Ms. Nielsen reiterated that the map is an unofficial working map. It is reflective of the Legislative language. The Legislative language is what will rule, and the map will reflect what is in the bill. She highlighted the different elements of the map, such as the Special Use Permit boundaries. There are other parts of the Legislation included in the map as well. There was discussion about avalanche areas and Special Use Permits. Commissioner Robinson asked to review the areas where private land connections could occur. He also asked that public lands that might be problematic as far as connections be identified. It was noted that there are Federal inholdings, but it is possible to miss all of those. The CWC Board further reviewed the unofficial CWNCRA map.

It was noted that there can be certain land exchanges considered in the future, but those do not necessarily need to be included in the bill. Commissioner Robinson wanted to understand if it is the general opinion that there should be no land adjustments in the CWNCRA. It was clarified that another process already exists for land adjustments. Commissioner Robinson asked if there

is another process that could clean up some of the parcels, which was confirmed. It was noted that it is easier to handle that externally. Special Advisor Broadaway stated that there is an interest in the connection of private lands. Commissioner Robinson asked about potential connections to the Wasatch Back. Special Advisor Broadaway shared comments about the Hidden Canyon area.

Commissioner Robinson asked why Special Advisor Stauss does not support the ability to connect on private lands. Special Advisor Stauss explained that there is an intrinsic value in leaving places alone and not having more development in areas that are already development-heavy. The value of nature and the value of land need to be taken into consideration. Commissioner Robinson pointed out that private land is being discussed. Special Advisor Stauss explained that operations are occurring on public land. Commissioner Robinson mentioned the original land exchanges that were included in the bill. He is not suggesting that these be added back into the bill, but noted that there were efforts made in the past to focus on certain exchanges. There are a lot of reasons why that did not move ahead. It has since been suggested that there could potentially be private land exchanges with the Forest Service. He asked if this should be further considered.

It was reported that there are some parcels outside of the Special Use Permit. There is a willingness to exchange some of them and put those into public ownership through the Forest Service. This could be done outside of the CWNCRA process. Commissioner Robinson believed Snowbird has a bit of land on the north side of the canyon that is not part of the resort. He asked what the plans are for those lands. It was noted that there is an openness to having a conversation about the land. Commissioner Robinson shared comments about the previous land exchange component.

It was acknowledged that over the years, the ownership of certain ski resorts has changed and certain positions have changed. Ms. Briefer believed the value of trying to keep the exchanges in the bill is that the private lands owned by the resorts and included in the exchange would then become part of the CWNCRA. If there are exchanges with the Forest Service outside of the CWNCRA process, there is uncertainty about whether that land would be part of the CWNCRA. There would need to be language in the bill to add clarity about exchanges occurring outside of this process. Commissioner Robinson acknowledged that the exchanges add complications.

Commissioner Robinson does not want to force exchanges to be in the CWNCRA if there is a desire to handle those outside of this process. The map was further reviewed, and a 40-acre parcel was referenced, which was within the proposed CWNCRA. There is another piece that is owned, which is 38 acres, but it is not within the CWNCRA. There are some parcels outside of the ski area. It was explained that there is a willingness to trade those to the Forest Service. There are certain non-resort lands that are owned, and there have been discussions about potential exchanges. Right now, there is no public land access from SR-210 to the ridgeline. As a result, the backcountry community currently has to cross over private land, which could become a problem.

It was suggested that those present focus on what will make it possible for the CWNCRA to move forward. The land exchanges are more difficult to reach consensus on and can be time-consuming. Ms. Poirier asked to review the area of the map that is between Big Cottonwood Canyon and Little Cottonwood Canyon. She mentioned the high-elevation terrain that is outside of the ski area private lands. She asked if there is a reason the high-elevation carve-out shown will not be part of the Wilderness. It was reported that it is associated with Powderbird. Based on that information,

Ms. Poirier believed Powderbird would likely want to retain that area for heliskiing use. She understands that land exchanges are not intended to be included in this version of the CWNCRA, but wondered if there could be additional conversations outside of the CWNCRA process. It was confirmed that there is a willingness to continue to have discussions about certain parcels.

Ms. Briefer explained that the initially discussed land exchanges were meaningful, as there were concessions made by other parties. However, she agrees that it is far more complicated to include the land exchanges in a bill that will already be difficult to pass. She understands how complex some of the lands are in terms of title and ownership. If these exchanges happen outside of the CWNCRA, it makes sense to include language in the bill that clarifies inclusion in the boundary. Commissioner Robinson further reviewed the information included on the map. Ms. Poirier highlighted several areas and explained that she wants to see backcountry terrain preserved.

Ms. Poirier read language from the Alta Ski Area Avalanche Mitigation Permit and the 2014 scoping decision. It states that the permit would authorize only specific avalanche mitigation activities. All current public uses and other permitted uses of the area would continue as they currently exist or are permitted. Ms. Poirier would like to see language like this in the bill. She asked if the town and residents have an opinion. Mr. Cawley reported that the avalanche mitigation activities are dependent upon. In addition, Alta Ski Area brings tax revenue to the community. There is still a focus on environmental protection and watershed stewardship.

Commissioner Robinson asked if there are individuals present who want affirmative language that prohibits a modification to the Special Use Permit. Ms. Poirier explained that this is one of the gray areas there is a desire to work through during this process. Special Advisor Stauss pointed out that the Central Wasatch is critical. Ms. Poirier added that it is important for certain conditions to exist long-term. Protections on the segment indicated on the map would be a significant concession for the backcountry community since many of the other important lands in the original draft of the bill have since been removed. This piece would be a win that she could bring back to the backcountry community. Commissioner Robinson believed the bill would be agnostic when it comes to crossing private land to private land with connections. There was discussion about potential future plans for the ski resorts. It was noted that Alta Ski Area is independent. There is a need to remain competitive with the other ski resorts in the Cottonwood Canyons.

Commissioner Robinson wanted to know if there are other outstanding issues the CWC Board would like to discuss. He acknowledged that the unofficial map would need to be refined in the future, as there are still some details that need to be worked out. He reminded those present that there are separate water discussions taking place as well. It was noted that transportation will not be facilitated or inhibited by the CWNCRA. Ms. Nielsen reported that there is a specific section in the Legislation that states the Legislation is transportation neutral and does not impede the ability for the Utah Department of Transportation ("UDOT") to implement transit alternatives.

Ms. Nielsen shared information about the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act and how that has impacted the CWNCRA. Additional time was spent reviewing the different elements of the unofficial map. The newly proposed Wilderness area that the Legislation would create was shown, which is the Mount Aire/Grandeur Peak Wilderness Area. At the meeting, attendees asked to review various sections of the map. There was discussion about the proposed CWNCRA

boundary. Ms. Nielsen reiterated that the purple polygons represent non-Federal land. There is no specific information about ownership on the map. Commissioner Robinson stated that it was helpful to review the map during the CWC Special Board Meeting, as it provided additional clarity.

John Adams mentioned the earlier comment about Alta Ski Area and how it is independent but wants to remain competitive. He asked if that means that, in order to attract more visitors, there needs to be more terrain, or if there are already so many visitors at the resort that more terrain is needed to handle the crowds. It was clarified that demand at the ski resort is currently being managed.

CLOSING

1. Chair Mendenhall will Call for a Motion to Adjourn the CWC Board Meeting.

MOTION: Scotty John moved to ADJOURN the CWC Special Board Meeting. Roger Bourke seconded the motion. The motion passed with the unanimous consent of the Board.

The CWC Special Board Meeting adjourned at 10:05 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing represents a true, accurate, and complete record of the Central Wasatch Commission Special Board Meeting held Tuesday, October 20, 2026.

Teri Forbes

Teri Forbes
T Forbes Group
Minutes Secretary

Minutes Approved: _____