

Sand Flats Recreation Area (SFRA)
Stewardship Committee Meeting
Thursday, December 9th, 2021 at 3 pm
Held virtually on Zoom

In Attendance:

SFRA Staff:

- Andrea Brand (AB) Director
- Matt Olding (MO)

GCATT

- Tyson Swasey (TS)

Grand County Commission:

- Evan Clapper (EC)

BLM:

- Jennifer Jones, (JJ) Assistant Field Manager

Stewardship Committee Members:

- Mike Kelso (MK) joins at approximately 4pm
- Tom Dillon (TD)
- Molly Taylor (MT)
- Dale Parriott (DP)

Call to Order

3:15 pm due to technical difficulties

Approval of Minutes

September 9th, 2021 approved. Molly made a motion and Dale seconded it, and passed with all in favor.

Agency Reports

2021 Budget

AB- Discusses remit totals. Through November SFRA has brought in over \$800,000. Compared to 2019 SFRA up 23%. In 2020 SFRA was down 22%. Evening out over the two years. Remit sheet shows revenue from booth and online sales. No reimbursements or interests or grants are shown.

Review County wide proposed increase in wages and benefits.

EC- Effort County wide to catch up. A salary survey was done years ago, got closer but still did not go far enough. AB- Not aware of this at last meeting. This adds about \$70,000 to the budget. \$383,000 for salaries budget. Received this updated budget from Chris Baird an hour ago. Some things are not exactly correct. Reads that SFRA will bring in less than \$800,000, but SFRA revenue has already surpassed that. Youth grant is correct. Will bring in more in recreation.gov. AB reviews few items. Capital improvements, Capital equipment UTV purchase pulled from one account to the other. Inventory is over for tools and office equipment due to new lap tops, new blinds for booth. Inventory tools, purchased new Bosch drill for putting in sign posts on the trail.

Balance sheet- Not seeing Investments line item, but shows total amounts in Cash in Combined cash funds. All monies are now put together from all departments to make the most interest. Revenues match our remit sheet.

Citizens to be Heard

There were no citizens to be heard

General Business- Action Items

Raptor Route Extension

AB- The Kestrel (non- motorized) route is shown as pink and green lines on the map and these routes were discussed at previous meetings. The trail would take riders from Falcon Flow parking lot to campground H and avoid Day's Crack on the Sand Flats road. Plans to go further, are shown as purple line and has been discussed before. Tyson sent AB a proposal yesterday for another route option but AB has not walked that yet. Maddie Logowitz of GCATT will be writing up grant for Kestrel route next spring as it is due in May. That is why vote for Kestrel route is on the agenda.

MT makes a motion to support it. AB- Any discussion? EC- Would this include the discussion from Tyson on the other route? AB- Not as part of this vote. No discussion on this section, TD seconds it. All vote in favor.

MT- Should we add the proposed north route to the approval process? AB leery of adding something have not seen on the ground and was only just proposed. Timeline is adequate. Purple section is more difficult trail to build and more expensive. AB would put in for grant in spring of 2023. Grant is due in March for the purple trail, needs a lot of engineering, needs cobble, drainage, needs to be built up to make it handicap accessible. Archeology has to be done, NEPA process, etc. Kestrel will be a single track, Maddie will put in for grant in May and then construction could happen in the fall or spring.

MT- Is there a way to start the purple route as a single track first? AB- It is extremely sandy and archeological clearance and other parts of the NEPA process will need to be done first. BLM archeologist Lori Hunsaker said she could get the 1.8 miles of Kestrel route surveyed and completed by August so that GCATT could build in the fall. She said that was all she could do by then.

TS-The Kestrel route is more a single track. It does have some sections a little more advanced construction wise. The part from campgrounds H to D (purple route) will be engineered. What I sent AB yesterday would be close to the proposed purple line but would be a single track and would go from campground H and then work its way to the Overflow camping area. There is a potential for closing some of campground H and providing parking in there for the time being. The purple route will be for every type of user not just cyclists.

AB-The UR.org grant would be a good choice for this project. JJ and Katie have worked on these grants in the past.

JJ- BLM partnered with the County for three UR.org grants. Would be great for Sand Flats to do that.

Fee change

AB-There has been no change in fee structure for seven years. The RAC board is not fully staffed and BLM is not sure when they will meet. The RAC board makes decisions on changes for fees on public lands. Since SFRA was proposing dropping the existing day use fees and not proposing new fees, in discussions with BLM we thought at first we might not need to go before the RAC board. But after further discussion the BLM recommended that we bring it before the County Commission and get it passed and then go before the RAC board in the future. Really consent agenda coming before you all. Reasons for fee increase include increased costs in wages and benefits, more staff, and two leased vehicles next year along with numerous high priced projects. One additional project is improvements to parking areas for Raptor route users.

AB compares SFRA with National Parks. NPs just have week passes, no day passes. Arches is \$30 a vehicle, \$25 motorcycle, \$15 bike or pedestrian. SFRA week passes are \$10 for a vehicle, \$5 motorcycle or bike and \$15 per vehicle with a utility trailer. Current SFRA day pass is \$5 vehicle and \$2 bike or motorcycle and \$10 vehicle with a utility trailer. Dead Horse Point state park is shown on list as well. Change proposed was to drop day use passes. Grand County Commission passed this as part of the Consolidated Fee schedule on Tuesday. Bringing it to you afterwards as Consent Agenda. Is there any discussion about this fee change?

DP- I have friends that come up to ride in the evening, what would price be? AB- A motorcycle would have to pay \$5 instead of \$2 but it is a week pass. TD- Since a lot of folks come up for a weekend. After they get their week pass instead of a day pass, would this have an impact on traffic and encourage folks to come back again? DP- I wouldn't pay \$5 for one ride around Slickrock but not opposed to change. AB- No change to annual pass or camping fees. MO and AB motorcycles expect to pay more. EC- This is not about the day use vs week pass, but can you speak about the trailer fee. AB- SFRA passed a utility trailer fee in 2010 for \$2 and then in 2016 for \$5. We do have 2, 3 or 4 rigs in one trailer. MO- Record is 6 on one big trailer. EC- Saving money if they are trailering. Would like to encourage people to trailer and decrease traffic through neighborhoods. AB- A lot of visitors are surprised by how low our prices are but we do not want to discourage trailers.

Motion to vote on Fee change. DP made a motion, EC seconded it. All voted in favor.

Discussion Items

Follow up on minutes from previous meeting:

COVID19 mitigation efforts and SFRA operations update

AB- Operations slightly different in fall, had the window open with a Plexiglas shield, people could pay from their vehicles. Put in new plastic bollards along lane and this kept folks proper distance from the booth. MO- Worked well.

Mill Creek Community Collaborative Recommendations

AB- JJ do you have an update?

JJ- Been quite a bit of coverage in two local newspapers. Mill Creek Community Collaborative is an entity that through community engagement provided recommendations. The BLM will move forward with environmental assessment that will involve public comment opportunities for any proposed actions and we do not have a timeline for that.

AB- I have shared comments at past meeting about concerns with traffic and its potential effect on Sand Flats, not just with the proposed change with Mill Creek parking but also with the Lion's Back Development.

JJ- For clarification, the Power dam access will not be closed down by the BLM. This access is a County and City situation. Relocating the trailhead is not something the BLM can do as we will not close the road. In relation to Potato Salad, from BLM perspective, it would be an implementation of an additional trailhead unless the City or County at some point were to close this access in some way. Much in the media about relocating the trailhead. At this point in time it is not realistic. MO- Is the road a County road? JJ- Yes, City parcel at first and then County road portion and then turns to BLM.

TRT monies for Responsible Trail promotion committee update

AB- Some of the TRT monies are being used for SFRA and Travel Council educational videos to run on Emery Telcom TV. TRT monies will now be used to create a full time position to manage the trail ambassadors. Much of the monies will be spent on labor. SFRA is not receiving any money from TRT. Last time we met we thought we would receive \$10,000 to \$30,000 that would transfer over to SFRA for kiosks, signs and brochures. TRT is now able to carry over money from this year to next. This is fine, SFRA has money for these things. It was just that Maddie and AB were originally tasked with spending quite a bit of money in 2021. Some of these funds will pay for videos to run on Emery Telecom TV again. Apparently the Grand County Commission is going to be reviewing and approving the production of all videos going forward so it may be a more lengthy process. The “5 tips for an Awesome Moab Adventure” video has been edited by Mark Finley and at the first Responsible Trail Promotion committee meeting in January, AB will be presenting that video to see if any further edits are needed before it gets approved and goes on Emery Telcom TV. JJ- Have you seen the 4x4 video with Friends For Four-Wheeling that Finley has been working on? Could share it with the Responsible Trail promotion committee. Great messaging as far as four wheel drive and this is translatable to other users, well done. The Travel Council provided funding. AB- Yes, good idea.

Introduction to Sand Flats video

AB- SFRA video is still being edited. SFRA gave Mark a good draft commentary that Sonja Nicolaisen, SFRA wrote up. Hope to have a draft video to send to you after the first of the year. Video is for SFRA website and process will now include approval by the GC commission. Video should be in place before the spring season.

Parking Expansion Project

AB- Survey is done. Jones and DeMille have drawn up a plan for the parking lot. Area is 37,000 square feet, almost the same size as Fins parking and graveled. Cost is approximately \$70,000. Will go out for bid first thing in January, built before spring. For decades trailers have been parking at Hell's Revenge exit so this is replacing that parking. That area will be lost due to the Lion's Back development. Any extra fill will be spread up at Baby Lion's Back entrance. Phase 2 of Lion's Back development is the building of 34 casitas. After this and before phase 3 and the building of the hotel, the City of Moab may require a traffic study of the Sand Flats road.

Traffic and Feasibility Studies for Sand Flats Entrance area

AB- Dead Horse Point State park has 900,000 visitors and one entrance station. Sand Flats 200,000 visitors, one entrance station, average wait time when there is a line is 15 minutes. Cons are that vehicles wait on a hill and commercial users are on a time line. Only 20% of users have already paid or are commercial tours. AB needs to speak with BLM engineers and Jones and DeMille's engineers if 20% is enough to warrant another lane? AB needs to meet with them after the first of the year.

Booth UTV Survey for Grand County Commission update

AB- Continued to do the UTV survey thru November. Percentages were close to before. Private 31%, Rentals 25%, Tours 44% out of sample size of 28,000 vehicles. Break down of motorized vs non-motorized, almost 21,000 sample size is 75% motorized and 25% non-motorized. This is similar to the percentages at the last meeting. 2016 surveys estimated it was half and half motorized and non-motorized.

MT- Two out of every three UTVs are rentals and tours according to Make Moab Quiet Again campaign that used this booth data. (2 out of 3 is 66%. Rentals make up 25% and tours 44% which is 69%) Rental UTVs pay at the booth or online ahead of time. No agreement with rental companies, SFRA tried to do that but only a few companies took SFRA up on it. Tour companies pay 3% to the BLM.

Sand Flats road

AB- RAISE grant, paving SFRA road was part of business plan in 2015 due to safety issues, with traffic and dust both on the roads and in the campgrounds. BLM and Grand County Road dept. have been looking since that time and haven't found funding. Some other projects ahead of us and FLAP grant doesn't open again until 2025. There will be additional issues with the Raptor route and with increased traffic the need is greater. The Road dept. worked with Jones and DeMille to put in a RAISE grant application. AB wrote up many details for this grant. Apparently they did not get the grant in on time and it was rejected. Good news it is ready for next year. Paid for by Road dept.

Maintenance

AB- This fall contractor painted the Fins and Things toilet. Hasn't been painted since new in 2014. He sealed roofs and patched cracks. Professional job, should last a long time. Painted floors in toilets in Datura campground. Issues even though these toilets were installed in 2019. Next year contractor will paint Slickrock, Hell's Revenge and toilet in B campground.

BLM removed pipe safe from Juniper campground and installed it at SFRA east entrance. Sign for online payment will go in at boundary at UPS to LPS. We will see how this goes. Currently don't get revenue from this unless they get dropped off by shuttles coming through the booth.

Sand Flats Application for International Dark Sky Park and events

AB- Held two more star parties since we met. AB will continue to work with Crystal White on application for Dark Sky status. Crystal helped Dead Horse and surrounding NPs get their dark Sky status. Will replace lights at the booth to help meet Dark Sky guidelines.

Grand County Commission updates

EC- Don't have anything from County for this committee, covered things. AB made her annual presentation to commission last night and it was well received. Commissioners had questions about these bike trails we have been discussing and paving of the Sand Flats road. There is a lot of interest on what is going on at Sand Flats. She did a good job, well represented.

BLM updates

JJ- Extend appreciation for AB gaining the support from the Grand County Commission for the fee change proposal. Federal Lands Enhancement Act requires that any change to fees, whether it is additions or deletions needs to go before the RAC board through an updated business plan. Utah does not have a RAC board in place right now. Good to know that County Commission supports this.

BLM campground closures are in place due to reduced visitation this time of year. May have heard of interest in private helicopters in the Fisher Towers area. BLM is working on an Environmental Assessment for this. Hunter Canyon campground is closed due to the flash flooding. Individual campsites were removed and working on one group site and the rest will be a day use area, hopefully open by spring. Big Bend C is getting a corrugated metal shade structure to replace old wood one. Partnering with GCATT to build a shade structure at Moab Brands Trail. Questions?

AB- What do you know about the trail ambassador program from BLM perspective?

JJ- First learned about it on front page of newspaper.

AB- New to me too as far as the permanent position, but makes sense with the work load.

JJ- Support it and look forward to having more involvement as things progress. Understand the program will start with hiking and then biking trails and then OHV trails eventually.

AB- I had talked about taking on the motorized volunteers at SFRA since Maddie was in charge of the non-motorized Trail Ambassadors but a full time position is needed for this program.

JJ- Evan do you have more information?

EC- It was a late addition to the budget. The "ask" came from GCATT. GCATT oversaw paid Trail Ambassadors last fall at hiking trails- Corona Arch, Grandstaff Canyon, Mill Creek. They had the tent up, displays, lured in kids. Tip of the ice berg but is impactful. Seems like money well spent. Maybe invite Maddie to the next meeting?

AB- Makes sense. Too much for either one of us to take on.

MO- People like it when they see employees out on the trails.

MT- Talk about volunteer trail ambassadors at SFRA to connect with that program. Expanded volunteer trail presence.

AB- Everything Motorized Trail Committee volunteers have done on the trails has been well appreciated and received. SFRA has a new full time person, we have more presence on the trails.

MK-BLM has gotten their mini X and we should find a nice project on Fins and Things.

JJ- Will be using it out in the Klondike area currently but yes we need grant matches.

Jeep requested a project during Jeep Safari at Hells, Fins, Poison Spider, or Cliff Hanger.

TD- What is a mini X?

MK- Has implement for digging, scraping, runs on a track.

AB- Great timing for spring projects. Need to get with you MK on project ideas.

MO-Really impressed with work on trails outside of SFRA.

JJ- Yes, we keep making improvements. Thanks for all efforts you do at SFRA. Request for comments on the Grand County Land Bill that is on County website.

AB- Still haven't looked at the survey information you sent.

JJ- Visitor satisfaction survey. Did this at Mill Canyon Track site but not that successful, requires individual onsite to administer the surveys. At end of survey the group produces a report. Not a must.

AB-Trying to figure out if we have the staffing for this. Focus on Hell's Revenge would be good. SFRA is due for a survey.

Adjourn