

**Sand Flats Recreation Area (SFRA)
Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 9th, 2023
3:00 pm**

In attendance

Sand Flats:

Andrea Brand, Director (AB)

Matt Olding, staff (MO) via zoom

Stewardship Committee members:

Mike Kelso (MK)

Tom Dillon (TD)

Molly Taylor (MT)

Dale Parriott (DP) arrives 3:06 pm

Grand County Commission

Evan Clapper (EC) (via zoom)

Bureau of Land Management

Jennifer Jones (JJ)

GCATT, Trail Ambassador program

Anna Sprout (AS) arrives at 4:34 pm

Call to Order

3:00 pm

Approval of Minutes

January 12th, Special (Emergency) meeting, MT made a motion, TD seconded it. All vote in favor. December 8th, 2022 minutes MK made a motion, MT seconded and all vote in favor.

Agency Reports

Budget 2022

AB-Total remit- 2021 and 2022 were compared to 2019. 2023 is compared to last year which is what we used to do before Covid. 2023 still above the 10 year and 5 year averages. The cold spring weather has affected visitation. JJ- It is early and would be anecdotal, but we are seeing a decrease of 10 to 20%. People are still skiing and snow packs are 200% of normal.

Balance sheets- \$667,700. Budget officer has not taken out the \$42,000 for 2022 for the Clerk's office, HR and Treasurers office expenses for SFRA, nor the \$10,000 for Search and Rescue. Under Capital Improvements SFRA did not spend \$99,000 in 2022. SFRA also did not spend \$70,000 in wages and \$17,000 in benefits. "Sand Flats Fees/Online" (from Recreation.gov fees for group sites) revenue for 2022 was \$76,500. It is showing \$64,000 because Jana Smith retired and no one was putting the money into that account. I resolved it with the Clerk's office and Jenibeth Jones is now handling it. \$7,000 awarded for the Youth Grant from 2022 is not shown. The line item "SandFlats Fees" includes Square online sales.

MT- Discussion on line item names for online sales. AB will look into changing name.

MT- SFRA might need to adjust the budget by 10% if visitation doesn't improve.

JJ- Discussion on toilet and dumpster costs that Moab BLM spends in comparison to SFRA.

Citizens to be Heard

No citizens to be heard

Discussion Items

Follow up from previous meeting

AB and MO present PowerPoint

BLM repairs and improvements in campgrounds F, G and H and at the Fins and Things exit Lee Palfreyman, BLM built a road at the exit with the dirt moved from the new parking lot and capped it with harder material. He used the boulders SFRA had stockpiled. It is now obvious where to go to stay out of the dip which fills with water at times. The total for all material was under \$10,000. Mike Kelso, Red Rock 4-wheelers was going to put a fence here but we decided to build it elsewhere and just block dip off with signs.

Seeding in H campgrounds

Expensive, quote is \$4,000 to seed four campsites. SFRA paid under \$2,000 last time because the company was seeding Lions' Back across the street. JJ- Speak with Kara of Wildscapes. MT and MO- Organize a massive volunteer day. AB- Yes we could, but a sealant on the seeding would be best. There is a lot of vegetation around it that will help it revegetate.

Short alternative reroute on Fins and Things 4x4 trails has been approved by the BLM. SFRA staff needs to mark it.

HB180 UTV test update

AB- Anna Sprout, GCATT, pointed out that you can do the test, not read anything, just click boxes and get the certificate. Our suggestion is that each page should not let people advance to the next page without correct answers. Other feedback has been positive. AB let Chase Pili, Utah OHV program, know of our concerns. JJ- Ali Kolowski, who is in the video, is experiencing social media harassment since the HB180 test came out. AB- MK and DP took a lot of heat about SFRA nighttime closures on social media. AB will talk to Chase Pili and Mark Finley about eliminating her last name.

Raptor Route update

JJ- On the ground cultural is done and hopefully approval process will be complete by fall. There were concerns from SUWA but they are standing down.

International Dark Sky Park application

AB- Will get different bulbs at the booth; fixtures are correct. We are doing dark sky monitoring and recording how dark it is at 7 trailheads. Falcon Flow is the darkest. We already meet dark sky criteria we just have to do further monitoring as part of application process. Crystal White, NASA ambassador will present night sky programs again this summer. I will work on application this summer; planned to do it in January but the RAISE grant took over my time.

Hiring

AB- No luck, applicants were not a good match. AB does some booth and patrol each week but it would be nice to have at least one more employee. Starting pay is \$22 to \$28 an hour, highest ever. EC- I will get the word out.

Fee change process update

AB- Was supposed to go before the URAC January 18th but it will now be mid-May as the process is taking longer. Hopefully we can implement the changes by June 1st. Based on calculations we could be losing approximately \$90,000 this year. JJ- Business plans throughout the state are seeing unprecedented scrutiny. SFRA business plan has been through headquarters and the state office. Moab office is doing everything they can to move this along to meet deadlines. Press releases are being reviewed by Tracy Stone Manning, BLM Director.

AB- In 2015 I worked with Rock Smith and the process moved along quickly. JJ- Lots of involvement from the state this time and for all business plans, not just this one. It is also happening with EAs, and other processes. EC- Is SFRA 2023 budget based on fee change? AB- We budgeted for what we needed but some capital improvements could be delayed, such as the shade structure at office for \$50,000. It is low priority. We may not need to make entrance station improvements. Last fall outfitters commended us on how quickly they get through the booth. 15 minutes is maximum wait and that is uncommon. Really improved now that Covid is over. MT- How about using second lane by entrance? AB- It doesn't meet safety standards as is and would need to be improved. We can trim the budget by not building these Capital Improvements in 2023.

MO shows the new Travel Council Moab's Living Soils video by Mark Finley

MT- Need to have a video with a man with a beard; more typical of this crowd. AB- Yes, the Backcountry Tips video is narrated by John Marshall. Other new videos coming out soon include mites and tadpole shrimp with Tim Graham. Originally TRT monies were going to pay for 6 to 8 videos to run on Channel 6 TV, but money was not available so SFRA paid for three to run from March- June. This includes "5 Tips for an Awesome Moab Adventure", Biking and "Moab's Living Soils." Hopefully TRT can fund the other five videos too from June- November.

Sand Flats Road and RAISE grant

AB- The Road Dept. put in for this grant two times before. First time they missed the deadline and last year they did not get it. Bill Jackson asked me to be involved this time and we feel it is a better application. AB got letters of support from the BLM and with Bill from the GC

Commission. AB facilitated a meeting so we could get debriefed on what was wrong with the previous application. AB added many updates including Sheriff's accident reports. Proposal is for 12-foot lanes; 1–3-foot paved shoulders, bike lanes on both sides and it calls for milling up the existing pavement and putting in new. AB tried getting a letter of support for the project from Trail Mix but they voted not to support the grant application. MO- Why? AB-They were surprised it would be paved up to Porcupine Rim. They said the road would be a "Loss of wilderness characteristics." This is a safety issue. It has been on our business plan since 2015. Paving the road is part of the Master plan the commission approved in August 2022. MO- When do you find out if you got it? AB- this summer or fall. Last year they had over 900 applicants and 120 were awarded funding.

Youth grant

AB- Will put in by due date in April for \$75,000 over 5 years at \$15,000 a year.

Responsible Recreation

See end

New Topics

Alltrails and website improvements and processes:

AB- Thanks to Anna Sprout, GCATT, I have access to the back side of Alltrails app. regarding SFRA and have fixed some things. Jason will do some too. In the process I noticed that Alltrails had many trails listed as "Grand County trails" instead of "Moab BLM trails" and I spoke with Katie Stevens and then Anna about changing this. Alltrails still has to approve my edits for info on safety, trail direction, seasonal info, etc. Want it to match our website and also the language that Responsible Recreation is using. JJ- I attended a presentation by Wander app representative recently. MT and DP good idea to have Wander app. EC- Are you trying to steer people away from trails, like Mill Creek? AB-Anna Sprout has access to everything, I only have access to SFRA and I am not doing that at this time. It would be nice if they took down Cowboy Jacuzzi. JJ- BLM tried to get them to respect private property concerns at Hidden Valley for example, and sent a letter to no avail. MO- Project trails from REI and Gaia are popular. EC- Alltrails is the most popular that is why Anna started with it. If folks use Wander App. then we have control.

Sticker vandalism

AB- Total cost \$2,185 in materials and labor for repair so far. Not sure if we found all of the damaged signs in the backcountry yet. When stickers are on sign backs we use a blow torch to remove. Stickers peeled off carsonites pretty easily until he switched to Gorilla glue. There were approximately 40 stickers removed. MT- What about using brown spray paint? JJ- Hopefully it has stopped now and we can get ahead of it. AB- There has been sticker vandalism since December. We have a photo of the large boot print we saw multiple times by the vandalism. I sent same documentation and photos to the County Attorney and JJ and BLM LE.

Director wrote letters of support

For BLM LE for OHV that they are trying to replace and Sheriff's dept for two OHVs and a trailer. JJ- OHV grant program has several million dollars available. SFRA should apply.

Trail work by volunteer groups at Sand Flats in February

AB- "Friends for Wheelin" repaired pipe and cable fences on SITLA property on Hell's Revenge. Sand Flats paid for materials and will get reimbursed by SITLA. They fixed the ones' on the Abyss too, Jeff Stevens and Dave Hellman. MTC held a Rake and Ride and went out on South Fins and Things and fixed some fences that were down and blocked off some illegal routes with wood and boulders. The Red Rock 4-wheelers installed a fence about a ½ mile in from the exit where an illegal route was getting more use and needed a fence.

JJ- Heard from Dave Hellman that the Staircase was getting more use on to the right side of the trail where it drops down and he wanted to know if it needed to be blocked off. MO and AB- Yes it does because you have to back up if you go to the right as most rigs can't do it.

AB- Trail Mix held a work day for the Hiking group. Worked on Pinion trail, cobbled it again. Someone removed the cobble and threw it in the bushes after it was cobbled last time. We have a big pile of cobble and can just continue to cobble it if it disappears again- like fixing vandalism. We want to narrow the trail; we seeded it last year. They also worked in from Falcon Flow's north and south entrances. They had around 30 people.

MO- This is the Staircase area in question and photos with it open and blocked off last October.

AB- When I went out with "At Your Leisure" crew and MTC in November we put a lot of rocks and wood there to block it off. We need to put in some metal posts with arrows.

Grand County Commission updates

EC- RAISE grant application with Commission is the only thing in connection with this body.

BLM updates

JJ- Ecommerce solutions discussed with the group. Off-grid kiosk at Big Bend along with Horsethief. Rec.gov zero-day reservations. You can do a reservation the day of but only for loop A and then B is first come first serve at Ken's Lake. JJ has a list. Klondike, Westwater, Hunter canyon has zero-day available too. Also Scan and Pay option with Rec.gov app is \$2 and zero day reservations are \$8 a transaction fee. Can only do two nights but hoping soon you can do seven nights. AB-This is so people don't have to use cash? JJ- Yes. MO- Any issues with kiosks? JJ-Had to call for some maintenance last winter. Reservations- challenge is people don't show up. Huge problem is the availability. Someone doesn't show up and then no one camps there. MT- Conflicts with system, language issues for foreigners. MO- What is the cancelation policy? JJ- If they cancel 24 hours in advance they get a full refund. AB- Having SFRA Booth is so helpful. JJ- Poison Spider project- fixed drainage along parking lot, graded and toilet is done and parking lot should be paved in July. Fisher Towers moving along, auxiliary parking area for 30 something cars and new toilet will come this summer. Figuring out what we are doing with Scenic Skyway across from Preserve; have put in shade structure and accessible ramp. Big Bend camping area we will be adding another group site. Westwater access is sloppy and County Rd dept. will help with roads. There are lots of events coming up. New version of our newsletter is out. Outfitter workshop will be held on March 16th. AB will be one of the speakers updating folks on SFRA. MO puts up the agenda on the screen. AB- Search and Rescue said that they would like to be involved next time. JJ- Some outfitters would like it to be later in May so that guides can attend. AB- County used to put on Customer Service training and it was very informative. Dave Pals is the official Field Manager for Moab.

Responsible Recreation updates

AB reads from Anna Sprout's email- "We have started our spring season and have trail ambassadors at popular mountain biking and hiking trailheads. We're branching into motorized and climbing ambassadors this year. We're excited to be making connections in every recreation community. We've launched a business program and hosted our first two pilot sessions. The focus is on communication skills and communicating education and practices to protect during short interactions with visitors. We're working with USU to evaluate the effectiveness of our Trail Ambassador program. We have created a survey and they will be setting up at trailheads, with and without trail ambassadors this week. "

Anna Sprout enters the room. Trail Ambassadors focus on trail education. How to protect yourself, others, and the environment, Educate on Leave no Trace principles. Will do education along the trail and set up near cairns or biological soil crust. Might fix or take down cairns. Trail Ambassadors will pick up trash along the trail and do some minimal graffiti removal. Some interactions might be simple-"Stay on the trail" or "Do you have water?" This can prevent a Search and Rescue incident or resource damage. If we find more intensive issues we let the BLM know. Staff doesn't pick up waste. Our goal is to go where the most people are. AB- When people see you doing things like this and more involved projects like graffiti removal it gives them an opportunity to ask questions and a great chance for education. What is a quality interaction? Are they just being counted because they walked by or more? I would love to see the survey USU is doing. AS- I will send it to you. Sometimes it is a simple interaction, other times longer. We spoke with 36,000 people last year, out of 56,000. Trail Ambassador presence alone helps. AB- Someone in a uniform makes such a difference. MO- Are you going to do a trail report for the motorized trail system? AS- Not yet, just getting program going first. We have been predominantly non-motorized so new territory for us. We are applying for a motorized grant and getting support from MTC and others. Discussion ensues on equipment for program and grant. AS- Reach different users, hikers and bikers on the trail and hold Climbers Coffee at Lion's Park to meet this user group. Hired motorized Trail Ambassador. AB- Discussed places along SFRA trails for Trail Ambassadors to set up; locations have to be picked carefully. AS and JJ- Go over vocabulary of motorized use with the BLM. AB- You can use our website for info. Much of what we have written up came originally from the BLM and it was approved by them. Brochures started back in the early 90's. JJ- We didn't have any resources back then but we were expected to clean up poop. AB- Whole reason 40 campsites got closed at SFRA was due to human waste issues (in 2002).

Adjourn