

Regular Meeting

Moab Tourism Advisory Board (MTAB)

Held at Grand County, Utah Commission Chambers
125 E. Center
Moab, Utah 84532

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xguRV4shLg>

MINUTES

February 10, 2026 | 3:00 p.m.

**** Time stamps (HH:MM:SS) correspond to the video****

Regular Meeting

Members in attendance: Lori McFarland, Wendell Williams, Cora Phillips, Brian Martinez, Howard Trenholme, Sharon Kienzle

Members in attendance remotely: Rebecca Monceaux

Non-members in attendance: Ali Harford (MOT), Mick Soleta (MOT)

Non-members in attendance remotely: Campbell Levy (Campstories), Jessica Kunzer-Pearson (Camp4)

Opening Items

Call to Order (00:04:22)

Citizens to be Heard (00:04:55)

Introductions (00:05:07)

Guest report from Andy Smith, Outdoor Recreation Mitigation Board (00:07:07)

- Andy Smith reported on the new Outdoor Recreation Mitigation Grant at the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation, noting he sits on the statewide board and currently serves as chair.
- Commissioner Martinez reminded the board that when HB456 was created, the bill that changed TRT distributions, it also created this new grant. The grant priorities include funding visitor-related emergency costs (search and rescue, EMS) tied directly to outdoor recreation visitor, counties with smaller populations, and need for financial assistance to manage recreation impacts.

- Andy said the board is working toward July 2026 as the first anticipated application window, with an estimated \$6.6 million currently available in the fund and likely more as additional collections accrue.
- Brian and Andy discussed application mechanics, noting the goal is one application per county listing prioritized projects (rather than separate applications for each project), and focusing reimbursement on personnel and operating costs, not large capital equipment.
- Andy emphasized that applications must flow through counties (not directly from individual agencies or cities) and invited MTAB and county officials to review the draft application when available and share feedback with him.

Discussion and Action Items

7. Archery Range at OSTA Grant Discussion/Endorsement Letter (00:23:44)

- Moved to top of agenda to hear from Commissioner Trish Hedin
- Commissioner Hedin presented an update on a proposed archery range at Old Spanish Trail Arena (OSTA) and requested MTAB support in the form of a letter to accompany a Utah Department of Outdoor Recreation grant application. Commissioner Hedin explained she secured a grant for the project and has already completed substantial in-kind excavation work.
- Lori stated she was uncomfortable signing a detailed letter she had not had time to review in advance, given that she had only been able to open it shortly before the meeting, and indicated she preferred to delay a decision or use a more general board-level statement.
- Wendell expressed concern that the draft letter included extensive project-specific language that more properly belonged in Commissioner Hedin's application, suggesting MTAB's letter should be shorter and more tourism-focused.
- Jason Taylor commented that he had read the letter earlier in the week and felt it was well-written and closely tailored to state grant criteria, and suggested the board could simply approve it as-is.
- After discussion, Jason made a substitute motion to approve Commissioner Hedin's draft letter as an MTAB letter of support without naming Lori as the signatory, instead submitting it as a letter from the MTAB/County. Howard seconded. The motion passed 6-1, with Lori voting against and Rebecca abstaining.

2. Approval of minutes (00:36:52)

- Tabled until the next meeting

3. Elect Chair/Vice Chair for MTAB (00:37:12)

- Lori opened the annual election of MTAB officers.
- Sharon motioned to have Wendell Williams be appointed as Chair. Howard seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

- For vice chair, Sharon expressed interest in nominating Alex if he were available, but because Alex was not present at the meeting at that moment, Lori and others felt uncomfortable voting on his behalf without confirming his willingness. Jason suggested postponing the decision until Alex could participate.
- Howard then made a substitute motion to nominate Lori as vice chair. Wendell seconded. The motion passed 4-3, with Sharon, Cora, and Jason abstaining.

4. Update on board applicants (00:44:23)

- Lori reported that the ninth board seat had several applicants. The board discussed how to interview applicants, deciding to invite applicants for public interviews.
- Howard made a motion that the chair and vice chair screen applicants for eligibility (the board member must be employed with a TRT/TRCCA collecting entity). Sharon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Canyon Spirit 2026 Update (00:48:12)

- Lori invited Howard to give an update on the Canyon Spirit, where he works as an employee.
- He reported that, as of early February, Canyon Spirit has already surpassed its total 2025 ticket sales for the coming season. Howard stated their goal is to sell 13,000 tickets in 2026, roughly double the prior year, and to reach 25,000 tickets in 2027 once a second train is added, with trains operating six days a week in Moab. He emphasized that Canyon Spirit attracts high-value, low-impact visitors who stay in hotels, dine at local restaurants, book tours, and walk downtown, with relatively little stress on local infrastructure compared to some other segments.

8. Update from Special Events Marketing Grant subcommittee (00:51:40)

- The Special Events Marketing Grant subcommittee (for the March 1 grant application) said there have been a few applications so far. They also reiterated that the grant can only be used for direct advertising spend; it cannot be used for marketing creation, like for photo shoots. Commissioner Martinez asked to join review committee meetings.

9. “Who is Moab” project update (00:57:12)

- Ali provided an update on the “Who is Moab” project, showing the board a trailer of the videos. Board members expressed their support of the project, and encouraged MOT staff to work with Madden Media to develop a paid media distribution timeline to get maximum exposure for the videos.

10. Consideration of future agenda items (01:03:38)

- Sharon requested that MTAB invite a representative from the National Park Service (and, if possible, BLM) to a future meeting to provide updates on operations and policies, particularly around timed entry at Arches National Park.
- Jason noted ongoing confusion about whether timed entry will be implemented in 2026, with NPS website language remaining vague, and emphasized that local businesses and

visitors need clear, official information soon to plan for spring and summer visitation. Board members stressed the importance of coordinated messaging among the State of Utah, National Parks, Moab Office of Tourism, and local businesses, to avoid misinformation once timed entry news is released.

- Commissioner Martinez brought up the need for e-bike messaging as well, and proposed a coordinated communication effort between the MOT, Trail Mix, and the Motorized Trail Committee.

11. Board Member Reports (01:06:08)

- Wendell reported that town was strong for early February, with many businesses preparing to reopen for Valentine's Day weekend. He said he was encouraged by the data-driven approach from Madden and Camp4/Tourist, and believes the targeted campaigns are working.
- Cora reported that the Chamber After Hours event at Rooted Vine on Thursday will feature Mick presenting on the Special Events Marketing Grant, giving Chamber members and the public a chance to learn how to apply. The Chamber is also planning its golf tournament on May 8 and an upcoming board retreat on February 19, where two new Chamber board members will be seated.
- Jason Taylor reported for the City of Moab that the City is working on sidewalk projects and garbage cans. He also asked the board why Scott Solle with Search and Rescue wasn't able to address the board about writing a letter of support for SAR's podcast project; Lori said Scott didn't get her materials in time to add it to the agenda. Commissioner Martinez emphasized the need for those applying for grants and asking for letters of support to provide context on the grants they're applying for.
- Howard reported that the Essential Air Service (EAS) contract is out for bid, and three bidders—SkyWest, Contour, and Denver Air Connection—will each bring aircraft to Moab for site visits and tours on February 17, 18, and 19; Howard invited MTAB members and appropriate officials to attend and ask questions. He then said that he believes tax revenues are continuing to fall, but believes in the work the MOT is doing. He then expressed his support for Mick Soleta to become the Office of Tourism Director. Board members then debated how occupancy rates are calculated.
- Sharon Kienzle reported that the Moab Information Center and Arches Visitor Center have seen notable increases in visitation compared to the prior year. She said the Arches Visitor Center is currently operating on reduced winter hours (9:00–4:30, then 8:00–4:00 in early March) due to staffing challenges, and has only hired 5 of 15 needed seasonal staff so far; there is no firm date yet for extended hours.
- Commissioner Martinez reported that he has been heavily involved in supporting the Rural Utah Film Incentive, stressing its importance to Grand County's economic diversification. He said he is also working to clarify the TRT "rec/film/convention" breakout within the promotion bucket, with an eye toward potentially funding airport studies, restrooms, and other eligible projects from that portion; he plans to return to MTAB once legal guidance is complete. He then shared preliminary TRT and TRCCA numbers for October/November collections, indicating strong year-over-year increases in

late 2025, and noted that when comparing only the second half of 2025 (post-June, when advertising resumed) to 2024, TRT is down only about 1% year-over-year—showing that late-year marketing significantly closed the earlier revenue gap.

- Ali Harford and Mick Soleta added brief notes about participation in Tourism Day on the Hill and other statewide events and ongoing trade and PR work (e.g., IMM, global markets).
- Lori closed by reiterating appreciation for the board's work, noting that she and Wendell had submitted a personal letter to the County Commission expressing support for Mick Soleta as a strong candidate for the Moab Office of Tourism Director position and acknowledging the challenges and successes of operating without a permanent director over the past year.