



## San Rafael Swell Recreation Area Advisory Council (RAAC)

### Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2024

*Castle Dale, Utah*

#### Meeting Attendees:

- **San Rafael Swell RAAC members:** Kent Wilson, Rod Player, Sue Bellagamba, Keven Jensen, Leon McElprang
- **BLM employees:** Elijah Waters, Kyle Beagley, Dana Truman, Anna Wasden, J.D. Mallory, Bridget Murray, Sarah Baldwin, Jason Kaitchuck, Jaydon Mead, Molly Hocanson
- **Members of the public:** Terri Bennett, Nicole Nielsen, Jim Jennings, Kai Palmer, Ray Bloxham, Windwalker Akaltii, Simone Griffin, Karen Scrafford, Christopher Hagedorn, Renee Thibodeaux, Cameron Monson, Bob Wohlers, Steven Devel, Robin Hunt, Leo Hardy

#### Welcome and Introductions

##### Designated Federal Officer, Green River District Manager, Elijah Waters

- The meeting began with welcome and introductions of attendees along with icebreaker questions.

##### RAAC Chairman, Kent Wilson

- The Chairman reviewed the Agenda.

#### Recap of Previous Recommendations

##### BLM Planning & Environmental Coordinator and Dingell Act Project Lead, Molly Hocanson

- Presentation on previous recommendations made by the Council.
- A short discussion occurred between the RAAC and BLM about these previous recommendations.

## **Special Recreation Permits (SRP)**

### **BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, Bridget Murray**

- Presentation on the current status of SRPs within the Recreation Area and possible changes that could be made to SRPs through the San Rafael Swell Recreation Area RMP Amendment.
- The RAAC asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation.
- There was a discussion about if large events should be allowed within the Recreation Area. The RAAC also discussed group sizes that would need to contact BLM and possibly get an SRP that would be different than the 24 that is in the current RMP.

## **Overlapping Plant and Wildlife Resource Concerns with Proposed Recreation Zones**

### **BLM Wildlife Biologists, Sarah Baldwin and Jason Kaitchuck**

- Presentation of the current status of special status plants and wildlife within the Recreation Area and possible management options for the protection of these species.
- The RAAC asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation specific to monitoring, threats, designated vs. dispersed camping, and identifying triggers for adaptive management.

## **Public Comment Period**

*Leo Hardy –*

- What does a photography permit allow for in wilderness, specific to drones? Is a commercial guide allowed to stash equipment?
- The Designated Federal Officer explained that this is an opportunity to address the RAAC not to ask BLM questions, there will be follow-up on this outside of this meeting.

*Simone Griffin (Blue Ribbon Coalition) –*

- Please consider that dispersed campsites may not have a fire ring because those campers have practiced Leave No Trace principles. A closure to dispersed camping and focus on only designated dispersed camping will push those type of campers away.
- There should not be a seasonal closure on any routes unless there is science and data to back up that closure.
- Consider that the recent D.C. Circuit Court decision on the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)'s lack of authority to make regulations will affect the Travel Management Plans and the RMP Amendments.

*Bob Wohlers –*

- Thank you for preserving the Swell. I hold an SRP currently and lead 3-to-4-day overland tours on street legal vehicles. How is overlanding going to be regulated through this plan? How will dispersed camping be affected? How will an educational SRP be prioritized? There needs to be

curriculum available for professional tour guides. On my tours, I have a biological background, so I include biological information to the participants in my tours. I research the area carefully to do so. There needs to be better curriculum provided for these tours. Will there be anything like that with a recommendation?

## **RAAC Discussion**

The RAAC discussed the following:

- Is a dispersed camping closure necessary? It is believed that locals like that experience, so it's continuation should be supported.
- Camping needs to be studied and evaluated for resource concerns and damage so that there is a threshold developed to identify if management needs to occur.
- How are dispersed campsites inventoried? It is not just counting fire rings but looking at other types of camping related disturbance.
- If a complete inventory is done it could serve as a baseline for future inventories and increases of a certain percent of growth of user created campsites could lead to other management.
- Possible criteria for determining if dispersed camping is an issue could be resource damage, user conflicts, and density of sites.
- Impacts should be considered more than hitting a certain permit number when determining how many SRPs should be issued.

## **RAAC Recommendations**

- Whereas the San Rafael Swell Recreation Area and the Dingell Act provides for a variety of uses, unmanaged uses can cause unacceptable resource damage and user conflicts.  
Be it resolved that the RAAC supports the longstanding tradition of dispersed camping in the Recreation Area, except for
  - Areas with resource concerns
  - Conflicts with traditional uses (i.e. grazing)
  - Areas where concentrated use detracts from the experience.
- Be it resolved that the SRSRAAC supports the zoned approach for camping and recreation.
- Whereas the Wedge area has the highest potential for recreational impacts to sensitive cacti, and  
Whereas two-way traffic on Route SS3158 requires off route passing of two-way traffic,  
Be it resolved that the RAAC recommends that Route SS3158 be limited to one way traffic (going west) and no trailers, and that we rescind the previous recommendation of a seasonal closure on this route.
- The BLM should preference SRPs which:

- Support one or more purposes of the Recreation Area and provide a plan for educating participants on its resources
- Take place outside of March and April or make use of less crowded weekdays
- Focus recreation on sites and areas capable of withstanding repeated use
- Are not duplicative of, or on the same weekend as, current permits
- Have a history of acceptable performance and stewardship with the BLM.

The BLM should also provide education content to operators on the Recreation Area and the resources and users therein.

- The BLM should avoid permits for activities which fall within Class IV for any of the physical evaluation criteria (soils and vegetation, associated features, environmental effects, size of area). BLM should utilize bonds for activities in Class III of these categories as appropriate.
- During the planning process, BLM should identify a threshold for event permits quantity which considers recreational impacts, physical capacity, and socioeconomic effects to adjacent towns.

All recommendation motions were seconded and passed unanimously.

#### **Next Meeting Proposed Topics**

- Carrying capacity
- Dingell Act Land Exchange parcels within the Recreation Area
- The Utah Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office request for a Memorandum of Understanding for the protection, management, and maintenance of the Recreation Area (Dingell Act, Section 1222(j)).