

**MINUTES OF THE
NATURAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE, AND ENVIRONMENT INTERIM COMMITTEE**
Wednesday, October 19, 2011 – 2:00 p.m. – Room 210 Senate Building

Members Present:

Sen. Ralph Okerlund, Senate Chair
Rep. Roger E. Barrus, House Chair
Sen. Casey O. Anderson
Sen. Allen M. Christensen
Sen. Margaret Dayton
Sen. David P. Hinkins
Rep. Joel K. Briscoe
Rep. Brad L. Dee
Rep. Brad J. Galvez
Rep. Neal B. Hendrickson
Rep. Michael E. Noel
Rep. Douglas Sagers
Rep. Stephen E. Sandstrom
Rep. Evan J. Vickers

Rep. Christine F. Watkins
Rep. Ryan D. Wilcox
Rep. Bill Wright

Members Absent:

Sen. Gene Davis
Rep. Melvin R. Brown
Rep. Jack R. Draxler
Rep. John G. Mathis

Staff Present:

Mr. J Brian Allred, Policy Analyst
Ms. Tracy J. Nuttall, Associate General Counsel
Ms. Kimberly A. Heiner, Legislative Secretary

Note: A list of others present, a copy of related materials, and an audio recording of the meeting can be found at www.le.utah.gov.

1. Committee Business

Chair Barrus called the meeting to order at 2:09 p.m.

MOTION: Rep. Watkins moved to approve the minutes of the September 21, 2011 meeting. The motion passed unanimously with Rep. Dee, Rep. Vickers, and Rep. Wilcox absent for the vote.

2. Department of Natural Resources Executive Water Task Force Report

Mr. Mike Styler, Director, Utah Department of Natural Resources, distributed "Executive Water Task Force" handout and explained the makeup of the Water Task Force. He also said that the Task Force meetings have regular attendance from people all over Utah who are interested in water issues. He said that the Water Task Force will have four proposed bills for the 2012 General Session. He responded to questions from the Committee.

3. Department of Natural Resources - Parks and Recreations

Ms. Mary Tullius, Director, Utah Division of State Parks and Recreation, distributed "Report on Intent Language" and discussed how the Department of Natural Resources is meeting the requirements of the 2010 Appropriations Act.

Ms. Tullius and Mr. Styler responded to questions from the Committee.

Rep. Noel asked how much money the Edge of the Cedars State Park received from the federal government for holding federal artifacts.

Ms. Karen Krieger, Deputy Director State Parks, said that the Edge of the Cedars State Park receives between \$20,000-25,000 per year from the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service to offset the cost of caring for federal artifacts.

Rep. Noel also asked questions about the reduction in law enforcement in state parks.

Mr. Larry Gray, Southwest Region Manager, Utah State Parks, said that he recently gave a presentation in Kane County on having counties take over some of the operation of state parks, in an effort to make state parks financially viable.

Chair Okerlund asked Mr. Gray about the privatization of Otter Creek State Park. Mr. Gray said it went well for the park staff because they were able to operate three state parks with the same amount of staff with which they had operated one park in 2010. Mr. Gray also said that he will have a better idea how the privatization of Otter Creek fared financially after the contract expires in October.

Ms. Irene Hansen, Chair, Utah State Parks Board, said that the state parks are another asset owned by the citizens of Utah. She said that over the past 10 years the state parks have gone from a 70 percent dependence to a 30 percent dependence on the state budget. She said that she is determined to keep all of the state parks open.

Mr. Ellis Ivory, Volunteer Executive Director, This is the Place State Park, said that over 270,000 people visited This is the Place State Park in the past year, which he said is a substantial increase from the past. He said that This is the Place State Park has a unique opportunity to receive donated help in both cash and labor. He said over 24,000 volunteer hours were given at the park last year.

Mr. Jeff Packer, President, Friends of Utah State Parks, said that the audit on the state parks was misleading. He cited several places in the report that he said misrepresented the facts. He said that privatization of state parks is troubling to him and does not make economic sense. He asked the Committee to restore the \$2.8 million of funding to state parks.

Mr. Mike McKee, Uintah County Commissioner, said that the counties cannot take on federal and state programs. He also said that Dinosaur National Monument has around 400,000 visitors annually. He said that it is important to the community and state to continue to fund these historical sites.

Mr. Jeff Salt, Executive Director, Great Salt Lake Keeper, said that the Oregon State Parks program is a model of turning around their state parks from the brink of closing. He suggested that Utah look at alternative ways to save the state parks. He said that he does not think that the audit conducted on state parks went deep enough and asked the Committee and the Office of the Legislative Auditor General to reconsider the audit.

Mr. Phil Lyman, Salt Lake County Commissioner, asked that the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum be taken off the closure list. He said that a more logical approach would be to restructure the repository fee schedule of the museum. He said the federal repository of the Edge of the Cedars was never intended to generate a profit, but said it could be restructured to do so.

Ms. Claudia Cottle, Bear Lake Watch, said that Bear Lake is a natural resources that the state is charged with taking care of. She said that the state parks system is an important part of protecting Bear Lake resources.

Mr. Jim Morkin, Uintah resident, said that he was concerned with keeping state parks safe. He said that if funding was taken away from state parks they would not be able to keep the parks safe and crime would increase.

Mr. Mel Terry, Economic Developer, Piute County, said that he understands why the parks system is losing money, but said that there are ways to save the parks. He said he does not think that privatization will help. He suggested ways to increase profits in state parks.

Mr. Gordon Topham, Chair, Sevier County Commission, said that the Paiute ATV trail is nationally known and allows for people to ride an ATV right from their motel room and go through town to the trail. He said that the State Parks system provides the law enforcement for that trail. He said that much of the economy in Sevier County is based on the Paiute ATV trail revenues. He responded to questions from the Committee.

Mr. Steve Burr, Friends of Utah State Parks, said that state parks are important to tourism and Utah. He said that he represents many organizations who would like the \$2.8 million appropriation for state parks reinstated.

Ms. Claudia Jarrett, Sanpete County Commissioner, said that Palisade State Park is a multi-use state park and that the community would be devastated if the park was closed.

Chair Barrus said he appreciated all of the public comment and support for state parks. He asked Mr. Styler and Ms. Tullius how the Legislature could help. Ms. Tullius said they could restore the \$2.8 million to the State Parks budget. Mr. Styler asked for flexibility from the Legislature.

Chair Okerlund said that it is always a good idea to look at better efficiencies and that Utah will have a stronger state parks system as a result.

4. Department of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement Efficiencies

Rep. Lee Perry, House District 2, distributed and discussed "Law Enforcement Efficiency Task Force Recommendations" from the Department of Natural Resources. He explained several efficiencies that the Department of Natural Resources had identified.

Mr. Sid Groll, Law Enforcement Director, Department of Natural Resources, said that he appreciated the opportunity to participate in the efficiency report. He said that they first looked internally at the resources they had to cover the safety of parks and then looked externally at local resources. He then explained additional efficiencies that the Department of Natural Resources identified.

Rep. Perry and Mr. Groll responded to questions from the Committee.

Chief Lynn Excell, Hurricane Police Department, said that he was involved in creating the "Law Enforcement Task Force Recommendations" report. He said that state parks need to remain safe. He said that he has seen rangers placed in danger because the number of rangers were reduced for efficiencies.

Mr. Steven White, Grand County Sheriff, said that in Moab the sheriff's office has a great working relationship with the State Parks. He said that he has been frustrated because this panel has met several times

to discuss these issues without any progress. He said that this issue needs to be reviewed on an annual basis. He responded to questions from the Committee.

Mr. Bill Cox, Rich County Commissioner, said that without the state park's law enforcement component, it would not be possible for Rich County to protect Bear Lake during the tourist season with the increase of tourists. He said that when the number of law enforcement officers is reduced the safety of everyone is jeopardized.

The chairs thanked the participants for their report.

5. Adjourn

MOTION: Rep. Hendrickson moved to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously with Sen. Dayton, Rep. Dee, Rep. Vickers, and Rep. Wright absent for the vote.

Chair Barrus adjourned the meeting at 5:09 p.m.