



# GRAND COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2030

*"Adventurous Small Town Spirit"*

## SECTION TEN: PARKS, RECREATION AND NATURAL AREAS

### 1. OVERVIEW

Protection of the land base and the ecosystems, such as the river valley, is not only important for maintaining the health of natural systems but contributes to the quality of life for citizens with respect to air and water quality.

Natural areas within the urban environment offer many benefits and opportunities to experience and respect the natural world. Natural areas also offer respite from the pressures and stimulations of urban life as well as provide a variety of educational and recreational opportunities for the citizens of the community.

### 2. PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The County is fortunate to be situated along the Colorado River system and its tributaries and adjacent to a large forested area to the east providing extensive outdoor recreation opportunities as well as beautiful scenery.

Parks and recreational facilities play an important role, contributing to the health and wellbeing of the community. Park space could include areas developed and maintained for active or passive recreational use, such as public parks, athletic fields, historic and natural areas. Recreational facilities include arenas, multi-use complexes, and other indoor and outdoor sport facilities.

The County offers some parks and recreational facilities including Old City Park and the Old Spanish Trail Arena. Various community groups offer a wide range of programs and activities to individuals of all ages. Important groups represent active trails – hiking and biking, off road vehicle usage.

Back and front country access gives the County the enviable role to influence the recreational use of the natural environment so that we articulate the tremendous community, regional and national assets. Mutual land use strategies with all public partners will help preserve and advance public land assets.

Both passive and active open space and amenities need to be consistently referenced in land use entitlement actions such as rezoning, and subdivision. The primary objective of the parks and recreation system is to provide all residents with readily accessible parks and recreation facilities.

Outdoor recreation facilities include golf courses, recreation community clubs, field tracks (football field, tennis courts, and soccer pitches), ball diamonds and playgrounds, and cross country skiing trails. Some examples of major outdoor recreation facilities include Sand Flats.

As communities grow, the needs change and existing facilities may require redevelopment or upgrading. Redevelopment of existing recreation facilities should meet the changing needs of the community and promote safety and accessibility as primary considerations.

## BACKGROUND



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Grand County consists of 96% public lands, or more than 1.7 million acres. There are five public land jurisdictions that administer these lands. See ownership status in Schedule 16.9.

1. National Park Service (NPS);
2. Bureau of Land Management (BLM);
3. US Forest Service (USFS);
4. School and Institutional Trust Land Administration (SITLA);
5. Sand Flats Recreation Area;
6. Utah Forestry, Fire and State Lands; and
7. Utah State Parks.

The Areas of special interest include:

1. La Sal National Forest;
2. Arches National Park;
3. Canyonlands National Park;
4. Dead Horse State Park;
5. Utah Raptor State Park;
6. Scenic Highway 128;
7. The Colorado River;
8. The Green River;
9. 26 BLM campsites within Grand County;
10. Numerous non-motorized and hiking trails,;
11. World renowned mountain biking areas; and
12. Cultural and historical preservation sites.

Regional cooperation remains crucial to managed growth plans and coordination of public land uses and access.

## **National Park Service (NPS)**

*Unlike lands managed by the BLM and USFS, these lands are managed by NPS exclusively to protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources within their boundaries. These lands are bound by Federal Statute (36 CFR Chapter 1-7).*

*The National Park Service prepares a variety of planning and environmental documents to help guide management of park resources and visitor use and activity. Most plans follow planning procedures outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).*

*Arches National Park has a general management plan in place, written in 1989. "The primary purpose of the plan is to provide a foundation from which to protect park resources while providing for meaningful visitor experiences," (National Park Service n.d.).*

*"In 2013, the park developed a Foundation Statement to update a shared understanding of the park's purpose, significance, resources and values. This document can serve as a foundation for future planning and management decisions," (National Park Service n.d.).*

## **Utah State Parks**

The Utah State Parks Strategic Plan implementation started in 2017. The supporting document addresses how parks are maintained and preserved, and then planned for future growth. In 2021 the Utah State Legislature created the Utah Raptor State Park in the northern sector of Grand County on lands owned by SITLA.



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Anticipated development includes a campground with amenities such as water, electricity, sewage, flush toilets and showers. Recreational opportunities such as hiking trails and cultural sites, and on-site employee housing for park rangers.

Development challenges include a reliable water source and sewage and drainage systems. Construction is anticipated to begin in December of 2021.

### **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

The BLM manages resources, opportunities, and access to lands. The field office oversees roads, range management, wildlife habitat, recreation, and grazing. Various entities make up the BLM's presence in Moab including the following portfolios:

1. Recreation (examples):
  - i. Off-highway vehicle use;
  - ii. Mountain biking, climbing, base jumping, hiking;
  - iii. Horse-back riding; and
  - iv. River rafting;
2. Supports millions of visitors and hundreds of recreation related jobs in the local communities;
3. A wide array of land uses such as oil and gas production, mining, and livestock grazing.

The Moab Resource Management Plan adopted in 2008 serves as the backbone for all land use planning and decision making within the Moab area. The BLM Master Leasing Plan, approved in 2016, guides how mineral leasing and development for oil, gas and potash will occur in the planning area of Grand County. This plan mitigates impacts of resource development including mining. Increased visitor numbers have strained recreation services.

*US Bureau of Land Management (BLM): The Moab Field Office manages BLM lands in Grand County. Land use decisions for all BLM lands are made according to mandates defined by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. FLPMA requires the BLM to manage lands under multiple-use philosophy. A component of FLPMA is the requirement for an open and public land use planning process in the development of resource management plans (RMP). Each BLM Field Office must develop a RMP to guide future land use activities on public lands. The RMP defines goals, objectives, and rules for commercial and extractives industries, transportation, recreation, and conservation. To complete an RMP, the BLM follows planning procedures outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).*

### **State Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA)**

*State Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA): Trust lands are parcels of land throughout our state that were granted by Congress to Utah at the time of statehood. Although trust lands support select public institutions, they are not public lands. Trust lands were allocated specifically to generate revenue to support designated state institutions, including public schools, hospitals, teaching colleges, and universities.*

*There are 330,138 acres of SITLA trust lands in Grand County. SITLA is directed by Utah Administrative Code to maximize commercial gain from these properties through sale, lease, or exchange. These transactions occur through sales and leases of individual properties but also through large-scale land and mineral rights consolidations (CRMP Toolkit).*

SITLA owns and maintains multiple parcels of land within Grand County and manages resource mineral partnerships and leases and long-range development projects. Resource extraction includes oil, gas, potash, helium, and various other minerals. SITLA collaborates with the Moab USU Extension campus project on a 40-acre parcel of land.



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Further improvements will focus on student housing and academic buildings. SITLA's prime directive is to seek the highest and best use of land to benefit state institutions including schools.

### **USFS**

The Manti-La Sal National Forest manages part of the La Sal Mountain range in Grand County. USFS is updating their Land Management plan, is in the analysis phase of wilderness evaluation, and guides the future management decisions for optimal forest health, recreation opportunities, and wilderness protection.

*The only national forest in the region is the Manti-La Sal National Forest (MLS).*

*The US Forest Service (USFS) manages land use decisions by developing forest plans under the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-588). Forest plans provide strategic direction for management of all resources on a National Forest for ten to fifteen years. Forest plans require consideration of alternatives and public input under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Forest plans describe the desired conditions and provide guidance for projects. They do not make site-specific decisions or require any specific actions, but all projects conducted on a National Forest must be consistent with the strategic direction in its forest plan.*

### **Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands**

The Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FFSL) has jurisdiction over the bed and banks of Navigable portions of the Colorado and Green Rivers within Grand County. The bed and banks of these waterways are known as Sovereign Lands; commonly known as submerged lands in other States.

Sovereign Lands are public lands; managed using multiple-use sustained-yield principles. When determining proposals to use sovereign lands, FFSL considers impacts to the public trust values of navigability, recreation, aquatic beauty, water quality, and wildlife habitat, against the need for any proposed use.

### **Other Federal Lands**

*A few miles south of Green River in Grand County lies within the 2,535-acre White Sands Launch Complex, also known as Utah Launch Complex and Green River Launch Complex. This area is owned by the federal government Department of Defense (CRMP Toolkit).*

### **Tribal Lands**

*Tribal lands are sovereign lands not subject to local or state governments. However, tribal governments must be consulted during planning processes involving lands with historical Native American uses.*

*The Ute Indian Tribe owns land in Grand County as part of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation.*

### **Custom + Culture**

*Before the first white settlers arrived in Grand County in the 1800's, native peoples used the land for hunting, gathering, and agriculture. The original white settlers farmed and ranched, bringing livestock to the valley for grazing.*

### **Goals**

1. Encourage the expeditious processing of permits for the economic use of public lands that benefit the local economy and are consistent with the policies of this plan, especially permits for the film industry, mineral extraction and recreation.



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2. Public lands agencies are encouraged to adopt policies that enhance or restore watersheds for Moab, Spanish Valley, Castle Valley and Thompson Springs. The county supports classification of these aquifers to the highest quality standard. Grand County will follow all state and federal water protection laws and actively engage local, regional, and federal land management agencies in discussing risks to aquifers and aquifer recharge areas in Grand County.
3. Support BLM-SITLA exchanges that are advantageous to Grand County residents for reasons such as: (a) protection of community watersheds; (b) protection of lands that are important to county residents for recreational or other economic values; (c) protection of lands from developments that might otherwise lead to a net increase in county costs for infrastructure and public services; (d) consolidation of land-ownership patterns to reduce fragmentation; or (e) identification of lands which may be suitable for use as low to moderate income housing.
4. Encourage federal and state land-management agencies to develop, maintain and implement travel management plans that include designated roads, official trails and approved motor-vehicle open areas. The plans should address types and seasons of permitted uses, maintenance levels, public education strategies and enforcement.
5. Travel management regulations and policies will continue to be publicly available on a countywide roads map maintained jointly by the county and federal/state land-management agencies. This comprehensive roads map will show the current travel-management designations of Class B county roads (maintained) and Class D county roads (not maintained) alongside public land-management agency travel-management road designations.
6. Encourage public land-management agencies to continue to work to resolve conflicts between user groups. In doing so, the guiding principle is that residents and visitors have a right to enjoy use of the public lands, but they need to do so while minimizing impacts on the land and on each other's' public lands experiences.
7. Encourages public land-management agencies to restore damaged areas.
8. Grand County contains many areas with special and unique character. The county supports the special areas identified in the 2008 BLM Resource Management Plan and will participate in considering the designation of and planning for future special areas.
9. Grand County's wilderness plan was adopted in 1995, several years before the most current wilderness suitability/eligibility inventories were completed by Federal agencies. Updates to the County Wilderness Plan may be advisable prior to consideration of Federal public lands legislation.
10. Work in cooperation with public land-management agencies to permit and promote special uses, events and activities that support the local economy. Special uses, events and activities should mitigate adverse impacts.
11. Promote cooperation with federal and state agencies to identify and implement appropriate management of high-use and special-value areas, including areas such as: Sand Flats, Mill Creek, Potato Salad Hill, the Highway 128 corridor, the Kane Creek corridor, and Moab Rim Trail.
12. Promote cooperation with federal and state agencies and neighboring counties to implement special control measures on public lands where illegal dumping and littering are occurring.
13. Support creation and maintenance of a public shooting range at an appropriate location in order to encourage firearm safety and minimize safety risks to the public and the environment.
14. Support the BLM and other organizations in conducting a study detailing the economic benefits of recreation on public lands in Grand County.
15. Consult with public land-management agencies to ensure dark skies are not compromised on public lands.
16. Encourage public lands agencies to implement measures to ensure natural quiet is not degraded.



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17. The county will continue to be an active participant in planning for the future use of the UMTRA site.
18. Continue to work with the State of Utah Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands to implement the Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan and to reduce wildfire threat in the wildland-urban interface.
19. Encourage federal land agencies to continue to coordinate with the County on proposed campground development and expansion, specifically for areas within close proximity to Moab.

### Goal:

Promote the health and wellbeing of residents by providing a broad range of parks and recreational facilities and services for all ages, and consider implementation through a Parks and Recreation Master Plan in cooperation with all public land agencies and adjacent jurisdictions.

### Policies:

- i. Encourage that all parties formulate compatible vision statements that prioritize public land preservation while *maintaining natural resources, recreation, and beauty*;
- ii. Collaborate with all partners on mutual access, trails and other transportation systems;
- iii. Public lands decisions affect the local economy, quality of life for residents, and water quality and quantity and should part of any economic development master plan;
- iv. Collaborate with other levels of government to acquire, develop, and improve existing parks, trails and recreation facilities;
- v. Support multi-use parks and recreation facilities that facilitate a wide variety of passive and active activities;
- vi. Assess the viability of converting existing long-term public space easements into dedicated parks and managed open spaces, especially in developing areas of the county such as southern Spanish Valley;
- vii. Within the master plan identify open space requirements and cash-in-lieu options, based on an equitable market analysis aligned with parks and recreation projects;
- viii. Maintain the safety of our parks through posted signage and enforcement to discourage transient visitor use and decrease trash and pests;
- ix. Endeavor to retain, conserve and upgrade Old City Park as a unique and attractive park with some limited provision for active recreation facilities;
- x. Encourage cooperation between the County, jurisdictional partners, school boards and community agencies to meet the recreational needs of the community and maximize the use of parks and recreation facilities;
- xi. The cost sharing of facilities and park development between the County, the City of Moab, and school boards will be continued wherever feasible and advantageous to all parties and the community;
- xii. Encourage community participation in active living programs through training and support of volunteers in all aspects of the County's facilities, programs and services;
- xiii. The Community Services Department will continue to evaluate parks and recreation facilities in order to identify deficiencies in the existing system and to meet these deficiencies;
- xiv. Review parks and recreation needs through household surveys, public meetings and other



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public input sources;

- xv. Cooperate with community-based organizations to promote periodic trails and parks maintenance that will promote community identity and involvement. For example, the County could support volunteer groups for periodic trails and parks maintenance. A well-maintained trail and park will encourage use and promote community pride;
- xvi. Develop a trails master plan highlighting easy wins, public to private connections considering CPTED principles, right-of-way acquisition strategies, and economic links;
- xvii. Examine cross generational recreational activities and place facilities in regional park locations;
- xviii. Evaluate current recreation facilities and update the asset management plan to consider long-term operation and maintenance costs, prioritization and capital expenditures;
- xix. Develop a capital plan including a list of projects, timetable and cost analysis;
- xx. Consider a regional parks plan that initiates mutual action plans, funding options, trail network connections, and events and river use collaboration;
- xxi. Consider the formation of a Parks and Recreation Board/Commission to implement planning policies, with membership including rural municipalities, school boards and community agencies;
- xxii. Consider sponsorship policies for a range of advertising ventures, including naming rights;
- xxiii. Further evaluate revenue streams from development impact fees, subdivisions and other land use actions and develop a strategic approach to funding allocations and prioritization;
- xxiv. Encourage federal land agencies to continue to coordinate with the County on proposed campground development and expansion, specifically for areas within close proximity to Moab;
- xxv. Classify facilities that consider local, regional, and state designations with criteria for active elements such as skateboarding, batting cage, pump tracks, mountain biking, BMX, motocross, rafting, slacklining and road biking; and
- xxvi. Foster the wellbeing of the community through continued development of the Old Spanish Trail Arena.

### **Goal:**

Ensure facilities are evaluated through operation and maintenance studies, and capital plans considering cross-generational activities; programs that leverage business partnerships including tourism; and lifelong learning and educational opportunities.

### **Policies:**

- i. Encourage community participation in active living programs and link trails to recreational sites;
- ii. Balance facility location with land use, transportation, environment and economic development;



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- iii. Consider recreational needs through social needs and policies; and
- iv. Promote "green" building and maintenance strategies including considering a LEED gold or equivalent certification for the building and site development.

### 3. OPEN SPACES

Open space for recreational activities makes a community more attractive and desirable as a place to live physically and socially. Although the County is integrated with and surrounded by public lands, open space in communities creates "living rooms" for residents.

Open space includes public and municipal lands dedicated as permanent open space such as natural or semi-natural areas, County wide and neighborhood parks (e.g. Old City Park), pathways and school sites. As a whole, the open space system is one of the primary elements, along with the road network, which give shape to the County and enhances the landscaping and beautification.

Planning for the open space system takes many factors into consideration:

1. Local and County Wide outdoor recreational and educational needs;
2. Protection of environmentally significant areas;
3. Representation of diversity of natural and manmade features;
4. Provisions of linkages to create a continuous park and parkway/open space system; and
5. Availability of public financial resources.

Provisions will continue to be made in every residential subdivision for open space in the form of parks, playgrounds and neighborhood recreational facilities. This will be implemented through the Land Use Code in conformity with the provisions of *Utah State Code*.

#### **Goal:**

Ensure recreational facilities, trails, parks and open spaces are interconnected, safe and accessible to all members of the community (reference Schedules 16.10 – 16.19 Trails).

#### **Policies:**

- i. Ensure recreational facilities are evenly distributed throughout the County and interconnected;
- ii. Conserve and preserve natural and environmentally sensitive areas, permitting managed public access (e.g., river boat launch and trail network, but preserving riparian areas);
- iii. Locate future major recreation facilities at key intersections or near a neighborhood entrance;
- iv. Ensure design of new parks reflect safety and security of park users;
- v. Consider linear park corridors that incorporate trails, mixed use development and potential relief channel for river flooding (e.g., along rail corridor);
- vi. Give priority to existing communities where recreational needs are highest when providing recreational facilities;
- vii. Ensure trails, riverbank, and park areas are upgraded and maintained in accordance with the



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recommendations provided through a *Parks and Recreation Master Plan*;

- viii. Community gardens should be identified throughout the County and incorporated into neighborhoods;
- ix. Continue to ensure the provision of parks, playgrounds and neighborhood recreational facilities or payment in lieu for providing passive and active recreation space - implemented through the Land Use Code;
- x. Wherever possible encourage the use of green space as buffers between industrial, commercial, institutional and residential use;
- xi. Provide opportunities for the public to enjoy the amenities of the historic waterfront by encouraging linkages to the riverbank and its trail system from all areas of the County in accordance with *the Parks and Recreation Master Plan*;
- xii. Encourage neighborhood pocket parks that serve the needs of residents not within convenient walking distance of a central neighborhoods park (Old City Park); and
- xiii. Identify new and existing areas suitable for linear parks.

### **Goal:**

Protect and enhance the Colorado and watershed riparian areas for the enjoyment of present and future generations while considering the need for the County to expand and keep the river as the main focus.

### **Policies:**

- i. Any development should enhance and complement the natural and historic features of the area;
- ii. Ensure the riparian ecosystems of the Colorado River and its tributaries are protected from any incompatible development;
- iii. The planning and management of all Parks will be oriented to protecting and enhancing the natural environment and rehabilitating already disturbed areas while permitting the development of compatible uses consistent with *The Parks and Recreation Master Plan*;
- iv. Integrate the Colorado River plan into a Parks and Recreation Master Plan and consider compatible land uses such as multi-use trails, orienteering and historical panels, and an eco-friendly village;
- v. Recognize the tremendous river asset and integrate with land use planning;
- vi. Develop policies regarding river events, access, celebrations and milestone recognition of natural and historic features;
- vii. Develop a site plan and asset plan for Old City Park and incorporate into the Capital Improvement Plan; and
- viii. Encourage and support a comprehensive and joint approach between the City of Moab and the County.