

Presentation for Grand County Commission related to the Moab Information Center (MIC)

June 21, 2022

Commissioners, thank you for providing the Canyonlands Natural History Association (CNHA) with the opportunity to address the Commission for the purpose of extending the current lease to operate the Moab Information Center.

The need for a central visitor information center became a point of discussion as early as 1989 as Moab's "business" shifted from Uranium to tourism as the primary driver in rebuilding its economy. It was clear to businesses and the agencies that without such a facility that gave out consistent and accurate information, safety awareness, and stewardship messaging, that the visitor's ability to plan and experience a safe and enjoyable visit to this area would be very difficult.

Prior to the establishment of the MIC, visitors got their information primarily by asking in stores and restaurants, often from seasonal employees who had limited knowledge of the area and there was no training or quality control for what was being recommended. The only agency visitor center, close to Moab, was at Arches. In addition, visitors were calling or writing for information to Grand County, Moab Chamber of Commerce, Travel Council, Moab City, Utah Parks and the three federal agencies.

To try to get a handle on this, representatives from Grand county including the Travel Council, CNHA, and the three federal agencies began meeting. There was consensus that a downtown, centrally located "community visitor information center" was needed. Moab citizen, Ralph Miller (Claudia's dad), owned the property at Main and Center and learning of the need for a visitor center, agreed to a very reasonable price and held the property until the county could get a low interest CIB loan and the agencies could get an "earmark" federal appropriation through Utah Senator Garn, to help build and equip the facility. It was truly a model project of cooperation to address a clear growing community problem.

The MIC was dedicated on June 15, 1993. On hand to represent the partners were Charlie Peterson (Grand County Council), Bob Jones (Grand County Travel Council), Jerry Shaw (USFS District Ranger), Roger Zortman (BLM District Manager) and Walt Dabney (NPS SEUG Superintendent). It was agreed by all that the agencies through CNHA would lease the MIC from the county. When established it was envisioned that the lease payments would be used by the county to maintain the facility. The costs of operating the facility would be borne by the agencies through CNHA with the sale of books and other materials at the site and contributions from the county.

Now after almost 30 years the MIC has become a central focus for visitors to this area. While technology has changed and improved the way many get information it is also not as responsive or often as current as the information provided in person by professionals at the MIC. People new to an area often like to talk to a real person who "has actually been there". And it gives the opportunity to talk to visitors about safe travel in this desert environment and how to use it responsibly. Grand County SAR is very supportive of the contribution the MIC makes to "preventative SAR".

CNHA represents the agencies, as well as Grand County, Moab City, Moab businesses, the Travel Council, Chamber of Commerce, and indeed the citizens of Grand County with its home town "Welcome

Center". It provides and pays for a service that is invaluable to thousands of people a year who come in to talk to MIC staff, watch the orientation movie or listen to an educational lecture, obtain OHV permits and use the public bathrooms. This year NPS rangers have been added at the site to facilitate the Arches "timed entry" reservation program.

The MIC is not a "money maker" for CNHA. The cost to operate and staff the facility is approximately \$370,000 annually including rent paid to Grand County of \$27,600. CNHA net revenue, through sales at the MIC, is approximately \$235,000. The Travel Council (Grand County) contributes \$45,000 per year, and the City of Moab contributes \$10,000 per year. To provide this service for the visiting public to Grand County, CNHA pays approximately \$315,000 per year from its revenues, and contributions from the federal agencies.

These are visitors to parks, public lands, forests and state parks and most importantly, financially, to Grand County. Because for whatever attraction brought them here from all over the world, the economy of this county is what benefits the most. The Moab Information Center has been a major player in the life and business of this county. CNHA feels this role is critical and is willing to continue to operate the MIC and underwrite these cost. We request that the Grand County Commission approve another five-year extension of this lease.

Thanks and we are here to answer any questions you might have.

Walt Dabney, CNHA Board Member
Claudia Page, CNHA Board Member
John Weisheit, CNHA Board Member
Roxanne Bierman, CNHA Executive Director
Sharon Kienzle, MIC Manager