

**Utah Division of State Parks
Department of Natural Resources**

Strategic Plan FY 2027

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**State
Parks**



UTAH

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Lieutenant Governor
Deidre M. Henderson

Department of
Natural Resources

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State Parks Team and Guests,

Every great achievement begins with a clear vision and a shared commitment to move forward together. With that inspiration in mind, the Utah Division of State Parks is proud to present our 2027 Strategic Plan. While we continue to evolve, our core passion remains unchanged: a deep love for outdoor recreation and an unwavering commitment to the stewardship of Utah's most treasured spaces.

In recent years, Utah State Parks has experienced sustained, historic growth, welcoming an unprecedented number of visitors. We remain fiercely committed to our self-sustaining model, utilizing user fees to fund and maintain first-class facilities without relying on taxpayer dollars.

Our parks and programs have never been more dynamic. We continue to diversify our offerings to match the desires of the modern adventurer by expanding full-service campsites, providing premium glamping options, boosting outdoor recreation, growing and maintaining our world-class facilities, and safeguarding our vital historical, archaeological, and paleontological antiquities. We strive to create deeply impactful experiences that endure in the memories of our staff and visitors alike.

Our Strategic Plan follows our philosophy of adaptive management. Rather than a rigid mandate, this document outlines our broad institutional values and high-level strategic goals. We purposefully omit rigid metrics to empower our team, allowing park leadership to tailor and implement real-time strategies that address the unique ecological, financial, and recreational needs of their specific locations.

This plan serves as our compass for the future, a blueprint designed to balance growth with responsible stewardship; ensuring that Utah's state parks remain safe, spectacular, and self-sufficient for generations to come. We are committed to fostering an environment where our team is heard, empowered to solve issues, and appreciated for their passion, teamwork, and dedication to offering exceptional hospitality.

Sincerely,

Scott Strong
Director, Utah Division of State Parks

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Mandate

In 1957, the Utah Legislature established the State Parks and Recreation Commission, anchoring a promise to protect and celebrate the state's iconic landscapes. For more than half a century, this system operated under a traditional, taxpayer-subsidized model.

However, the economic realities of 2010 forced an existential shift. Facing severe budget cuts and legislative directives, the Division was challenged to reinvent its operational model. Rather than retreat, Utah State Parks innovated, transitioning from a heavily subsidized agency into a largely self-sufficient enterprise—proving that our parks could be both profoundly valuable and fiscally responsible.

By 2021, a global surge in outdoor recreation required a more specialized approach to land and asset management. To meet this demand, the Legislature and the Governor strategically divided the agency into two distinct entities:

- The Division of Outdoor Recreation: Established to administer the state's Trails, Boating, and OHV programs, and to drive community investment through recreational grants.
- The Division of State Parks: Refocused entirely on the stewardship, operations, and management of Utah's state park system.



Through decades of organizational evolution, our foundational mandate has remained constant. Enshrined in Utah statute, the Division is charged with delivering:

“A long range, comprehensive plan and program for the acquisition, planning, protection, operation, maintenance, development, and wise use of areas of scenic beauty, recreational utility, historic, archaeological or scientific interest, to the end that the health, happiness, recreational opportunities and wholesome enjoyment of life of the people may be further encouraged.”

This Strategic Plan is the modern manifestation of that 1957 promise. It honors our history of financial resilience, reflects our streamlined focus, and outlines our roadmap to ensure Utah’s state parks continue to enrich the lives of our residents and visitors for generations to come.



Living Document Explanation

Nearly 70 years after the Utah Legislature's original vision, the Division is managing 46 state parks, three state monuments, and all of their supporting programs. This strategic plan meets the spirit and intent of the legislative mandate and the management needs of the Division. It sets expectations and provides guidance for all Utah State Parks team members. Trends and expectations change over time, and flexibility will be needed as the Division of State Parks moves into the future. This document will be adjusted and amended as time and circumstances demand.

Application

Each staff member should carefully review this document and make note of how their duties specifically support the mission, values, and goals outlined here. All parks, programs, and individual goals should have alignment with one or more of the strategic principles outlined in this document.

Whether you are a park manager, a park ranger, a curator, an office specialist, a seasonal team member, maintenance staff, or an administrator, you should see what you do each day reflected in these objectives.

Mission Statement

**To enhance the quality
of life by preserving
and providing natural,
cultural, and recreational
resources for the
enjoyment, education, and
inspiration of this and
future generations.**

Values Alignment

As a division of the Department of Natural Resources, we are committed to keeping our strategic plan in alignment with the greater departmental values:

- Own It/Solve It: I solve problems and seek solutions that get us closer to achieving our mission goals.
- Be Accountable: I am responsible for my behaviors, actions and results.
- I See You: I include others and address bias in order to create fairness and greater delivery.
- Speak Up: I share my perspective and ideas without fear and seek feedback from others.
- Improve Always: I respectfully question the status quo when I believe there is a better way. I strive to better myself and my team.

Additionally, we are careful and deliberate in our drive to uphold the 4 Core Pillars of the Utah Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and its objectives:

- Community Health: Identify and prioritize opportunities for communities to improve physical and mental health through outdoor recreation.
- Access: Ensure the benefits of outdoor recreation are accessible to all communities regardless of location or ability.
- Land, Air, & Water: Ensure responsible growth, stewardship, and participation in outdoor recreation through a conservation-minded approach.
- Community Connection: Encourage efforts that enhance the connectivity of existing or planned recreation assets and increase capacity for community-wide social development and education.



Fiscal Year 2027 Strategic Objectives

- 1. Provide unreasonable hospitality (based on the book “Unreasonable Hospitality” by Will Guidara).**
- 2. Build a culture of openness, support, and intentional growth.**
- 3. Promote and maintain State Parks.**
- 4. Be thoughtful stewards of Utah’s natural resources and heritage.**
- 5. Strengthen and build Relationships.**



Provide Unreasonable Hospitality

Key points to consider:

- **Elevating Guest Satisfaction:** As a division, we exist to provide for our guests and citizens. Happy visitors become our strongest advocates. Delivering memorable park and museum experiences drives repeat visits, encourages cross-location exploration, and fuels organic word-of-mouth growth.
- **Service vs. Hospitality:** “Service is black and white; hospitality is color... Service is technical, delivery-focused; hospitality is how the customer feels during that delivery.” Guidara, W. (2022) Takeaway: Excellence in service is baseline; hospitality is the competitive advantage.
- **“One-Size-Fits-One”:** Most businesses aim for a “one-size-fits-all” approach to ensure consistency. True hospitality requires being present and listening for the small details that allow you to treat a customer as an individual.
- **Managing the “Swan”:** Above the water, it is graceful and calm; below the water, its feet are paddling furiously. In a business, the customer should only see the “grace.”
- **The 95/5 Rule:** Manage 95% of your business with extreme discipline (down to the penny), but you should spend the remaining 5% on making magic happen. The 95% provides the efficiency and profitability that allows the business to survive. The 5% provides the “unreasonable” gestures that create lifelong loyalty.

Strategic Targets

- **Hospitality Mindset Culture:**
 - Train 100% of field and office staff on Verbal Judo by Q1 2027.
 - Train all managers on Unreasonable Hospitality principles by Q1 2027.
 - Increase staff training in First Aid, CPR, Defensive Tactics, Maintenance, Search & Rescue, etc. to create a safer and more enjoyable park visit experience.

- **Visitor Magic:**

- Launch a division-wide grant allowing for specific guest-related enhancements that drive unreasonable hospitality gestures.
- Additionally, reserve a park-wide fund for grants allowing staff to make real-time, unexpected gestures for park guests to make each visit special.

- **Elevated Programming:**

- 2026 Central Utah Astronomy Festival.
- Roll out the revised Life Jacket Loaner Program across high-visitation water parks.
- Improved Bison Roundup at Antelope Island.
- Increased cultural and historical programs over previous years.

- **Enhanced Visitor Experiences:**

- Debut renovated visitor experiences at Fremont Indian State Park Museum, Anasazi State Park, and the new Antelope Island Visitor Center and Theater.

- **New Parks and Park Expansions:**

- Golden Hills (East Canyon State Park) expansion.
- Development of Mantua Reservoir as a new state park.
- Development of Westwater Canyon as a new state park.
- Development of Chief Toquer Reservoir as a new state park.
- Feasibility studies of Gooseberry Narrows and East Carbon Coke Ovens for consideration as future new parks.

- **Privacy Compliance:**

- Achieve 100% compliance on privacy records benchmarks by year-end to protect and build trust with our guests and partners.



Build a culture of openness, support, and intentional growth

Key points to consider:

- **Create an Internal Culture of Hospitality:** You cannot expect your staff to give “unreasonable hospitality” to customers if they aren’t receiving it from leadership and peers.
- **The Charitable Assumption:** When someone makes a mistake, assume that they had good intentions or are going through something difficult. Instead of, “Why are you late?”, consider asking, “You’re late—is everything okay?”
- **Praise in Public, Criticize in Private:** Constructive feedback should be a gift, given without emotion and aimed at the behavior, not the person.
- **Support the Goals and Innovation of Teammates:** Give them the space to innovate and support their individual goals and intentional growth opportunities whenever possible.

Strategic Targets

- **Peer Support Network:** Expand the Peer Support and NEAT (New Employee Alignment & Training) programs to ensure adequate coverage across all regions.
- **Leadership Training:** Continued staff development programs like CAMP, SOUL, Lead in 30, Crucial Conversations, and new park manager training.
- **Recognition & Morale:** Enhance ABC (Above & Beyond the Call) Awards, staff appreciation events, recognition call outs, etc. to highlight staff living the agency’s hospitality values.
- **Operational Health:** Establish streamlined project tracking tools and strategic processes to improve job efficiency and reduce unnecessary stress on our staff.
- **Staff Development:**
 - Increase training, certification, and career growth programs.
 - Launch the inaugural Southwest Region Training Session.

Promote and Maintain State Parks

Key points to consider:

- We will solidify the Utah State Park brand as a unique and premier hallmark of our state's identity.
- We will ensure the public recognizes the specific value, quality, and character found only within our system.
- We are committed to operational excellence by maintaining our current assets to the highest standards, continuously improving where we can, and strategically expanding the scale and quality of our parks and programs.
- Consistently review critical park maintenance and facility needs and prioritize them appropriately. Share the prioritized lists with agency partners, like DFCM, and pursue additional funding opportunities such as grants, matching funds, or restricted funds to help meet additional needs.

Strategic Targets

- **Asset Integrity:** Implement a standardized, routine park inspection and quality assurance system.
- **Grant Capture:** Mandate that 100% of qualifying parks submit at least one grant application to maximize capital investment.



- **Facility Enhancements:** Complete targeted infrastructure upgrades, including the Palisade Clubhouse Kitchen renovation.
- **VIP and Influencer Experiences:** Invite local stakeholders, government officials, influencers, and members of the media to experience our parks, programs, and events.
- **Media Development:** Continually enhance our media library showcasing recreational opportunities, enhancement projects, dynamic programming, cultural/educational events, and the natural beauty of our parks and museums.
- **Quality Experiences:** Ongoing funding to support facilities, including restricted funding for maintenance.
- **Public Engagement:** Host groundbreaking events and ribbon cutting/ grand opening celebrations to spread awareness of the improvements and enhancements happening at our parks.
- **System Expansion:**
 - Transition Lost Creek into a fully operational standalone state park.
 - Officially dedicate the Golden Hills (East Canyon State Park) and Palisade State Park boundaries.
 - Development of Mantua Reservoir as a new state park.



Be Thoughtful Stewards of Utah's Natural Resources and Heritage.

Key points to consider:

- Guided by integrity in resource management and heritage education, we are dedicated to safeguarding the diverse treasures that define Utah.
- We will cultivate a culture of deep-rooted stewardship where every team member is an empowered advocate for responsible recreation.
- By integrating modern management techniques with ethical oversight, we ensure our parks and monuments remain authentic and resilient.

Strategic Targets

- **Cultural Compliance:** Enforce mandatory Section 404 archaeological compliance processes for all state park development projects.
- **Wildlife Connectivity:** Partner with the Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to complete the Echo State Park Wildlife Crossing plan.
- **Immersive Interpretation:**
 - Finalize the museum overhaul and interactive interpretive exhibits at Fremont Indian State Park.
 - Implementation of dark sky programming across all eligible parks.
 - Increased cultural and historical programs compared to previous years (e.g. Utah Symphony at Territorial Statehouse, Pioneer Day celebrations, and Camp Floyd reenactments).
 - Complete new displays, movie, and cultural programming at Antelope Island.

Strengthen and Build Relationships

Key points to consider:

- Our ability to innovate and expand depends on the strength of our relationships. Continue to work closely with the Governor's Office, other state agencies (i.e. DFCM, Division of Purchasing, State Finance, etc.), and the DNR leadership team.
- We are committed to proactive engagement with legislative, community, and private partners to foster a shared understanding of our mission.
- Maintain close relationships with federal land, water, and natural resource management agencies, counties, and municipalities to participate in shared stewardship opportunities.

Strategic Targets

- **Local Civic Presence:** Guarantee Utah State Parks leadership representation at key county commission, city council, and other public meetings statewide.
- **Modern Visitor Access:** Complete the Parkspass contract rollout and establish transparent project tracking metrics.
- **Concession Strategy:** Identify and launch at least three new high-value concession opportunities across the system.
- **Regional Stewardship Agreements:** Formalize local support agreements for Westwater Canyon.
- **Federal Partnerships:** Work with federal partners, such as the DOA and DOI, to identify shared stewardship opportunities, and pursue management agreements where appropriate.
- **Privacy Compliance:** Achieve 100% compliance on privacy records benchmarks by year-end to protect and build trust with our guests and partners.

