

**San Juan County
Tourism Tax Advisory Board Meeting
Monday, August 25th, 2025
Blanding City Office**

TTAB Board Members:

Name	Role	Position	Term Expires	PM Training Completed
Derryl Jack	Chair	At Large	1/31/2027	Y
Dallin Tait	Vice Chair	Bluff Dwellings, Lodging	1/31/2027	
Jennifer Davila	Board Member	La Posada Pintada, Lodging	1/31/2028	
Brian Ballard	Board Member	Wolf Springs Resort, Lodging	1/31/2026	
Bill Haven	Board Member	Abajo Haven	1/31/2028	
Harold Simpson	Board Member	Simpsons Trail Handler, Outfitter	1/31/2028	
Kaeden Kulow	Board Member	Appointment by Monticello City	By Appointment	Y
Ben Muhlestein	Board Member	Appointment by Blanding City	By Appointment	Y
Linda Sosa	Board Member	Appointment by Bluff Town	By Appointment	Y
Silvia Stubbs	Board Member	San Juan County Commission	1/31/2026	Y

Attendance:

Members Present: Bill Haven, Derryl Jack, Harold Simpson, Jennifer Davilla, Linda Sosa, Ben Muhlestein, Kaeden Kulow, Dallin Tait, Silvia Stubbs

Members Absent: Brian Ballard

Staff Present: Allison Yamamoto Sparks

Staff Absent: None

Guests: None

Presentations

Allison provided updates on various tourism initiatives:

- **TRT Collections:** If Golding's Lodge's contributions from last year are excluded (as they stopped remitting in June when Navajo Nation purchased them), TRT collections are actually up year-over-year. International visitation is seeing fewer visitors, but overall domestic spending is up 5%. International spending is down 2%, primarily in retail and other categories (guided activities, gas, convenience stores, museums), with Canada and Germany showing significant declines.
- **Social Media Report:**
 - **Facebook:** 76% of the annual goal for reach and 66% for new followers have been met. San Juan County has surpassed Bryce Canyon Country in followers, with Moab as the next target.
 - **Instagram:** The goal of 5,000 new followers for the year has been exceeded by 115%. Instagram continues to grow, attracting a younger demographic than Facebook.
- **Digital Report:**
 - **Newsletters:** Visitor newsletters are sent every other month, and an industry newsletter is sent quarterly to travel trade partners. The most recent industry newsletter in August featured Bluff's dark sky designation, Natural Bridges National Monument, the Dinosaur Museum, and Patio Diner.
- **Print Advertising:** Continued advertising in "Moab Happenings" from May through October, including free articles to promote San Juan County. Ads are continuously monitored and A/B tested for effectiveness.
- **International Opt-ins:** Participation in international marketing options through the Utah Office of Tourism, focusing on high-spending markets like Canada, France, and Germany. The office received a co-op marketing grant covering half the cost of these initiatives (approximately \$27,000).
- **TV and Streaming:** KUTV visited again in May, featuring businesses like Ancient Waves, Bluff River Trail, Wild Expedition, Sunrise Outfitting, San Juan Stampede Pro Rodeo, and Mountain Joe's Trail Rides. A longer Fresh Living segment focused on Bluff.
- **San Juan Stampede Pro Rodeo:** Allison assisted with marketing for the rodeo this year. International visitors from Germany, the UK, and France attended, many experiencing their first American rodeo. They learned about it through "Moab Happenings," local radio, and banners. Social media advertising targeted a 150-mile radius around Monticello.

- **FAM Tour Report:**

- Several familiarization (FAM) tours have already taken place, including groups from Belgium and France.
- Taylor Hartman, media manager for Visit Ogden and a freelance writer, published a six-page article in BBC Sky at Night focused on Bluff and Monument Valley after his FAM tour. The tour cost the office about \$300.
- The Visit USA Parks FAM tour allowed the office to control the itinerary, sending the group to various communities, including Monticello, Blanding, and La Sal. Two articles resulted from this FAM.
- A "Parks and Beyond" press group of travel writers was particularly interested in Utah's "dirty soda" scene, making Dirty Pop a popular stop for social media posts.

- **Upcoming FAMs:**

- Virgin Media's Ed Finn will be filming "Ed Finn in America" in San Juan County, focusing on indigenous culture, basket weaving, and a backroom tour at Edge of the Cedars.
- The current FAM coordinator for the Utah Office of Tourism will be visiting to familiarize himself with the county.
- Excitement for India and Germany reverse sales missions, where international travel trade partners will visit San Juan County. This initiative by the Utah Office of Tourism aims to introduce new products to partners who are familiar with more established destinations.

- **Shows and Events:**

- IPW in Chicago focused on Canadian, French, and German appointments. Lewis Williams participated in the Utah Office of Tourism's press conference and stayed at their booth.
- For the first time, the Southern Utah National Parks Group (including San Juan County) had a 50-foot booth at IPW, larger than the Utah Office of Tourism's. Moab will be heading up the booth design next year.

- **Other Updates:**

- The office was awarded \$182,250 in co-op marketing grant funding, the highest amount given to any tourism office. Harold is now on the Utah Office of Tourism Board, representing four counties, including San Juan.
- A collaboration with the Salt Lake Storm semi-professional box lacrosse team resulted in a special jersey designed by indigenous artist Gilmore Scott, honoring the roots of lacrosse. A suggestion was made to have the team present at local schools.
- Film trail markers are being worked on; two have been placed. The La Sal Junction marker was straightforward, but the Forest Gump Hill marker on Navajo Nation requires a more complicated process.

- Brochure requests have decreased over the years as more people use digital versions, but the office continues to mail out paper copies.
- A visitor awareness and sentiment survey presentation is scheduled for Wednesday at Bluff Dwellings Resort to share interesting information about visitor perceptions, particularly regarding restaurants and amenities.
- The Utah Tourism Conference is scheduled for September 30th to October 1st in Bryce Canyon. Alison will be on a panel about policy, planning, and partnership in public lands tourism. She will also be on a panel at the Eastern Utah Economic Summit in October, discussing tourism in rural counties.
- The office has hired a full-time visitor services position. Cortney Yazzie, currently with the Utah Navajo Trust Fund, will start in two weeks.

Discussion:

Attendees discussed current tourism trends:

- Jennifer Davila reported a 10-15% decrease in overall year-to-date international bookings in Bluff, noting that July and August usually see a surge in international visitors. She expressed interest in combined international and domestic spending graphs to understand how international bookings affect domestic traffic.
- Muhlstein observed similar trends for August, with a current dip in room occupancy despite being slightly up year-to-date in revenue due to increased prices. His tour company is down about 15% year-to-date.
- Bill Haven's French bookings were up this August compared to last year, with many repeat visitors. Guests mentioned feeling welcomed despite media portrayals that suggested otherwise. Bookings for next year are already strong.
- Concerns were raised about a lack of bookings from specific international tour operators like Authentic, ATI, and Rock Mountain.
- The conversation shifted to dark sky tourism, with San Juan County having the most designated dark sky areas in the country. Jen emphasized the potential for offseason travel with dark sky initiatives and the unique aspect of capturing Native American winter star stories.
- Allison is working to expand the Southeastern Utah Astrofest into San Juan County, with national monuments and Edge of the Cedars expressing interest.

The meeting concluded with Alison's final updates.

