

Business

Kane Creek’s future: ‘A research and innovation hub’

/ October 28, 2021

By Carter Pape



The vision the partners at Kane Creek Preservation and Development have for the area’s future is one of technical innovation and environmental restoration.



A mockup of what Kane Creek Preservation and Development partners are calling a “research and innovation center” planned for the river corridor. The plans are a sketch of what they said “a flexible, multipurpose space could look like that also integrates with the natural features.” Image via Trent Arnold

The company recently completed its acquisition of roughly 180 acres along Kane Creek Boulevard, and in discussing their plans for the area, they gave roughly equal attention to their development ideas and their preservation ideas.

“We’re really trying to do the right thing,” said Craig Weston, one of the company partners.

One of the first steps in the project, however, is displacing people from their homes. Weston and Trent Arnold, another company partner, said that eight tenants lived on the land when they first bought it. They said they are trying to help each of the eight, some of whom have families or live with others, find new, better living conditions.

Preserving the natural

Among the ideas at the front of Weston’s mind for Kane Creek: Eradication of invasive plant species taking over the riparian area, rehabilitation of native plants, restoration of the land and soil, economic diversification, workforce housing, a space for Colorado River researchers, and buildings that set a new standard in Moab for efficient water use.

Arnold said the land they now own along Kane Creek “has been highly utilized — some might say abused,” by previous owners, including farmers. He hopes to bring in a higher standard for managing the property.

Jonathan Hoffman, the groundskeeper for the company, is already on the case. During a tour of the area, he said he spends most of his day picking weeds, mitigating erosion, and working generally on reclamation and restoration projects.

Arnold said that anyone who frequents Kane Creek can expect one of the first new structures to pop up in the area to be a plant sanctuary, where he said the company will grow native plant species that will replace the invasive ones over time.

Building the innovative

Weston said he originally purchased a parcel along Kane Creek five years ago when Charlie Nelson, the previous owner, put the land up for sale. He established Kane Creek Campground and hired Hoffman as a host, but the operation shuttered when the pandemic struck.

A few years later, Weston exercised his option to acquire the rest of Nelson’s Kane Creek properties. That’s about the time he met Arnold and Tom Gottlieb, who are now his two partners on the project.

The three looked at the Kane Creek properties and realized that, if they built it out to the maximum residential density Grand County allowed in the area, they could establish more than 2,000 housing units on the 180 acres.

However, that didn’t resonate with Weston. He said 30-50 units was a better number, but mostly, he envisions a center for research and development.

Why try to build a small business park along the cliffs of Kane Creek in the first place? One reason is zoning. Years ago, Grand County dubbed most of the private land in that area to be in the highway commercial zone. That zoning affords property owner the right to build houses, apartments, offices, or nearly any other legal use.

The oversight components

Commercial land in Grand County, according to officials in the county planning department, is relatively scarce. John Guenther, the head of the county planning department, had recommended to the county commission the approval of a rezone earlier this year that would have established more commercial zoning along Highway 191. The commission voted unanimously against it, citing a need for more residential rather than commercial development.

This inclination of Grand’s elected officials to prefer more restrictive land use regulations is one reason Kane Creek Preservation and Development has already filed a preliminary plat with the county. This vests their right to realize their ambitious development goals; otherwise, the county could rezone the area or change its land use regulations to get its hands deeper into controlling what the company can build.

In part because the preliminary plat is just an early step in the legal process of development, the initial filing might not represent the exact plans on which the company settles. Many of the plans are still in flux, including the courting of companies that might like to set up shop along Kane Creek.

One key oversight function the county will serve, though, is regulating overnight rentals. The Kane Creek development is unlikely to include any, but if it does, they will require a green light from the Grand County Commission — that just last month rejected such an application.

What it all might mean

Among the companies Weston said were interested in setting up shop at the innovation hub were an electric car manufacturer and a manufacturer of electric off-highway vehicles. Though Weston did not say Rivian was the electric car manufacturer in question, he mentioned them during the conversation.

Rivian has recently done extensive off-road testing of prototype trucks in Moab. Last year, they tried and failed to initiate construction of a showroom just north of Moab, off Highway 191 near the intersection with Highway 313. One difficulty the project faced was finding a way to establish a sewer connection or septic system.

Arnold said the plans the company is drawing up include a dedicated wastewater treatment plant that would output water clean enough to drink — cleaner, he said, than the snowmelt from the La Sal Mountains.

Weston said the housing that would accompany the business hub would be among the most efficient in the county in terms of water use.

And as for the likelihood of the project getting done, Arnold said the company is “not in any rush on this,” that it is “well-capitalized,” and investing in a community they believe will accommodate the growth.

“We know some people think of Moab as anti-business,” Arnold said. “We don’t see it that way.”

Related Stories by The Times-Independent

Go To The Business Section



Kane Creek development pursues wastewater plant

Kane Creek Preservation and Development, LLC is seeking a permit to construct a wastewater treatment plant along the banks of...



Kane Creek project leaves some residents in lurch

For now, he’s hoping to stay at the Lazy Lizard, a local hostel where he spends Moab’s frigid winters...



Election, OHVs, festivals and more

The second half of our Year in Review for 2022, in the June 23 edition, begins with images and text...

Load More

Connect

The Times-Independent
35 East Center Street
Moab, UT 84532
435-259-7525

About Us

Subscribe
Privacy Policy
Contact Us

Popular Categories

News
Outdoors
Opinion
Sports
Obituaries

Follow Us

