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Kane, Interior meet over signs

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Officials of the Interior Department and Kane County met for six hours Wednesday in an effort to end the standoff over the county's placement of its road signs on federal land in and around the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

Nothing was resolved, but negotiators for both sides say an agreement could be within grasp. They will meet again on Dec. 15.

"I'm very encouraged," said Larry Jensen, the Interior Department's regional solicitor, following the meeting at the state Bureau of Land Management offices in downtown Salt Lake City. "The county has taken the initiative and put some proposals on the table that address both the near-term issues surrounding the signs and the overriding issues of who owns the roads."

Said Kane County Commissioner Mark Habbeshaw: "We presented what are some very viable solutions. They're going to require some flexibility on our part and the part of the BLM. But we are moving forward."

Neither Jensen nor Habbeshaw disclosed specifics. But Habbeshaw said the county was willing to remove "some signing" based on a "package" of issues that is currently being negotiated. The Kane County commissioner added that the lawsuit filed by the county against Interior last month over the monument's transportation and water plans was not part of Wednesday's discussions, but could be withdrawn as well as part of a larger deal.

- Joe Baird