

[DRAFT] UTAH WATERSHEDS COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

October 14, 2025

1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Department of Natural Resources Auditorium
1594 W. North Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84116



Meeting Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LTil4ynX1I>

Council Members present:

Scott Paxman, Chair, Reclamation Projects

Sterling Brown, Vice Chair, Utah Lake Watershed Council

Cody Allred, West Colorado River Watershed Council

Laura Briefer, Jordan River Watershed Council

Nathan Daugs, Bear River Watershed Council

Tim Davis, Utah Department of Environmental Quality

Kris Hamlet, Utah Division of Emergency Management

Candice Hasenyager, Utah Division of Water Resources (non-voting member)

Victor Iverson, Utah Association of Counties

Dustin Jansen, Utah Division of Indian Affairs

Robert Moore, Utah Association of Special Districts

Brett Palmer, West Desert Watershed Council

Kelly Pehrson, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

Warren Peterson, Water Attorney

ValJay Rigby, Agricultural Interests

Marcelle Shoop, Environmental Conservation Interests

Rick Smith, Weber River Watershed Council

Teresa Wilhelmsen, Utah Division of Water Rights/State Engineer (non-voting member)

Bill Winfield, Southeastern Utah Watershed Council

Dex Winterton, Uintah Watershed Council

Council Members not present:

Joel Ferry, Utah Department of Natural Resources

Rikki Hrenko-Browning, Industrial Interests

Andy Nickle, Sevier River Watershed Council

Mike Noel, Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council

Tammy Pearson, Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council

Ken White, USU Extension Vice President

Others present:

Carly Payne, Watershed Councils Coordinator

Matthew McEttrick
Todd Stonely

**Eric McCulley
Nathan Lunstad
Rachel Shilton
Joel Williams
Ati Vainuku
Soren Simonsen
Heidi Hoven
Sarah Schechter
Mindy Mees
Alisa Meyer
Brandon Yardley**

**Duane Houston
Mark Stratford
Lauren Griffeth
Lucy Parham
Mark Scadden
Scott Taylor
Trevor Nielson
Jeff Seedall
Jessie Danning
Jennifer McBride**

Meeting Minutes

1:05 - 1:13 p.m. - Welcome and roll call (Chair Scott Paxman)

Chair Scott Paxman led introductions of attending Utah Watersheds Council (UWC) and audience members.

1:13 - 1:25 p.m. - Uintah Watershed Council Report (Dex Winterton, Uintah Watershed Council)

Dex Winterton, Uintah Watershed Council Chair, provided an overview of the council's activities. Water from the Uintah Basin is exported to the Wasatch Front, so water users in the Uintah Watershed feel the weight of water-related decisions in the area. Concerns include effects of the ongoing drought, perceived lack of management in national forests, need for increased education to improve the reputation of agriculture and alfalfa among Utahns, and development of new technologies and policies to help the oil industry make better use of water.

Winterton shared that after initial doubts, he recently came to see the council as a great platform to share needs and find solutions to ongoing water issues. He extended an invitation to anyone interested in water or water policy, especially legislators who intend to propose or vote on legislation, to engage with the watershed councils and learn how policies will affect people from various areas and backgrounds.

Warren Peterson asked how Winterton would like the Uintah Watershed Council to tie into the Governor's new initiative to encourage better forest management. Winterton responded that the council is not involved at this point but would be interested in becoming involved.

Additional group discussion regarding the Colorado River negotiations and water quality improvements within the energy sector occurred.

1:25 - 1:31 p.m. - West Desert Watershed Council Report (Brett Palmer, West Desert Watershed Council)

Brett Palmer reported on behalf of the West Desert Watershed Council. He noted the council's ongoing progress despite the challenge of managing such a geographically large and diverse area. The council hosted several guest presenters this past year and completed site visits to Grouse Creek to observe their ongoing restoration and Morton Salt Company to learn about their water use and production.

Group discussion was had regarding challenges the West Desert basin faces, including Pinyon-Juniper overgrowth, drought, large areas of federal land, and managing the vast and diverse interests of the basin.

1:31 - 2:00 p.m. - Jordan River Watershed Council Report (Laura Briefer, Jordan River Watershed Council)

Laura Briefer, Chair of the Jordan River Watershed Council, presented on behalf of the council. Heidi Hoven (Vice Chair) and Soren Simonsen (Jordan River Commission Director) were also present. Briefer began by explaining the overlap between the Jordan River Watershed Council and the Jordan River Commission, including the benefits that have come from that dynamic.

The council participated in the 2026 State Water Plan, Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan, Functional Flows Framework study, legislative updates and field trips. The commission also hosted several successful festivals, activities and volunteer events. They recently held a planning meeting to identify challenges and needs within their watershed and to develop strategies to increase future collaboration. Briefer also shared that integrating the Jordan River Watershed Council with the preexisting Jordan River Commission leveraged coordination and staffing which broadened stakeholder engagement.

Simonsen stated that the council would welcome a formalized seat for the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council (GSLAC) on their board since GSLAC serves informally as the Great Salt Lake Watershed Council. Peterson offered to discuss the topic with Tim Hawkes, current chair of GSLAC.

Peterson highlighted this council as an example of effective collaboration and requested they share their strategies with the other local watershed councils at a future UWC meeting.

Tim Davis shared that the Department of Environmental Quality is working with multiple agencies to develop new strategies and education related to harmful algal blooms. He offered to present that information to the UWC at a future date.

2:00 - 2:34 p.m. - Presentation on watershed management (Matt McEttrick, Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands)

Matt McEttrick, Southeast Area Manager for the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FFSL) provided an overview of post-fire restoration. FFSL works with private landowners, state agencies, the U.S. Forest Service and other partners to provide assistance to those wishing to use, improve or conserve their forested lands. McEttrick highlighted the Wildland Fire Program,

the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Program, the Sovereign Lands Program, and post-fire rehabilitation. Details on each program can be found in the attached slides.

McEttrick announced a new post fire rehab funding opportunity from FFSL beginning in 2026. The purpose of the funding will be to address severe ecological and hydrological impacts due to high-severity wildfires. The funding cycle will be ongoing. Municipalities, counties, and fire districts that participate in the State of Utah Cooperative Wildfire System may apply. FFSL can also apply for funds. If any entities that don't qualify for the funds would like to apply, FFSL could apply on their behalf; the entity could partner with the division and remain involved in the project.

McEttrick highlighted the upcoming collaborative Dear Creek Fire restoration work as an example of the processes that FFSL and partner organizations can implement to improve watersheds after wildfires. He stressed the importance of local partnerships to accomplish this work.

Peterson encouraged interested local watershed councils to reach out to local FFSL area managers for presentations on this subject.

2:34 - 2:36 p.m. - Review of annual report and presentation to the Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment (NRAE) Interim Committee

Candice Hasenyager and Paxman recently presented on behalf of the watershed councils to the NRAE Interim Committee. They shared the councils' recent activities and progress as well as information from the Watershed Council Annual Report. They asked the committee for additional state funding to be set aside for wildfire restoration and mitigation. Paxman reported that there was no firm response from the committee.

Council members discussed that although the watershed councils are still in their infancy, they have seen great progress in increasing coordination and communication in their areas regarding local water issues. Paxman added that it is the job of the UWC to help local councils keep momentum and remain involved and interested in what's happening around the state.

2:36 - 2:41 p.m. - Discussion regarding keeping local councils informed during the legislative session

The council discussed possible ways to keep the watershed councils informed during the 2026 legislative session. Briefer suggested having a state agency report on upcoming legislation during the January UWC meeting and to share out upcoming meeting agendas for the Legislative Water Development Commission and Utah Water Task Force. Paxman suggested the Division of Water Resources send out a short legislative briefing every few weeks during the session. Winterton suggested that a shared, live document could list new water bills as they are introduced - this could include compiling existing tracking lists from entities such as Division of Water Resources and the Department of Environmental Quality.

2:41 - 2:46 p.m. - Nominations and election for Chair and Vice Chair

Briefer moved to retain current council leadership with Scott Paxman serving as chair and Sterling Brown serving as Vice Chair. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2:46 - 2:47 p.m. - Approval of the July 10, 2025 meeting minutes

Smith moved to approve the July 10, 2025 meeting minutes. Nathan Daus seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2:47 - 2:51 p.m. - Confirmation of 2026 meeting dates

The council discussed the following meeting dates for 2026:

- Monday, January 12, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.
- Thursday, April 9, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.
- Thursday, July 9, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, October 6, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.

2:51 - 2:51 p.m. - Public Comment

No public comments.

2:51 p.m. - Additional discussion

Brown recommended strategic planning as a January meeting agenda item. He recalled a list of topics compiled during one of the council's first few meetings and recommended revisiting that list to evaluate progress, suggesting the council could then plan meeting agendas for the next year with strategic topics and speakers. Smith suggested that hearing from the U.S. Forest Service is one such agenda item. Members were encouraged to submit suggestions to Payne, Paxman, and Brown.

Brown also noted that although this council is required to report to the Legislature and governor, those entities have no legal obligation to report back to the council. He suggested requesting that those entities report back to the council as a courtesy, that way the flow of information could go both directions and information from the state could be reported down to local watershed councils more successfully. Other council members agreed they would like to see more strategic communication and utilization of the watershed councils.

Palmer moved to adjourn the meeting. [Unknown council member] seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2:57 p.m. Meeting adjourned

Uintah Watershed Council Report

2025







Jordan River Watershed Council Update

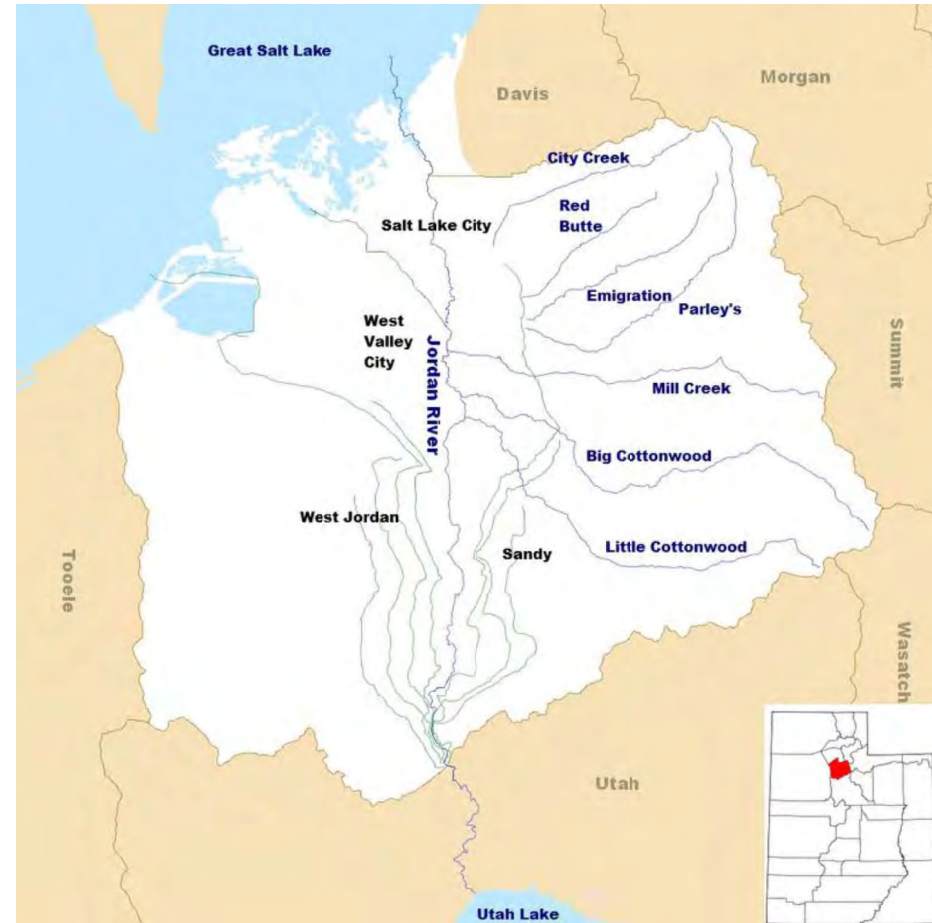


Utah Watersheds Council Meeting
October 14, 2025
Laura Briefer, Council Chair and
Director, Salt Lake City Public Utilities



The Jordan River Basin

- 3,805 square miles (including Utah Lake Watershed) – 791 square miles is the Jordan River Watershed Council area, including all of Salt Lake County, and parts of Utah and Davis counties
- Major inflows are Utah Lake and several sub-watersheds from the Wasatch and Oquirrh mountains
- Outflow is at Great Salt Lake
- Elevation Range – from above 11,000 feet down to 4,200 feet
- Encompasses the most populated region of the state at over 2 million people



Watershed Council Representatives

Cities

- Saratoga Springs
- Lehi
- Bluffdale
- Riverton
- Draper
- South Jordan
- Sandy
- Midvale
- West Jordan
- Murray
- Taylorsville
- Millcreek
- West Valley City
- South Salt Lake
- Salt Lake City
- North Salt Lake

Water & Reclamation Districts

- Jordan Basin Improvement District
- South Valley Water Reclamation Facility
- Central Valley Water Reclamation Facility
- South Davis Sewer District
- Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District
- Salt Lake Department of Public Utilities

Counties

- Utah County
- Salt Lake County
- Davis County

Tribes

- Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation

**36 Total
Council
Members**

Agriculture & Industry

- Gardner Heritage Farm
- Jordan River Foundation
- Larry H. Miller Company
- Rocky Mountain Power
- Utah Fairpark Corporation
- Wasatch Rowing Foundation

Wildlife & Research

- National Audubon Society
- Tracy Aviary
- Utah's Hogle Zoo

Advisors (Non-Voting)

- State Agencies
- Federal Agencies

Recent Watershed Council Meetings

(quarterly meetings held together with Jordan River Commission Governing Board)



Dog Lake, upper Mill Creek watershed

- Watershed Council strategic planning
- 2026 State Water Plan
- Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan
- Functional Flows Framework for Jordan River and Great Salt Lake
- Legislative updates
- Field trips

Recent Activities, Events & Field Trips

- Rio Tinto Kennecott's Bingham Mine Field Trip
- Technical Advisory Committee Stormwater Infrastructure & Low Impact Development (LID) field trips
 - May – Spanish Fork
 - September – University of Utah and Salt Lake City
- Jordan River Media Tour with Great Salt Lake Collaborative



Rio Tinto Kennecott Mine, Bingham Canyon watershed

Recent Activities, Events & Field Trips

- Volunteer Activities
- Jordan River Commission 15 - Year Anniversary Celebration
 - Commemoration Event in Lehi
 - Media Event in North Salt Lake
- Technical Advisory Committee Stormwater Infrastructure & Low Impact Development (LID) field trips:
 - May – Spanish Fork
 - September – University of Utah and Salt Lake City
- Get to the River Festival – September 2025



*15-Year Anniversary
Media Event*

*Get to the River
Festival
“Something’s
Brewing” Event at
Tracy Aviary’s Nature
Center at Pia Okwai*

*Photo credits:
Jordan River
Commission*

Watershed Issues Identified in August 2025 Council Meeting

- Water quality
- Water supply
- Information and expertise sharing
- Great Salt Lake
- Funding for watershed restoration, water infrastructure
- Preserving, restoring, and enhancing ecological function
- Public education
- Recreation
- Homeless issues



Cecret Lake, Little Cottonwood Creek Watershed

Photo credit: KSL News

Upcoming Council Activities and Topics

- Strategic priorities development
- Explore establishing a Watershed Council Focus of the Jordan River Commission Technical Advisory Committee
- Considering schedule adjustment in 2026, longer meetings and separate from Jordan River Commission Governing Board
- Consideration of topics for next convenings:
 - How water is funded
 - Great Salt Lake Shoreline Preserve
 - Engagement with Central Wasatch Commission and other organizations
 - Nexus of quality of life, economy, and water in our Basin
 - Engagement with state planning and policy processes
 - Tribal interests

Fife Wetland Preserve, Jordan River
Photo credit: Salt Lake Tribune



Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands

A New Chapter: Post-Fire Restoration in Utah

Matt McEttrick | Southeast Area Manager



Overview

What am I going to talk about?



Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands

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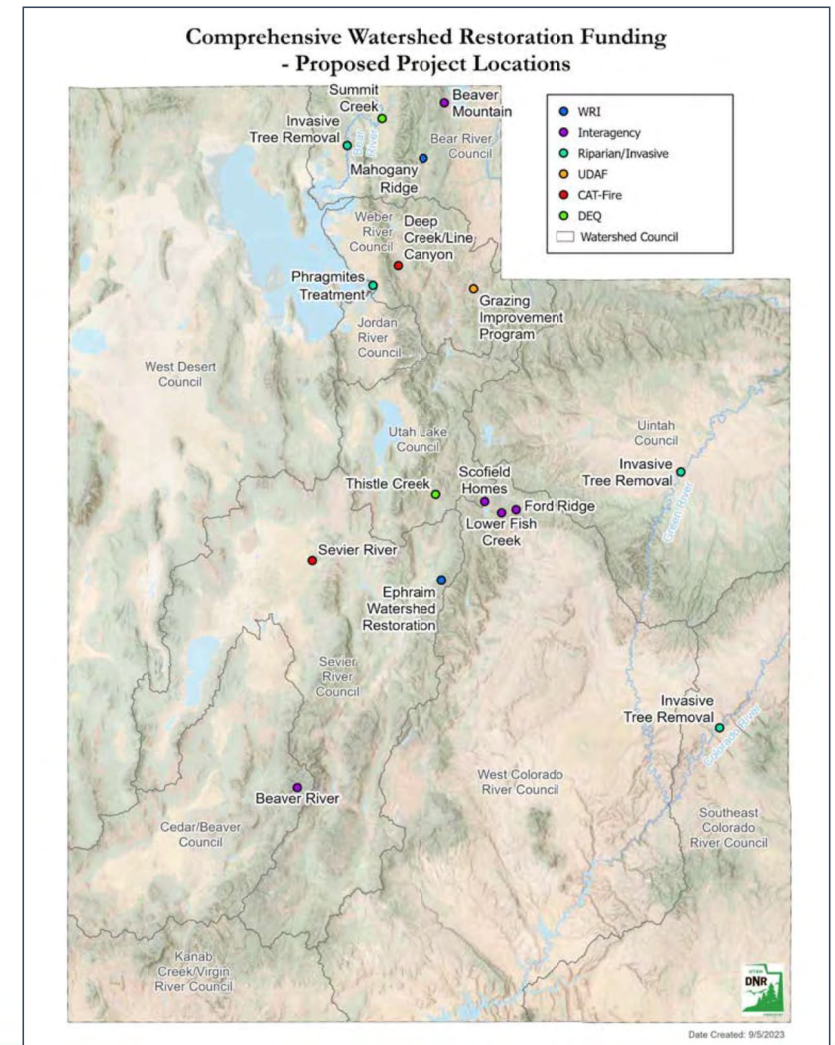
FFSL Mission

The Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands manages, sustains and strengthens Utah's forests, rangelands, sovereign lands and watersheds for its citizens and visitors.



FFSL Programs

- Forestry
- Wildland Fire Management
- Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)
- Sovereign Lands (River)



Forestry Program



Forested lands in Utah are one of the state's most valuable natural resources. They provide (to name a few) scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, clean air and supply timber products.

Most of the forested lands in the state are held by private landowners or by the US Forest Service.

Each of the Division's six area offices employs a forester who works with landowners and other partners to provide assistance to those wishing to use, improve or conserve their forested lands.

Wildland Fire Program



Every year, hundreds of wildfires burn on private, state and federal land in Utah. Fires occurring on federal and tribal lands are managed by the [US Forest Service](#), [Bureau of Land Management](#), [National Park Service](#), [US Fish & Wildlife Service](#) and the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#).

Wildfires that occur on state and private lands that aren't inside city limits are managed by the **Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands** and are coordinated through County Fire Wardens.

County Fire Wardens work with federal agencies and local fire departments to coordinate the suppression effort.



Wildland Fire Program Areas



Wildfire response and coordination

Burn permitting

Training for local resources and cooperators

Cooperative Wildfire Systems (CWS)



Wildland Urban Interface Program (WUI)

The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is the zone where structures and other human development intermingle with undeveloped wildland fuels. This WUI zone poses risks to life, property, and infrastructure in associated communities. FFSL's WUI Program exists to help with these issues.



Wildland Urban Interface Program Areas



- Fuels mitigation work (thinning)
- Community outreach
- Prescribed burns



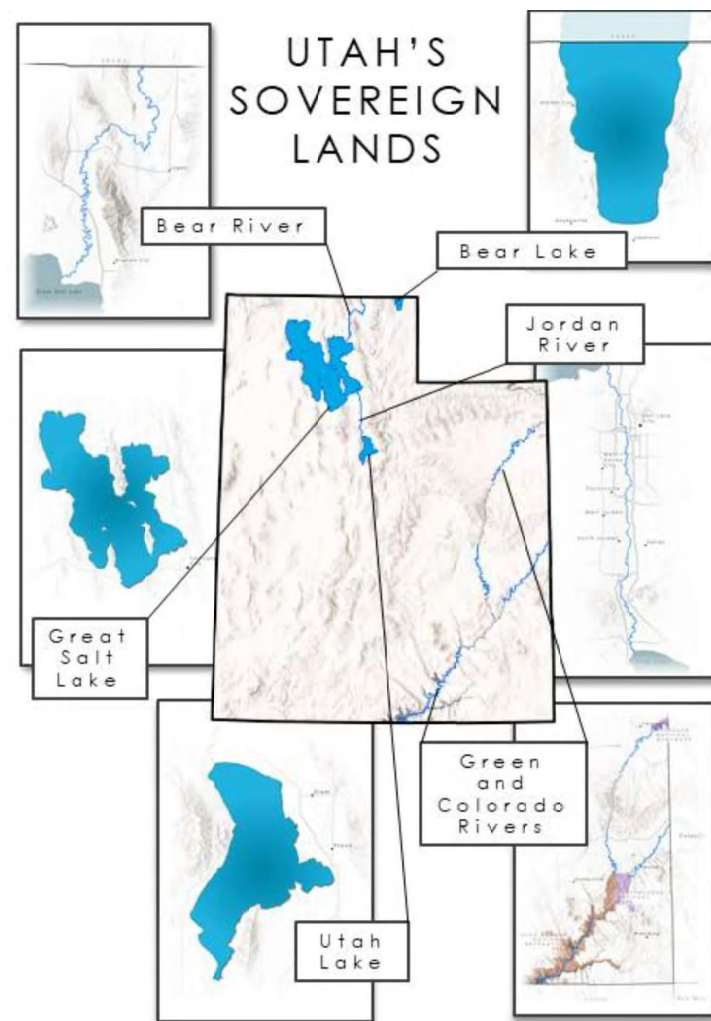
Sovereign Lands

Bear Lake	Bear River
Great Salt Lake	Jordan River
Utah Lake	Green River
	Colorado River

- Over 1.5 million acres of lakebed and riverbed
- Over 2,200 miles of shoreline

Additional Lands managed as Sovereign Lands include:

- Moab Exchange Lands (Prairie Dog and Utahrapator State Park)
- Several upland parcels abutting sovereign lands



Sovereign Lands Program Areas

- Riparian restoration work
- Non-native Removal
- Cleanup
- Permitting for special use leases, general permits, and easements on sovereign lands





What about post-fire?

As wildland fires have become larger and more destructive, post-fire work has become more and more important

FFSL is already working on post-fire restoration projects across the state and is building its ability to do even more – involves all programs within FFSL



Post-fire rehab

Fire on the landscape is a natural process

But impacts may still need to be mitigated – environmental and economic, social

Fires getting larger and more severe



Environmental impacts

Soil erosion and soil chemistry changes

Loss of habitat and species

Altered physical conditions

Smoke



Economic impacts

Damage to life and property

Fire Suppression costs – crews, aviation,
logistics – who pays?

Insurance rate increases

Loss of recreational and other economic
opportunities (esp. tourism)



Social Impacts

Mental and emotional well-being

Loss of housing and employment or
lack of access

Disruptions to community function



FFSL Post-Fire Efforts

Focus mostly on environmental impacts:

Erosion

Revegetation/Resilient Forests

Protection of critical infrastructure and critical watersheds protects



Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands



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Erosion Control: Burn Scars = Flood risks



Seeding



Erosion control Structures



Mulching/Pocking/Slash



Revegetation



Container Planting



Targeted Seeding



Bioengineering / Low Tech
Process based



Critical Watershed Protection



Critical Infrastructure Protection

Roads

Bridges

Culverts

Powerlines

Water Supply

Utility lines and piping



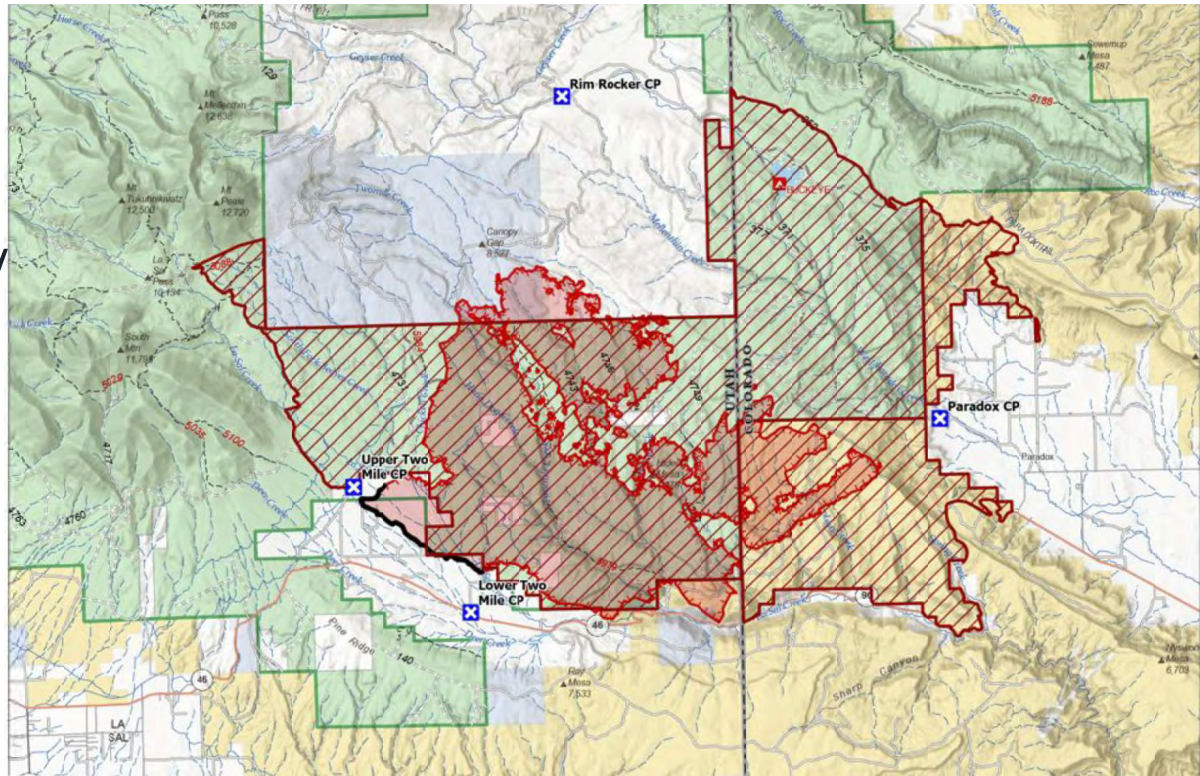
New in 2026: FFSL Post Fire Rehab Funding Opportunity

- Purpose: Post-wildfire rehabilitation funding to address the severe ecological and hydrological impacts due to high-severity wildfire. This funding supports efforts to stabilize soils, reduce excessive runoff, manage sediment flows, and protect critical watersheds, water systems, transportation routes and infrastructure. The goal is to promote ecological recovery, build community wildfire resilience and protection from further hardships due to the wildfire occurrence.
- Funding cycle is ongoing
- Notice of award deadline will be on FFSL website
- Intended for municipalities, counties, fire districts that participate in State of Utah Cooperative Wildfire System and FFSL programs



Deer Creek Fire Restoration

- Deer Creek fire burned in summer of 2025
- Human caused, burned approximately 17.5K acres
- Burned homes and other structures near La Sal Utah
- Majority of burned area was US Forest Service with some State, BLM and private
- \$24M dollar cost



Deer Creek Fire Restoration Work

- Proposal written in collaboration between FFSL, DWR, USFS, San Juan County, local non-profits and private landowners
- Work will include:
 - Aerial seeding
 - Upland erosion control structures
 - Targeted seeding mixed with erosion control work and plantings in key drainages
 - Hazard tree felling
 - Road and culvert evaluation and protection
- Timeline runs from Fall '25 to July 1st '26
- \$1.3M request, looking like we will get approximately \$400K awarded



• We have additional proposals to continue post-fire

Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands

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Thank you. Questions?

Matt McEttrick
FFSL Southeast Area Manager

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Utah Watersheds Council

CHAIR: SCOTT PAXMAN

VICE CHAIR: STERLING BROWN

Annual Report

September 2025



"The watershed councils are exceeding expectations in the work local councils and the state council are doing. They have assisted and advised the Division of Water Resources on the state water plan and the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan. We look forward to their continued collaboration and representation on the critical water resources issues our state is facing."

— Candice Hasenyager, Director, Utah Division of Water Resources

Utah Watersheds Council

Local Councils

Bear River • Cedar/Beaver • Great Salt Lake • Jordan River • Kanab Creek/Virgin River • Sevier River
Southeastern Utah • Uintah • Utah Lake • Weber River • West Colorado River • West Desert

WatershedCouncils.utah.gov • WatershedCouncils@utah.gov

Background

The Utah Watersheds Council brings together agriculture, industry, conservation, reclamation project, water attorney, municipality, special district, state agencies and Utah State University Extension representatives as well as local watershed council members from across Utah to discuss and collaborate on important water-related issues. For a public body, the diversity of interests represented by the state council is both impressive and unique. This state council provides a forum for discussion, collaboration and coordination among water interests; offers advice to the governor and legislature on water issues; and supports local watershed councils. It also facilitates the sharing of valuable tools and resources that may be available to local councils. Similarly, local councils provide a diverse forum for discussion and collaboration at the watershed level and in turn advise the state council on important regional water issues.

The Watershed Councils Act was passed in 2020. After a delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state council was established in 2022 and oversaw the formation of local councils in 11 basins between 2022 and 2024 (Figure 1). By mutual agreement, the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council currently fills the role of Great Salt Lake Watershed Council.

2025 recommendations to the Utah Legislature

To fulfill its statutory duty to advise the governor and Legislature on water resources and policy issues, the state council recommends the following action items to the Utah Legislature:

1. Wildfire mitigation and post-fire seeding

The state council recommends the following to improve watershed health: “further align government agencies and necessary funds to promptly and properly reseed lands impacted by wildfires...to help mitigate the impacts of erosion. For example, after the 2018 Pole Creek and Bald Mountain wildfires, large amounts of sediment and debris impacted the Spanish Fork River and drainage, resulting in significant

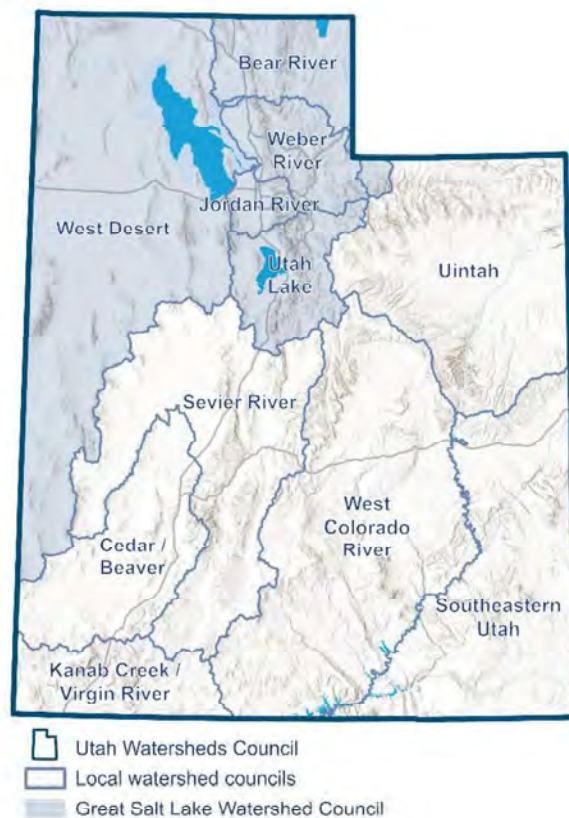


Figure 1. Map of watershed council boundaries.

impacts to the quality of Utah Lake and its tributaries and significant, increased costs to industry and local governments. A focus on wildfire mitigation and an increase in the number of resources available immediately after a wildfire would facilitate large area reseeding projects, reducing the amount of erosion and limiting its detrimental impacts” (Utah Lake Watershed Council).

2. Improved coordination with the United States Forest Service

The state council recommends improved coordination efforts between Utah and the U.S. Forest Service at state and regional levels. Because the Forest Service manages a significant portion of Utah’s watersheds, increased collaboration will benefit water resources, infrastructure, communities and agencies.

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2025 watershed council activities

Local council reports

Local councils report to the state council at each quarterly meeting to educate on basin hydrology and management, review recent activities and present water-related concerns for state council discussion and action.

State water plan

The watershed councils are playing an important role in the development of the 2026 State Water Plan. Over the summer, councils provided information for the “Basin Perspectives” chapter of the plan, which will highlight the water-related challenges and needs in each of Utah’s watersheds. This input will help reduce knowledge gaps, increase local ownership and contribute to a well-rounded document that serves the entire state.

This fall, the councils will help Utah’s Division of Water Resources host “Water Talks”, or public scoping meetings, in which members of the public can learn about the state water plan and express their communities’ water planning priorities (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Members of the local watershed council and public at the Southeastern Utah Water Talk in Monticello, the first in a series of public scoping meetings for the 2026 State Water Plan.

Presentations and site visits

The state council hosted presentations on many topics this year, including the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan, Water Fee Study, 2026 State Water Plan and Drinking Water Source Protection

program. Presenters have expressed the benefit of the watershed councils as pre-built, knowledgeable stakeholder groups. At the invitation of the Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council, the council held its January 2025 meeting in Kane County, during which members visited Jackson Flat Reservoir and received an overview of local water management and plans (Figure 3).



Figure 3. State council members on a site visit to Jackson Flat Reservoir in Kane County, Utah.

Likewise, local councils discussed a wide array of topics such as groundwater recharge, Great Salt Lake conservation, watershed health, impacts of wildfire and more. Many councils took site visits to see project areas firsthand (Figures 4, 5, 6). These discussions improve local collaboration and prepare the councils to advise the state council.

“There is a lot to be done in our basin to address interconnected issues of Great Salt Lake, drought, growth, prosperity and environmental quality. We see a positive role for our watershed council in convening stakeholders and engaging the public in important conversations about water stewardship.”

— Laura Briefer, Jordan River Watershed Council Chair and Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities Director

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Local watershed council initiatives

In addition to their statutory role, some local councils have initiated additional projects to benefit their watersheds. For example, West Colorado River Watershed Council is developing a comprehensive map of the watershed and a project database to inform its coordination and advisory efforts. Jordan River and Utah Lake watershed councils are working on cross-basin collaboration to reflect the interconnected nature of their watersheds. Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council is exploring future participation in the Watershed Restoration Initiative program.



Figure 4. West Desert Watershed Council visited Morton Salt Plant to learn how industries impact Great Salt Lake and Utah's economy.

Review of the Watershed Councils Act

As directed in the Watershed Councils Act, the Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment Interim Committee shall end its review of the act before September 30, 2025 and submit a report of its recommendations to the Legislature before January 1, 2026. As written in Utah Code 73-10g-309, the state council “shall clearly identify for the...committee the public purposes and interests for which the councils were originally created and whether those public purposes and interests are still relevant and being adequately addressed through the councils”. Legislation outlines the following specific purposes for the state council (1-5) and local councils (6):

1. Serve as a forum to encourage and facilitate discussion by and among the stakeholders relative to the water-related interests of the state and the state's people and institutions.

The state council meets quarterly to discuss ongoing water-related issues and projects at the watershed and state levels, including presentations from local watershed councils, state and federal agencies and additional stakeholders.

2. Facilitate communication and collaboration between the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture and Food, Department of Environmental Quality and other state and federal agencies in the administration and implementation of water-related activities.

The executive directors of the departments of Natural Resources, Environmental Quality and Agriculture and Food attend state council meetings in which they coordinate on water issues. Additionally, employees of the divisions of Water Resources, Water Rights, Wildlife, Forestry, Fire and State Lands, Water Quality and Drinking Water; Department of Agriculture and Food; and more join state and local watershed council meetings regularly, improving cross-agency collaboration in each basin.

3. Consult and seek guidance from local councils.

Local councils report to the state council quarterly to provide information and advice on local and state water issues. Additionally, local councils are encouraged to contribute during meetings, request agenda items and suggest topics for discussion and action.

“Having acted as the Chair of the Utah Watersheds Council for the past two years, I have seen a lot of progress and growth in the state council as well as each of the local watershed councils. We allow three or four local councils to update the state council each quarter, and it is obvious that they are meeting, touring and discussing a variety of issues in and about their respective watersheds. Utah's watersheds are diverse, and it has been interesting to see the complexities, differences and similarities between them. It will be important to keep the

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momentum going by finding ways to assist one another in our challenges and learning from each other's successes."

— Scott Paxman, Utah Watersheds Council Chair and Weber Basin Water Conservancy District General Manager

4. Advise the Water Development Coordinating Council regarding the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan (HB 280, 2024)

The Water Development Coordinating Council presented to the state council on the development of the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan and Water Fee Study and will seek additional feedback from the council before the plan is published in 2026.

5. Provide advice to the governor and Legislature on water issues.

See section "Recommendations to the Utah Legislature" above.



Figure 5. Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council members learned about the Virgin River Program with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

6. Each local council shall provide a forum to encourage and facilitate discussion of and collaboration on local watershed issues.

Local watershed councils volunteer many hours per year to discuss and collaborate on water issues. Councils strive to reduce duplication of efforts in each watershed by working with local organizations, state

and federal agencies, water conservancy districts, universities and more.



Figure 6. Bear River Watershed Council on a joint tour of Cutler Dam with USU Water Lab, government employees, PacifiCorp staff and local officials. Participants explored the dam and discussed how water infrastructure and delivery impact Great Salt Lake.

Reflection

Watershed council members have already expressed the benefits of their existence.

"The Southeastern Utah Watershed Council has allowed our region to collaborate over our most precious natural resource — water. We are building alliances to actively address this resource scarcity."

— Trisha Hedin, Southeastern Utah Watershed Council Co-Chair and Grand County Commissioner

Although the councils are relatively young, they display strong ability to address the important purposes set forth by the Utah Legislature in 2020. As Utah's water landscape and priorities continue to evolve, the diversity and adaptability of the watershed councils position them well to continually increase regional collaboration, support water planning, improve government efficiency and garner involvement from Utahns statewide as they work to meet future water needs.

This report was prepared by Carly Payne, Watershed Councils Coordinator with the Utah Division of Water Resources, under the direction of the Utah Watersheds Council. For more information, contact watershedcouncils@utah.gov.

Utah Watersheds Council

Local Councils

*Bear River • Cedar/Beaver • Great Salt Lake • Jordan River • Kanab Creek/Virgin River • Sevier River
Southeastern Utah • Uintah • Utah Lake • Weber River • West Colorado River • West Desert*

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