

THE GREAT SALT LAKE BASIN INTEGRATED PLAN PHASE 1 REPORT



Water
Resources



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public and partner engagement during Phase 1 of the Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan (GSLBIP) set the stage for basin-wide planning by illuminating what water users and partners want when it comes to Great Salt Lake and water supply in the basin, and what they're willing to consider doing to get there.

During this phase, more than 600 participants engaged in interactive discussion sessions and surveys, sharing their priorities and ideas about the future of water management in the basin. These discussions revealed the suite of priorities and strategies that define successful water management in the Great Salt Lake Basin, as well as the metrics that can be used to measure that success.

Those involved in Phase 1 of the GSLBIP would like to see water management scenarios compared based on their impacts to **ecological health, habitat and wildlife; agriculture, food and working lands; water supply and reliability; and air quality and dust**. They recommend tracking these impacts using metrics for habitat and ecosystems, lake elevation and hydrology, dust emissions and air quality, changes to depletions and return flows and salinity and water quality. Ultimately, these scenarios will aim to advance the objectives identified in the Situation Assessment Report: a resilient water supply in the basin and a healthy Great Salt Lake. To influence these outcomes, partners suggest incorporating a suite of robust strategies including **agricultural optimization; urban conservation and landscaping; pricing, incentives and funding; water rights, leasing and allocation; and wetland and watershed management and restoration**.

In Phase 2, the GSLBIP project team will work with water providers, water users and other partners to develop a range of water management scenarios. Shaped by the insights into shared priorities and potential actions from Phase 1 and several new studies exploring potential strategies and their costs and impacts, these scenarios will represent different means of managing the many demands facing the basin's water supply. The management scenarios will be put to the test using a new RiverWare Planning Model currently being developed for the basin by the United States Bureau of Reclamation.

The modeled scenarios will give water users and partners a new glimpse into our water future under different climate conditions and an understanding of how the choices we make can alter that future. In Phase 3, the alternative scenarios will enable water partners and the public to clarify goals in the context of the changes and effort required to achieve them and to evaluate actions based on their anticipated impacts.



BACKGROUND

The Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan (GSLBIP) originated in 2022 when the Utah Legislature directed the state to develop an integrated assessment of water supply, demand and environmental needs across the basin watershed through HB 429 (2022). The GSLBIP process will create a collaborative roadmap for managing water across all Great Salt Lake Basin watersheds in ways that promote a healthy lake and a high quality of life in the basin. This roadmap will be built by the state of Utah, major water users, water conservancy districts, municipalities and the public, and will guide those same groups in making decisions about how to use and conserve water in the basin.

The GSLBIP is a long-range strategy for realizing the commitments of the **Great Salt Lake 2034 Charter** and will build on years of prior and ongoing planning and collaboration, including the **GSLBIP Work Plan**, the **Great Salt Lake Basin Study** being conducted by the United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the **Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan** developed by the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner.

The Utah Division of Water Resources (the division) is leading the creation of the GSLBIP together with the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner and in close collaboration with Reclamation. Phase 1 of the planning process was completed in the summer of 2026 (see **Figure 1** for an overview of project phases and general schedule). The objectives of Phase 1 were to **define and rank priorities** and **identify initial management alternatives** that can be used to create water management scenarios during Phases 2 and 3. The workshops, meetings and interviews were also designed to **increase awareness of the GSLBIP** and the varied perspectives regarding water management in the basin and to **begin building a foundation of trust and collaboration** between planning partners, water users and state agencies. The work completed in Phase 1 constitutes the first step towards building the shared foundation that will underlie the end product of the GSLBIP. The findings from Phase 1, which provide an outline of what water users and partners want and are willing to support, will be carried forward into Phase 2 where they will be used to develop alternative management scenarios for water in the basin.

To support the creation of the GSLBIP, Water Resources also commissioned several studies to address critical knowledge gaps. These studies include:

- Great Salt Lake Stormwater Study
- Opportunities and Costs of M&I Water Conservation
- Options and Costs for Dust Control
- Opportunities and Costs for Agricultural Optimization Leasing
- Functional Flows for Streams
- Quantification of Evaporative Losses from Great Salt Lake and its Wetlands
- Groundwater Well Monitoring
- Bioenergetics Study: Water Requirements for Shorebirds

The studies can be found at water.utah.gov/gslbip-studies



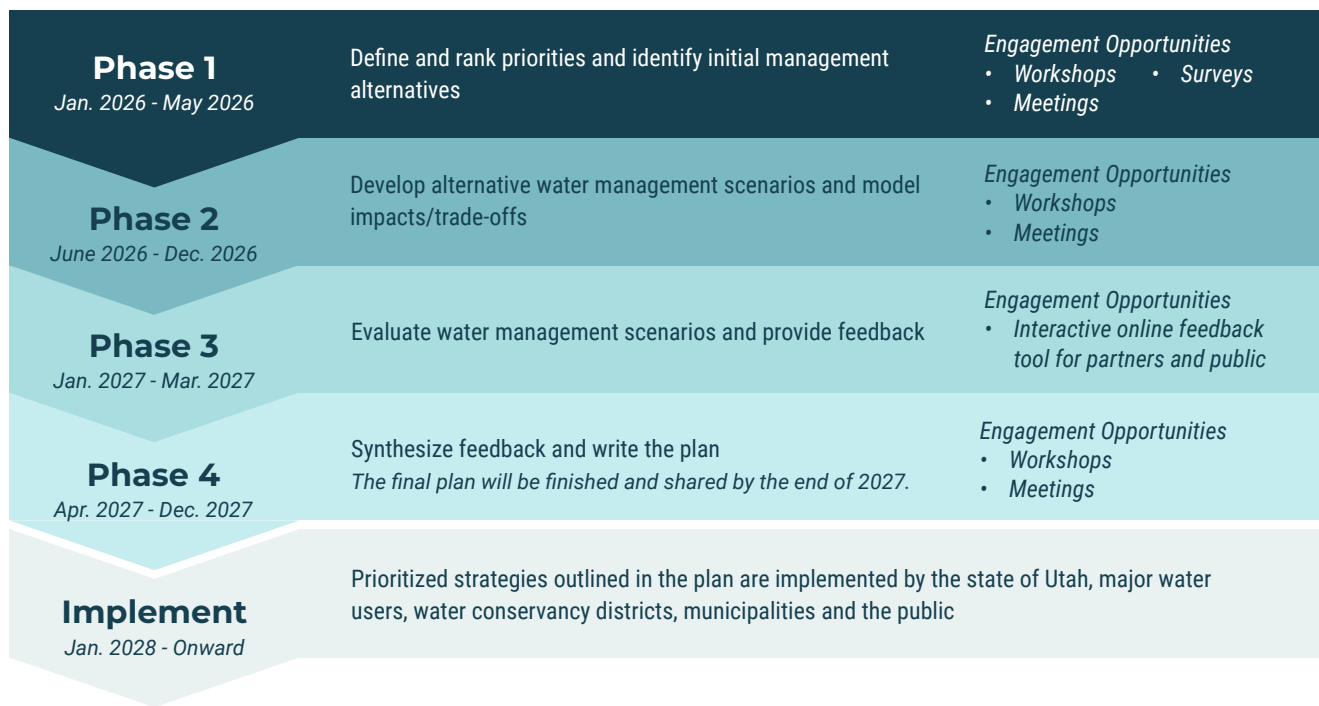
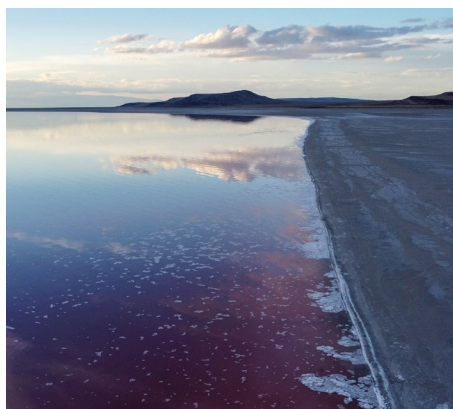
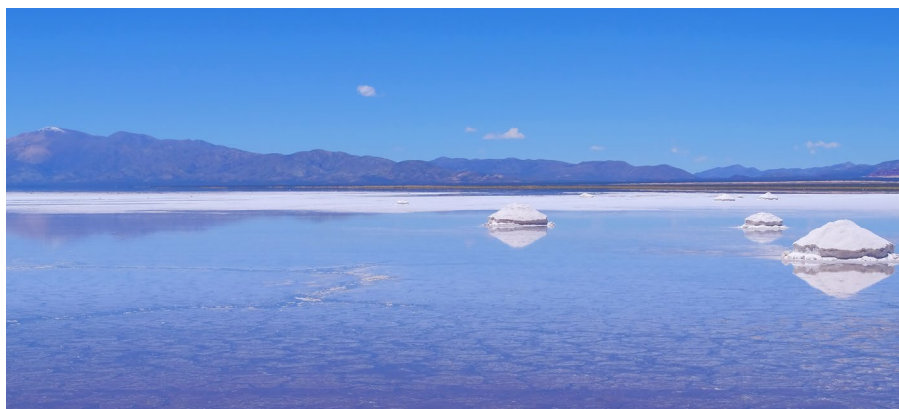


Figure 1. GSLBIP Project Phases and Schedule.



PROCESS

During Phase 1, which extended from February 2026 to the end of June 2026, Envision Utah and the division facilitated discussions with water planning partners and large water users regarding water in the Great Salt Lake Basin. The project team used a live engagement platform to ensure that everyone in attendance had the opportunity to share their thoughts. These discussions focused on priorities and metrics for success as well as strategies for meeting those priorities. Participants were also asked about implementation tools and barriers, trade-offs associated with different strategies. Over 500 participants across numerous user groups, representing diverse water interests across the basin, participated in one of more than a dozen discussions.

GSIBIP Phase 1 engagement workshops:

- Great Salt Lake Advisory Council
- GSLBIP Steering Committee
- Utah Water Users Workshop
- Bear River Water Users
- Envision Utah's Board of Governors
- Jordan River Watershed Council
- Envision Utah's Spring Breakfast
- Utah Lake Authority
- Bear River Watershed Council
- Utah Farm Bureau
- Utah Lake Watershed Council
- West Desert Watershed Council
- Utah League of Cities and Towns
- Great Salt Lake Issues Forum
- Weber River Partnership's Urban Watershed Symposium

Roughly 80 public responses from a public survey found on the division's GSLBIP project page containing similar questions are also represented in this report. The project team also met with each of the major water conservancy districts in the basin to enhance coordination on planning and shared goals.

Phase 1 Workshop Locations and Response Counts

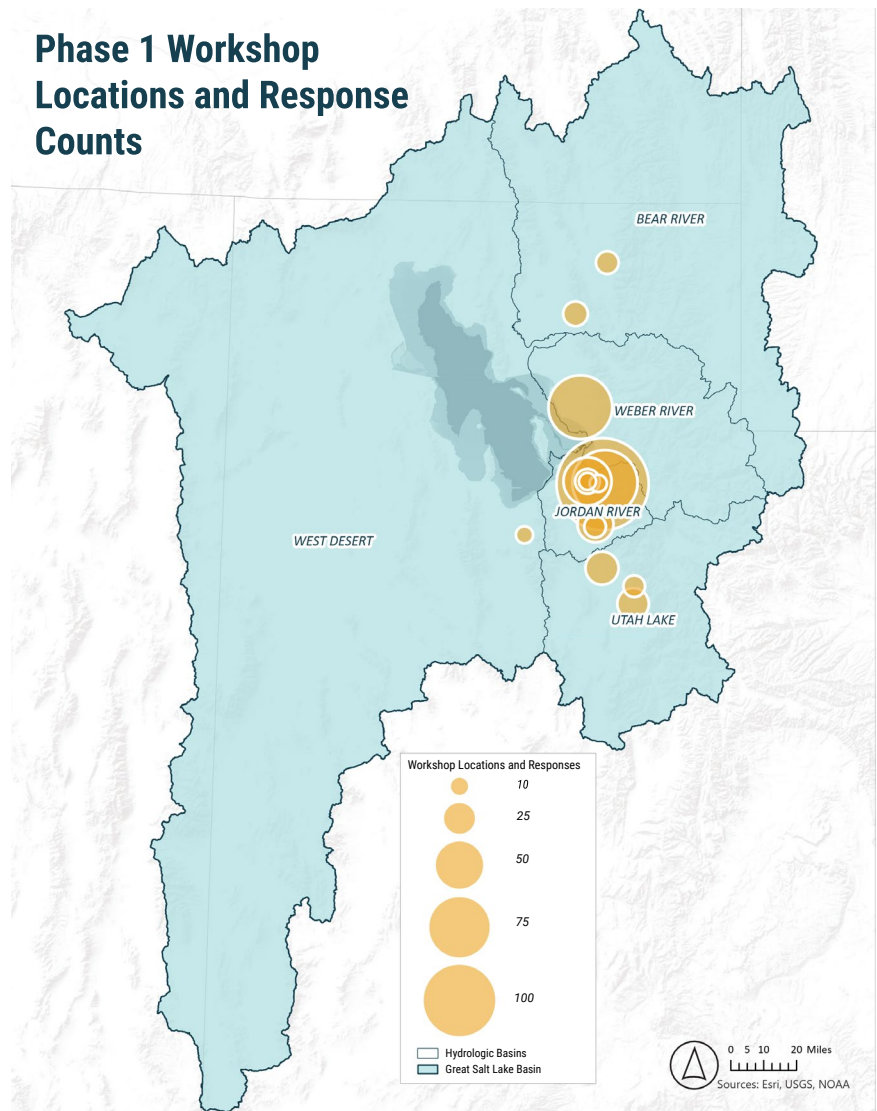


Figure 2. Phase 1 GLSBIP engagement workshop locations and response counts



RESULTS/FINDINGS

The findings from Phase 1 engagement are summarized below. These results should not be interpreted as a formal vote, but rather as an indication of the general level of interest in—and support for—certain priorities, strategies and metrics that may be included in the GSLBIP alternative scenarios developed during Phases 2 and 3.

Findings: What water users and partners want

Watershed priorities

Participants prioritize ecological health at Great Salt Lake and upstream, water supply and availability for human uses, air quality and quality of life and agricultural production and sustainability. Overall, partners suggest that a balance of several priorities is needed.

“Ecosystem health, specifically brine shrimp and birds”

“Protecting return flows and water quantity while safeguarding our rural and agricultural community’s way of life”

“Balance in use that fit[s] the environment...recognize that we live in a desert...have water use reflect a scarce supply. Water should lead every state decision”

Choose your top three of these priorities [~12 options that are summarized categories developed from raw responses to the Brainstorm Priorities question, or pre-populated in the Google Form].

Top Responses:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Ecological health, habitat & wildlife | 6. Human health & livability |
| 2. Agriculture, food & working lands | 7. Great Salt Lake health / lake levels |
| 3. Water supply, watershed & aquifer sustainability | 8. [General] Water conservation & demand management |
| 4. Air quality/dust | 9. Economy & industry |
| 5. Water quality & drinking water | 10. Municipal and industrial / urban water use |

Water concerns

Participants are most concerned about water scarcity, ecological deterioration and future hydrology and climatic uncertainty.

“Toxic dust as lake bed dries up, decrease of lake effect snow, economic impact of drying lake bed...”

Respondents expressed great concern about balancing the water supply with demand from future growth and development, as well as concerns about general overuse of water resources. Concerns about air quality and dust, impacts to agriculture and rural communities, economic impacts, doubts about political and public will to make changes and impacts to quality of life are also common.



Measuring performance and progress

Partners suggest using metrics relating to habitat quantity and quality, lake elevation, dust emissions and air quality, changes to diversions or depletions and water quality and salinity to measure progress towards their priorities.

Other popular categories of metrics included public health, public sentiment, agricultural viability/working lands, snowpack and streamflow and land use and growth indicators.

Consider your top priorities for water in the GSL Basin. What metrics could be used to measure the success of actions taken to accomplish these priorities?

Top Responses:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Habitat/wildlife/ecosystem indicators | 3. Air quality/dust indicators |
| 2. Lake elevation/hydrology | 4. Reduced use/depletions/diversions |
| | 5. Water quality/salinity/pollution |

Findings: What water users and partners are willing to do

Water management strategies

Almost 30 alternative management strategy categories were revealed through the engagement activities. Participants were most interested in management strategies for agricultural water use optimization methods and for municipal and industrial (M&I) water use reduction, including outdoor water use reduction through landscaping changes.

"Mandatory reduction of useless urban turf/lawns and transition to xeriscape"

"Buy water rights, help farmers convert to better products to grow that use less water, no export of alfalfa or other products grown in Utah to other countries"

Water rights and leasing, as well as restoration actions, ranked high on both the brainstorming question and the selection question. Other strategies included public education and cultural change, delivery and storage infrastructure improvements, habitat restoration, water pricing reform, water policy improvements and enforcement, open space and agricultural land preservation, berms and other lake management infrastructure, incentives and subsidies and water reuse.

Below are the top five answers for the selection question regarding management strategies:

Choose your top three of these strategies [~12 options that are summarized categories developed from raw responses to the Brainstorm Alternatives question, or pre-populated in the Google Form].

Top Responses:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Agricultural optimization | management |
| 2. M&I / urban conservation & landscaping | 6. Invasive species & vegetation management |
| 3. Pricing, incentives & funding | 7. Growth & land use management |
| 4. Water rights, leasing & allocation | 8. Governance, coordination & systems balance |
| 5. Habitat, wetlands & watershed restoration / | 9. Public education & behavior change |
| | 10. Data, modeling, metering & monitoring |

Water management strategy tradeoffs

In several sessions, participants were asked to describe any important tradeoffs associated with proposed water management strategies. Participants most often mentioned trade-offs surrounding political feasibility, often referencing political backlash to new laws and regulations or increased costs to water users. Responses also showcased concerns about unfavorable impacts to agricultural water users, agricultural production and rural communities from potential changes to agricultural water use.



"If [the] government takes legal action to control lawns (for example) there will likely be political backlash in Utah that could make lake protection unpopular."

"If we pursue agricultural water reduction, it may result in economic harm to farming communities and the businesses around them"

Overall, responses indicate that a broad cultural shift in water users and partners' relationship with water is needed to foster a resilient water supply and high quality of life in the basin. Other responses included data and monitoring improvements, water supply augmentation and integrated growth and water management planning.

Barriers to GSLBIP success

When asked about the barriers to the future success of the GSLBIP, respondents most often cited sociopolitical factors. Popular responses included political will; public understanding, trust and buy-in; fragmentation due to competing interests; and resistance to cultural and behavioral change.

"Utah needs to enforce water conservation measures, not just suggest them...state leaders need to stop being afraid to tell the public that significant conservation is necessary. It is past time for stronger action and clearer messaging"

The sentiments of these responses mirror those of the Water Management Strategy Implementation question (below) in that they reflect the idea that a broad cultural shift in water users' relationship with water may be necessary for the GSLBIP to succeed. Participants also frequently cited uncertainty around climate change and future hydrology, and highlighted economic factors, such as growth and development pressures.



Water management strategy implementation

State leadership, coordination and public education are seen as essential to implementing water management strategies. Participants also believe that water law and policy must continue to evolve. Many management strategies hinge on funding and investment.

"Many of the changes require and will benefit from greater public awareness and education. Dedicated campaigns focusing on these issues relying on multiple partnerships with govt/business/personalities all aligned to educate, encourage and support the changes that are going to make a difference"

"[W]ater efficient/conservation zoning and building codes, 100 year planning horizons, capturing the true economic value of water/ecosystem services to have meaningful comparisons with competing economic interests"

Overall, responses indicate that a broad cultural shift in water users and partners' relationship with water is needed to foster a resilient water supply and high quality of life in the basin. Other responses included data and monitoring improvements, water supply

For your top strategy, what would be required to implement it successfully at scale? Consider the structural changes, institutional roles, funding mechanisms, legal or policy changes, partnerships and implementation capacity that would need to be in place. What exists today, what is missing, and who would need to act?

Responses:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Leadership/Coordination & Integrated Planning | 5. Data, Modeling, Monitoring & Measurement |
| 2. Public Education, Engagement & Cultural Change | 6. Integrated Growth & Water Planning |
| 3. Water Law, Policy & Enforcement | 7. Water Leasing/Rights Acquisition |
| 4. General Funding & Investments | 8. Water Pricing & Rate Reform |

Reasons for GSLBIP success

To conclude these discussion sessions, participants were asked why they believe the GSLBIP can and will succeed. Collaboration and the sense of shared responsibility that already exists in the basin emerged as the strongest theme from the body of responses. Participants also frequently touched on a sense of urgency, broad stakeholder involvement and shared benefits of success. These responses are encouraging, as many of them acknowledge the need to collaboratively come together to find solutions for Utah's shared water challenges.

"The GSLBIP will succeed because the GSL is now a universal priority. It has become the unavoidable lens through which all state and basin-wide water management is conducted."

Comparison to public surveys

The values and ideas shared by partners in phase 1 are largely aligned with the public perceptions represented in Envision Utah's 2024 Water Values Study and Utah State University's (USU) 2023 Future of the Great Salt Lake Survey.

These previous surveys confirm that participants prioritize drinking water, habitat and wildlife and air quality. They also provide additional insights into why people care about water and Great Salt Lake: they see these resources as underpinning strong communities and families, prosperity and outdoor recreation and beauty— the things that make living in Utah great. Additionally, the USU survey found that the lake's role in temperature modulation and lake effect snow are important to the public. These surveys also emphasize the lake's importance to water users and partners' cultural identities.

Envision Utah's Water Values Study confirms that outdoor residential use is an opportunity area for conservation, but only 42% of respondents reported wanting to see residential, commercial and community green lawns and landscaping change to use less water, incorporate more native plants and consist of less lawn area. Only 30% of respondents felt that agricultural water use was too high, and on average they underestimated how much water is diverted for agricultural uses. The Water Values Study also found that 73% of participants support the reuse of treated waste water. While some municipalities engaged in Phase 1 of the GSLBIP expressed interest in reuse as a new source, other partners were concerned about the net depletion impacts of reuse projects.

Both surveys emphasize the importance of government action at all levels to implement solutions. They also suggest that water for existing human uses is seen as more important than water for new uses and growth and that new development should be conditioned upon a demonstrated water supply.



NEXT STEPS

The information gathered through these discussion sessions will shape scenario development in subsequent phases of the GSLBIP planning process, as shown in Figure 2.

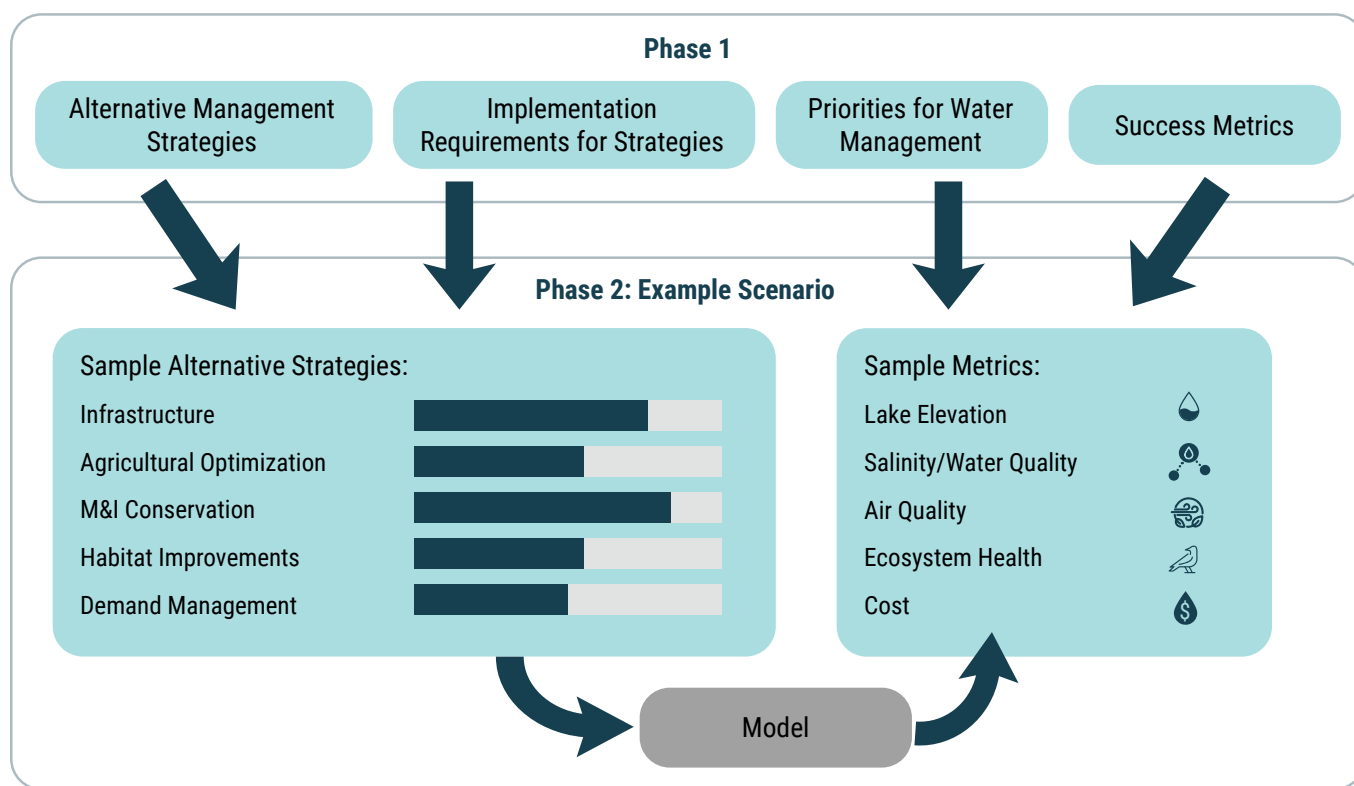


Figure 3. Example workflow for how Phase I inputs will be used to design alternative management scenarios in Phase II.

The Phase 1 findings regarding what water users and partners want and what management actions they would be willing to support will be carried forward into Phase 2 and 3, where they will be used to develop alternative management scenarios for water in the basin. Participant responses will inform a “menu” of alternative management strategies and metrics that partners will be able to incorporate into customized scenarios in Phase 2 during the Fall of 2026. Information from new studies regarding the impacts and costs of stormwater management, M&I conservation, agricultural optimization and dust control will also inform the scenario-building exercise. The project team will identify trends from Phase 2 scenarios to develop a final comparison scenarios for Phase 3 in early 2027. The comparison scenarios will then be modeled to highlight priority metrics and packaged for public and partner feedback. Finally, partners throughout the watershed will create the first Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan, a collaborative roadmap for managing water throughout the basin.



APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

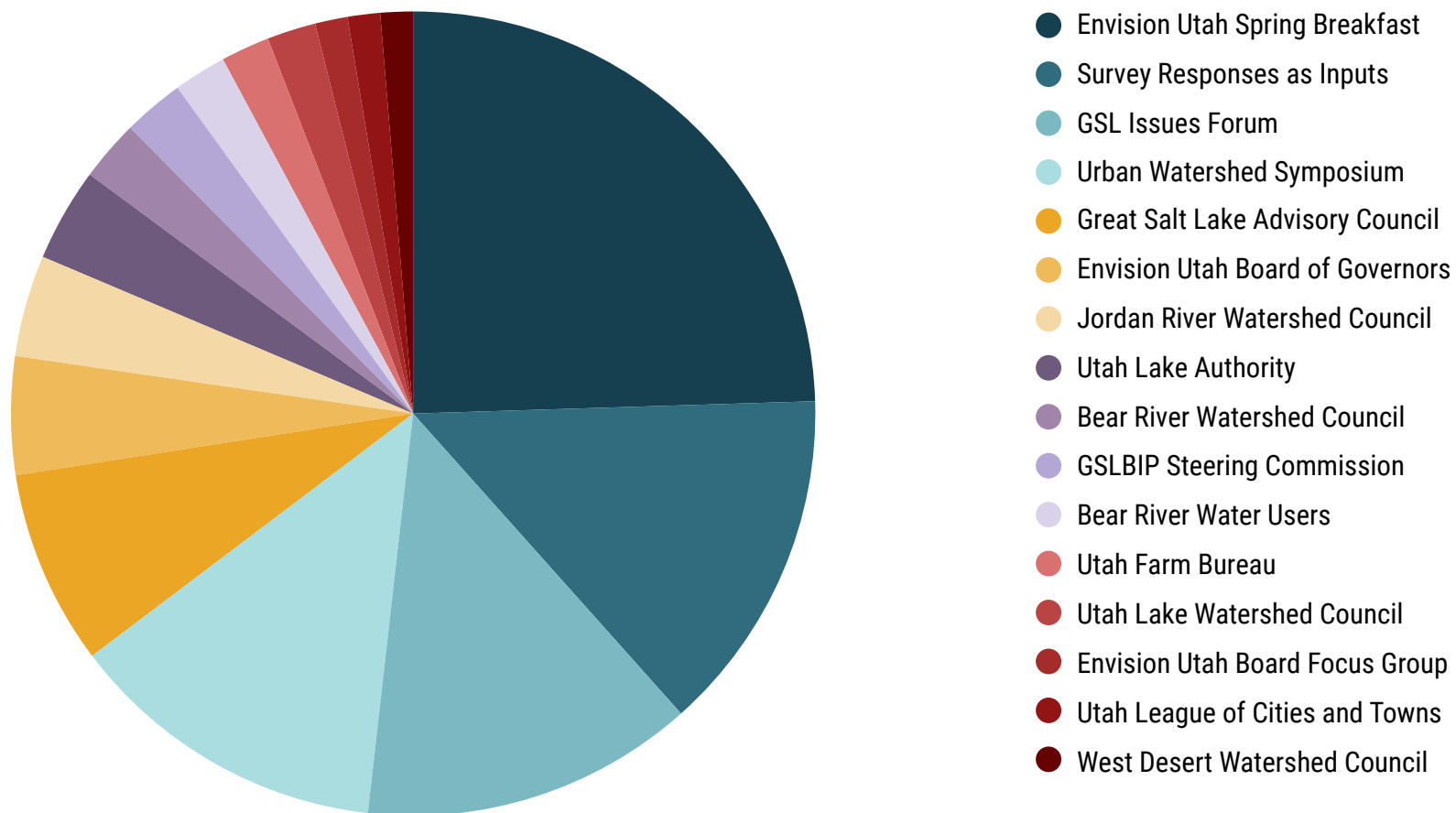


Figure 1. Quantity of responses received per meeting (n=612)



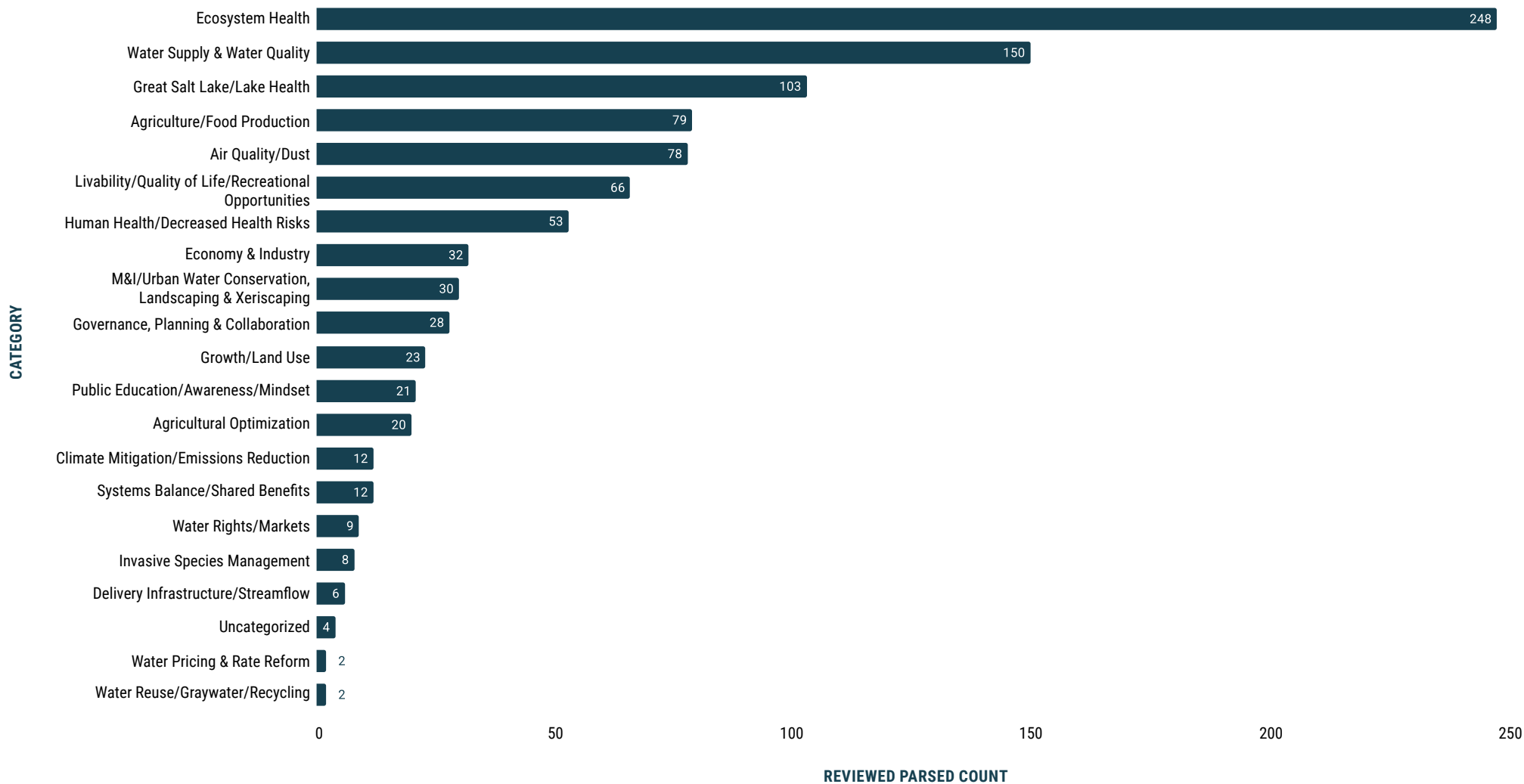


Figure 2a. Brainstorm most important priorities

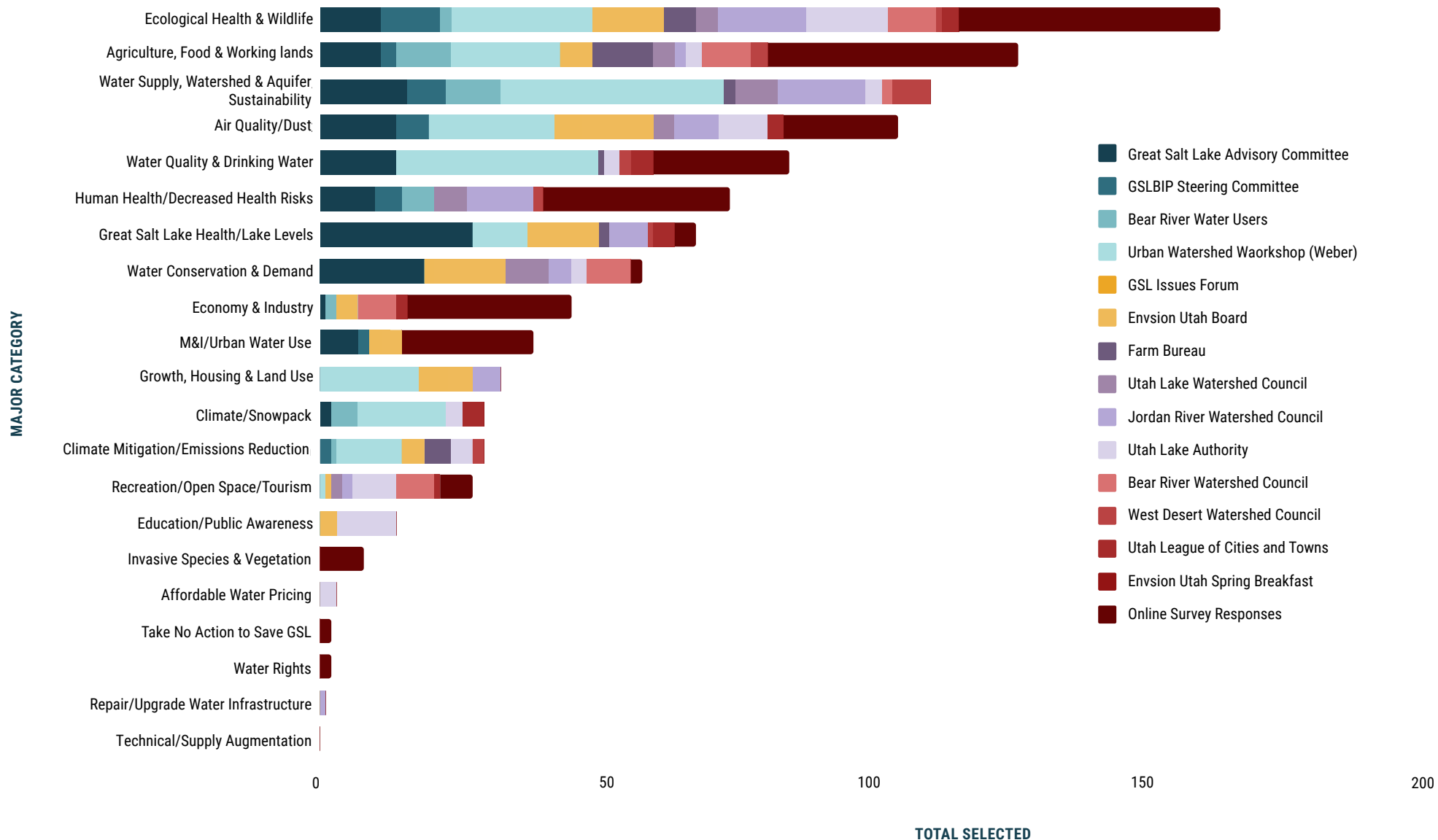


Figure 2b. Select top three most important priorities, broken down by workshop



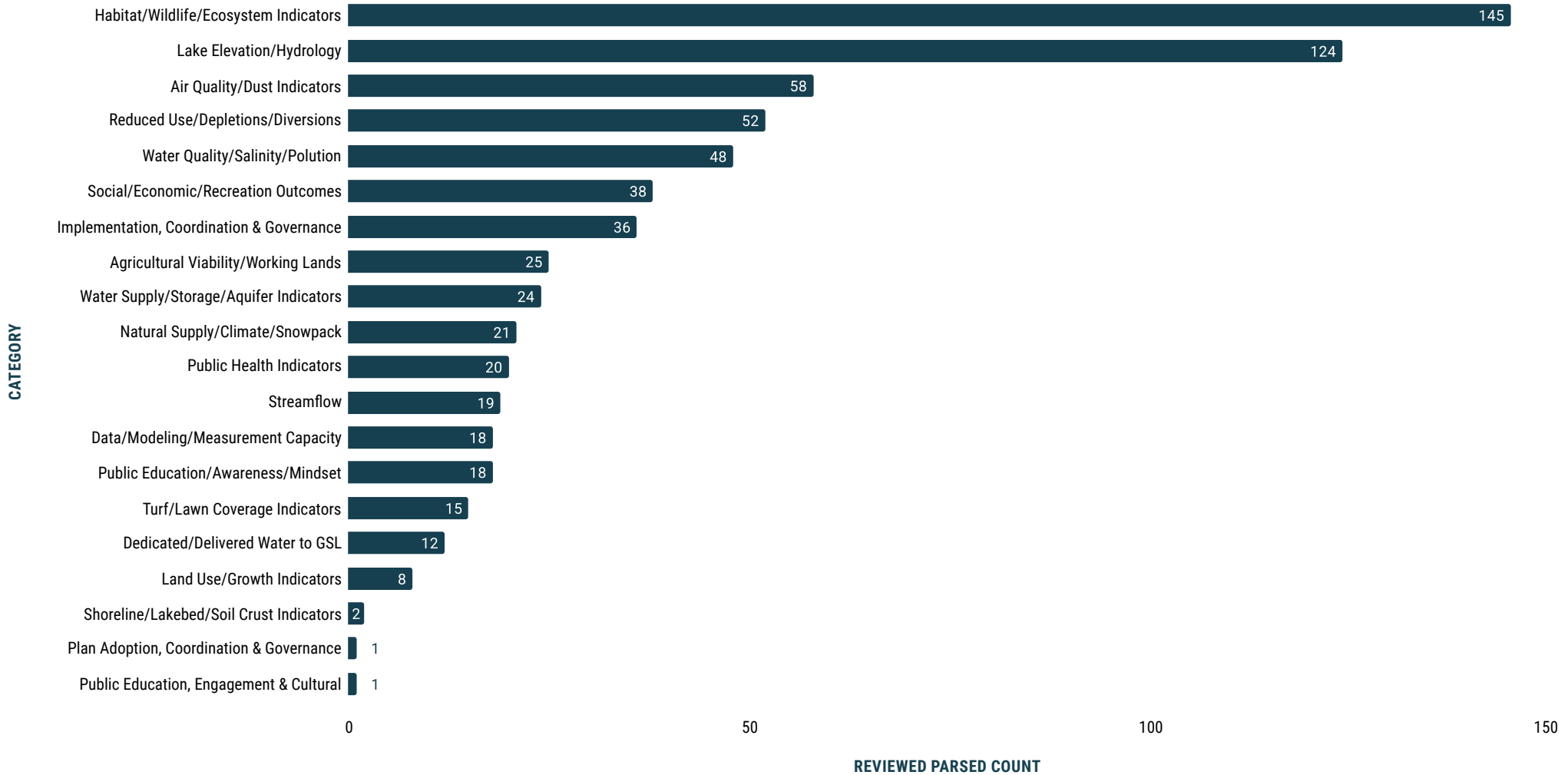


Figure 3. Brainstorm success metrics



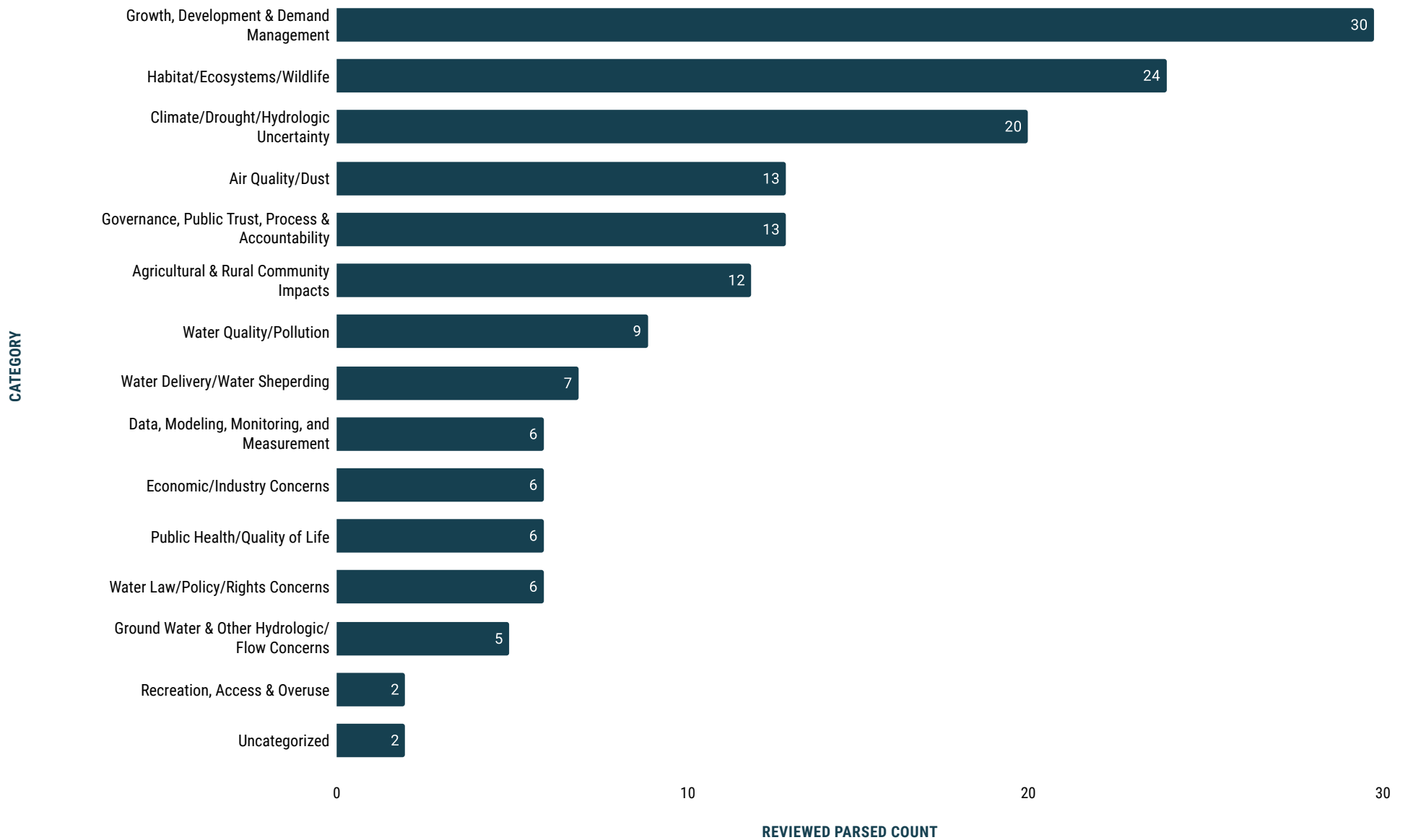


Figure 4. Brainstorm concerns

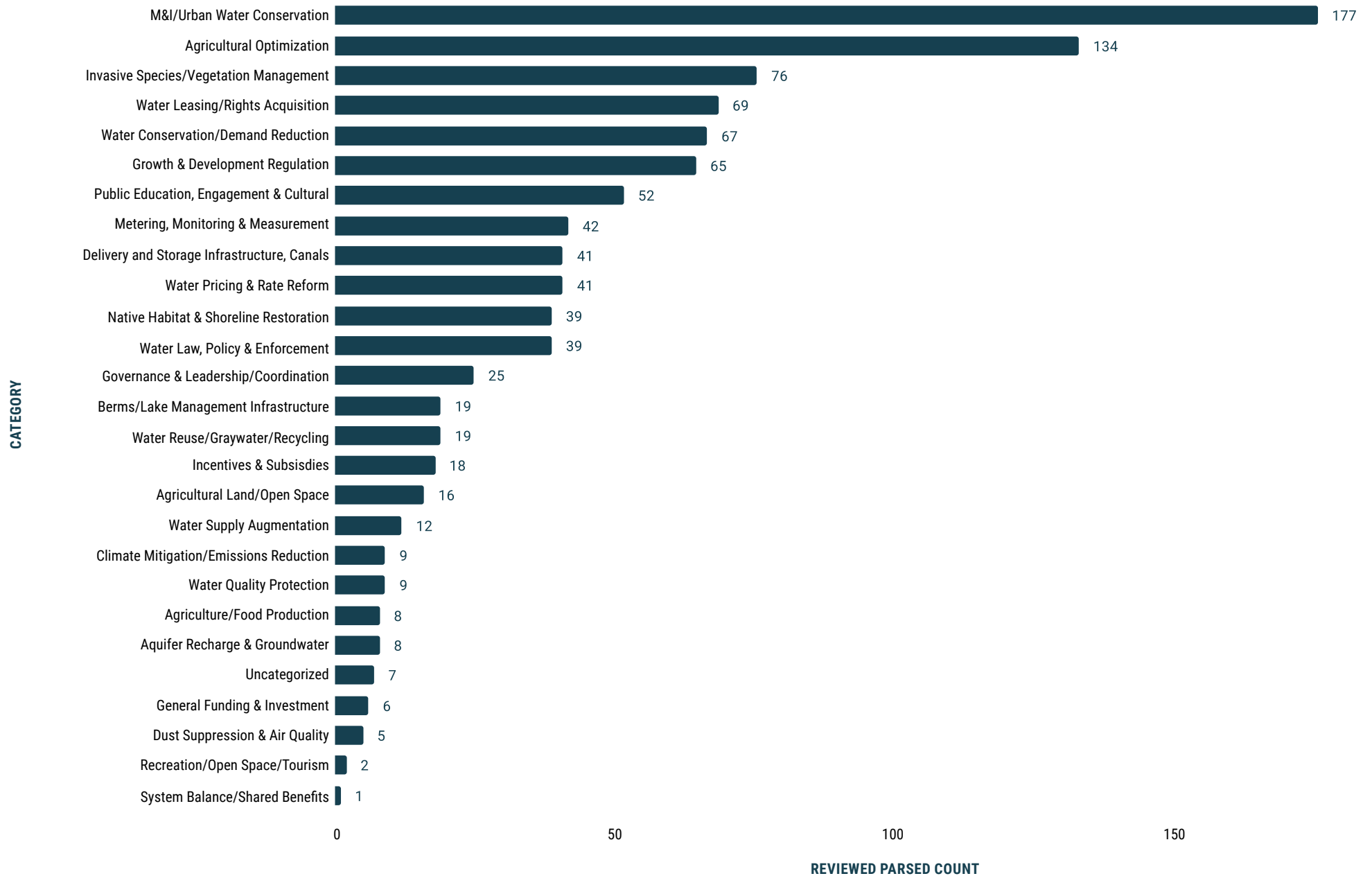


Figure 5a. Brainstorm water management strategies



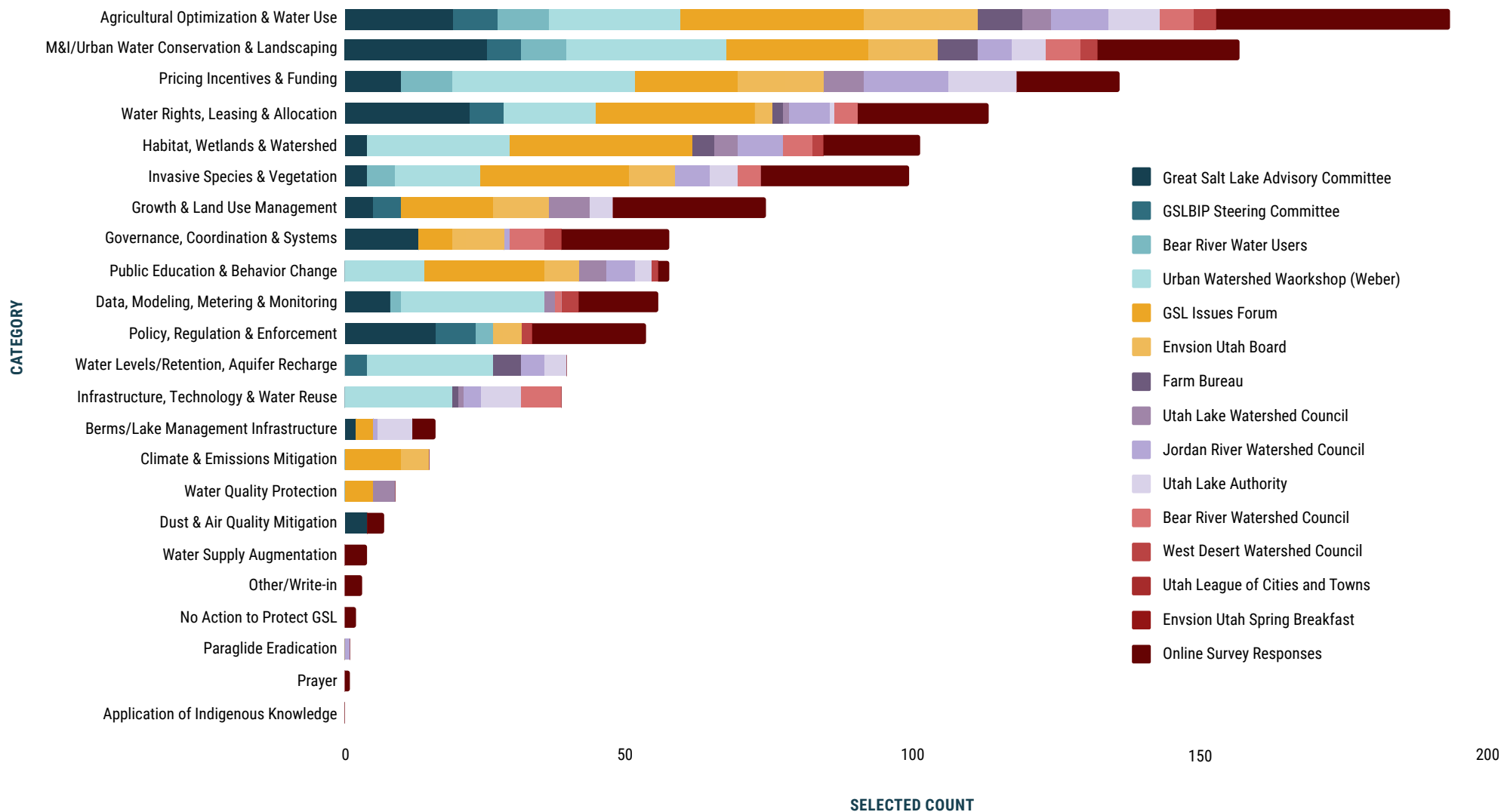


Figure 5b. Select top three strategies, broken down by workshop



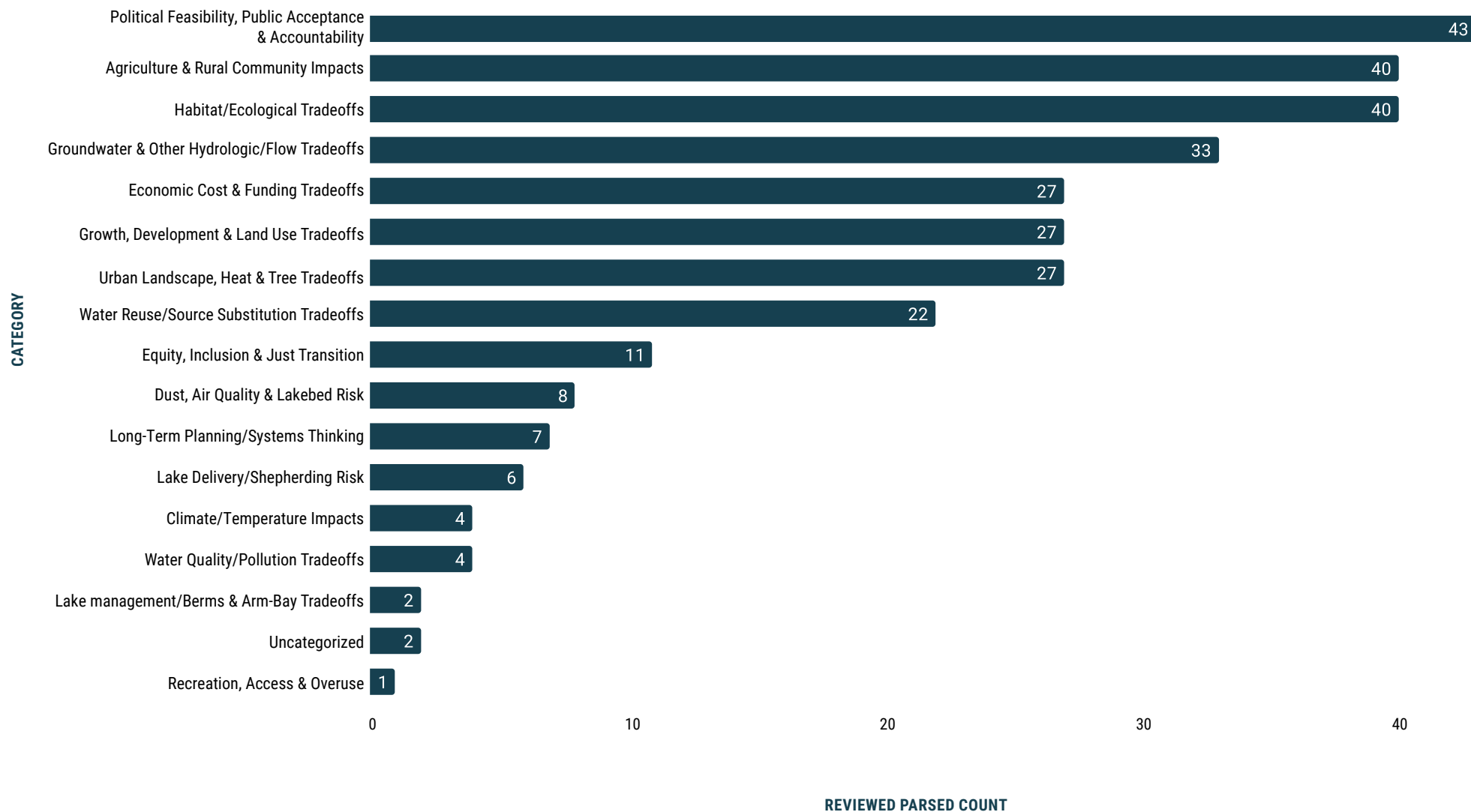


Figure 6. Trade-offs



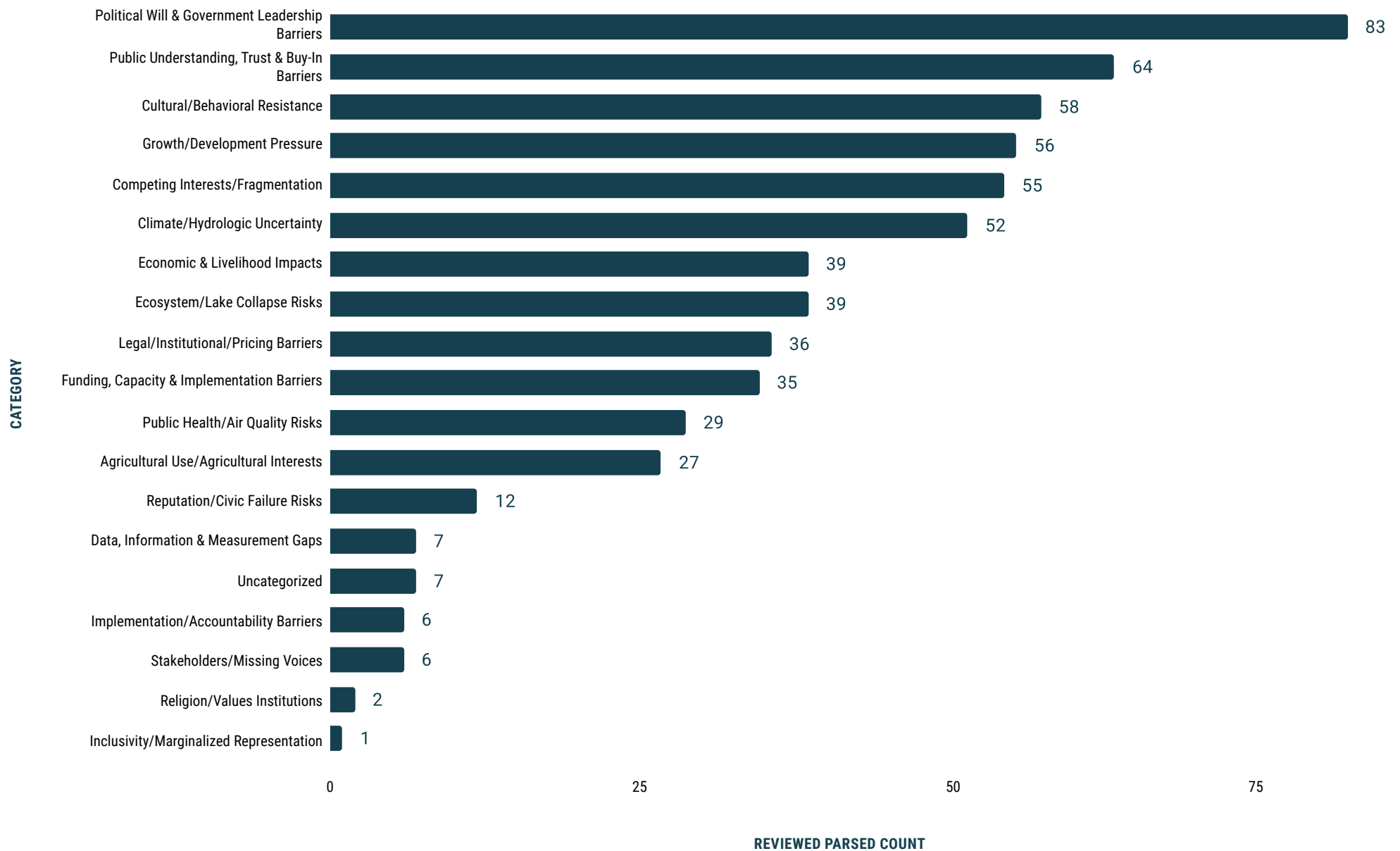


Figure 7. Barriers to GSLBIP success



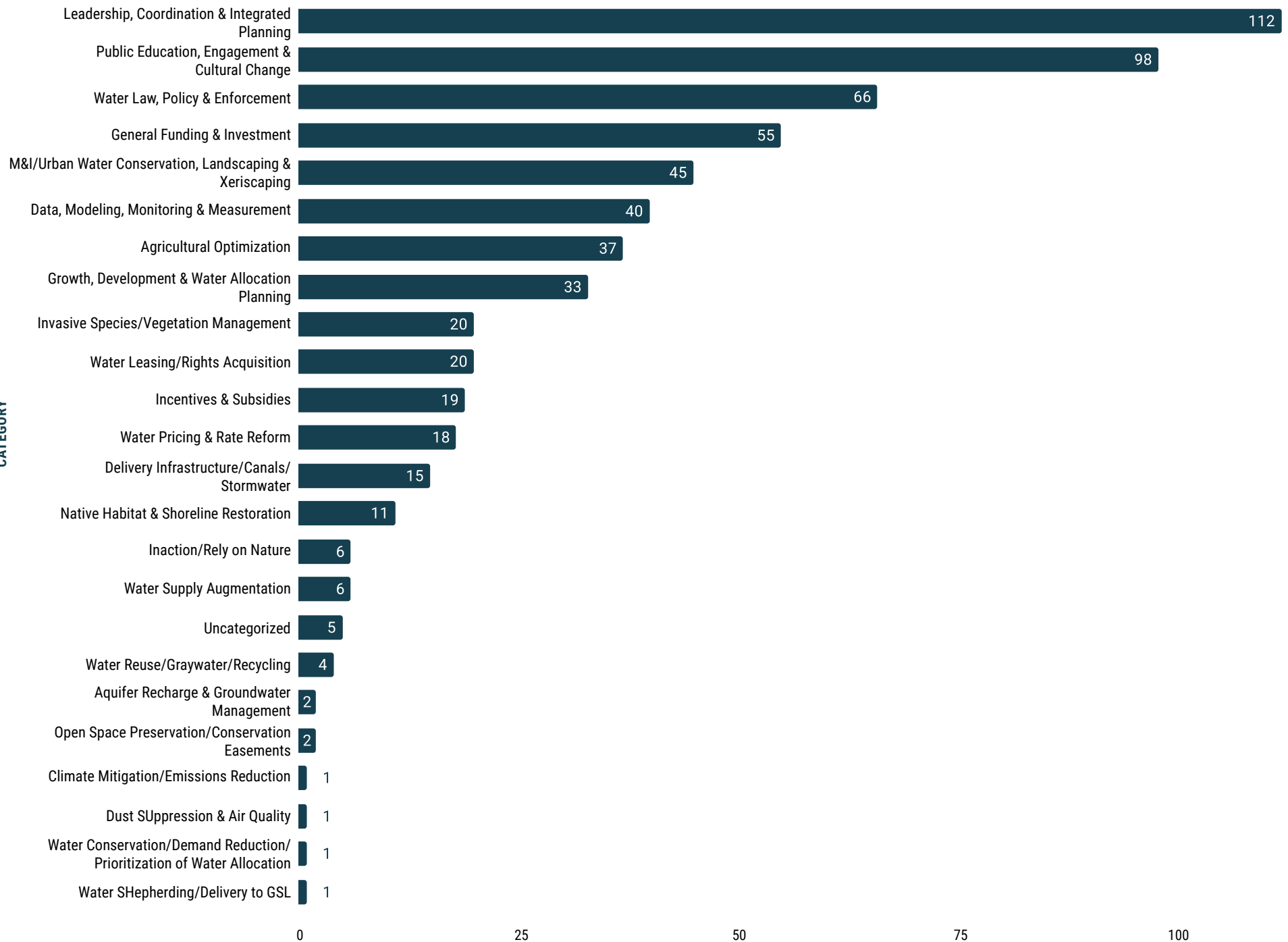


Figure 8. Brainstorm strategy implementation needs

REVIEWED PARSED COUNT