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AWWA



# How policy is shaping Utah's water future

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# Managing & Protecting Utah's Natural Resources



## Water

- Enhancing water certainty, security, and watershed health



## Energy

- Expanding Utah's energy and minerals portfolio



## Public Lands

- Advancing stewardship, outdoor recreation, and wildlife resilience

# Working Across Agencies to Protect Our Water



## Wildlife & Wetlands

Wetlands provide habitat

Groundwater is a primary water resource

Phragmites removal



## Forest Health

Watershed Restoration Initiative

Wildfire mitigation & response



## Mining & Energy

Responsible mineral & energy extraction

Energy development



## Recreation

90,000 miles of rivers and more than 2,000 lakes to play in and on

Low water levels hinder access and more

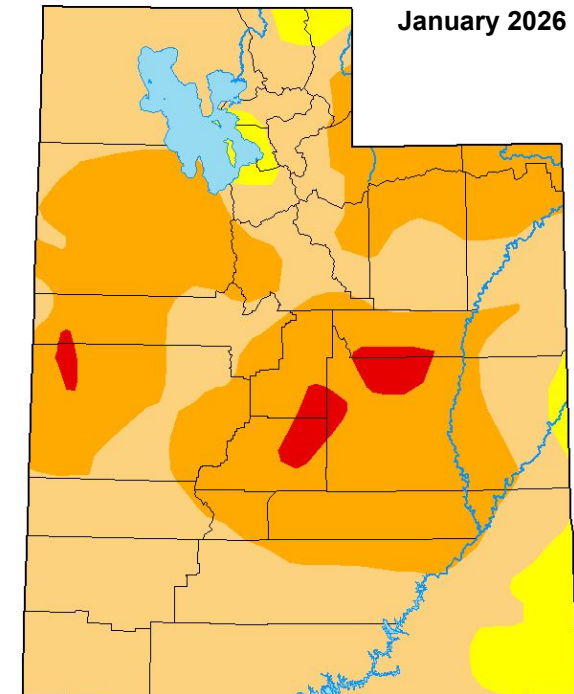
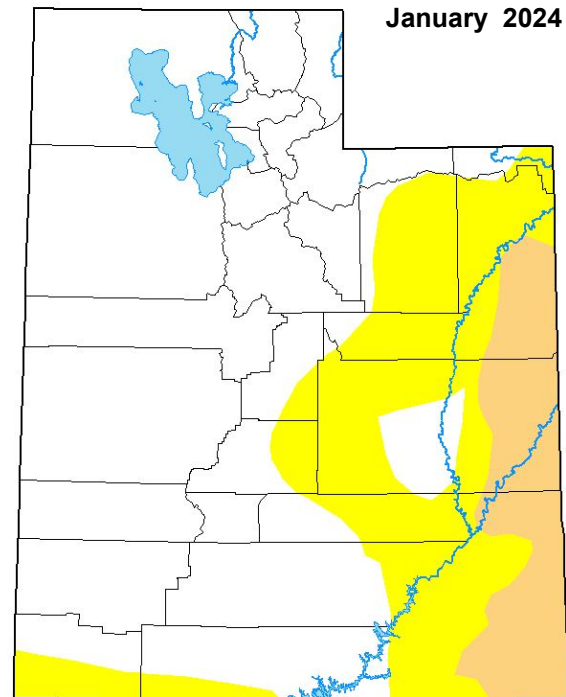
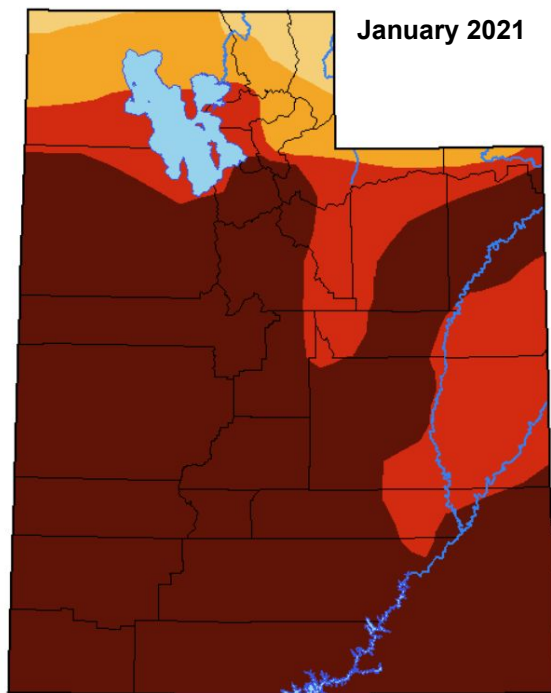
# Unusual Weather Patterns ...

- Wettest October on Record (SLC, much of Northern Utah)
  - Salt Lake City recorded 4.95", shattering the previous record of 3.91" set in 1981
- November and December were the warmest on record and helped propel Utah to its **warmest calendar year on record**
- About 94% of the state is in some level of drought
- We're hoping for a snowy February and March, but the **chances of a normal snowpack are less than 30%**
  - Likely to hit record low snowpack about February 1st



# In Drought or Preparing for the Next ...

*We can't control how much we get, but we can control how much we use*



## Intensity

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

## Authors

United States and Puerto Rico Author(s):

[Richard Heim](#), NOAA/NCEI

Pacific Islands and Virgin Islands Author(s):

[Curtis Riganti](#), National Drought Mitigation Center

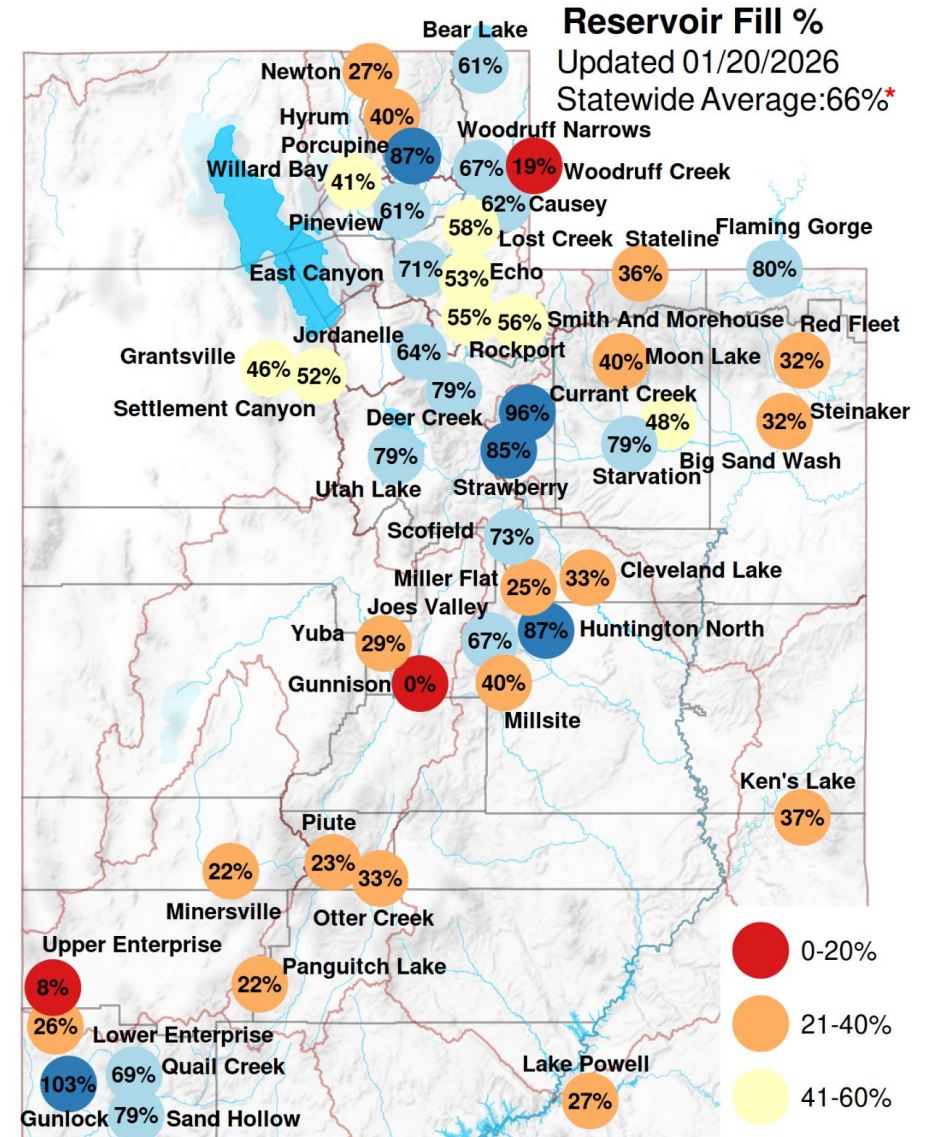


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# Conditions & Reservoirs

- Statewide, reservoirs are currently **66% full** (**8% higher** than average)
  - Storage prevents shortages
- Soil moisture is **52%**, about **7% higher** than typical for this time of year



Data Sources: [water.utah.gov/reservoirlevels](http://water.utah.gov/reservoirlevels)

\*State average excludes Lake Powell & Flaming Gorge to better represent the state's water supply.

Total capacity including these is 40%

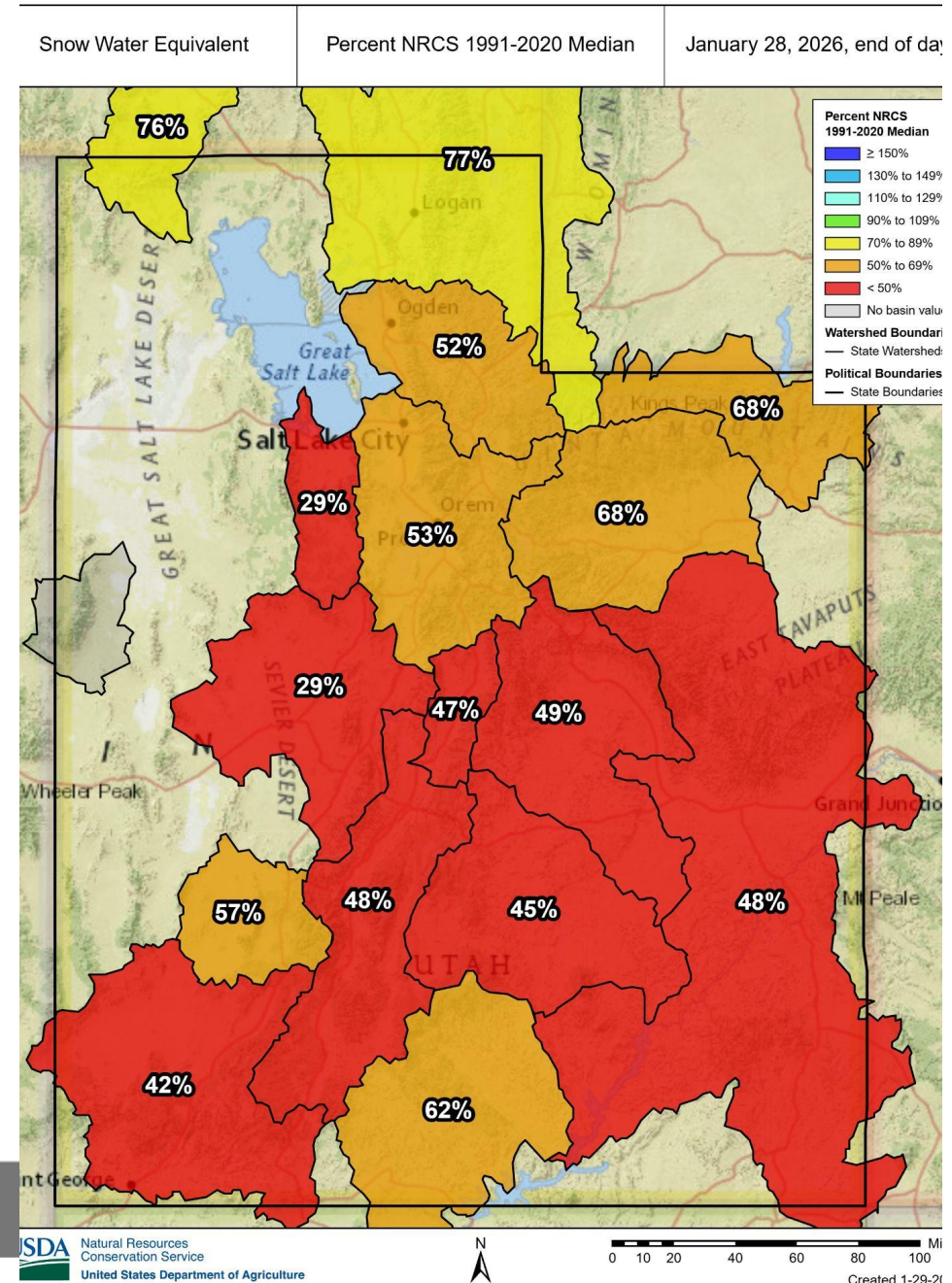


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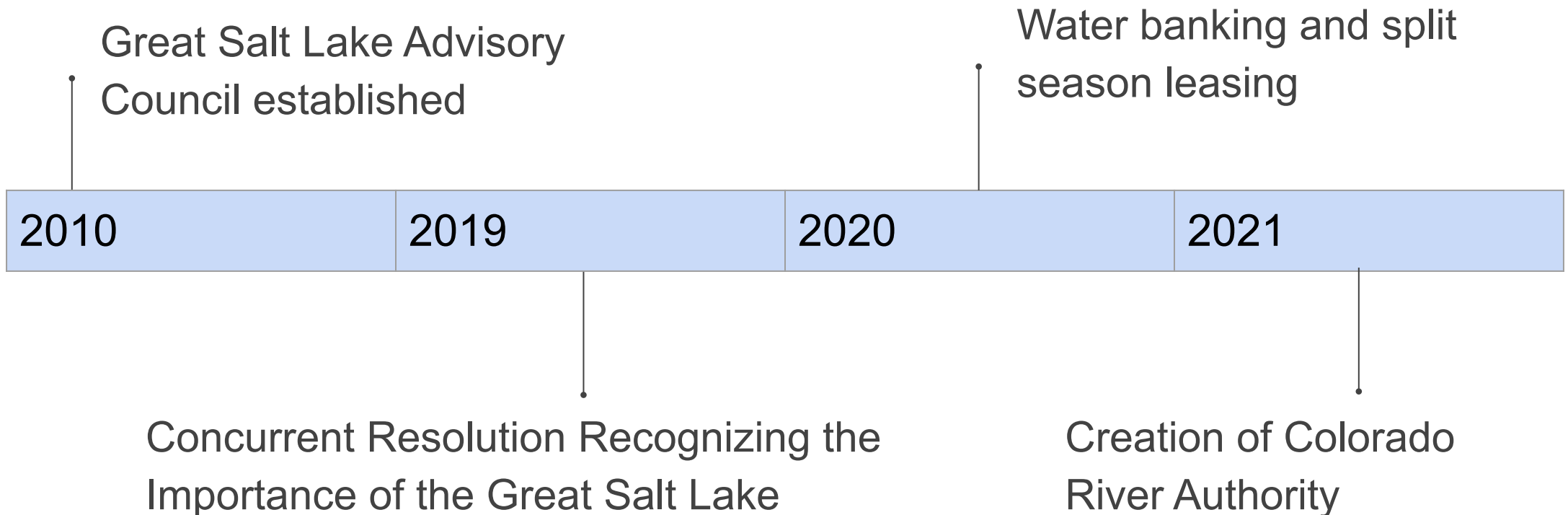
# Snow Water Equivalent

- Snow water equivalent is not looking great
  - Uppermost northern basins are at **52-77%** of normal
  - Central basins are **29-53%**
  - Southernmost basins are **42-62%**
- Currently 25 NRCS SnoTel stations are at their record low
  - Many more are at the second lowest



# Water Legislation Evolution Pre-2022

Largely transactional rather than policy shifts and investment targeting the broader welfare of water



# Extreme Drought Triggers Change

- 2018: Drought declaration October
- 2019: Good snowpack (127% of average)
- 2020: Second-hottest summer
- 2021: Record-dry soils at start of water year
- 2022: Below-average snowpack absorbed by dry soil resulted in abysmal spring runoff
- 2023: Record-breaking snowpack
- 2024: Strong snowpack
- 2025: Average water year
- 2026: So far not good ...



*Jordanelle 2022*

# 2022 – The year of water legislation

- 335 bills introduced
- 128 bills passed
- 79 legislators introduced water legislation
- Over \$500 million appropriated



# 2022 Session Highlights

- GSL Watershed Enhancement
- GSL Amendments
- Instream Water Flow Amendments
- Sovereign Lands Revenue Amendments
- State Engineer Modifications
- Sovereign Lands Trespassing Amendments
- Secondary Water Metering Amendments
- Water Wise Landscaping Amendments
- Water Conservation Modifications
- Water Amendments



# 2023 – 2nd Year of Investment & Action

- 2nd year in a row, significant investment and a long list of bills targeting water conservation, efficiency and infrastructure
- Appropriations total over \$500 million (one-time) and \$164 million (ongoing)
- Builds on a similar investment in 2022, for a total of about a **\$1B**



# 2023 Legislation Highlights



## Ag Optimization

Grants for irrigation efficiency projects — \$200M

## Water Conservation

Utah Water Ways  
Water Efficient Landscaping Incentives

## GSL Commissioner

Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan

## Cloud Seeding

\$12 million one-time, \$5 million ongoing

## Infrastructure

Water Reuse Reservoir and Desalination — \$50M

# 2024 Legislative Session

**150 DNR-related bills tracked — 92 passed**

- Water Efficient Landscaping Requirements
- Water Measuring and Accounting Amendments
- Utah Waterways Amendments
- Water Amendments
- Water Related Changes
- Great Salt Lake Revisions
- Secondary Water Amendments
- Generational Water Infrastructure Amendments
- Utah Lake and Great Salt Lake Study Amendments



# 2024 Legislative Highlights

## HB453

### GSL Amendments

Fairly compensates the state, while ensuring the lake is not harmed in the mineral extraction process

## HB62 Utah Water Ways Amendments

Creates resources and professional development opportunities used in K-12 schools educating youth about water

## SB211 Generational Water Infrastructure Amendments

Creates the Water District Water Development Council and a water agent to explore water solutions

## HB61 Water Measuring and Accounting Amendments

Adds the promotion of telemetry to the State Water Policy and provides rule-making authority to the State Engineer

## HB280

### Water Related Changes

Addresses long-term water planning needs, creating the Water Infrastructure Fund and modifies provisions of the state water plan

## SB18

### Water Modifications

Modifies various water rights-related provisions associated with “saved water” and agricultural water optimization



# 2025 Legislative Highlights – 136 tracked, 105 passed

## HB 41 State Water Policy Amendments

Updates Utah's water policy to better manage resources

## HB 46 Water Rights Applications Amendments

Addresses the reinstatement of lapsed applications

## HB 47 Public Lands Watering Rights Amendments

Protects the water rights of livestock grazing on public lands and provides clearer guidelines for water use

## HB 89 Water Transfer Amendments

Amends Utah's probate law regarding the transfer of personal property after a person's death

## HB 174 Water Rights Restricted Account

Expands the allowed use of funds in the Water Rights Restricted Account

## HB 243 Agricultural Water Optimization Amendments

Modifies the account to enhance ag water efficiency and research, and adjusts grant eligibility requirements

## HB 274 Water Amendments

Modifies Utah's water service regulations, emphasizing water conservation, metering and rate setting

## HB 285 Water Infrastructure Modifications

Establishes changes to Utah's water infrastructure funding and management, creating a unified planning process with 10-year and 20-year project phases

## HB 311 Watershed Amendments

Amends Utah's water laws concerning water commissioners, water banking, and development

## HB 446 Great Salt Lake Amendments

Introduces comprehensive amendments related to the Great Salt Lake, focusing on its management, mineral extraction, and water rights

## HB 520 Water Entity Amendments

Establishes a Great Salt Lake Trust Council to oversee watershed enhancement and moves the Great Salt Lake Commissioner within DNR

## SB 33 Water Rights Recording Amendments

Modifies existing Utah law regarding water rights documentation, specifically addressing how water rights are recorded and disclosed during property transactions

## SB 80 Water Fee Amendments

Authorizes state agencies to create a fee schedule for water consumption and regulation, including fees for public water systems to fund infrastructure and incentivize conservation measures like tiered rates and metering

# Water Highlights

- 187 remote cloud seeding generators statewide
- 82,000 secondary water meters installed (*\$265M in ARPA funds contracted*)
- Updated or replaced 50+ measurement & automation devices
- 65% of Utahns eligible for landscape incentives
- Demand Management – 15 applications 19,925 acre-feet
- Adopted GSL Distribution Management Plan

## Ag Optimization

Grants for irrigation efficiency projects

## Water Conservation

Water efficient landscaping incentives

## Great Salt Lake

Measurement and Infrastructure Gap Analysis Phase II;  
Distribution Management Plan, Basin Integrated Plan

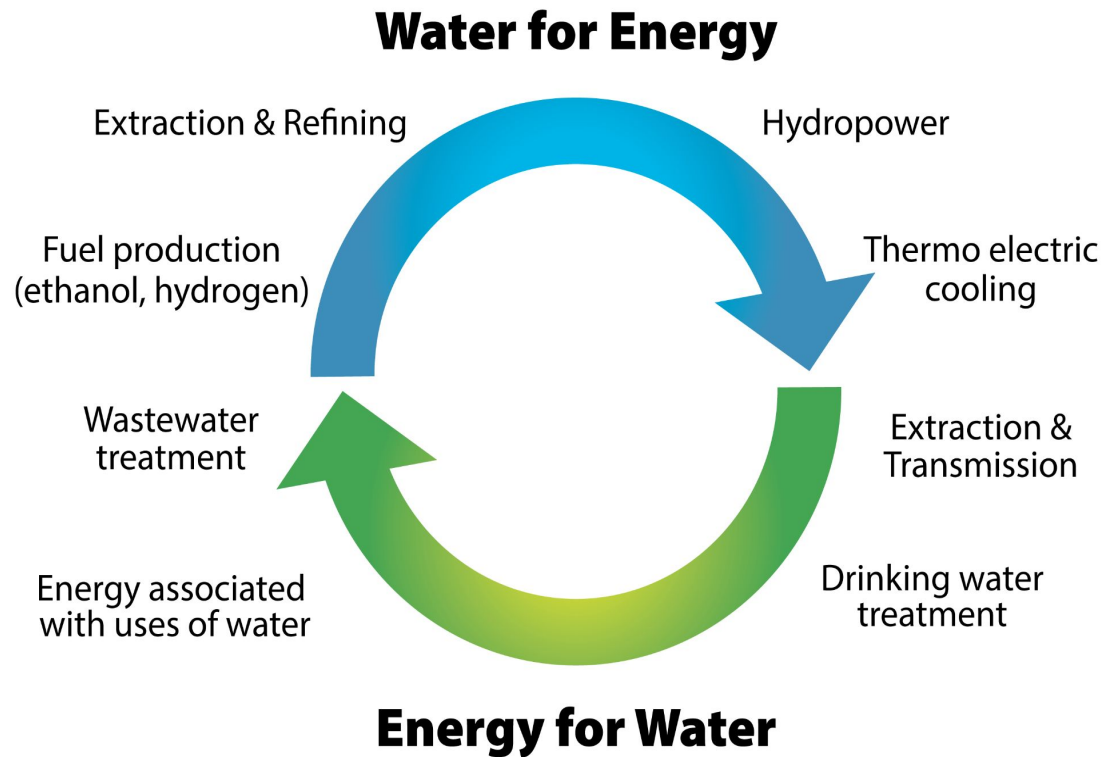
## Cloud Seeding

Program is now fully remote and includes drones

## Infrastructure

Dam safety, water reuse reservoir and desalination

# Water and Energy – Continue to be Hot Topics



*Water use varies by energy source and is a key consideration*

## Water for energy production

- Fuel extraction (oil, gas, mining)
- Cooling for plants (coal, natural gas, nuclear)
- Water as an energy generation resource
  - 60 Hydropower plants, half are utility-scale (1 MW or more) that generate 2.2% of Utah's total generation
  - Power and recreational opportunities

## Energy for water production

- Pumping (wells, uphill from surface water)
- Treatment (drinking water; wastewater)
- Distribution (systems to maintain flow)
- Heating for use (18% of home energy use)
- Desalination (energy is up to 50% of cost)



# 2026 Proposed Legislation

**HB 60** - Water Rights Amendment (Shallenberger) – Clarifies the process to approve or reject applications

**HB 76** - Data Center Water Policy Amendments (Koford) – Requires large data centers to be transparent with their expected water use before building in Utah

**HB 154** - Water Loss Study Amendments (Owens) – Directs the Division of Water Resources in partnership with Division of Drinking Water to study reported data regarding water loss

**HB 157** - DNR Amendments (Shipp) – Clean-up bill, including lifting the \$10M cap on low-interest rate loans for the installation of secondary water meters. The cap was in place before the division received \$265M (ARPA)

**HB 247** - Great Salt Lake Funding Amendments (Ward) – \$125,000 for water leasing that benefits brine shrimp

**HB 296** - Water Commitment Amendments (Nguyen) – Permits a water provider to make a statement of commitment of water to the Great Salt Lake in their Water Conservation Plan

**HB 328** - Water Usage Modifications (Okerlund) – Eliminates overhead spray irrigation to water nonfunctional turf in some types of new development within the GLS Basin



# 2026 Proposed Legislation (continued)

**HB 348** - Dedicated Water Amendments (Koford) – Amends existing law to establish and regulate "dedicated water applications," which are new types of water use applications

**HB 349** - Statewide Water Storage (Brooks) – Authorizes use of WIRA funds for dams and reservoir loans

**HB 363** - Water Easement Amendments (Abbott) – Amends Utah law regarding water conveyance prescriptive easements—rights gained through long-term, continuous use of another’s land to transport water

**HB 400** - Landscaping Water Amendments (Owens) – Directs municipalities and counties within the GSL Basin to adopt water-efficient landscaping ordinances for new development

**HB 410** - Water Leasing Amendments (Koford) – Creates a water leasing program

**SB 21** - Geothermal Study Amendments (McKell) – Changes to water rights regarding geothermal fluids

**SB 198** - Water Project Management Amendments (Sandall) – Creates the Office of Water Management within the Division of Water Resources for managing state water projects

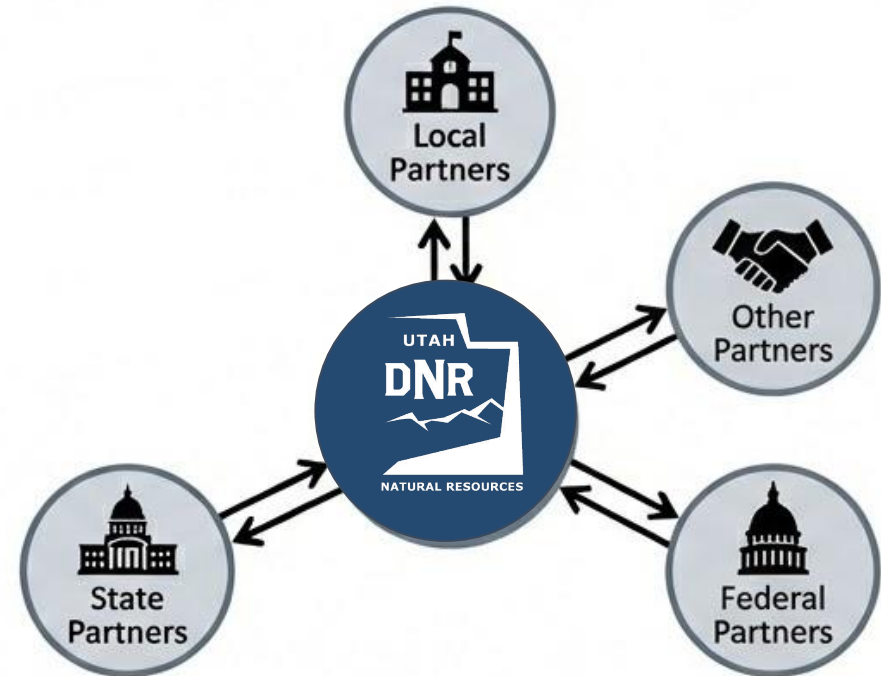


# Achieving Better Outcomes Together

## DNR Agency Purpose



## Collaboration Strengthens Outcomes



Close collaboration among all partners strengthens outcomes and avoids duplication of efforts.





# Maintaining Momentum

- There is more work to be done, which requires a strategic and forward-thinking approach
- We will continue to collaborate with our state, local and federal partners to ensure priorities are aligned to leverage resources
- We are harnessing the best science and data to guide the work of managing and protecting our natural resources



# Thank you.

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