



WATERLINES

Legislature Hoards \$72 Million for Pork Barrel Water Projects During Pandemic-Driven Budget Cuts

Since late spring, Utah legislators have been making sweeping cuts to critical social services and raiding rainy day funds because of the pandemic's economic impacts and growing deficit in the Utah budget. But one massive fund has not been touched and is still increasing during this economic downturn: a shadowy slush fund for pork barrel Bear River Development and Lake Powell Pipeline spending.

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The Legislature slashed rain day funds during this pandemic economy, but left \$72 million untouched for destructive water projects.

URC Scores Another Victory Against Unnecessary, Expensive, & Destructive Lake Powell Pipeline



Lake Powell, already at historically low levels in this megadrought, would be the point of diversion for the largest new water diversion in the Colorado River Basin.

After 10+ years of advocacy, the Utah Rivers Council won a major victory in September against one of the American West's most egregious proposals: the Lake Powell Pipeline. The pork barrel project has long been a sacred cow of Utah water leaders, and had been expedited by the Trump Administration for approval as early as January 2021. The relentless marketing machine behind this destructive, multi-billion-dollar project was openly proud of the Pipeline's expected approval since the Provo Office of the Bureau of Reclamation released the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in June 2020.

But the Lake Powell Pipeline was turned on its head when 14,000 public comments were submitted about the Pipeline, the largest new water diversion proposed in the seven state Colorado River Basin. Some of the critics included major water suppliers outside Utah, who rarely criticize another state's project. Headlines from media outlets across the American West questioned how a community that used more than 300 gallons of water per day – twice that of Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Denver and the U.S. Average – could claim it was facing a water crisis.

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Millcreek, Murray & Salt Lake County Partner to Save 246,920 Gallons of Water in your Next Rainstorm

Three visionary municipalities came together in 2020 to conserve water by distributing another 567 rain barrels to local residents. Millcreek City, Murray City and the Salt Lake County Watershed Program subsidized these wonderful 50-gallon rain barrels for their constituents, helping homeowners save water and money on their water bills and improve water quality of local streams and rivers.



Volunteers prepare 567 rain barrels to be loaded for eager customers through a contactless process that will lead to water savings and water quality improvements to local streams and rivers.

During one of the driest days of the summer, all three municipalities distributed these popular rain barrels from Rain Water Solutions to eager residents. Despite pandemic restrictions, our highly anticipated event came together after countless hours of worrying, planning and adapting the event for no-contact distribution. After five years of bringing these high-quality rain barrels to Utah, we have distributed 4,924 rain barrels to Utah residents. That’s enough water to save 246,200 gallons of water every time it rains enough to fill a 50-gallon rain barrel!

Rain barrels are an excellent way to improve the water quality of our streams and rivers by reducing urban runoff. When rainwater flows over pavement, it collects household hazardous waste, oil, rubber and many other pollutants. Collecting rainwater and discharging it onto yards and gardens after the rainstorm reduces polluted runoff entering our precious aquatic landscapes.

If you are interested in purchasing one of our very solid and reliable rain barrels from Rain Water Solutions, please contact us at info@utahrivers.org to be put on our 2021 waitlist.

New Headquarters for the Utah Rivers Council

With the pandemic forcing changes to how we work, we’ve elected to move our office closer to our staff and to the glorious watersheds we work to protect. Please see the new address below.

Utah Rivers Council

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Iron County to Raise Water Rates 700% to Mine Aquifers in Neighboring County

The Central Iron County Water District (CICWD) is quietly seeking to raise water rates 700% to mine the aquifers in neighboring Beaver County with a massive new groundwater development project. The sprawling development is called the Pine Valley Water Supply Project and would include the construction of 15 groundwater wells, 66 miles of pipeline, 12 miles of powerlines and 9 miles of new roads. It is among the most expensive possible sources of water for Cedar City that will burden working families with generations of unnecessary debt. A financial plan commissioned by the CICWD exaggerated future water needs by using outdated, inflated population growth forecasts that are 65% higher than what is expected in Iron County.

The CICWD began the federal permitting for the project through the Bureau of Land Management with a draft environmental impact statement expected in 2021. The financial plan noted that water rates must increase 700% to pay for the \$260 million project, but the water district failed to consider the massive drop in water demand accruing from such a draconian rate increase. If water rates are increased 700%, the resulting drop in water demand by water users would make project water completely unnecessary.

Water use in Cedar City is between 240 – 280 gallons per capita per day, roughly twice the U.S. average. The CICWD currently mines 7,000 acre-feet more water from local aquifers than is replenished by recharge, according to their own documents. This has caused the ground to sink by as much as 1.2 inches per year, but spending proponents in the CICWD have failed to embrace or consider how water demand strategies like conservation programs are used by modern utilities across the West.

The project would mine water out of the ancient aquifers below neighboring Beaver County, pumping 15,000 acre-feet of water annually from Pine Valley to Cedar City. Although monitoring wells would measure drops to the aquifer, this monitoring is just a marketing pitch because once \$260 million is spent on the fiasco, the water district won't simply turn it off after it's proven to be an unsustainable water mining operation. Existing ground water users will be dried out or forced to drill their wells deeper, which is a costly endeavor for 5th generation farmers and ranchers.

The project's financial plan lists several less-expensive alternatives which could meet future water needs, one of which includes local wells and increased conservation efforts at a cost of \$84 million. We will keep you informed about future opportunities to stop this costly and unsustainable project and hold our water district leadership accountable for their extravagant spending proposals. We'd also like to thank our colleagues at the Great Basin Water Network for providing leadership on this critical issue.



The Wah Wah Mountains in Beaver & Willard Counties remain one of the last isolated ranges in Utah, visited by only a few. The BLM is considering approving 15 groundwater wells that would tap into ancient aquifers and pipe that water 66 miles to Cedar City residents, who use between 240 - 280 gallons of water per capita per day. p: John George via SUWA.

Utah Rivers Council Scores Another Victory Against

Continued from cover page

When the DEIS was released, the dysfunction of Utah's water development industry was exposed for the world to see, attracting outrage far and wide. The architect of this dysfunction, the Utah Division of Water Resources, quietly asked for an extension to overhaul the DEIS, which will take another two years and waste millions more in taxpayer dollars. The dishonest Division remains mum about their \$40 million-and-counting failure, as well as the fact that this is the 4th time they've asked the federal government for a delay in the last 15 years. This decision to delay their own project is a stunning, 180-degree reversal and desperate attempt to save a flawed project.

Utah Rivers Council Submits 200+ pages of Pipeline Comments

The URC submitted 224 pages of detailed comments on the flawed DEIS, capping off another milestone in the Pipeline's lengthy permitting process and yet another step in our 10+ year battle against this taxpayer boondoggle. Our comments identified many flaws, including artificially inflating future water demand to create a false need for the project, ignoring the effects of climate change on the Colorado River and refusing to even study a water conservation alternative.

The Bureau also incorrectly analyzed how the project would be repaid and ignored the irreparable damage to cultural resources and endangered species. Some 14 other organizations from across the American West signed on to the URC's comments, demonstrating that people from around the country recognize how the Pipeline is fatally flawed.

State Engineer Considers Lake Powell Pipeline Water Right Application

URC staff presented oral arguments to the Utah State Engineer against the water right application for the proposed Lake Powell Pipeline in October. Our argument followed our 60 pages of written comments filed in June against the Pipeline, demonstrating that this water right exists only on paper since there is no real, wet water in the Colorado River to put into the Pipeline.

Climate change has already reduced the snow packs and hence the water flows of the Colorado River substantially and will continue to do so in coming years. Some recent peer-reviewed studies estimate that water flows in the Colorado could drop 10% - 30%, a serious crisis for existing water users.

Residents in Arizona and Nevada cut 200,000 acre-feet of their water use from the Colorado River in 2020, because of the serious drop in water flows over the last 20 years. Even without climate change impacts, there is a serious overallocation of water rights in the Colorado River Basin without the additional diversion of the 86,000-acre-foot of Lake Powell Pipeline water.



Climate change has reduced water levels of Lake Powell so severely that Hite Marina is now a parking lot.

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Unnecessary, Expensive, & Destructive Lake Powell Pipeline

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The URC reiterated that the Lake Powell Pipeline is financially reckless, since studies by PhD economists from the state's leading universities demonstrate that water rates will need to increase over 500% to repay Utah taxpayers for the costs of the Pipeline. This means Washington County residents will be forced into gigantic water rate increases to pay for an empty pipe since there will be no water available. The State Engineer is contemplating both sides of the issue and no timeline has been announced about when a decision will be made.

Six States Ask Secretary of Interior to Hold Pipeline Permitting



A dock on the Colorado River sits high above the waterline in Laughlin, Nevada. Water users across the West are concerned about low water levels caused by climate change and new diversions.

In a historic first, a coalition of state water agencies, large water suppliers, and Governors' representatives of Nevada, Arizona, California, Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico authored a letter to the Department of the Interior asking that Utah's controversial Lake Powell Pipeline be placed on hold. The letter is a demonstration of how out of touch Pipeline proponents have been in understanding the impacts of the Pipeline's impact to the water supplies of seven states.

The six states and water authorities were joined by over a hundred small businesses in Nevada and Arizona who signed on to a joint letter urging the Bureau of Reclamation to reject the Pipeline. This astonishing array of businesses and community leaders expressed serious concerns stating:

“Our businesses and communities will acutely feel the impacts of the Lake Powell Pipeline for generations to come. We are already struggling to grapple with the new reality on the river and the Lake Powell Pipeline will further jeopardize our economic future.”

Organized by Laughlin, Nevada, business owner Brea Chiodini, this impressive coalition gives voice to millions of residents whose future and livelihoods would be impacted by Utah's water grab. Over 14,000 public comments were submitted to the Provo Office of the Bureau for the Lake Powell Pipeline fiasco. The public is beginning to see through the Division of Water Resources and Washington County Water's misinformation campaign. Pipeline proponents are going to work harder than ever to advance this fiasco but we must continue to keep up the pressure! Call your legislators, write a Letter to the Editor in your local newspapers, and help us stay vigilant. With your help, this is a fight that we can and will win.

We would like to thank all of you who have helped us in opposing the Lake Powell Pipeline. Whether you wrote an LTE, donated, or had a conversation with a neighbor, your activism is the true power of change that is needed against destructive water projects.

New Studies Show Utah's Colorado River Water Use Exceeds Current Supply

A range of recent studies on climate change reductions to the flows of the Colorado River Basin demonstrate that Utah has already exceeded its water right to the Colorado under the Law of the River. These findings come in stark contrast to claims by Utah proponents of new diversions, like the Lake Powell Pipeline and Green River Diversion, who 'believe' there is ample water available for new projects, even though they have not commissioned a single study to prove their beliefs. The overwhelming majority of published scientific papers estimate that climate change will reduce flows in the Colorado River 10% - 30%.

A climate study published in Science coined the term 'megadrought' to describe how warm and dry the Southwest U.S. has been. Their findings essentially mean that it hasn't been this dry since Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa, roughly 500 years ago. One of the Colorado River Basin's foremost climate scientists on water availability, Dr. Brad Udall, estimates that we can expect the 21st Century of Colorado River flows to be 20-30% lower than what was observed in the 20th Century.

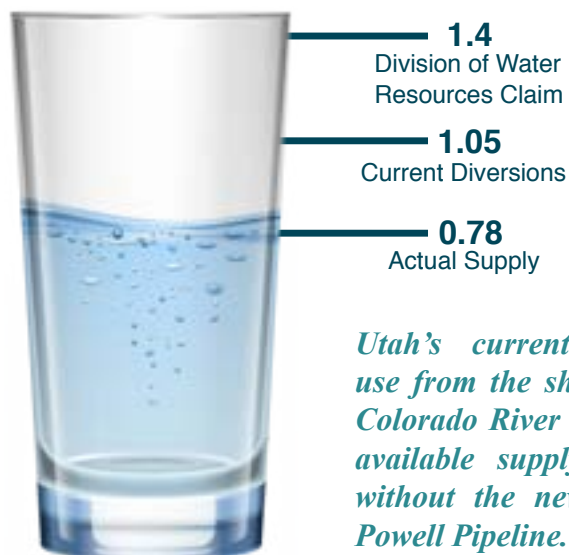
Here's how the math works. With a 20th Century average of Colorado River water flows at about 15 million acre-feet (maf), a 20% decline means a new base flow of just 12.1 maf, to be shared by all seven states, Mexico and the sovereign tribes of the Colorado River Basin. If you think that's a figure we won't see for decades into the future, think again. In the last 20 years, average flows were just 12.4 maf, and although proponents call this a drought, it's likely just the beginning of future flow declines. Since the lower basin states must get their water first according to the Law of the River, deduct 7.5 maf from that 12.4 number. Then subtract another 1.25 maf for tribal water right depletions and system losses before the remaining four states of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming can stick their fork in the pie. This doesn't even include deductions for Mexico, which is currently forgoing their 750,000 acre-ft in water rights.

So a 20% climate change reduction in flows translates into just 3.41 maf of water leftover for these four states, leaving Utah with just 780,000 acre-feet of water from the Colorado River Basin. The Bureau of Reclamation estimates Utah used 1.05 million acre-feet of water from the Colorado River in 2018, significantly more than Utah's projected allocation. The Lake Powell Pipeline would exacerbate this deficit.

Pipeline proponents' claims that the Colorado River is a secure source of water are not just untruthful, they are dangerous. Yet the delusional Division of Water Resources claims that Utah magically has 1.4 million acre feet of water available in the Colorado River. The idea that there is enough water to serve the Lake Powell Pipeline is an irresponsible \$3 billion pipedream. When will Utah wake up from this nightmare?

Utah's Overallocated Colorado River Water Supply

(Values in millions of acre-feet)



The Future of the Great Salt Lake Rests on Political Courage



This satellite photo compares 2015 levels of the Great Salt Lake to the Lake's average level as seen by the white outline. Climate change and large diversions of tributaries have caused a decline in Great Salt Lake water levels.

A plethora of recent studies on the Great Salt Lake, the largest wetland ecosystem in the American West, shows that the decisions we make over the next 10 years are critical to the future of this aquatic treasure. The Great Salt Lake is threatened by local water suppliers and the Division of Water Resources, who are proposing to divert the Bear River, the single largest water source to the Lake. Diverting the Bear River would lower the Great Salt Lake several feet, drying up habitat for some 8 million individual birds migrating through the region each year.

Recent studies make clear the Great Salt Lake is reaching a breaking point. Climate change and excessive water use has already depleted Great Salt Lake inflows by 39%, causing an 11-foot decline in Lake elevation. Studies by Mississippi State researchers show the Lake's tributaries have been steadily declining since at least 1970 as a result of climate change. Despite this, the Division of Water Resources claims that additional diversions like Bear River Development will only drop Lake levels 6 inches. A model commissioned by the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council found that diversions and climate change will likely drop the Lake another 2 to 4 feet, or in the worst-case scenario, 12 feet by 2045.

The Utah Division of Water Resources continues to advance a water rights application to divert 400,000 acre-feet of water from the Bear. The diversion would be used by urban Utahns, who are America's #1, highest per capita water users. Most city water is used outside on grass, either through treated culinary water or through untreated secondary water. Treated culinary water is cheap because property taxes on homes, businesses and cars are collected to lower water rates, thus incentivizing waste. Most secondary water is unmeasured so users have no idea how much water they use. Efforts to phase out property taxes and meter secondary water have been blocked by proponents of Bear River Development.

The URC has been fighting Bear River Development since 1997 and we defeated construction of two proposed dams through legislation we wrote and got passed in the 2002 Legislature. Since then, there's been a lack of legislative courage to stop \$2.9 billion Bear River Development or implement less expensive water conservation alternatives. State legislators bow to the will of nonsensical claims by lobbyists from the Jordan Valley Water District, Weber Basin Water District, and Central Utah Water district who are working to advance Bear River Development. To preserve the Great Salt Lake, we need legislators courageous enough to oppose pork barrel spending from drying up the Great Salt Lake. Contact your legislators and ask them to prioritize the preservation of our namesake.

Legislature Hoards \$72 Million for Pork Barrel Water Projects During Pandemic-Driven Budget Cuts

Continued from cover page

This special interest gravy train, officially known as the Water Infrastructure Restricted Account (WIRA), was established through a pair of bills rammed through the Utah Legislature in 2015 and 2016 to pay for these two destructive megaprojects. Sales taxes are funding these destructive and unnecessary water projects and more than \$72 million is collecting dust in this pandemic economy, waiting for these projects' approval. The WIRA fund is expected to balloon to \$502 million by 2028. Water lobbyists are hoping no one will notice that the two largest spending proposals in the state budget are hiding in plain sight.

Since the pandemic hit Utah, the economy has unraveled budgets, thus compounding impacts to Utahns suffering from illness, job loss and business collapse. So far in 2020, the Utah Department of Workforce Services has received nearly the same number of new unemployment claims as were filed in the previous five years combined. More unemployment benefits have been paid out in the past seven months by the agency than were paid in the previous eight years combined.

During this unparalleled economic crisis, it tiptoes towards incompetence or even corruption to hoard taxpayer funding for unnecessary water projects that even proponents admit are not needed for at least 30 years from now. In a state that prides itself on fiscal responsibility, it is outright hypocrisy to fund pipedream projects like Bear River Development and the Lake Powell Pipeline, while tens of thousands of suffering Utahns watch healthcare funding get whittled away. Given the plethora of low-cost water conservation alternatives that can provide water at a fraction of the costs of these megaprojects, it is an insult to the public that the Utah Legislature continues to fund pork barrel spending.

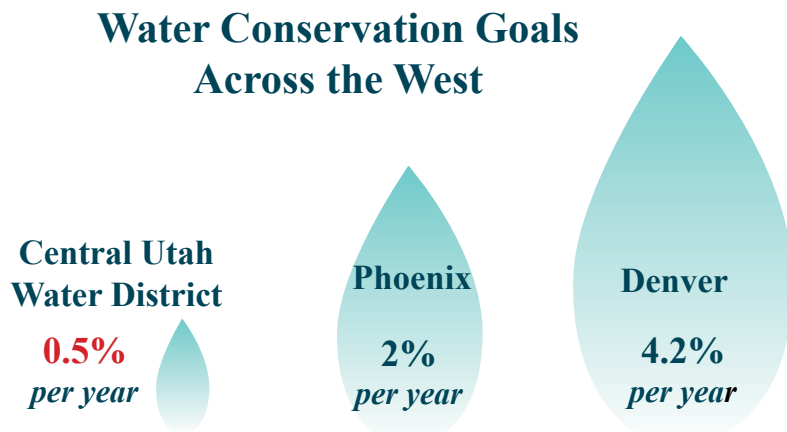
Are your legislators voting in favor of water conservation? Ask them yourself by visiting www.le.utah.gov and use the My Legislator tool at the bottom to call or email them.



The sun sets on the Great Salt Lake, America's Serengetti. The Lake is threatened by climate change and proposed Bear River Development. The project would divert over 220,000 acre-ft of water from the Lake annually. Since 2016, a sales tax fund has accrued \$72 million to support Bear River Development. p: Scott Law.

Central Utah Water District Violates Utah Law and Reduces Water Conservation Efforts

At their most recent board meeting, the Central Utah Water District (CUWD) voted to reduce the amount of water they conserve each year when they approved their new water conservation plan. The new CUWD Water Conservation Plan sets water use reduction goals of just 0.5% per year, replacing the previous 1% per year water use reduction goal. Both the new and old conservation goals are much lower than water use reduction percentages implemented by other cities in the American West where 2%, 3%, 4% or more are routinely achieved each year. This helps explain why urban Utahns are still America’s single highest per person urban water users in the U.S.



The Central Utah Water District lowered its water conservation savings goal from 1% to just 0.5% per year with the adoption of their new water conservation plan. This figure is significantly less than other American cities like Phoenix and Denver which have much more ambitious annual water use reduction goals.

When several board members requested time to consider written comments summarizing the impacts of high-water use submitted by the Utah Rivers Council, their motion was voted down and this sham of a conservation plan passed without discussion. The CUWD staff also pulled the wool over its board and the public in the new conservation plan by falsely claiming the agency would work to support new water conservation legislation. This claim amounts to outright greenwashing since it is the CUWD staff and its lobbyists who have led the effort to kill virtually all water conservation legislation proposed at the Utah Legislature over the last 10 years. We sincerely question the CUWD’s commitment to supporting water conservation, especially in light of a new plan that works to reduce water conservation goals.

This anti-water conservation effort follows the CUWD’s violation of Utah laws regarding notifying the public of its budget proposal. In June, the CUWD held a board meeting to approve a new 2021 budget but the agency failed to give proper public notice or share the budget with the public when asked in advance of the meeting. Agency staff refused to allow the public to participate in the electronic meeting upon request during the pandemic’s stay at home order. These actions violated Utah law, so the URC filed a 17-page letter with the Utah State Auditor, asking that the budget meeting be held again. After a review, the Utah Auditor ordered the CUWD to redo its budget meeting and to post the budget in advance of the meeting.

As a government agency that receives federal funding and represents a diverse array of stakeholders, the CUWD has a responsibility to adhere to state law and strive for honesty and transparency in its operations. It is disappointing the CUWD staff appear to revel in gamesmanship, greenwashing, and suppressing public involvement in what should be a transparent process as stated by Utah law.

Bureau of Land Management Proposes Mining Inside Protected Green River Wilderness

A Denver-based mining company is proposing to mine inside a protected wilderness area in Labyrinth Canyon, a popular stretch of the Green River below the city of Green River, Utah. If approved, the Twin Bridges mining company would be allowed to build and improve roads, construct drill pads, and extract helium in and around a newly designated wilderness area just two miles east of the river. Helium is an element used frequently in laboratory settings.

The construction would substantially degrade this newly-protected Wild and Scenic River that is a popular recreation destination for people from all across America. The impacts include visual and auditory disruptions and habitat fragmentation that could carry on to the Green River itself. The area around the proposed helium mine was designated as the Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness Area in 2019 when Congress passed legislation protecting 54,000 acres of wilderness in the area and established 63 miles of the Green River as Scenic under the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Some 50 of those miles are in Labyrinth Canyon.



The Green River works its way through Labyrinth Canyon, a popular destination for people from all around the world. The BLM is considering opening the area to helium mining that would fragment habitat within the 54,000-acre Labyrinth Canyon Wilderness Area, designated by Congress in 2019.

Normally, extraction of any kind is prohibited in wilderness areas, but the Twin Bridges mining company secured leases for this site via an expedited Bureau of Land Management (BLM) auction in 2018. Suspiciously, the company won the lease after legislation was passed in Congress to establish the wilderness area. The BLM's rushed auction meant that this mining lease was grandfathered in when the Congressional wilderness protections were finalized shortly thereafter. The BLM is conducting an environmental review to determine whether the project should be allowed to proceed.

The Green River through Labyrinth Canyon is one of the most pristine and wild stretches of river in Utah. It attracts people from across the country and was meant to be protected for all time for the public. This proposal threatens the Green River's unique wilderness characteristic and endangers one of the nation's most iconic desert rivers. While the public comment period for this project closed November 9th, we encourage you to reach out to your federal Congressional Representative and Senator and ask them to tell the BLM to abandon this reckless proposal. Labyrinth Canyon is too special to turn into a drilling site.

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Go to www.utahrivers.org/email-alerts to sign up for URC email alerts, and make sure you stay in the know about important issues affecting Utah's amazing rivers. You can also stay up to date by following us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

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