

STATE OF UTAH'S RIVERS



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Adapting our consumption to rivers, not rivers to our consumption

critical restoration opportunities are facing strong resistance. A broad spectrum of conservation groups is engaged in river and watershed protection in Utah, all working to shift river management toward adapting water consumption patterns to balance human and ecological needs. What follows are the positive and negative developments currently affecting the realization of this objective.

As we again face below average snowpack across the state, the impacts of our excessive water consumption on rivers are becoming all too obvious. While valuable progress is being made to increase the public's understanding of the need for greater water conservation, the implementation of meaningful policies has yet to occur. It is certainly encouraging that proposals for new dams are falling out of favor, but those for pipelines and other diversions continue. River restoration programs across the state are generating results, yet some

Recognition of Water Conservation Needs

Utah's rivers have no more to give. Utah is second only to Nevada in per capita water consumption, which is 80 percent above the national average. Public recognition of the need for water conservation is building. Last July the state's principle public radio station, KUER, produced and aired an excellent series on the need for Utah residents to conserve water. One month later Governor Leavitt agreed that water conservation must play a key part in the future of water management in the state. This growing recognition represents a critical step for the state toward finding new water supplies through conservation, not more diversions. Significant water savings could come from two sources: mechanisms for replacing lawns and other irrigated landscaping with native plants, thus eliminating the need for up to 2/3 of municipal water demand; and mechanisms to improve agricultural efficiency, especially for alfalfa, the most water-intensive crop grown across the state.

KUER Receives River Stewardship Award

Last July, radio listeners throughout Utah were treated to an excellent three-part documentary *Soaking the Desert, The Story of Water in Utah*. This contemporary overview has helped to illustrate that there is indeed sufficient water, but our excessive use is causing scarcity. An internet companion to the documentary has further helped to spread the word about the need for, and viability of, conserving water. For this outstanding public service, LIVING RIVERS selected KUER, and reporters Jenny Brundin and Vince Pearson, to receive its 2002 *River Stewardship Award*.

Rivers be Dammed Award back page

Bill to Save Bear River Valley from Dams

The State House and Senate have sent a bill to Governor Leavitt's desk which would prevent construction of two dams in the Bear River Valley. These projects are widely opposed by farmers, ranchers, conservationists, and elected



Bear River Valley awaits decision

officials in Northern Utah because they would inundate thousands of acres of farms and ranches, burial grounds of the Shoshone Nation, and wetlands along the river.

Momentum to Move Radioactive Waste

Three miles from Moab, adjacent to the Colorado River, sits a 10.5-million-ton pile of radioactive waste from the former uranium ore processing facility operated by Atlas Mineral Corporation. After more than a decade of battling now bankrupt Atlas and a host of federal agencies, momentum has developed to move the 130-acre pile. In October, 2001 the Department of Energy took control of the site, and in January, 2002 the National Research Council began an investigation to determine the best method of containment and storage. Previously, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission supported merely capping the pile on site. However, the inability to prevent the gradual seepage of the waste into the river, and the potential for a major flood to wash the pile into the river all at once, raise serious questions about such a strategy, particularly for downstream water users in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. It is anticipated that the National Research Council's findings will validate the urgent call to move the pile to a less environmentally vulnerable location.

Central Utah Project Restoration

While arguments continue as to the merits of the Central Utah Project's dewatering of Green River tributaries, the project mitigation funds continue to be put to productive use demonstrating the viability and desirability of river restoration here in Utah. Nearly-3.5 miles of a 10-mile stretch of the Provo River have been engineered back into a more natural course between Jordanell Dam and Deer Creek Reservoir. Work on the remaining 6.5 miles is expected to be completed within the next two to three years. This will help restore valuable wetlands lost over 50 years ago when this stretch of river was channelized for flood control purposes. Although not as extensive, but nonetheless significant, are the restoration efforts under way at several locations along the Jordan River. Of key significance is the work on 120 acres at 106 South, where partnerships with organizations like Great Salt Lake Audubon and Tree Utah have mobilized the community to participate in restoration efforts. It is hoped that they will soon be able to renew a contract with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to continue their efforts there. Overall, it is hoped that these projects can further illustrate the value of earmarking funding for such restoration on its own, and not solely in exchange for negatively impacting riverine habitat elsewhere.



Crews working to revegetate the eroded banks of Moab's Mill Creek Canyon

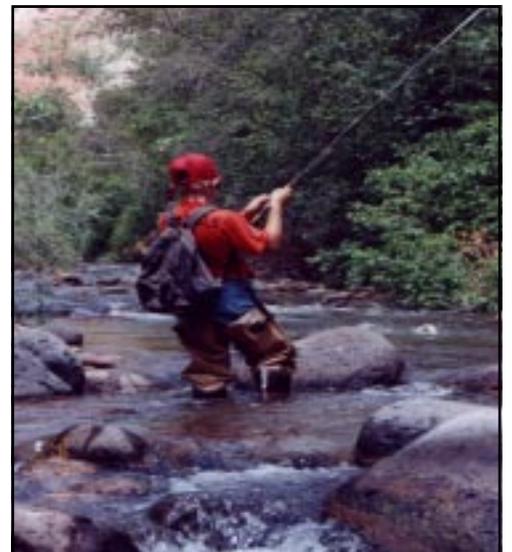
Restoring Moab's Mill Creek

A small tributary of the Colorado River, Mill Creek flows 30 miles from the La Sal Mountains through Moab to the river. Mill Creek Canyon is representative of riparian areas in the upper Colorado Plateau not only in its natural history, but in the human use patterns that have altered it during the past 100 years. Mill Creek is an essential feature of Moab's landscape; providing irrigation water, feeding Moab's drinking water aquifer, and historically watering grazing cattle. Mill Creek's watershed also has a long history of recreational uses; from housing an illegal still, to hiking, swimming, and riding horses. Recently, cattle grazing has given way to recreational tourism as the watershed's primary land use. Invasive exotic plant species, including tamarisk, russian olive and ravenna grass were introduced as erosion control plantings and in landscapes of nearby homes are rapidly displacing native species. But a unique partnership has developed to help reverse this trend. Rim to Rim Restoration and Four Corners Mental Health Services, in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, are leading crews of teenagers to undertake erosion stabilization, trail delineation, removal of exotic plants and native revegetation. The crews gain first time job experience, teamwork skills and knowledge of their local ecology while working toward restoring a creek for future generations.

Small Dams Impeding Restoration Opportunities

Numerous small hydroelectric facilities dot Utah's river corridors. Though tiny in comparison to the likes of Flaming Gorge and Glen Canyon dams, their impacts on riverine ecosystems can nonetheless be significant. For example, for the past 47 years much of the water that flows off the south face of Boulder Mountain has been diverted to generate a few megawatts of hydroelectricity. Four-and-a-half miles of Boulder Creek has been dewatered as a result, significantly altering its ecology and causing the loss of habitat for native Colorado cutthroat trout, which are being considered for listing as an endangered species. But this damage need not be permanent, as the license to operate the Boulder Creek hydroelectric plant is currently up for review by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Because of these environmental concerns, Boulder Creek is an excellent candidate to be rejected by FERC. Prior to receipt of a new license the project must demonstrate it will be in compliance with all environmental laws. Most such laws did not exist when the project received its initial license nearly 50 years ago. In a growing number of relicensing cases across the country, the public has demonstrated that it is either impossible for many facilities to be brought into compliance, or that it is too expensive to do so, causing them to be decommissioned and rivers to be restored.

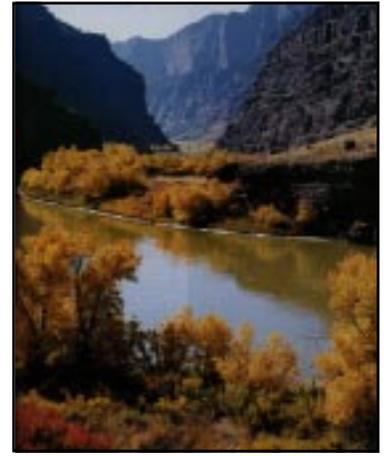
Additionally, the diversion pipe for the American Fork Dam constructed in 1900 has ruptured repeatedly, destroying the brown trout nurseries for the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness Area. Up to 8,000 cubic yards of sediment, uprooted trees and other debris have come pouring off the hillside with each rupture. The dam's owner, PacifiCorp, wishes to renew its license to operate this facility, but is unwilling to conduct the necessary repairs to permanently correct this problem. Bonneville cutthroat trout habitat has been affected in the Bear River due to PacifiCorp's Grace-Cove project dewatering six miles of riverbed. This project too, is undergoing relicensing, affording another critical opportunity for river habitat restoration.



Just upstream, 4.5 miles of prime Colorado cutthroat trout habitat awaits restoration on the East Fork of Boulder Creek

Dinosaur National Monument's River in Peril

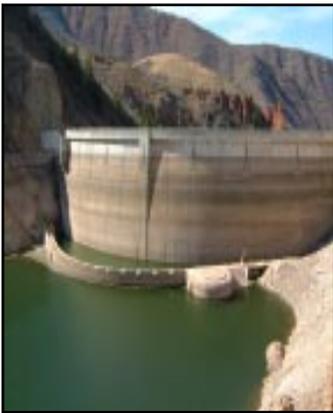
One of Utah's celebrated natural wonders, Dinosaur National Monument, is dying. Spared inundation by two major dams nearly 50 years ago, the monument's riverine ecosystem is now suffering a slow death as a result of the operations of Flaming Gorge Dam upstream. Constant cold water releases, lack of sediment and unnatural flows have advanced the decline of native habitat and accelerated the colonization of alien species. Later this year, the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec) will be proposing changes in the dam's operations in an effort to correct the damage. These proposals, however, will in all likelihood be inadequate. BuRec's experience with dam reoperations has yet to provide any lasting benefits. In Grand Canyon, below Glen Canyon Dam, dam reoperation efforts have been under way for five years to correct similar problems there, yet natural habitat conditions have only worsened. What's lacking is BuRec's willingness to study dam decommissioning options, which would allow for the restoration of natural processes. Such studies are required by the federal government for private dam owners, but not federal projects.



Dinosaur's scenic grandeur masks the slow death occurring on the Green River

Park City's Suffering East Canyon Creek

East Canyon Creek and Reservoir, which drain the Snyderville Basin around Park City, were once counted among Utah's premiere trout fisheries. Today, both the reservoir and the creek are in drastic decline, their valuable fisheries essentially killed by the adverse affects of development in Park City and the Snyderville Basin. There are two primary culprits in this ecological collapse—shrinking flows in the creek as well as increasing phosphorus pollution in both the stream and reservoir. Sadly, state bureaucrats knew 20 years ago that unchecked development in Snyderville Basin would severely degrade the East Canyon watershed. Yet, in spite of this awareness, as well as state and federal laws written to prevent such degradation, state and local officials never took positive steps to halt the watershed's decline. Presently, environmental groups are working with other partners in pursuing lawsuits aimed at defining and correcting the civic neglect that underlies this environmental degradation. However, it will probably take more than a few court decisions to fix this watershed. State and local officials must recognize their legal and ethical responsibilities to these valuable natural resources, and undertake whatever measures are necessary to protect both water quality and quantity in the face of unbridled growth pressures.



Low water levels expose old dam in East Canyon

Too Much Sediment, Not Enough Water, for the San Juan

The San Juan River is in desperate condition. This river has nearly the same sediment content as the Green and Colorado rivers combined. The sediment is collecting in the upper arm of Lake Powell reservoir and for the last two seasons, river runners have had to carry their boats and gear through mud and slime to get to their vehicles. Left unaddressed, this trend will impair the economies of small rural towns such as Bluff, Utah, which depend on revenue from whitewater rafters. After Grand Canyon, San Juan Canyon is the most popular overnight river trip on the Colorado Plateau.

Fish biologists, during their scheduled inventories to monitor endangered fish species, are finding fewer and fewer native fish of reproducing age in the San Juan River. Efforts to reverse this with hatchery fish are failing because the natural nursery habitats have been destroyed by dams and diversions, and non-native fish predate on the young hatchlings. Some thirty diversions of water upstream have seriously dewatered the San Juan River, diminishing natural processes that the native plants and animals require for reproduction. Despite the obvious threat to the river, yet more depletions are expected from the proposed Animas-La Plata Project near Durango, Colorado, and the existing San Juan—Chama Project, where diversion increases to meet the demands of sprawling Albuquerque, New Mexico are expected.



San Juan River

Dewatering Price River Canyon

The Sanpete County Water Conservancy District has teamed up with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to construct a diversion dam on Gooseberry Creek in the headwaters of the Price River. Known as the Narrows Dam project, this diversion would provide supplemental water for agricultural and municipal irrigation. If constructed, the project would dry up 36,000 acres of Price River Canyon as it enters the Green River upstream from the town of Green River. This canyon is proposed for wilderness designation by the Utah Wilderness Coalition and provides some of the last remaining habitat for the endangered Colorado squawfish.

Lake Powell Pipeline

Washington County Water Conservancy District is planning to construct a water pipeline from Lake Powell reservoir to advance development in the greater St. George area. Presently, Washington County's water consumption is 335 gallons per person per day, 25% above the state average, which itself is the second worst in the country after Nevada. This pipeline represents little more than an effort for the county to continue its wasteful ways by depleting water that belongs in the Colorado River. On its own, the 70,000 acre feet that would be diverted through this pipeline represents nearly half of the water necessary to restore the Colorado River delta. Modest conservation measures, especially requiring native landscaping, would save taxpayer money and eliminate the need for any new water diversions to service likely growth in the St. George area.

Rivers be Dammed Award

While public awareness for water conservation grows across the state, it has yet to reach Utah's southwestern corner. Ron Thompson, director of the Washington County Water Conservancy District, continues to promote unnecessary water projects while also ignoring the environmental impacts associated with the District's existing infrastructure. The Virgin River is already suffering greatly, and now Thompson wants water from the Colorado as well. For this unfortunate commitment to river destruction, LIVING RIVERS has selected Thompson to receive its 2002 *Rivers be Dammed Award*.



Ron Thompson



Westwater Canyon, Colorado River

Pah Tempe Hot Springs

The Virgin River has suffered immensely from excessive diversions by Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD). Beyond the dewatering of the river, one of the most unfortunate impacts has been the near destruction of the only hot spring in southern Utah. Pah Tempe Hot Springs is a priceless natural resource that has been sacred to Native Americans for centuries. Eighteen years ago, WCWCD began installing pipes and diversion works which have ruptured the Springs on four occasions over the past three years. Permanent repairs to restore these healing waters to near their natural condition have yet to be made. WCWCD leadership regard the potential loss of Pah Tempe as an acceptable trade-off in their efforts to further develop its water delivery infrastructure. However, it is unclear whether WCWCD had the federal clearance necessary to construct this infrastructure at the outset. Regardless, there are repairs that can and must be made to help preserve these most unique of hot spring waters.



Pah Tempe Hot Springs before and after the rupture of Washington County Water Conservancy District pipes



Wilderness River Corridors

While a significant number of river reaches are of wilderness caliber, federally designated as wilderness study areas or proposed as wilderness by Utah citizens groups, there are a number of reaches, especially through national forests, that have yet to be considered for wilderness designation. These streams, creeks and rivers are in many cases being degraded by grazing, logging and unmanaged ORV use. Some 200 reaches which lie within the state's six national forests should be considered for wilderness designation. Additionally, whereas the land bordering rivers may be designated or proposed as wilderness, the rivers themselves may not. Just as motorized vehicles are not allowed in wilderness or wilderness study areas, so too should they be considered for exclusion from the rivers themselves. Existing and future wilderness proposals, especially for areas such as Desolation Canyon on the Green River and Westwater Canyon on the Colorado, must include provisions for managing the rivers through these areas as wilderness.

LIVING RIVERS mobilizes people to protect and restore the integrity of rivers and watersheds. For information on our full range of river advocacy programs, or becoming a member, please give us a call or visit our website.

LIVING RIVERS

www.livingrivers.net
email: info@livingrivers.net

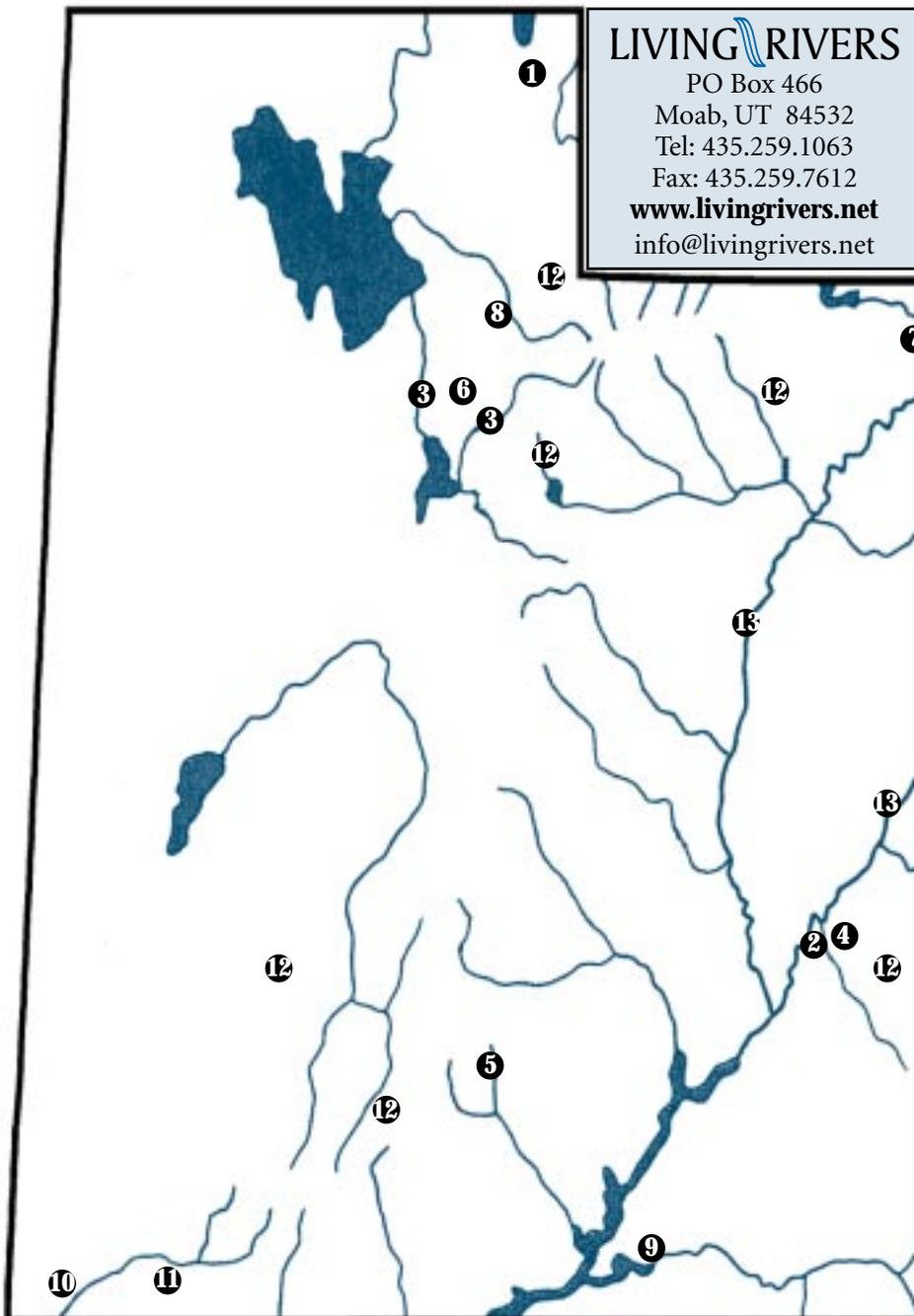
PO Box 466
Moab, UT 84532
Tel: 435.259.1063
Fax: 435.259.7612

PO Box 1589
Scottsdale, AZ 85252
Tel: 480.990.7839
Fax: 480.990.2662

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For additional information on the issues addressed in this report, please contact the following:

- Bear River Dams
Zach Frankel
Utah Rivers Council
(801)486-4776
zach@utahrivers.org
- Radioactive Waste
Tori Woodard
Sierra Club Glen Canyon Group
(435)826-4778
toriwoodard@scinternet.net
- Central Utah Project Restoration
Jeff Salt
Great Salt Lake Audubon
(801)485-2550
saltoftheearth@qwest.net
- Moab's Mill Creek Restoration
Rim to Rim Restoration
Kara Dohrenwend
(435)259-6670
wildland@citlink.net
- Boulder Creek Hydro Relicensing
Living Rivers
Owen Lammers
(435)259-1063
owen@livingrivers.net
- American Fork Hydro Relicensing
Utah Rivers Council
Zach Frankel
(801)486-4776
zach@utahrivers.org
- Dinosaur National Monument
Living Rivers
John Weisheit
(435)259-1063
john@livingrivers.net
- East Canyon Creek
Utah Waters/Trout Unlimited
Darrell Mensel
(801)205-3464
dmensel@xmission.com
- San Juan River
Colorado Plateau River Guides
Annie Payne
(80)580-5621
anniet@lasal.net
- Lake Powell Pipeline
Living Rivers
Owen Lammers
(435)259-1063
owen@livingrivers.net
- Pah Tempe Hot Springs
Ken Anderson
(435)635-2879
pahtempe@infowest.com
- Wilderness Rivers in National Forests
Utah Environmental Congress
Denise Boggs
(801)466-4055
dbuec@ecoisp.com
- Westwater & Desolation Canyon Wilderness
Friends of Westwater
Greg Trainor
(970)244-1564



LIVING RIVERS

March 14, 2002

Governor Michael Leavitt
210 State Capitol
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Dear Governor Leavitt,

Attached please find a copy of LIVING RIVERS' 2002 *State of Utah's Rivers* report. As river stewards gather around the world on this, the 5th International Day of Action Against Dams and for Rivers, Water and Life, we are heartened that the Utah legislature is exercising increased caution with regard to unnecessary water projects, such as the Bear River dams. It is also encouraging to see mounting public interest in restoration efforts to repair the damage past projects have caused.

What is most promising, however, is the evolving dialogue concerning water conservation. As you noted last summer, even if Utah focused exclusively on developing all available water supplies, not enough water exists to service projected future demand. Managing the state's water consumption is the only way to buffer against shortages like those anticipated this year. Water conservation policies are also the most cost effective means to bolster supplies for both the short and long term. Utah's per capita water consumption is the second highest in the country after Nevada, indicating significant opportunities for improved water use efficiency should appropriate incentives be offered.

Sustained progress in water conservation will also allow for the preservation and restoration of key elements of Utah's natural heritage—its rivers. As a leader within the Colorado River watershed, you are undoubtedly aware of the increasing strain the basin's water consumption practices place on river habitat. Arizona has sacrificed nearly the entire Salt and Gila river system to diversions. Water seldom reaches the Colorado River delta and the Gulf of California. Riparian habitat throughout the watershed is suffering, and Utah is not immune. More diversions planned for the San Juan River and Green River tributaries signal dry streams ahead. Reduced water consumption must become a priority if these rivers are to be sustained.

LIVING RIVERS is committed to river protection through water conservation. Increased water efficiency will eliminate the perceived need for many projects, such as the St. George Pipeline or the Narrows Dam. Energy efficiency, too, can help to replace destructive hydroelectric projects, such as on the Bear River, American Fork and Boulder Creek, not to mention help to revive critical habitat in Dinosaur National Monument from the impacts of Flaming Gorge Dam.

Greater balance can be achieved in meeting ecological needs, as well as our own, from what rivers have to offer. That is the theme of the enclosed report as it highlights issues affecting river management across the state. We look forward to your feedback.

Sincerely,



Owen Lammers
Executive Director

cc: Utah Congressional delegation
Utah State Legislature