



# WATERLINES

## Lake Powell Pipeline Proponents Rushing \$3 Billion Project During Worst Economy in Nearly a Century



*Declines in Colorado River flows make it all but certain that no water will be available for the costly Lake Powell Pipeline. p: Hidden Passage, Glen Canyon.*

The Bureau of Reclamation is rushing to approve the largest new diversion of Colorado River water in the 7-state region. All while ignoring the impending impacts of climate change and the financial turmoil caused by COVID-19. The entire permitting process is being rushed to approve this dangerous project while the public is distracted with the global pandemic and protests that have shook the country to its knees.

The Utah Division of Water Resources continues to propose this unnecessary diversion of the Colorado River at a cost of \$3+ billion to Utah taxpayers, despite the biggest economic contraction since the Depression. The state should be using tax revenues to help the multitude of businesses and communities impacted by COVID-19. Instead, well-paid lobbyists continue to influence the legislature, collecting nearly \$40 million annually in sales-tax revenue each year to build the boondoggle.

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## Legislature Passes Bill Advancing Green River Diversion

The Utah Legislature took the first step to diverting Green River water to the lawns of the Wasatch Front, yet another gift to the army of water lobbyists at our state capitol. HB 328, sponsored by Representative Joel Ferry, was passed by the Legislature and cloaked as a measure to “simply seek information” on the costs of diverting precious Green River water to the overwatered lawns of Salt Lake County. The bill’s passage is the catalyst for yet another unnecessary, expensive, and destructive river diversion in Utah that comes by a Legislature hostile to water conservation.

HB 328 updates construction costs from a 2002 report by the Division of Water Resources, the state agency actively working to spend \$6+ billion in new water diversions on the Bear River and the Colorado River.

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*The Utah Legislature took the first step to divert prized Green River water to the Wasatch Front. p: Andrew Burr.*

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## Legislature Passes Bill Advancing Green River Diversion

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The 2002 report explored 16 alternatives to divert Green River water to the Wasatch Front, upstream of a prized cold-water fishery, vibrant aquatic ecosystem and outstanding whitewater that has been the anchor to five rural Utah economies. Green River water would be piped between 70 – 139 miles to enter either the Bear or Weber Rivers before being piped to Salt Lake County at a cost of 211– 449 million in 2020 dollars.

These rural Utah recreational communities are a part of a \$9.75 billion state tourism economy that has suffered dramatically during the extreme economic contraction due to COVID-19. The many rural businesses facing extreme hardship do not need the precious waters supporting their economy wasted on the lawns and gutters of the Wasatch Front. Spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on yet another unnecessary water project is a reckless level of leadership that only the Utah Division of Water Resources can provide. All during the current public health crisis which needs an infusion of capital to solve.

URC staff and volunteers worked hard to oppose and stop this bad bill as did many family businesses and community members across rural Utah. The outrage from concerned constituents and an avalanche of opposition led to several committee members opposing the bill, making a contentious fight for Representative Ferry and the water development industry.

The House Natural Resources Committee first voted down HB 328 by a vote of 5 – 4. But after some extremist political maneuvering led by Representative Michael McKell and a motion to reconsider by Representative Sue Duckworth, the bill was brought back to life and reconsidered in the same committee meeting. A second vote on HB 328 was held in the final minutes of the meeting, resurrecting the destructive bill and passing it by a single vote of 7 – 5.

### House Natural Resources Committee Voting Record to Divert The Green River

#### YES VOTES

Rep. Tim Hawkes  
Rep. Michael McKell  
Rep. Joel Ferry  
Rep. Scott Chew  
Rep. Logan Wilde  
Rep. Doug Sagers  
Rep. Sue Duckworth

#### NO VOTES

Rep. Joel Briscoe  
Rep. Christine Watkins  
Rep. Carl Albrecht  
Rep. Kevin Stratton  
Rep. Phil Lyman

Opposition to HB 328 continued and twice we came within a breath of killing this bill because of strong opposition to yet another destructive water project led by special interests. Although we lost this fight, everyone involved was inspired by the scope of energy and enthusiasm to protect Utah's glorious rivers and institute a sustainable and affordable water supply for Utahns. We'd like to thank you for your efforts to hold our elected officials accountable. We will continue to fight this unnecessary diversion on the Green River and for the communities that depend on its water.

#### Utah Rivers Council

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## Utah Legislature Kills Bill to Save Water, Continues Hostility for Water Conservation

In the 2020 legislative session, Representative Melissa Ballard ran HB 40, the Water Loss Accounting Act. The bill would have saved billions of gallons of water by addressing leaky pipes in our city water systems. At a cost of just \$1.5 million, fixing leaky pipes in our cities is one of the lowest fruits available to any water supplier, which is why similar bills have been passed by states across the country. Several Utah cities have already begun addressing their leaky water pipes because saving water saves money. But under the influence of water lobbyists who fear that saving ‘too much’ water jeopardizes the “running-out-of-water” justification for spending \$6 billion on proposed Bear River Development and the Lake Powell Pipeline, the Utah Legislature gutted the bill.

HB 40 could have saved 26,000-40,000 acre-feet of water annually, enough for over 100,000 people each year. It was created in partnership with the American Water Works Association, the largest water authority in the country. But HB 40 was replaced with text to create a task force to study the idea, postponing and likely killing yet another good water conservation bill. Unfortunately, HB 40’s demise is just the latest example of the Utah Legislature killing water conservation bills at the request of the Prep 60 water districts.

Reducing water use through rudimentary water conservation inherently undermines the ‘need’ for costly spending projects like the Lake Powell Pipeline and Bear River Development. When water use is reduced, our future water needs shrink and costly spending proposals become unnecessary.

Lobbyists representing the Central Utah Water District, the Washington County Water District, the Jordan Valley Water District and the Weber Basin Water District spoke out against the bill and its fate was sealed. These lobbyists have pooled their lobbying and legislative marketing behind a facade called Prep 60.

The public often forgets that water districts make money selling water and are thereby disincentivized to reduce water sales, or conserve water. Yet while these four water districts kill water conservation bills with one hand, they cover their tracks by hiding behind the green washing of a public marketing campaign called Slow the Flow. Even many board members of these water districts are often unaware of how their staff and contractors lobby against water conservation. The Slow the Flow campaign helps these water districts cultivate an image that they are conservation-minded, and many of their staff certainly are.

Yet over the years, the Utah Legislature has killed a plethora of water conservation and water efficiency bills which now lay in the overcrowded wasteland of the water conservation graveyard at the behest of the water districts leadership. There are dozens of other bills laid to rest to avoid jeopardizing big ticket spending proposals, that would require gigantic water rate increases, thus higher revenues for water districts.

In 2019, Representative Suzanne Harrison ran HB 143, a bill that asked water suppliers to consider how they could conserve water by reducing use to 175 gallons per person per day, the water use of Denver. The Utah Division of Water Resources and the four water districts vehemently opposed the bill, even though it didn’t mandate water use reductions, only that they consider how to save water.

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

# Hostility for Water Conservation

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Also inside the water conservation graveyard is the 2010 Utah Water Conservation Plan. The dead Plan was a threat to the spending wishes of the four water districts and the Division, because it saved ‘too much’ water at a reduction of 1% per year. In 2019, these water agencies gutted the Utah Plan, reducing the Governor’s statewide water conservation goal by 50% to saving just 0.5% per year between now and 2060. By comparison, other cities in the American West have achieved annual water savings of 2%, 4.2%, 7.5% and California even achieved a statewide reduction of 25%.

Another bill laid to rest by the Utah Legislature was SB 214, a bill to offer property tax relief to Utah taxpayers sponsored by Senator Lincoln Fillmore. This bill sought to reduce property taxes collected by water districts that allow these agencies to charge massive water users some of the lowest water rates in the nation. Subsidizing water rates through these property taxes means that gigantic users have little financial incentive to reduce their use, despite living in the second driest state in the U.S. This bill has been run five times in the last 20 years and killed each time by the same water districts.

With your help, we will continue to fight these powerful lobbyists from special interest groups and continue to put pressure on our legislators, ensuring water conservation bills are heard and debated, rather than sent to their immediate and premature demise.

## Water Conservation Bills Killed by Prep 60 Water District Lobbyists

### Water Conservation Act (2019)

**HB 143**, killed in the 2019 Legislative Session, asked water suppliers to consider reducing water use to 175 gallons per capita day, the water use of Denver. The water districts opposed even asking how Utah could conserve water because the answer jeopardizes their access to billions in taxpayer dollars.



### Property Tax Relief for Water (1998, 2014, 2018, 2019)

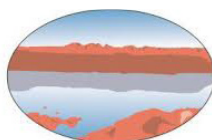
**SB 214**, killed in the 2019 Legislative Session, would have reduced property taxes going to water districts. These taxes lower water rates and encourage water waste, but every bill introduced over five sessions was killed due the water districts.

### Water Loss Accounting Act (2020)

**HB 40**, gutted in the 2020 Legislative Session, would have saved 26,000 acre feet of water by identifying leaks in city water pipes. The bill was written in collaboration with the American Water Works Association and similar bills have been passed by legislatures across the United States.



**Central Utah Water District**



**Washington County Water District**



**Jordan Valley Water District**



**Weber Basin Water District**



## Kane County Water District ~~Gets Kicked Out of~~ Withdraws from Lake Powell Pipeline

As a glimmer of good news during uncertain times, Utah water cartel members announced that the Kane County Water District is backing out of the proposed \$3 billion Lake Powell Pipeline. Yes, you read correctly.

For the last 14 years, the Kane County Water District claimed – in fact its Executive Director yelled such claims at several legislative committees – that Kane County needed water from the proposed Lake Powell Pipeline. The Kane County Water District is a small water supplier that delivers water to a very small percentage of Kane County’s population. Led by former Utah legislator Mike Noel, the water agency was widely criticized for failing to prove its claims for needing Pipeline water or coming up with a viable plan to pay for the water.



*Kane County Water District has withdrawn itself from the Colorado River Pipeline.  
p: Guy Romain.*

In 2013, a group of Utah economists performed a lengthy analysis of Pipeline repayment obligations on Kane County residents. They found that massive increases to water rates, impact fees and property taxes would be required to pay for the water. The Utah Division of Water Resources and the Kane County Water District claimed they could repay Pipeline costs but provided no substance to their claims.

Then in March 2018, the Utah Rivers Council filed a complaint with the Utah Attorney General’s Office seeking an investigation of Representative Noel and what role the Utah Division of Water Resources had in changing the official documents for the proposed Lake Powell Pipeline. Our complaint requested a formal investigation to determine if Mr. Noel used government resources to benefit his private land holdings. The complaint alleges that Mr. Noel may have used his position as both a legislator and as the Executive Director of the Kane County Water District to advance the proposed Lake Powell Pipeline. The Pipeline was slated to deliver water a stone’s throw from his land holdings in Kane County, estimated to be valued at roughly \$4-9 million.

For over 10 years, the Utah Rivers Council has led the opposition to the boondoggle Lake Powell Pipeline for the benefit of all Utahns and to help implement a sustainable water policy for our rivers and streams. We will continue to speak on behalf of transparency, government accountability in the water sector, and to apply science and data to draft good water policy for all Utahns.

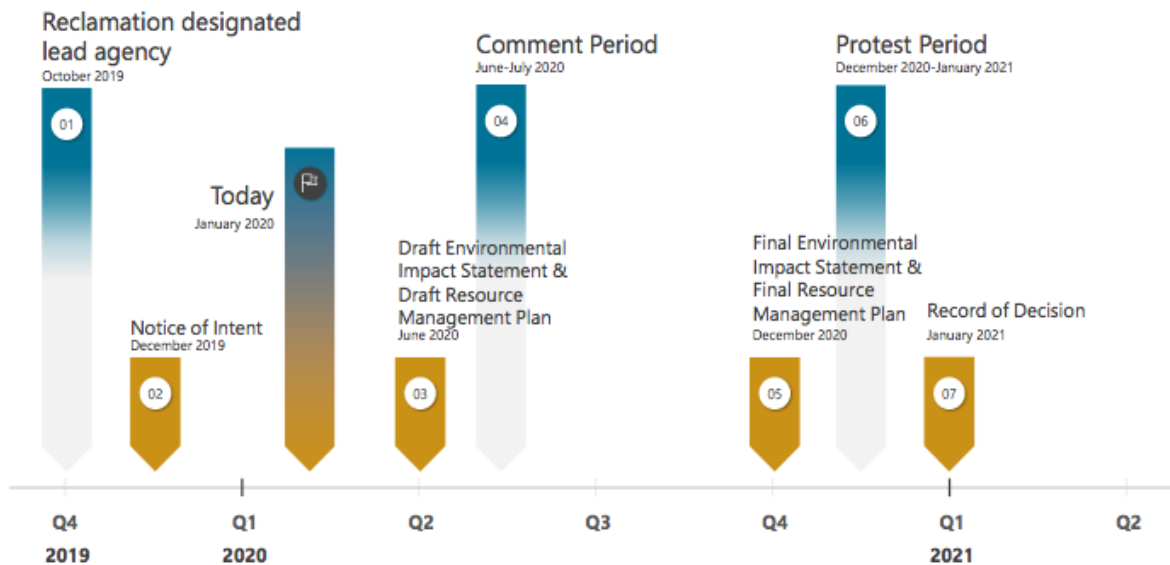
The Utah Division of Water Resources continues to claim that Washington County needs water from the \$3 billion Pipeline, but its justification for the project is based on a mountain of bogus claims and marketing hype. Utah Rivers Council will be providing detailed public comments demonstrating the many issues as well as alternatives to the Lake Powell Pipeline project.

A hearty THANK YOU to everyone who has helped and who continues to help us fight the Colorado River Pipeline. Visit our website [www.PowellPipeline.org](http://www.PowellPipeline.org) for more info.

## Lake Powell Pipeline Proponents Rushing \$3 Billion Project During Worst Economy in Nearly a Century

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The Division of Water Resources' eagerness to waste \$3 billion of Utah taxpayer money on the 140-mile-long Pipeline to deliver lawn water to residents in Washington County during this pandemic is insane and frankly, morally corrupt. Precious government resources and tax money should be funding solutions to this public health crisis by helping those facing unemployment and/or foreclosure and for neighborhood businesses and community employers.



*The Bureau of Reclamation's rushed timeline for the Lake Powell Pipeline, the largest new water diversion in the Colorado River Basin. The review process has been shortened as the agency permits the Colorado River Pipeline.*

The Lake Powell Pipeline is attracting criticism from across the drought-stricken Colorado River Basin. This foolish gravy train for lobbyists comes during an era of unprecedented climate change and declining Colorado River flows. According to climatologists, the last 19 years were the warmest in the last 500 years. The impacts from climate change are reducing Colorado River runoff volumes as the southwest enters a megadrought. Yet the Division of Water Resources and the Washington County Water District perpetuate the myth that Colorado River water is a reliable source of water. Reservoir levels in Lake Mead are so low from climate change that both Arizona and Nevada have been forced to reduce their Colorado River water withdrawals by a combined 200,000 acre-feet.

The Utah Rivers Council will keep fighting the Lake Powell Pipeline, as lobbyists and the Division continue their irresponsible quest to waste billions in taxpayer funding by building the world's longest skateboard pipe. We will be providing detailed comments on the draft environmental impact statement.

If you would like to provide public comment during this process, please email [rebecca@utahrivers.org](mailto:rebecca@utahrivers.org) or [matt@utahrivers.org](mailto:matt@utahrivers.org) for information.

## Utah Rivers Council Files Protest Against Water Rights for the Lake Powell Pipeline

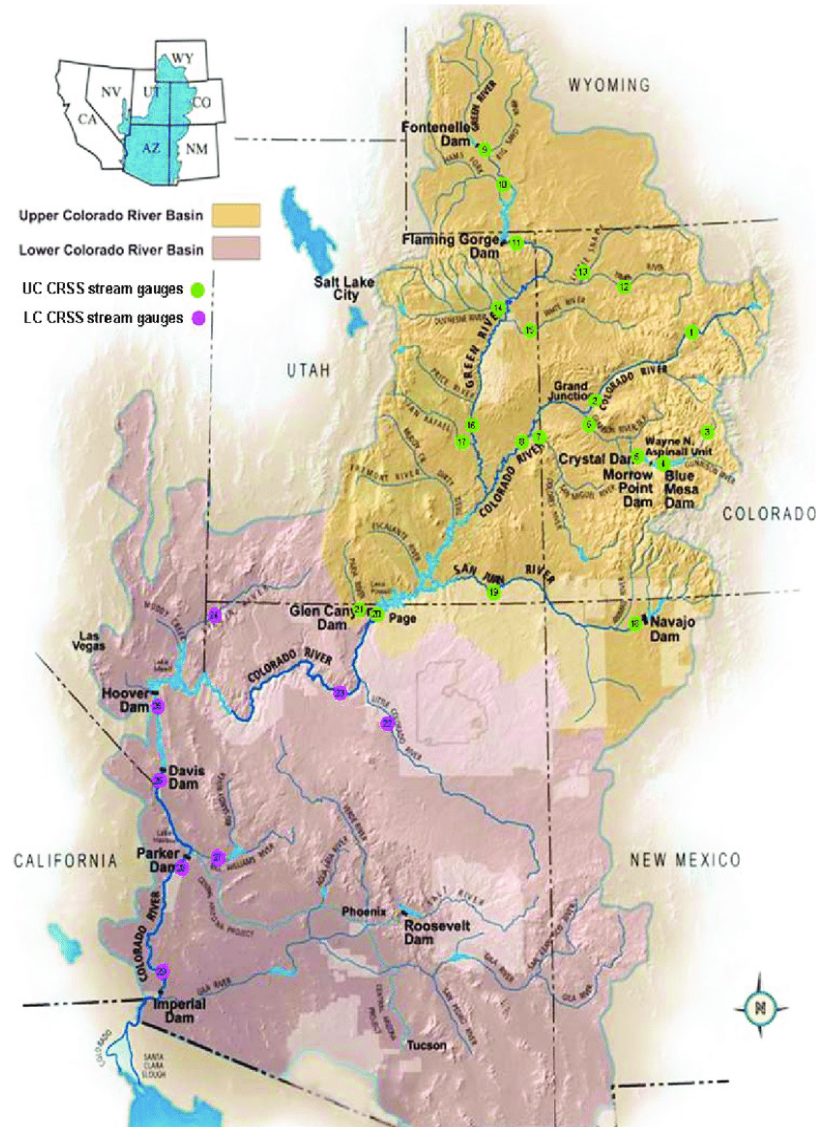
The Utah Rivers Council submitted a 60-page protest against the water rights application for the Lake Powell Pipeline. The Utah Division of Water Resources filed an application for the water rights for the Pipeline in April with the Utah State Engineer, in an attempt to secure a claim on this Colorado River water.

Our protest asks the State Engineer to reject the water rights application, focusing specifically on the Pipeline's substantial threat to public welfare. The protest also outlines the scores of climate change studies which document that the water rights in question don't exist. Due to rising air temperatures that have led to withering snowpacks and reduced river flows across the 7-state Colorado River Basin, water will not be available for the Pipeline.

The detailed protest documents the Division of Water Resources' abject failure to provide any semblance of a plan to repay the \$3 billion in debt from this boondoggle. Our arguments call into question the ethical veracity of wasting billions in taxpayer dollars during a struggling pandemic economy. We also summarized the injurious impact this project will have on low-income Utahns from at least a 500% increase in water rates needed to pay for this unnecessary pipeline.

As part of our protest we requested a public hearing to present our concerns in person and will keep the public informed about opportunities to participate in the hearing.

*The Colorado River is 1,450 miles long and provides water to nearly 30 million people. Yet climate change models show it will soon no longer be a reliable source of water for the Pipeline and other new water diversions. Source: USGS*



If you would like to read our protest to the water rights change application, please visit [www.utahrivers.org/blog](http://www.utahrivers.org/blog) for the full document.



## Las Vegas Water Grab Drowned in Opposition

Both Utahns and Nevadans won a major victory when the Southern Nevada Water Authority announced it won't challenge a court decision, which invalidated their water right claims to mine the aquifers along the Utah Nevada border in the face of 30+ years of community opposition. The announcement represents a major victory for sustainable water use and a powerful statement about what can be accomplished through



*The Southern Nevada Water Authority has finally shelved its \$15.5 billion water grab after 30 years of opposition.*

Since 1989, the Water Authority sought to pump the ancient waters out of the Snake Valley aquifers and pipe it 285 miles to Las Vegas. But in early March, Judge Robert Estes denied the Water Authority a portion of the rights for the project, which the court said could result in “water mining.” The court order also denied their plan to mitigate the environmental impacts of pumping activities. The Water Authority then declined to appeal the ruling after wasting \$330 million on the project over 30 years. Soon after, their Board of Directors voted unanimously to drop the groundwater development project from its future development plans, thereby ending the fiasco (hopefully).

As one of the driest parts of the U.S., groundwater recharge takes years to accumulate and the Water Authority was effectively proposing to mine Snake Valley aquifers with little assurances that it could be stopped once it began. Rural livelihoods in both states rely heavily on this groundwater and opposition came from the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute to fifth-generation farmers, with even the LDS Church expressing concerns. Many other people worked tirelessly to stop the project, but the Great Basin Water Network really dedicated themselves to this critical fight and they deserve the credit for their leadership and perseverance.

## Heated Debate at Hinckley Institute on Bear River Development

On March 4, the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah held a forum on Bear River Development, debating the projects purpose and need, water conservation alternatives, and even the definition of corruption. Critics and experts agree that based on historical data from neighboring states, total water withdrawals can actually decline as populations increase with proper water conservation programs and technologies. Project proponents, Marisa Egbert and Bart Forsyth, claimed the project is needed, despite acknowledging the plethora of alternatives yet to be instituted. The hour-long debate left audience members yearning for more answers on this controversial project.

*The speakers at Hinckley Institute from left to right:*

*Marisa Egbert (Bear River Project Manager), Zachary Frankel (Executive Director of Utah Rivers Council), Bart Forsyth (General Manager of Jordan Valley Water District), Gabriel Lozada (Associate Professor of Economics from the University of Utah)*





## The Utah Rivers Council Welcomes New Leaders

We're proud to announce that we've added new staff leaders! This is an exciting time at the Utah Rivers Council as the challenges and the threats facing our rivers and aquatic ecosystems are immense, but we are growing to meet them. Our team is working to energize and mobilize communities across the state and build the engagement needed to stop unnecessary, expensive, and destructive water development projects from being built.



**Rebecca Bauer** graduated from Appalachian State University where she received a B.S. in Sustainable Development. After graduating, she spent a year with AmeriCorps spearheading a campaign on Energy Efficiency in Western North Carolina, before working and traveling across the U.S. When Becca's not working, she's almost certainly riding her bike either on the road, dirt or snow. She is currently working on her Masters of Science in Energy Policy and Climate from Johns Hopkins University. Rebecca is a Grassroots Organizer for the Utah Rivers Council.



**Abbey Benesh** received her B.S. in Management and Industrial Relations from the University of Bridgeport and then her J.D. from the University of Utah, specializing in public interest and environmental law. She has worked for Earth Law Center, SUWA, Western Resource Advocates, and the Humane Society, ranging from establishing legal standing for rivers in India to the procedural National Environmental Policy Act. When Abbey's not working to protect the outdoors, she's outside playing in them, skiing, climbing, trail running, and hiking with her dog - Mowgli. Abbey is a Water Policy and Legal Analyst for the Utah Rivers Council.

**Jon Carter** has been working for the URC for a while now but has been promoted to Campaign Director to help lead our direct action campaigns. Jon received his B.A. in Business Administration from European University in Barcelona, Spain. Previously Jon worked for Patagonia in Salt Lake City, working with nonprofits across the state on the environmental crisis. Jon is a skier, climber and overall just excited to explore the great outdoors. Jon oversees our grassroots team and ensures implementation of our campaign strategies, communications, and general plans to further the Utah Rivers Council's goals.



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### Are You Signed Up for URC Email Alerts?

Go to [www.utahrivers.org/email-alerts](http://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.

## The Utah Rivers Council Welcomes New Leaders

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**Nicholas Halberg** has returned to the Utah Rivers Council, having previously worked as an Intern and as the WaterRoots Coordinator. He is a senior at the University of Utah majoring in Economics and Philosophy with emphases in statistical analysis and logic, respectively. His thesis is on how population growth affects water demand. During non-work hours, Nick can be found canyoneering, biking, and exploring new and wild places throughout Utah. Nicholas is a Research and Policy Analyst for the Utah Rivers Council.



**Allison Liddle** is currently a senior at the University of Utah, pursuing a B.S. in Environmental and Sustainability Studies and a B.S. in Political Science. Allison spent the past year working for Utah Rivers Council as a volunteer and as an Intern. Having spent the majority of her life exploring the various landscapes of the Western U.S., she has become fully captivated with our remaining wild spaces and believes the conservation of these areas important to our communities and our future. Allison is a Water Efficiency and Conservation Planner for the Utah Rivers Council.

**Matt Stephens** studied Environmental Studies and Geography at the University of Oregon. After school he worked with Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment educating residents about the impacts from poor air quality and developing programs that would mitigate air quality issues across the State. Matt loves to climb, ski, run, and spend time in the incredible mountains we are fortunate enough to live in. Matt is a Grassroots Organizer for the Utah Rivers Council.



### Water Reports Available at Utah Rivers Council

**CROSSROADS UTAH**



UTAH'S CLIMATE FUTURE

**Debt Repayment Obligations  
Created by the Proposed  
Bear River Development Project**



**Alternatives to  
Bear River Water Development**



Implementing Inexpensive Alternatives to the West's Largest New Water Project



Visit [www.utahrivers.org/reports](http://www.utahrivers.org/reports) for a free download.

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Become a proud advocate of Utah's rivers. They need your help, now more than ever. Questions? Call 801-486-4776 or email [info@utahrivers.org](mailto:info@utahrivers.org).

### Annual Membership Levels

- \$35 - Creek
- \$100 - Tributary
- \$250 - River
- \$500 - Estuary
- \$1,000 - Watershed
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other amount

## Utah Rivers Council Merchandise

Embroidered Hat: \$20  
*Black*

URC T-Shirt: \$20  
*Charcoal Grey*

URC Hoodie: \$45  
*Charcoal Heather*

URC Coffee Mug: \$18



Circle one:  
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XL

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\*Provide your email to receive timely updates about our conservation work. We will not share or sell your email address, and you can unsubscribe at any time.

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## RainHarvest 2020

Our RainHarvest program is back again in 2020! Millcreek, Murray, and Salt Lake County have partnered with us to once again offer the reliable rain barrels from Rain Water Solutions at a subsidized price. Order your discounted rain barrel at the link below while supplies last.

In addition to conserving water, rain barrels improve water quality by reducing runoff, which collects pollution from dirty streets and gutters. Over 4500 barrels have been distributed since the URC started RainHarvest, enough to save 225,000 gallons of water every time it rains enough to fill a 50 gallon water barrel!

Interested in a rain barrel?  
Go to [www.utahrivers.org/rainharvest](http://www.utahrivers.org/rainharvest) and order today.