

Utah Lake Study Committee Meeting
June 5, 2006
Boat Tour of Utah Lake

ATTENDEES:

Members

Commissioner Larry Ellertson, Utah County
Mayor Lewis Billings, Provo City
Mayor Heber Thompson, American Fork City
Mayor Bertis Bills, Payson City
Mayor Jerry Washburn, Orem City
Mayor Timothy Parker, Saratoga Springs
Mayor Toby Harding, Woodland Hills

Other Interested Parties

Bruce Chesnut, Technical Committee/Orem City
Robert West, Provo City
Greg Beckstrom, Provo City
Steve Kroes, Utah Foundation
LaNice Groesbeck, Provo City
John Dougell

Agency Representatives

Ty Hunter, Utah Lake State Park
Dick Buehler, Utah Div. FFSL
Dave Grierson, Utah Div. FFSL
Dave Wham, Division of Water Quality
Mike Mills, Division of Wildlife Resources
Annie Merril, Division of Water Resources
Todd Stonley, Division of Water Resources
Ben Anderson, Water Rights

Henry Maddux, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Larry Crist, US Fish and Wildlife Service
James McMillan, US Army Corps of Engineers
Robyn Pearson, Utah Department of Natural Resources
Reed Harris, DNR, JSRIP
Kris Buelow, CUWCD, JSRIP
Chris Keleher, DNR, Recovery Programs
Steve Schwendiman, Office of the Attorney General

State Park Visitor's Center. Mr. Buehler displayed the initial Management Plan map which showed the areas that have and have not reached settlement of disputed land ownership. Of the 220 landowners, about 35 are still in dispute. A final decision from the Federal court is anticipated by the end of this year. The map also showed original and recently acquired lake access points. An informational map will be distributed in the near future to help educate the public on lake access points. Utah County is working with the Army Corps of Engineers and the State on the trail system to connect the lake trail with the Jordan River Trail.

Each city needs to review shoreline access points and start dialogue to insure public access to the lake.

Mr. Hunter noted Utah Lake State Park improvements that include the fish cleaning station, erosion control, trails and sidewalks, building of the south jetty, and campground renovations. Estimated visitations this year should double last years' 180,000. Last year the American Fork Marina was closed and many boaters used the Lindon Marina which is located on sovereign lands and is a very nice access point to the lake.

Powell Slough. This area has about 500 acres, belongs to Utah State, and may be a site for a June Sucker recovery project. The proposal under discussion is to lease a 10-acre pond for 10 years, build a dike, remove the carp and then reintroduce plants and native fish which should thrive if not in competition with other species such as the carp. A 20% reduction in carp would result in a visible change in the ecosystem. Carp constitute 90% of the biomass in the lake and reducing that population is the first step to lake recovery. About 45,000 June Suckers have been stocked in the lake and about 300 to 1,000 exist naturally. Some of the stocked fish have survived, but what percentage is unknown. However, the June Sucker is no longer threatened by extinction.

The carp removal pilot program was explained. The first two days of fishing resulted in 8-9,000 pounds of catch which was lower than anticipated and included 45 pounds of catfish, etc. that were returned to the water. The goal is to remove 40-50,000 pounds of carp a day for 120 days for 6-7 years. Alternative methods for removal were presented including boom trawl nets and other mechanical methods. The physical ecosystem will change with carp removal. In the process of the BYU marketing analysis, carp was tested and came out clean for heavy metals, but the presence of PCBs (an oil-based contaminant) is a concern. The sources of PCBs are unknown but PCBs are manmade. Because of the uncertainty, human consumption of carp has dropped off. PCBs are mostly found in the fatty tissue of the fish and when that is removed, the remaining fillet has fewer contaminants. Water feeding species will have fewer contaminants than those species that root feed. A result of the analysis of PCBs in other species should be available in the fall.

The State currently owns about 80% of Powell Slough as a result of negotiations with adjacent property owners. Mineral rights are also owned by the State.

The Army Corps of Engineers regulates streams and tributaries that empty into the lake. A permit is needed and certain regulations must be met when impacting any of the feeders to the lake.

Geneva Steel. Dave Wham discussed water quality issues and said his staff review point and non-point sources of discharge, water sheds, ground water and storm water programs. A draft document for the TMDL study, which studied loads of pollutants and salinity sources, should be released by the end of June. The study reviewed the impact that pollutants may have on lake uses. Carp removal was not considered at the time of the study and will have a great impact on lake nutrients in the reduction of phosphorous. Geneva Steel was discharging into the lake and was meeting the required standards which were monitored by self sampling and by random samples by water quality crews.

Saratoga Springs. Mayor Parker said Saratoga Springs has been successfully working with developers on a lake shore development policy. Any development along the lake is required to build their section of the trail around the lake which is planned to join with the Jordan River Parkway. They are also proposing a policy that will require any lake side development to put in a street, sidewalks and trails on the lake side of the lot to provide a buffer and public access to the lake. The marina has 14 acres and more space will be needed as this is the only access point for boat launching on the west side of the lake.

There are stands of Christmas trees left from earlier farms which were used to supplement incomes of residents. During the drought years of the 1930s, Salt Lake City built an 11-mile long canal to get water from Utah Lake to Salt Lake City. Realizing that there were no houses in Saratoga Springs 14 years ago emphasizes the crucial need for a regional commission to address uses and users of Utah Lake water.

Mike Mills said the purpose of the Division of Wildlife Resources is to act as the “trustee” and “guardian” of fish and wildlife and to promote education, scientific and recreational enjoyment of wildlife. They preserve wetland habitats for migratory as well as local birds, promote fishing, bird watching, duck hunting and game sports. There are three conservation officers who patrol and enforce ordinances and policies throughout the state.

Bird Island. This is the only island on Utah Lake. The island is currently flooded, but in normal water years, the island is 1-2 acres in size. It is surrounded by dangerous rocks and boaters need to use caution when in that area. The habitat around the island provides good fishing and a good balance for fish and the necessary food chain.

Ty Hunter said there have been several rescues in this area in the past few years and, as a result, a press release was issued encouraging adherence to boating regulations and adequate preparation. Also, in the low water years, fences were erected along the shore line which are now under water and create navigation hazards. Residents have been asked to remove the fences and the ski clubs have helped in difficult situations.

Shallow lakes are more sensitive to environmental impacts than deeper lakes and a healthy shallow lake is unique which makes it more important to improve Utah Lake's condition. Rooted aquatic vegetation is critical to the environment because it provides a balanced habitat. If enough carp can be removed to restore aquatic plants, the rest of the ecosystem will improve naturally. Ultimately, 75% carp removal is needed.

Provo Bay. The water is a different color in this bay and the smell is different indicating algae growth in the water. Todd Stonely said the responsibility of the Division of Water Resources is comprehensive water planning, which includes statewide and river basin plans. Their priorities are water quantity and supply, particularly in planning for the projected doubling of the population in Utah County in the next 25-50 years. The uses will be more municipal and industrial and not so much agricultural. He said there is adequate supply for that projected growth. Utah Lake is an important resource in meeting the water needs of Salt Lake Valley which is also growing. Because of the dissolved solids in Utah Lake, the water is not used as drinking water, but can be used for lawns and gardens. To clean up the lake so the water could be used for drinking would involve costly reverse osmosis or a membrane technology. Evaporation is an issue at the lake and if certain areas were diked off, evaporation would be reduced and dissolved solids would not build up as much. The Central Utah Project will bring more water in of which 30,000 acre feet will go to the Salt Lake valley and 30,000 acre feet will go south. There doesn't seem to be a demand for more water supply on the west side of the lake at this time.

Reed Harris said evaporation is the largest water use and diking or lowering the lake level would result in a huge water savings. As a storage facility, Utah Lake is not very efficient. It covers 97,000 acres and more water is evaporated than goes over the spillway. The lake operates at compromise level which is 4489.045 feet. When that point is reached, the gates of the Jordan River are opened and the water flows out. In 1984, the lake was 5.46 feet above compromise, an instance hoped to not recur. However, the level of the lake is difficult to control and is mostly controlled by "mother nature." All current water rights have been allocated and are being honored.

Henry Maddox said the responsibility of his office is to mitigate any fish and wildlife losses in development projects, and weigh the benefits vs. the impact. They address migratory bird habitats, and threatened and endangered species such as the June Sucker to insure that development doesn't jeopardize their existence. He said the mitigation efforts for the June Sucker also serve as mitigation for impact of other federal activities.

Dick Buehler said the Phragmites (reeds), the Tamarisk and the Russian Olive are all nonnative elements that have been introduced to the lake over the years and have basically taken over the shoreline areas. Research is underway to determine ways to control the growth of these plants. Only one native plant has been found on the west side of the lake. The native vegetation--willows, cat tails and bull rush-- need to be reintroduced.

Permits have been issued to four ski clubs to operate on the lake. Provo Bay is only about 4-1/2 feet deep and is the most popular area for water skiers. With the help of a ski club, 400 yards of fencing was removed from that area last week.

James McMillen said the Army Corps of Engineers regulates wetland and other aquatic resources and issues permits for any necessary work that may impact those areas. There are small impact permits for areas less than 1/2 acre and a permit for anything over 1/2 acre. They determine the public benefit and the impact on wildlife and aquatic resources and then help to mitigate the impact. The mitigation requirement for wetland impact is 1:1. They deal with wetland preservation, spring and seep preservation, and restoration, and are considering a wetland bank.

A BIG THANKS to Jim Cross for the use of his boats for this tour.