

Jordan River Commission Governing Board Meeting

February 01, 2024 | 10:42 a.m.

Meeting Location

Education Center at Conservation Garden Park
Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District
8275 South 1300 West, West Jordan, UT 84088

And remotely via Zoom.

Meeting Attendees

Governing Board Members

Alan Packard, Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District
Alicia DeLeon, Salt Lake City
Councilmember Andy Pierucci, Riverton City
Ben Stireman, Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands
Betty Naylor, Gardner Heritage Farm
Brad Knoles, Rocky Mountain Power
Councilmember Bryn Heather Johnson, Draper City
Colby Hill, South Jordan City
Cory Fralick, West Jordan City
Mayor Dirk Burton, West Jordan City
Eric McCulley, Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission
Gina Grandpre, Saratoga Springs City
Heidi Hoven, National Audubon Society
Joel Thompson, South Valley Sewer District
John Mackey, Division of Water Quality
Kim Sorensen, Murray City
Mayor Kristie Overson, Taylorsville City
Laura Briefer, Salt Lake City Public Utilities
Michael Horrocks, Wasatch Rowing Foundation
Nathan Brakey, Office of Congressman Burgess Owens
Councilmember Paige Albrecht, Lehi City
Councilmember Ryan Mecham, Sandy City
Sandy Wingert, Division of Water Quality
Councilmember Silvia Catten, Millcreek City
Tim Brown, Tracy Aviary
Todd Draper, Draper City
Todd Munger, Lehi City
Wendelin Knobloch, Midvale City

Commission Staff

Soren Simonsen, Executive Director
Rachel Turk, Communications & Outreach Manager

Rae Robinson, Vegetation Coordinator, Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands

Visitors and Guests

Wade Tuft, Jordan Valley Water Conservancy

Ashley Cleveland, Salt Lake City

Laura Haskell, Division of Water Resources

Morgan Faulkner, Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands

Todd Stonely, Division of Water Resources

The Jordan River Watershed Council convened at 10:00 a.m., following which the Watershed Council adjourned and reconvened as the Governing Board.

Meeting Minutes

Councilmember Silvia Catten, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:42 a.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Identification of Governing Board members and other meeting participants in person and online.

2. Public Comments

Alan Packard reported that Utah Lake is full, and water will be released down the Jordan River to Great Salt Lake, tentatively in the next week or two.

Wade Tuft stated that there is a court decree to release water when Utah Lake gets above a certain level due to the risk of flooding in Utah County. The court decree in place requires that the gates stay open until Utah Lake levels drop below a certain level. This poses operational issues, as the exact amount of water to be released is unknown. Data from instream flows is being collected to assist in this matter.

Silvia Catten asked when the gates are typically opened. Wade replied that it varies. The release is happening a bit earlier this year than normal due to the tremendous snowpack and successful conservation efforts by Utah Lake water users. He reports that Utah Lake levels are currently about eight feet higher than they were this time last year.

Dirk Burton asked if the specific date of the release is known. Wade replied that the exact date is not known, but that appropriate notifications would be sent out once it has been determined. He added that the water release is done in a controlled fashion.

Ben Stireman asked if the gates would be open throughout the Spring as different entities call for water. Wade stated that he did not expect the gates to remain open throughout the entire Spring, but that water could be discharged through the same gate as needed.

Ben noted that beyond helping Great Salt Lake levels increase, high-flow Spring runoff, such as what would be seen in natural hydrological conditions, may help reduce the issues with phragmites infestations on upper stretches of the Jordan River. He also noted that it may be worth brainstorming how those natural conditions can be mimicked from time to time.

Soren Simonsen noted that Great Salt Lake did not rise as much as anticipated last year because reservoirs and groundwater were being recharged. The water released from Utah Lake may more effectively make its way to Great Salt Lake because it's not being distributed in the canals but will stay in the river channel and get there.

3. Presentations & Discussion

Blueprint Jordan River & Jordan River Commission Strategic Plan: Silvia Catten and Soren Simonsen, led a discussion to initiate strategic planning for the Jordan River Commission, including a review of the 2015 Commission Strategic Plan and the 2022 Blueprint Jordan River.

Soren briefly discussed the history of the Blueprint Jordan River Plan. One part of the strategic plan was to increase the funding available for various projects, which has been accomplished over the past few years. This comes from a combination of the Jordan River Recreation Area Fund, the Cooperative Weed Management Program Fund, and dedicated funding for the Jordan River Nature Center.

In addition, other grant programs have expanded, such as the Outdoor Recreation Program. Last legislative session, an ongoing funding stream known as the Active Transportation Fund was established as part of the Department of Transportation's annual budget. There's also ongoing funding for trails, which is independent of the Active Transportation Fund, and communities that are investing more.

Soren noted that many of the elements from the strategic plan in 2015 have been completed. He reports that every municipality that touches the Jordan River is now participating in the Commission. A representative from Utah County is needed, and discussions have been held to work toward that. In addition, the Get to the River Festival has been expanded, and thousands of people now participate. A consultant from Mighty Penguin has been retained to help with fundraising.

Soren reported that the Jordan River website is being upgraded, with plans to incorporate other watersheds and launch a mobile version. Many municipalities in the Jordan River watershed are taking steps to increase and improve natural areas, expand buffer areas, and adopt beneficial ordinances. Additional signage has been posted along the length of the Jordan River. A Jordan River flow experiment could not be performed in the past due to low water levels, but he mentioned that this may be a good year to run that experiment. Federal funding is being sought for programs to look at water quality and how flows can change water quality dynamics.

Soren reported that the Executive Committee and Commission staff believe it is a good time to develop a new strategic plan. He summarized some areas in need of improvement under the Blueprint Jordan River's seven Action Plans. There is still a fair amount of work needed to protect and preserve open space and optimize habitat and natural ecosystems.

Soren stated that the Executive Committee is looking for some guidance and input on how to move forward with a strategic plan, who would be involved, and what the time frame might look like. He noted that Commission staff have a great interest in helping to guide and direct efforts and identify what key projects to work on.

Eric McCulley stated that it would be beneficial to review the Blueprint and make objectives under each goal. He noted that there are a lot of them, and recommended that the Board come up with the criteria for deciding which ones are the most feasible in terms of financial resources

available, willing landowners, etc. He also recommended that, as a group, the Board could develop criteria that would evaluate the activities and come up with specific activities under those goals.

Andy Pierucci added that one important thing to capture in the strategic plan is the tributaries, which provide a lot of opportunities. He also mentioned that there are opportunities to expand inclusivity throughout the Valley, which is top of mind for him. He reported that there is a lot of tributary work that can be done to help connect people's minds to the broader watershed of the Great Salt Lake and Utah Lake. He encouraged the Governing Board to keep the tributaries in mind as they move forward.

Ben Stireman reported that he intends to focus on the riparian corridors and soft lands and sees a great opportunity to incorporate that into the plan.

Sylvia stated that in the last 10 to 15 years, the Commission has spent a lot trying to get amenities on the river and make it appealing to deeper users. She noted that they are not past that point but are at a better point. She stated that she feels like there is room for the Commission to do a lot more to include schools and educational opportunities to point people toward actually using the river and initiate an educational push.

Eric noted that there are outdoor classrooms in the Jordan River Migratory Bird Refuge. It has been difficult to get consistent engagement from the school districts and specific teachers because they move, change schools, change principals, etc. He agreed that engagement and education are going to be key. He stated that the youth must be taught how to get out there and have the chance to fall in love with the resource or the Commission's ultimate goals may not be realized. He reported that they are trying to do that on the Jordan River Migratory Bird Refuge right now and invited attendees to visit the site.

4. Commission Staff Reports

Rae Robinson, Jordan River Vegetation Coordinator: Rae reported that they are currently accepting proposals for vegetation improvement projects that will be completed in the next one to three fiscal years. She reported that there is roughly up to \$100,000 available to fund projects.

Rae reported that there are two seasonal workers from the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands working on the North Shore property on Utah Lake, but shortly they'll be moving to spots along the Jordan River. The seasonal workers will be brush-cutting Phragmites and controlling Russian olive and tamarisk with cut stump treatments. She asked for anyone interested or involved in the Cooperative Weed Management Area to reach out soon, as this is her last call before considering plant materials that will be needed for upcoming years.

Rachel Turk, Communications & Outreach Manager: Rachel provided information about grants related to Jordan River projects here. She highlighted the America the Beautiful Challenge Grant, which was awarded to the Division of Water Quality. She mentioned that there were also grants awarded by the Commission, which include the Jordan River Assistance Fund Small Grants. This year the Commission gave \$5,000 to North Salt Lake for the Porter's Landing Boat Launch Rehabilitation Project, and \$3,000 to the Seven Canyons Trust Range to River Relay. The Commission also distributed mini-grants for the Get to the River Festival, which went to South Salt Lake for Paint the Pavement Project, and to Millcreek for food and a dumpster as part of their canoe cleanup activity. \$1,000 was awarded to North Salt Lake for their paddle event.

Rachel also provided a summary of community events and outreach over the past year. She reported that the Puncture Vine Bounty Program was able to remove 2,380 pounds of puncture vine. Additionally, 642 trees, shrubs, and other plant life were planted in the spring and fall. In addition, 510 pounds of seed was placed in different areas.

Rachel reported that the Commission had 41 total paddles last year with over 1,200 participants. She also mentioned the Love Your Watershed initiative. She noted that when Commission staff are meeting with people, they always try to educate them on the stormwater system and get people thinking about what they can do in their communities.

Rachel reported that there were thirty outreach and education activities outside of the Festival and other bigger events, with around 3,000 total participants. She is working to share all the wonderful projects along the Jordan River so that people know what the Commission is doing. She reported that people are engaging in the newsletter content more by clicking and following links, signing up for events, and reading articles. She mentioned that last year there was a click-through rate of 3%. The last newsletter that she sent out was at 9%, so she is feeling good about the improvements seen in this area.

Rachel reported that the Commission held four activities per City Nature Challenge, with 266 participants just for the events that they organized, but the larger City Nature Challenge had many more participants. Last year, the Golden Spoke Bike Ride had 240 participants and the Commission held the 10th annual Get to the River Festival. Rachel reported that last year the Commission had 61 volunteer events with 2,800 volunteers and almost 6,000 hours. This includes monthly trash cleanups as well as stand-alone events. She reported that there were about 10,000 pounds of trash removed from the land and 26,000 pounds removed from the river.

5. Director's Report

Fiscal Year 2024 Second Quarter Financial Report: Soren Simonsen highlighted the financial report, which is reviewed every quarter. He also expressed gratitude for a grant from the Gerber Foundation, which allowed the Commission to rent dumpsters in conjunction with their river cleanups. He noted that this had an added benefit of more accurate tallies of what was removed since the dumpsters are weighed at the landfill. With 50% of the budget year completed the Commission is generally under in most categories.

Legislative Updates: Soren summarized a few bills he is watching. He reported that the Social Services budget includes a large funding request from Governor Cox, which represents a comprehensive approach to housing and homelessness. Much of this will be up to the Executive Appropriations Committee. He recommended that the Board put all the support they can behind the Social Services Appropriations specifically tied to homeless services and housing.

Soren mentioned that a pilot project opened in early December in downtown Salt Lake City for non-congregated shelters, sometimes called sanctioned camps or tiny house villages. He expressed excitement over seeing people who were previously camping on the Jordan River move into these facilities.

Another bill he reported on is sponsored by Representative Lesser. If passed, it would include canals as part of the active transportation program. This would look at potential canal corridors

that have the potential to become active transportation corridors. Some canal users are concerned that this could impede operations or result in mandates, but the sponsor has been very receptive to feedback and removed the mandate from the bill language.

Betty Naylor noted that a meeting will be held next Tuesday at 4 o'clock at the Utah State University campus in Taylorsville to discuss this issue, as it is a concern for the canal companies and the recreation community.

Grants and Funding Updates & Opportunities: Soren mentioned that several outdoor recreation grant programs have recently opened. If anybody is applying for grants, he stated to let the Commission know and they can support other's efforts, including writing letters of support. He also offered assistance with scoping projects. He noted that projects that bring together multiple communities across jurisdictional boundaries are often looked at very highly with the outdoor recreation grant program.

Upcoming Meetings, Events, and Activities of Interest: Nothing additional was noted

Alicia DeLeon asked if the JRC website has a language widget to be able to change the language choice for viewing information.

Soren replied that a more comprehensive website overhaul would be taking place soon, and they can add this to that scope.

6. Adjourn

Andy Periucci moved to adjourn the meeting. Todd Draper seconded the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

A meeting recording, presentation and handout materials, and meeting minutes are available at <https://www.utah.gov/pmn/sitemap/notice/889781.html>.

Meeting minutes prepared by Ren Griffeth, Jordan River Commission Administrative, Grant & Research Specialist.