

Hogle Zoo Jordan River Commission Small Grant Program Report

In Utah's Hogle Zoo's most recent Master Plan, the Jordan River was identified as an area of importance to grow our community conservation initiatives. With an estimated 65% of Zoo guests living within 10 miles of the river or crossing it in their daily commute, the River is relevant to our audience and is an ideal place to engage our guests and surrounding communities in meaningful conservation work. With the support of the Jordan River Assistance Fund, we were able to leverage other zoo support to launch the Hogle Hive Pollinator Initiative to augment restoration efforts through the creation of seed dumplings with Zoo guests. Jordan River Assistance Funds were used to purchase soil, fertilizer, clay, native restoration seed mix, a handwashing station, paper towels, and paper bags to make this initiative possible. A portion of the funds was also used to offset staff time spent planning and creating the activity.

We started running our Hogle Hive seed dumpling activity in the summer of 2022 with supplies we had on hand, including Jordan River Commission Custom Seed Mix and shredded paper. During this summer, several hundred seed dumplings were made. We learned that this method of making seed dumplings retained too much moisture and caused the seeds to sprout too early. The dumplings that were usable were planted during puncturevine weeding events hosted by the Zoo and Commission in the fall of 2022. The funds from this grant allowed us to reevaluate the process and make changes for 2023. We now make the dumplings without shredded paper and have found this to solve the problem of early germination.

In June and July of this year, the seed dumpling table was run daily, with an average of 67 guests participating per day. This is a total of more than 4,000 guests who engaged with the activity and learned about the importance of the Jordan River, the habitat it provides, and ways that they could both help and recreate at the River. In addition to the seed dumplings made with the Jordan River Custom Seed Mix, we also gave guests the opportunity to make dumplings with a native wildflower mix to take home to create their own pollinator habitats. Through this, approximately 3,000 seed dumplings were made and left with the Zoo for restoration projects, and 1,500 were taken home. While completing the project, staff and volunteers talked with guests about the river, its importance as a migratory corridor for birds and mammals, the beautiful habitats that it provides, the great work that is being done to improve it, and directed them to the multiple recreation opportunities it provides.

We are now in the process of reaching out to various partners working along the river to make the completed dumplings available to them for their restoration projects this fall. Through this, we aim to assist in furthering the goals laid out by the Jordan River Commission and the Blue Print Jordan River of controlling noxious and invasive plant species by replacing them with beneficial native plants. By following weeding with the planting of native seeds in the form of seed dumplings, we can decrease the likelihood that noxious and invasive plants will reestablish themselves. Instead, these will be replaced with beneficial, habitat-creating native plants. This project also addresses the goal of restoring native plant communities and ecosystems to the fullest possible richness, diversity, and health by utilizing a seed mix developed by the Jordan River Commission to ensure optimum species composition and species appropriate for attracting desirable wildlife and to promote biological diversity through the use of many native plant species.

As guests created the seed dumplings, they were told about our work on the Jordan River, and when they donated their seed dumplings, they were asked how it felt to be a Champion for Utah Wildlife. If they took seeds home, they were congratulated for being champions for pollinators and for joining the Hogle Hive. The purpose of this messaging is to reinforce a growing identity as Champions for Wildlife, and to show that conservation action is easy and rewarding. Talking about the number of dumplings made and referring to the concept of “the Hogle Hive” reinforced a sense of community and communicated that conservation is not a personal sacrifice that they need to make but a community effort they can join. They were also directed to sign up for our Jordan River Restoration projects online. Through this, we aimed to support goals relating to recreation and tourism by helping to provide natural areas that endure, captivate, and lead to healthy lifestyles through the promotion of biological diversity. We hope that in the future we can also direct guests to areas where the seed dumplings have been used to establish native plant communities so that they can both enjoy the river and parkway and see that their engagement at the Zoo really does make a difference.

In addition to running this activity daily on Zoo grounds, we were able to use the supplies at several special events, including our April Seeds and Bees event and Girl Scout Night at the Zoo. At these two events, an additional 150 restoration seed dumplings were made. These events offered more time to talk with participants about the project and the river. This went further in supporting another key initiative of the Blueprint: environmental education and stewardship through interaction focusing on education opportunities and programs that are focused on the benefits of a healthy river ecosystem. We hope to continue to do this with a wider audience by sharing a video of the process focused on how people can create seed dumplings at home on our social media platforms in the coming months. This will allow us to reach a much wider audience and share the importance of this urban river and the diverse opportunities people have to enjoy it.

With the supplies purchased and experience gained, we will eagerly pursue the opportunity to continue to partner with diverse river conservation and restoration projects while engaging and educating our Zoo guests about the importance of the Jordan River and all of the ways that they can help to support it as a healthy and thriving ecosystem for animals and residents.

Appendix



Figure 1 Seed dumplings made at Seeds and Bees event



Figure 2 Volunteer making seed dumplings at Seeds and Bees event