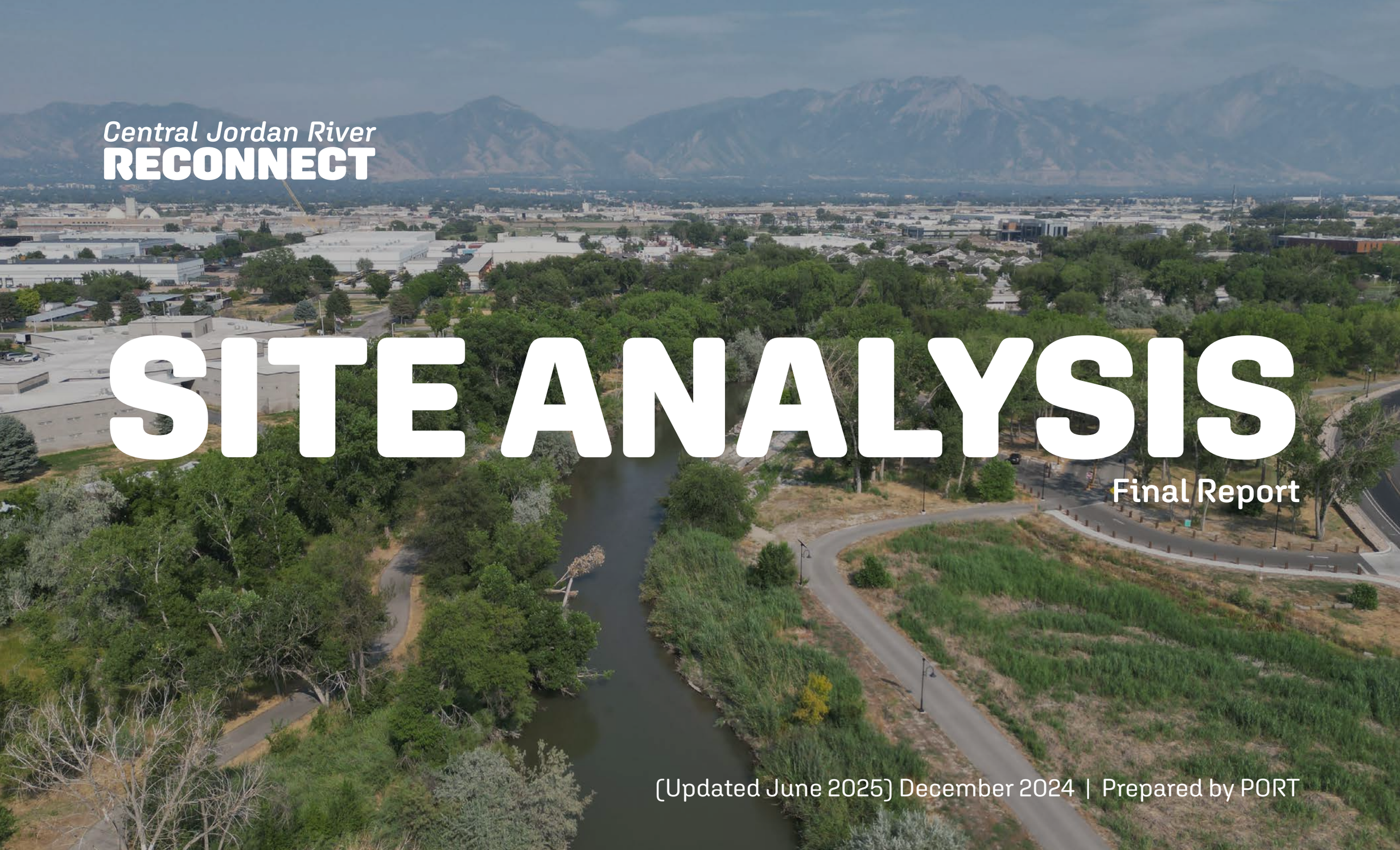

Central Jordan River
RECONNECT

SITE ANALYSIS

Final Report

(Updated June 2025) December 2024 | Prepared by PORT

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Central Jordan River
RECONNECT

OVERVIEW

Site Analysis

(Updated June 2025) December 2024 | Prepared by PORT

Overview

Introduction

The Central Jordan River Reconnect project aims to enhance the heart of Salt Lake County by restoring the Jordan River's ecological health and elevating its role as a vital public space. This study focuses on a seven-mile length of the Jordan River that spans five cities and is bounded by SR201 on the north and 5400 S on the south. This effort builds on decades of community advocacy, environmental research, and strategic planning, as well as renewed County focus on this stretch of the river over the past 5 years, positioning the river corridor as a symbol of both environmental stewardship and good urbanism. The goal of this planning work is to weave together recreation, community, and nature, creating a regional park system that strengthens the ties between neighborhoods, natural resources, and the region's rich history.

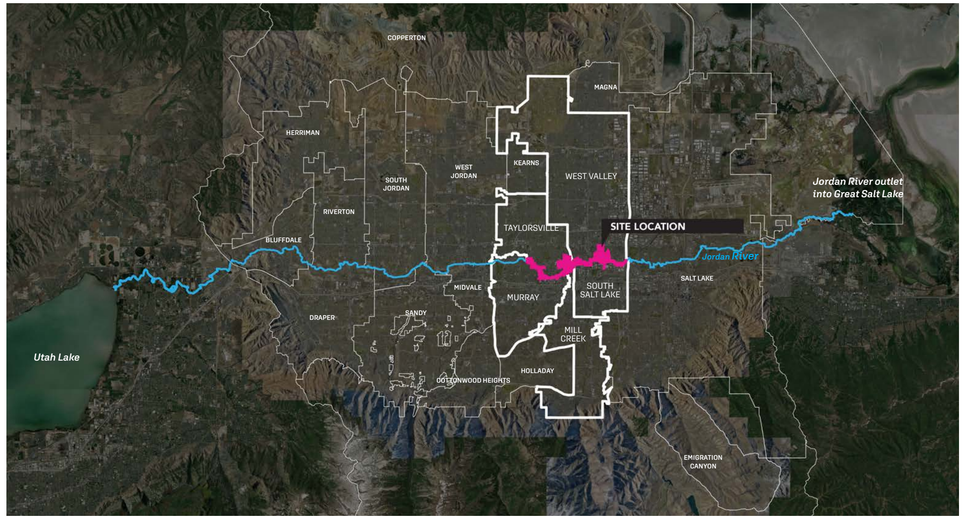
AERIAL VIEW LOOKING NORTHEAST TOWARDS SALT LAKE CITY, WITH TAYLORSVILLE TO THE LEFT AND GERMANIA PARK TO THE RIGHT.

AERIAL VIEW LOOKING SOUTH TOWARDS MILL CREEK, WITH SOUTH SALT LAKE TO THE LEFT AND WEST VALLEY TO THE RIGHT.

AERIAL VIEW OF THE CHANNELIZED JORDAN RIVER IN SOUTH SALT LAKE, WHERE INDUSTRIAL LAND USES DOMINATE THE RIVER'S EDGE.

Study Area Location + Extents

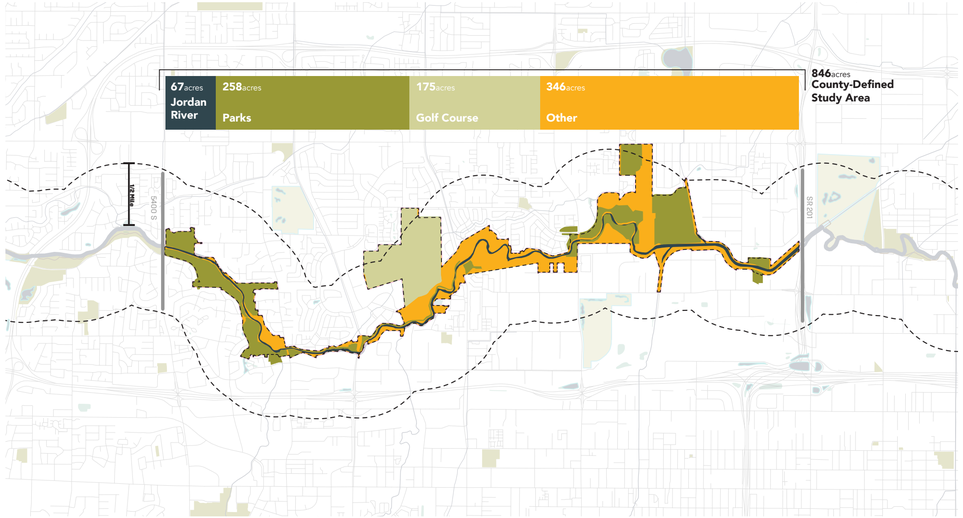
The Central Jordan River Reconnect looks at a 7-mile stretch of the river and its adjacent context. The study area begins at State Route 201, just south of Salt Lake City, and runs to 5400 S. This extent goes through five cities: South Salt Lake, West Valley City, Taylorsville, Millcreek, and Murray.



0' 2.5 mi 5 mi N

Study Area Breakdown

This area of the Jordan River became a state designated recreation zone in 2022. This area covers 250 yards on each side of the Jordan River from the edge of the river between SR-201 and 5400 South. For the purposes of this study, Salt Lake County identified approximately 846 acres of land adjacent to the Jordan River to be considered in this planning process. Since understanding the context around this 846 acres is crucial for having a full picture of the surroundings, this site analysis document typically uses a 0.5 mile buffer zone from the river between SR-201 and 5400 South as the extent of the analysis.



0' 2500' 5000' N

Overview

Project Communities

The Central Jordan River Reconnect project spans a dynamic and diverse study area that includes five municipalities: Murray, South Salt Lake, Taylorsville, West Valley City, and Millcreek. Just north of the study area is Salt Lake City. Each city presents its own unique characteristics, needs, and challenges, creating a complex mosaic of communities along the river corridor. Our approach will focus on inclusive and tailored engagement efforts, coordinated analysis, and place-specific recommendations, ensuring that each city's specific needs are addressed, while also considering their shared challenges and collective goals.

South Salt Lake
3.76 miles of river frontage

West Valley City
3.76 miles of river frontage

Taylorsville
3.26 miles of river frontage

Millcreek
0.67 miles of river frontage

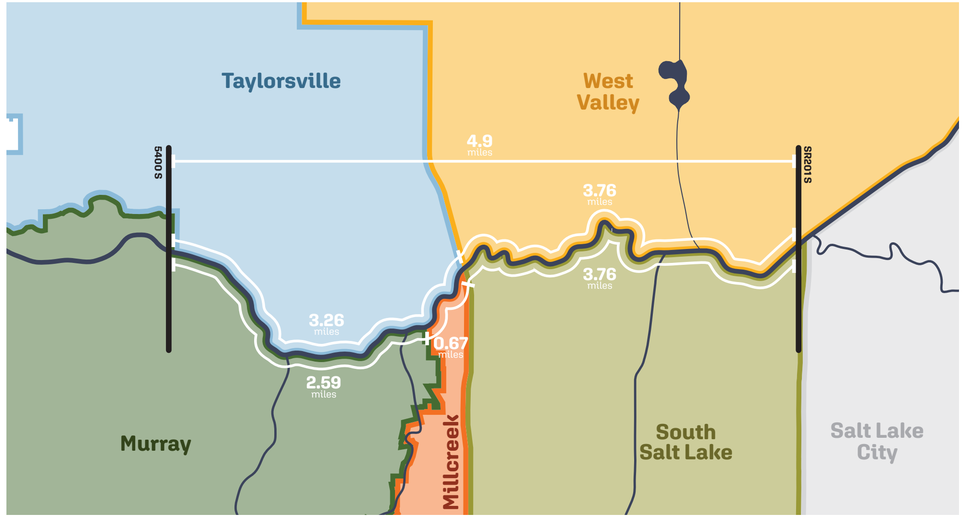
Murray
2.59 miles of river frontage

THE RIVER WITH DEVELOPMENT IN TAYLORSVILLE ON THE LEFT AND OPEN SPACE IN MURRAY ON THE RIGHT.

THE RIVER AND JORDAN RIVER TRAIL BETWEEN WEST VALLEY CITY (LEFT) AND SOUTH SALT LAKE (RIGHT).

River Frontage

Across the five cities, the way each city meets the river, connects to the trail network, and manages its riverfront is widely varied. While the river is viewed as an asset, coordinating uniform maintenance and management can be a struggle. This planning process endeavors to build a coalition of partners from each of the adjacent cities to develop a strategic and coordinated approach to the riverfront through the Central Jordan River area.



Overview

County Identified Priorities

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Improving access to and along the river, diversifying modes of transit

RIVERINE + ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

Improving water quality and river health, improving the riparian ecosystem and provision of habitat

RECREATION PLANNING

Improving opportunities for passive and active recreation

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Growing the capacity for smart development where appropriate

Project Themes

CONNECTED
CENTRAL JORDAN RIVER
Access, Transportation, + Movement

ECOLOGICAL
CENTRAL JORDAN RIVER
Habitat + Hydrology

ACTIVE
CENTRAL JORDAN RIVER
Recreation + Programming

STEWARDED
CENTRAL JORDAN RIVER
Care, Management, + Maintenance

Overview

Key Challenges

Navigating Municipal Boundaries

A major challenge of this project is navigating the differing priorities, regulations, and community identity of each of the 5 cities, plus Salt Lake County. Achieving a shared vision for the Central Jordan River corridor requires navigating these political and logistical complexities, making collaboration not just important, but absolutely critical to the project's success.

Access & Connectivity Challenges

Highways and industrial areas surrounding the Jordan River limit connectivity to the waterfront. While there is currently a network of public transit, bike infrastructure, and pedestrian walkways near the River, stronger east-west connections and more direct access points are needed to better connect surrounding communities to the river.

Ecological Health & Restoration

The Jordan River is a highly developed and altered river system. Returning to pre-development conditions is infeasible given the amount of development that has occurred within the rivers historic floodplain. Thus, efforts to improve the hydrologic and ecological function of the River should instead focus on enhancements to the rivers form and function with the goals of protecting and expanding habitat for wildlife, improving erosion and flooding, and bolstering opportunities for the enjoyment of the river.

Recreation Diversity & Amenity Enhancements

The Central Jordan River currently has numerous parks and open spaces which provide a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities. However, expanding the diversity of types of recreation, improving amenities, and increasing the programming of these spaces could draw more users to the the riverfront. In addition enhancing activation and opportunities for interaction with the river itself would amplify the regional park as a unique destination within the valley.

Management & Safety

Effective park management, regular maintenance, and consistent safety measures are needed to enhance the visitor experience. Collaboration with municipalities and service providers is essential to ensure cohesive land use and community well-being.

LOOKING SOUTHEAST TOWARDS THE WASATCH RANGE, WITH PIONEER CROSSING REGIONAL PARK IN THE FOREGROUND.

Overview

Schedule

This project will evolve through a collaborative, phased approach:

PART 1: PROJECT DISCOVERY
PART 2: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (VISIONING)
PART 3: PLAN DEVELOPMENT
PART 4: PLAN COMPLETION

Inclusive and multilingual engagement is at the heart of the Central Jordan River Reconnect project. Given the diverse populations across the five municipalities, our engagement strategy will:

- Prioritize multilingual communication, ensuring that all materials and outreach efforts are available in English and Spanish.
- Consider the collective challenges and shared goals of the region. These include environmental restoration, flood control, and ensuring that the Jordan River becomes a unifying space for all communities along its course.

By fostering collaboration among local governments, community organizations, and residents, the Central Jordan River Reconnect project aims to not only restore the river's ecological function but also strengthen social and cultural connections between the diverse populations that call this region home.

Public Outreach Approach and Schedule

Part 2
Visioning
2024

1 Connecting
EARLY OCT 2024

GOALS:
Raising awareness, getting to know the study area and the communities around it

2 Imagining
LATE OCT/NOV/DEC 2024

GOALS:
Verifying goals and guiding principles and understanding community priorities

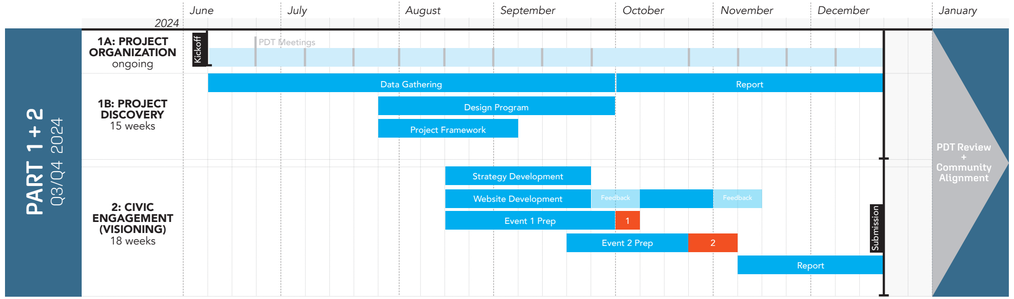
Part 3
Plan Development
Late 2025 - Early 2026

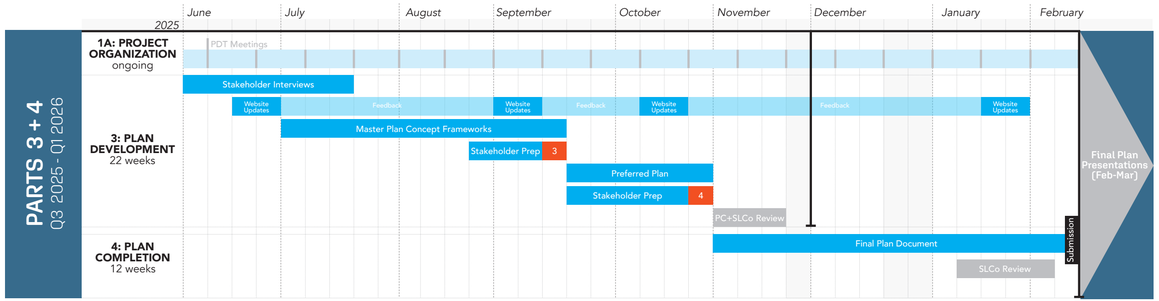
3 Alternatives
SEP 2025

GOALS:
Gathering feedback + impressions from the alternative plans presented

4 Culminating
FEB 2026

GOALS:
Presenting final plan for comments, building enthusiasm and momentum for next steps





Overview

Team

The Central Jordan River Reconnect project is guided by a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach, with the Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation Division serving as the project's client. The Jordan River Commission (JRC) also serves a central role in the development of this work. In addition to the JRC, the County has brought together a range of stakeholders, technical experts, and government agencies to ensure the successful planning, design, and implementation of this important river restoration initiative.

Project Development Team (Client Group)

The Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation Division leads this initiative, working closely with various county departments and local municipalities. The County's leadership ensures that the project aligns with broader regional goals, including ecological restoration, flood management, and enhanced public access along the Jordan River corridor.

Key departments from the County include:

- **Parks Planning and Development**: Overseeing the strategic vision and day-to-day management of the project.
- **Parks Operations and Maintenance**: Consulting on the needs and goals of the operations and maintenance team.
- **Flood Control**: Mandated with protecting life, property, and watershed from damage or destruction from flood and storm waters

Consultant Team

Salt Lake County has contracted a team of design and technical experts to supplement its in-house expertise and bring innovative solutions to the project. The consultant team is led by **PORT**, a firm specializing in landscape architecture and urban design.

Collaborating with PORT are:

- **Horrocks Engineers**, providing civil engineering services with a focus on floodplain analysis, stormwater management, and trail planning.
- **Rio ASE**, specializing in hydrology and river restoration, ensuring the project's alignment with water management and river health goals. **Ecosystem Sciences**, offering expertise in ecological restoration and habitat management.
- **Psomas**, contributing land use planning expertise, focusing on zoning, urban development impacts, and integrating land use with environmental preservation.
- **Horrocks Engineers**, providing civil engineering services with a focus on floodplain analysis, stormwater management, and trail planning.
- **Zions Public Finance**, focusing on economic impact analysis and financial strategies to ensure long-term viability.

Together, this consultant team brings a diverse range of skills and experience to the project, ensuring that it meets both environmental goals and community needs.

Key Stakeholders and Collaborative Efforts

The Central Jordan River Reconnect brings together a wide variety of stakeholders—local residents, environmental groups, community organizations, and public agencies—all working together to revitalize the river corridor. These collaborative efforts are crucial in tackling the complex challenges faced by the river.

Stakeholders and Advisory Committees include:

- **Jordan River Commission**: As an advisory body, the Commission comprises representatives from municipalities, counties, and special districts, fostering regional consensus. While it does not have regulatory authority, it plays a crucial role in coordinating efforts among local governments.
- **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)**: A diverse group of experts and stakeholders assembled for this project that ensures that technical aspects related to environmental health, flood management, and water resources are thoroughly evaluated throughout the project, including:
    - **Utah Division of Water Quality**
    - **Utah Division of Wildlife Resources**
    - **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**
- **Local Municipalities**: Cities along the river, including *Murray, South Salt Lake, Taylorsville, West Valley City, and Millcreek,* as well as Salt Lake City, are active participants, offering input on recreational needs, safety, and community access.
- **Nonprofit Partners**: Organizations such as Jordan River Foundation and Seven Canyons Trust play important roles in community engagement, ecological advocacy, and long-term sustainability of the river.

Governmental Involvement

Several governmental agencies are critical to the success of the Central Jordan River Reconnect project, each contributing their unique expertise and resources:

- **State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands**: Oversees riverbed management and ensures the ecological health of the river.
- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**: Provides oversight on any activities that could affect the river's flow and environmental integrity, including flood management projects.
- **Salt Lake County Public Works**: Responsible for flood control, stormwater management, and the maintenance of public infrastructure along the river corridor.
- **Local Public Works and Planning Departments**: Cities involved in the project manage trails, parks, and zoning issues, coordinating closely with the county and other stakeholders to ensure the river remains a valuable community resource.

The active involvement of these agencies ensures a cohesive and comprehensive approach to managing the river's diverse needs, from flood mitigation to enhancing public safety and recreation.

Overview

History

The Jordan River has shaped the Salt Lake Valley for thousands of years, serving as a critical natural resource and cultural landmark for the region. Its story is one of transformation, shaped by both natural forces and human intervention.

- Agricultural practices dramatically altered the river's natural landscape, transforming wetlands and floodplains into farmlands.
- Colonization altered how Indigenous peoples, such as the Ute tribe, and later settlers, interacted with the river, changing its cultural significance and ecological function.
- Urban development introduced new challenges, further disconnecting the river from its natural state and communities.

Pre-Settlement: Geology and Ecology

Around 20,000 BCE, Lake Bonneville covered much of modern-day Utah, including what is now the Jordan River corridor. As the climate changed and the lake drained around 16,800 BCE, it left behind the Great Salt Lake, fed by the Bear, Weber, and Jordan Rivers. Over time, the Jordan River evolved into a vital riparian habitat, supporting 12,500 acres of wetlands, oxbows, and ponds.

Before European settlement, the river fluctuated seasonally, fed by mountain streams and melting snow from the Uinta and Wasatch Mountains. In spring, its waters swelled, flooding adjacent plains and creating rich ecosystems of marshes and wetlands. These wetlands slowed the river's flow, reducing erosion and supporting diverse plant and animal species.

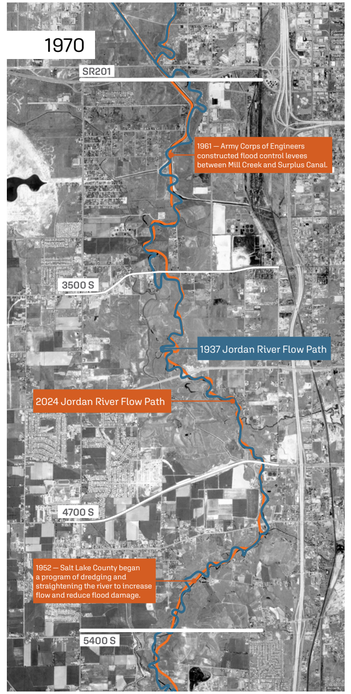
First Inhabitants and Early Settlement

Humans have lived along the Jordan River for over 10,000 years. The first known inhabitants were nomadic hunter-gatherers, followed by the Fremont people around 400 CE, who farmed and hunted in the area. By the 1350s, ancestors of the Ute, Goshute, Paiute, and Shoshone Tribes began to inhabit the region, utilizing the river as a source of food and materials.

European settlers, particularly members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, arrived in 1847, marking a profound shift in the river's history. The settlers, inspired by the biblical Jordan River, named it after the river in the Middle East. By 1850, they had established communities along the river and its tributaries. These settlers began diverting water for agriculture and flood prevention, transforming the river into a key resource for sustaining the valley's growing population.

19th and 20th Century: Transformation and Industrial Use

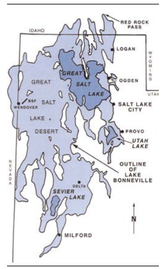
As settlement expanded, so did human impacts on the Jordan River. In the mid-1800s, the natural flow of the river was altered by the construction of major canals, including the Surplus Canal in 1885, which diverted water to support agricultural development. By 1892, the river's role as a natural outlet for Utah Lake was further controlled by dams and reservoirs, which drastically reduced flooding and altered the natural flow cycles of the river.



Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Jordan River became increasingly industrialized. The river served as a dumping ground for agricultural and industrial waste, leading to significant pollution. By the 1950s, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed levees to control flooding, straightening sections of the river and accelerating erosion.

Agriculture + development have fundamentally changed the river landscape.

History—PRE-SETTLEMENT HYDROLOGIC AND GEOLOGIC HISTORY



Outline of ancient Lake Bonneville
https://geology.utah.gov/popular/great-salt-lake/

The Bonneville Salt Flats. Although Lake Bonneville was freshwater, it contained salts that concentrated as the lake contracted. Much of the salt now in the Great Salt Lake is originally from Lake Bonneville.
https://geology.utah.gov/popular/great-salt-lake/

Due to the changing climate, the Great Salt Lake continues to decline in size today. Left: July 1986, Right: July 2022.
https://greatsaltlakenews.org/latest-news/ksl-com/why-utah-is-updating-its-answers-to-common-questions-about-the-great-salt-lake

20,000 BCE
Lake Bonneville covered much of what is now Western Utah; at its largest, was 325 miles long and 135 miles wide[1]

16,800 BCE
Drier climate caused the water levels in Lake Bonneville to drop significantly over about 2,000 years. This reduced the lake to what exists today- the Great Salt Lake, fed by the Bear, Weber, and Jordan Rivers, and Utah Lake[1]

16,800 BCE - 10,000 BCE
The newly formed Jordan River became important riparian habitat with oxbows, wetlands, ponds with approximately 12,500 acres of wetland habitat.[2]

The water levels of the Jordan River fluctuated greatly in different seasons and cyclically depending on water flowing into Utah Lake and its tributaries (specifically, snowfall and rainfall that drains from the Uinta and Wasatch Mountains).

River flooded in the spring due to snow melt and flowed into adjacent floodplain for a few month of the year, flow diminished in winter.

Natural meander corridor that included oxbows, marshes, sloughs, porthole ponds would slow the flow rate of the river, allowing for minimized scouring, entrenchment, and low velocities.

References

1. Tracy Aviary Nature Center: https://tracyaviary.org/nature-center/about-pla-okwa//history-of-pla-okwa//history-of-the-Jordan-river/
2. Utah History Encyclopedia: https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/j/JORDAN_RIVER.shtml
3. Jordan River Natural Conservation Corridor Report 2001
4. Blueprint Jordan River 2008
5. Brigham Young University. (1996). UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA - POWELL,AK, EDITOR. Brigham Young University Studies., 35(3), 170–172.

History—EARLY HUMAN HISTORY + COLONIZATION

The Galena - Soónkahni Preserve is a 250-acre preserve along the Jordan River Parkway trail containing a 3,000 year old archaeological site and monument to Utah's Native American tribes.
https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=2339781&itype=CMSID

A fur-trapping rendenzvous of early European colonials
https://community.utah.gov/pre-european-settlement-crossroads-and-the-idea-of-home/

Natural Jordan river corridor, 1901
https://www.loc.gov/resource/det.4a09208/

10,000 BCE
First known inhabitants along the Jordan were members of the Desert Archaic Culture, a group of nomadic hunter-gatheres.

400 - 1350 A.D.
Next known inhabitants were the Fremont people (400 A.D. to around 1350 A.D.) These people were composed of bands of hunters and farmers. Eventually, changing climate made farming unfavorable, leading to the disappearance of the Fremont.

Ancestors of the present-day Ute, Paiute, and Northwestern Shoshone begin to arrive in the area in the 1300's.

1350 - 19th Century
Goshute and Eastern Shoshone Tribes, as well as the Ute (south) used this area of the river as a source of food and materials

At the time of arrival of European settlers, the area bordered land occupied by several tribes, such as the Timpanogos band of the Utes in Utah Valley, the Goshutes on the western side of the Oquirrh Mountain Range, and the Northwestern Shoshone north of the Salt Lake Valley.

1776
Franciscan missionary Silvestre Velez de Escalante and a party of Spanish colonials entered the valley and explored Utah Lake

1824
The next group of Europeans to see the Jordan river was a party led by Etienne Provost, a French Canadian trapper. The party was attacked at a Shoshone camp along the Jordan in retaliation for the murder of a local chief.

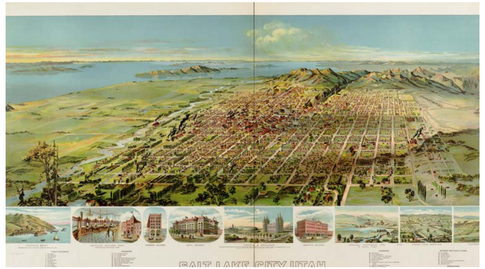
References

1. Tracy Aviary Nature Center: https://tracyaviary.org/nature-center/about-pla-okwa//history-of-pla-okwa//history-of-the-jordan-river/
2. Utah History Encyclopedia: https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/j/JORDAN_RIVER.shtml
3. Jordan River Natural Conservation Corridor Report 2001
4. Blueprint Jordan River 2008
5. Brigham Young University. (1996). UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA - POWELL,AK, EDITOR. Brigham Young University Studies., 35(3), 170–172.

History—MORMON SETTLEMENT, INDUSTRY, + THE POLLUTION OF THE JORDAN

Painting of Mormon pioneers entering the Great Salt Lake Valley by C.C.A. Christensen, Brigham Young University Museum of Art

Early photo of the Jordan River near Salt Lake
https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/j/JORDAN_RIVER.shtml



1891 Oblique drawing of Salt Lake City showing development and farming near the banks of the Jordan River
https://slco.org/surveyor/mapping--gis/free--historical-maps/

1847
The first members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, led by Brigham Young, arrive in the valley and begin establishing farms and settlements along the river and its tributaries. These settlers began altering the river by digging ditches and canals, building dams, and installing pumps to divert water for drinking, irrigation, and industrial use

1848
Pioneers cross the Jordan River to settle the west side of the valley

Pollution of the Jordan
Since the settling of the valley, the Jordan became heavily polluted, acting as a conduit for raw sewage, agricultural runoff, and mining waste traveling to the Great Salt Lake. 40 smelters contaminated the river with heavy metals, mostly arsenic and lead.

Late 1800's
The river was used to transport construction materials. This included floating granite blocks down to the city during construction of the Salt Lake Temple, and for logs and ties used on the Central Utah Railroad.[3]

1887
Cooper deposits were discovered at Bingham Canyon in the Oquirrh Mountains, and copper mining began, including an open pit mine at Kennecott.

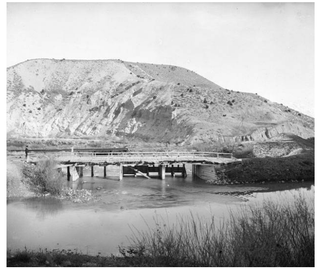
Early 1900's
Mills were established near the Jordan River in Midvale and West Jordan to process ore

1800's - 1950
Water from the Jordan river sustained agriculture in the Salt Lake Valley- by 1950, Salt Lake County had 489,000 acres devoted to farming.

References

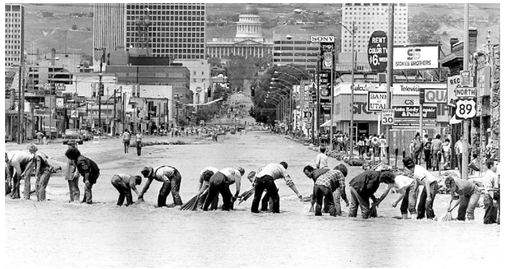
1. Tracy Aviary Nature Center: https://tracyaviary.org/nature-center/about-pla-okwa//history-of-pla-okwa//history-of-the-jordan-river/
2. Utah History Encyclopedia: https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/j/JORDAN_RIVER.shtml
3. Jordan River Natural Conservation Corridor Report 2001
4. Blueprint Jordan River 2008
5. Brigham Young University. (1996). UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA - POWELL,AK, EDITOR. Brigham Young University Studies., 35(3), 170–172.

History—RIVER MODIFICATIONS



Dam at the Jordan River narrows in 1901
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_River_%28Utah%29

Dam and pumping house at the Jordan River Narrows



Salt Lake City has dealt with periods of severe flooding and drought throughout history, including this 1983 flood that turned downtown streets into rivers due to record high precipitation.
https://www.ksl.com/article/41402975/looking-back-at-the-1983-flood-that-sent-a-river-through-downtown

1847
Early settlers began altering the natural meander corridor river by digging ditches and canals, building dams, and installing pumps to divert water for drinking, irrigation, and industrial use.

1849
The earliest dam and ditch along the Jordan was constructed to irrigate land on the west side of the river near present-day Taylorsville

1853 - 1885
A total of 5 canals were constructed to divert water for farming, including the construction of the Surplus Canal in 1885.

1872
The first dam in the Narrows was constructed, sparking controversy among residents who thought it raised the level of the lake

1885
A compromise was reached about the acceptable elevation of Utah Lake, resulting in new regulations to control when the river would be impeded by dams and flood gates.

1892
Utah Lake is established as a storage reservoir under the Morse Decree

1901
A major drought caused the Jordan River to periodically stop flowing

1902 - 1911
Dams and pumps were added to regulate water flow from the original cyclical flooding cycle to eliminate peak flows

1934
Another drought caused Utah Lake levels to drop so low that the pumps were rendered useless and the Jordan River ran dry. This happened again in 1992.

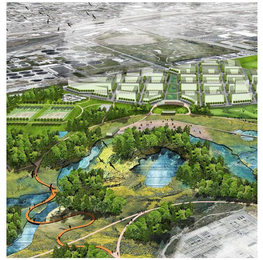
1952
After a major flood in 1952, a Diversion Dam is built by the Army Corps of Engineers. After this followed a program of dredging and straightening the river channel in Salt Lake County to increase river velocity and reduce the damage caused by periodic spring floods. This accelerated erosion and led to the loss of riparian vegetation int he corridor. The river was shifted to opposite sides of the floodplain in Midvale and Murray as part of local smelter operations

1961
Flood control project constructed levees from Mill Creek to head of Surplus Canal

A trash boom in Jordan River traps floating garbage in an effort to protect Great Salt Lake wetlands and waterfowl.
https://www.ksl.com/article/46288298/jordan-river-trash-boom-targets-floating-garbage-protects-great-salt-lake-wetlands

Three Creeks Confluence Park; where Emigration, Red Butte, and Parleys creeks meet the Jordan River. New projects like this one aim to reimagine the ecological and recreational potential of the Jordan River. https://www.sltrib.com/news/2021/07/03/projects-set-improve/

The Jordan River Parkway trail increases public awareness and advocacy for a cleaner, safer recreation corridor in the heart of the city. https://www.sltrib.com/news/2020/10/05/utahns-want-cleaner-more/



Rendering from "Jordan Rising," an entry for the On the River's Edge ideas competition in 2019.
https://www.migcom.com/news/%E2%80%9Cjordan-rising%E2%80%9D-wins-two-utah-awards

1960's

In the 1960's, the Jordan continued to be used as a waste disposal canal for slaughterhouses, packing plants, mineral reduction mills, and laundries. However, this decade marks a turning point in acknowledgment and action towards cleaning up the polluted river, and some sewage treatment efforts began.

1970

Jordan River Parkway is proposed as a flood control measure, with plans for trails, recreation opportunities, floodplain restoration, pollution cleanup

1972

Clean Water Act is passed. New effluent standards for industrial discharges further limited pollution into the 21st century.

1973

Utah State Legislature created the Provo-Jordan River Parkway Authority to head flood control measures, recreational facilities and conservation projects

1980

By this decade, industrial pollution began to decrease and Jordan River started to be reimagined as an urban oasis and recreational space

1986

$18 million used to purchase lands around the Jordan River and construct the Murray Golf course, several smaller parks, and about 4 miles of canoe runs and trails

2008

Blueprint Jordan River was published and represented the first comprehensive effort to develop a public vision for the future of the whole Jordan River corridor.

2010

The majority of the 40-mile Jordan Parkway trail is finished from Utah Lake to the Davis County Border

The Jordan River Commission is formed as a group of governmental and non-governmental entities invested in the Jordan River

2019

"On the River's Edge" competition generates community interest and design ideas for a 3.5-mile stretch of the Jordan River Parkway.

References

1. Tracy Aviary Nature Center: https://tracyaviary.org/nature-center/about-pla-okwa/history-of-pla-okwa/history-of-the-jordan-river/
2. Utah History Encyclopedia: https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/j/JORDAN_RIVER.shtml
3. Jordan River Natural Conservation Corridor Report 2001
4. Blueprint Jordan River 2008
5. Brigham Young University. (1996). UTAH HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA - POWELL,AK, EDITOR. Brigham Young University Studies., 35(3), 170–172.

Overview

Conservation + Renewal

In response to growing environmental concerns, efforts to restore and protect the Jordan River gained momentum. The Jordan River Commission, established in 2010, brought together government and community groups to address the river's ecological health. Today, the river spans over 50 miles and flows through three counties and 15 cities, playing a vital role in connecting Utah Lake to the Great Salt Lake.

Efforts are underway to restore the Jordan River to a more natural state, preserving its ecological value while also enhancing recreational opportunities for the surrounding communities. These ongoing conservation efforts reflect a renewed commitment to balancing human needs with the protection of the river's natural environment.

RESTORATION EFFORTS AT MILL CREEK CONFLUENCE, FEBRUARY 2018.
SOURCE: SOURCE CANYONS TRUST

Overview

Past Plans

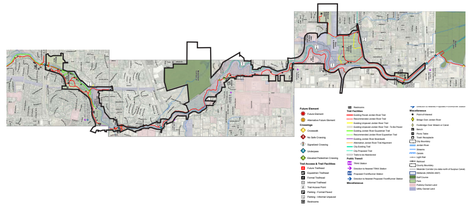
The Central Jordan River Reconnect project builds on more than a decade of collaborative efforts aimed at revitalizing the Jordan River. From the 2008 Blueprint Jordan River plan to the more recent 2022 Blueprint Refresh, stakeholders across multiple municipalities, environmental organizations, and government agencies have come together to restore the river's ecological health, enhance recreation, and create a connected regional asset. These cooperative initiatives have established the river as a critical resource for urban communities, fostering new recreational opportunities while protecting vital habitats. This project builds upon that legacy, uniting diverse partners to ensure the Jordan River is sustained as a thriving, resilient ecosystem.

BLUEPRINT RIVER JORDAN 2008

Prepared For: Jordan River Commission

OVERALL GOALS + VISION

- Habitat + natural systems
- Water and River
- Recreation + access
- Transportation
- Riverside development standards
- Communications, education, art

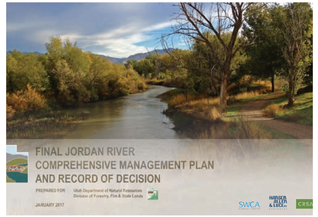


JORDAN RIVER TRAIL MASTER PLAN 2008

Prepared For: Salt Lake County

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

- Trail development standards
- Trail maintenance
- Environmental guidelines
- Trail recommendations



COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017

Prepared For: Utah Department of Natural Resources (FFSL)

MANAGEMENT + PRIORITY AREAS

- Management stakeholders
- River use class system
- Existing condition and management strategies for:
  - Ecosystem resources
  - Wildlife and habitat
  - Water and Hydrology
  - Community

BLUEPRINT RIVER JORDAN REFRESH 2022

Prepared For: Jordan River Commission

OVERALL GOALS + VISION (UPDATED)

- Habitat + natural systems
- Water and River
- Comfort and Inclusivity
- Recreation
- Safety and wellbeing
- Transportation + Development
- Communications, education, art

Central Jordan River
RECONNECT
7 miles, 5 cities, 3 creeks, 1 river

CENTRAL JORDAN RIVER RECONNECT 2025

Prepared For: Salt Lake County

IN PROGRESS

Overview

Past Plans

The 2022 Blueprint Jordan River Refresh gathered extensive community input to identify key priorities for the future of the entire Jordan River corridor. Residents emphasize the importance of improving water quality, expanding recreational opportunities, preserving natural habitats, and enhancing safety along the river. Preserving natural open spaces was a key concern. Perceptions of the river acknowledged that it was an important space, but many people also ranked it as dirty and unsafe.

The Central Jordan River Reconnect project builds directly on these themes by seeking to implement improvements within the 7-mile study area that focuses on creating an ecological, active, connected, and well stewarded Jordan River.

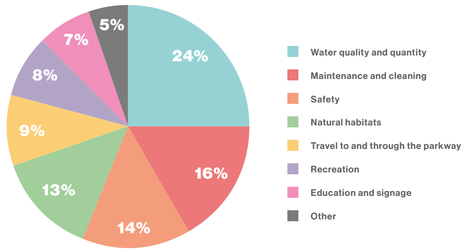
The main takeaways from the 2022 Blueprint Jordan River Refresh community survey reflect the community's priorities for the Jordan River corridor. *Key concerns included:*

1. **Water Quality and Quantity**: The top priority for respondents was ensuring the river's water quality and managing flows to improve its ecological health and functionality.
2. **Maintenance and Cleaning**: Regular upkeep of the parkway, including litter removal and landscaping, was highlighted as a critical need.
3. **Safety**: Improving safety along the river and its trail systems was a key concern, with recommendations for better lighting and patrols.
4. **Habitat Preservation**: Protecting and restoring natural habitats along the river to support local wildlife ranked high on the list of priorities.
5. **Recreation**: Expanding recreational opportunities, particularly those that connect people with the river, was also a significant community desire.

These insights directly inform theCentral Jordan River Reconnect Project, which aims to address these community-identified needs by enhancing water management, expanding recreation, improving safety, and restoring habitats.

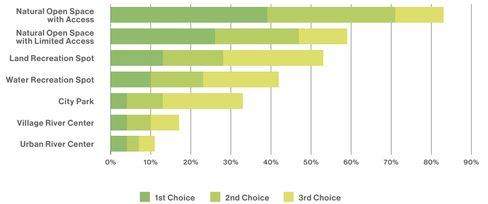
Blueprint Jordan River Refresh—COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TAKEAWAYS

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING THE JORDAN RIVER PARKWAY



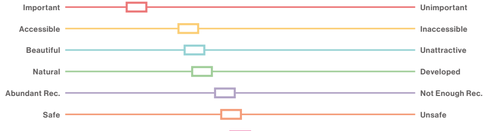
"Over 8,000 people contributed their thoughts and ideas to the refreshed vision for the Jordan River Parkway in focus groups, online meetings, and an online survey."

IMPORTANT PLACES TO CREATE AND PRESERVE IN THE JORDAN RIVER PARKWAY



The survey identified natural open spaces with or without public access as the most important places in the parkway, followed by recreational spaces.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE JORDAN RIVER PARKWAY



Survey respondents rated the Jordan River Parkway highly on importance, accessibility, beauty, and nature. Perceptions about recreation opportunities, safety, and cleanliness were mixed.

SOURCE: BLUEPRINT JORDAN RIVER REFRESH, 2022

Overview

Communities

The Central Jordan River Reconnect project spans a dynamic and diverse study area that includes five municipalities: Murray, South Salt Lake, Taylorsville, West Valley City, and Millcreek. Each city presents its own unique characteristics, needs, and challenges, creating a complex mosaic of communities along the river corridor. Our approach will focus on inclusive and tailored engagement efforts, ensuring that each city's specific needs are addressed, while also considering their shared challenges and collective goals.

Murray

Murray, with a population of 50,637, is characterized by a relatively high homeownership rate and a median household income of over $81,000. However, 14.2% of residents speak a language other than English at home, making multilingual communication essential. Murray's location along the river also makes it a key ecological hub, home to the Kennecott Nature Center.

South Salt Lake

South Salt Lake is the most ethnically diverse municipality in the study area, with 32.5% of residents speaking a language other than English and 24.7% identifying as Hispanic/Latino. The city also faces significant economic challenges, with a 14.6% poverty rate and lower homeownership. South Salt Lake is the smallest (by area and population) city in the valley.

Taylorsville

Taylorsville, with its population of over 60,000, is a relatively young and diverse city, where 23.7% of residents are Hispanic/Latino and 27.6% speak a language other than English at home. The city has a higher-than-average percentage of youth under 18 (27.2%) and relatively high homeownership.

West Valley City

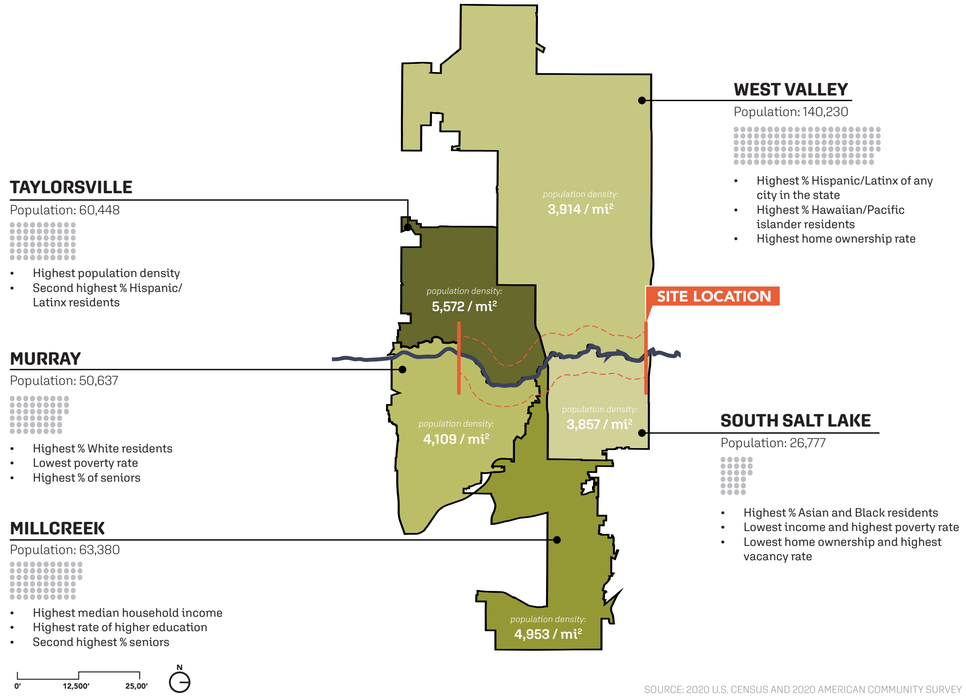
West Valley City, the largest city in the study area, is home to 140,230 residents, with 39.4% identifying as Hispanic/Latino. Nearly half the population (46.4%) speaks a language other than English at home. Addressing the needs of West Valley's diverse and multilingual population will be essential, particularly in terms of creating accessible recreation spaces and supporting community cohesion. Given the higher poverty and unemployment rates in some areas, efforts must prioritize economic inclusivity and opportunities for all residents.

Millcreek

Millcreek's residents are on average more affluent than the other cities and 51.3% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Millcreek was incorporated in 2016 making it the youngest of the five municipalities. The population of Millcreek has a large percentage of seniors.

Population Statistics

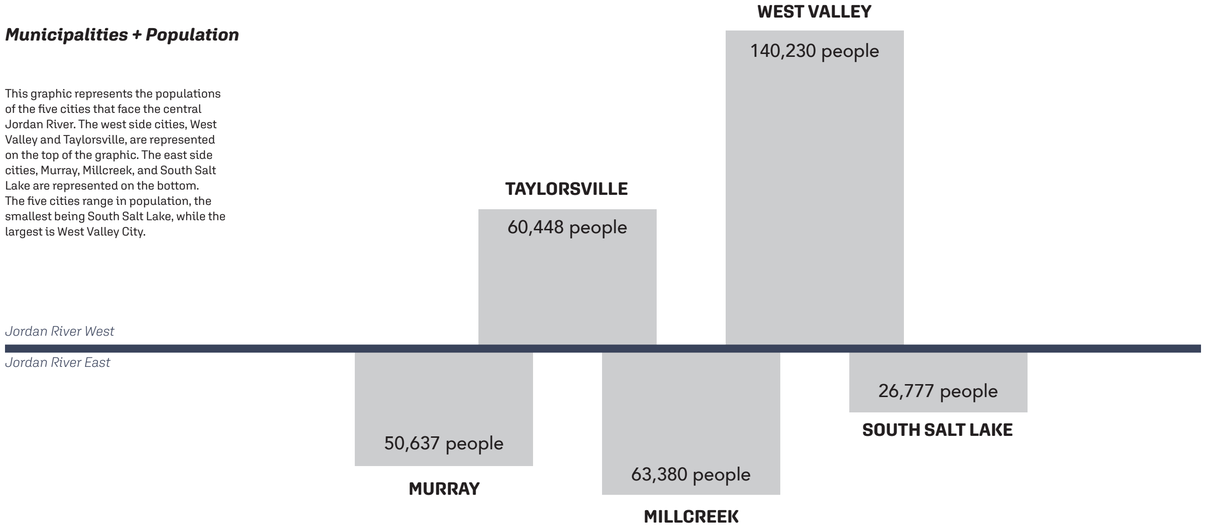
The cities along the river vary in size, density, demographics, socioeconomic status, and community priorities, resulting in a diverse array of planning needs. Understanding the existing communities, their opportunities and challenges, and priorities for interacting with the river will be essential to crafting a plan that is mutually beneficial.



SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Municipalities + Population

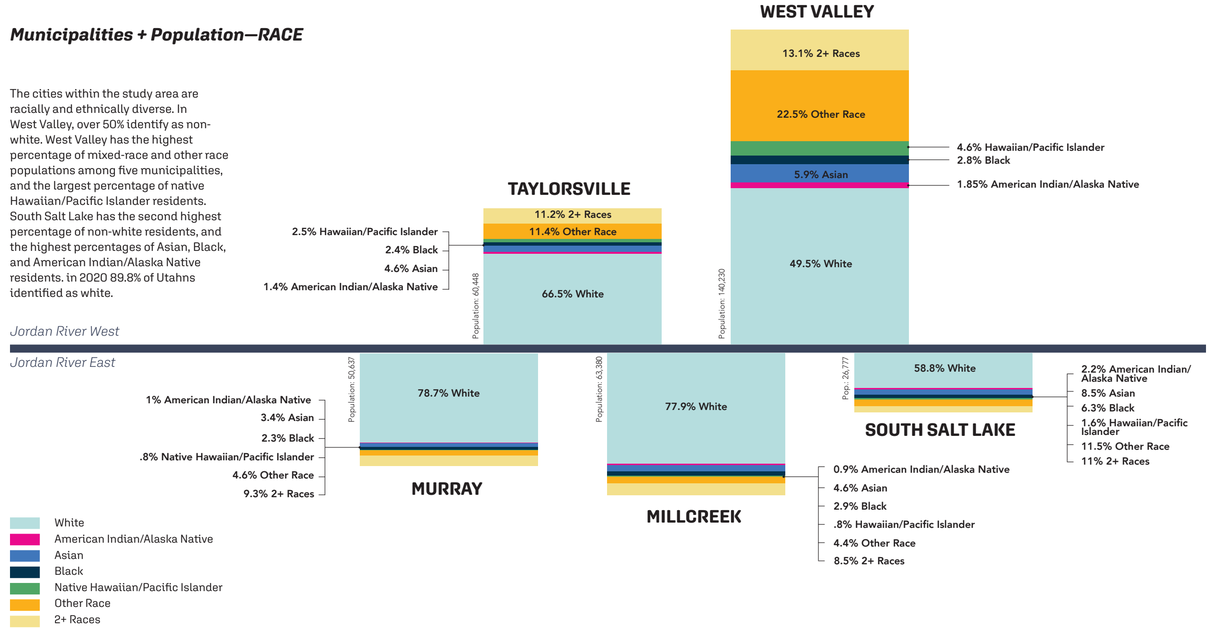
This graphic represents the populations of the five cities that face the central Jordan River. The west side cities, West Valley and Taylorsville, are represented on the top of the graphic. The east side cities, Murray, Millcreek, and South Salt Lake are represented on the bottom. The five cities range in population, the smallest being South Salt Lake, while the largest is West Valley City.



SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Municipalities + Population—RACE

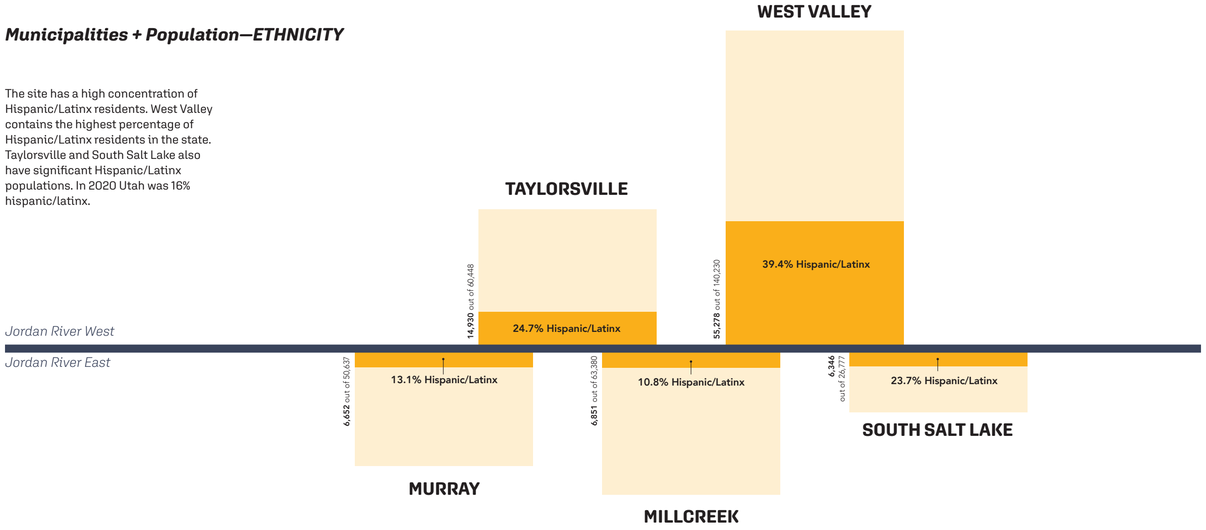
The cities within the study area are racially and ethnically diverse. In West Valley, over 50% identify as non-white. West Valley has the highest percentage of mixed-race and other race populations among five municipalities, and the largest percentage of native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander residents. South Salt Lake has the second highest percentage of non-white residents, and the highest percentages of Asian, Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native residents. in 2020 89.8% of Utahns identified as white.



SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Municipalities + Population—ETHNICITY

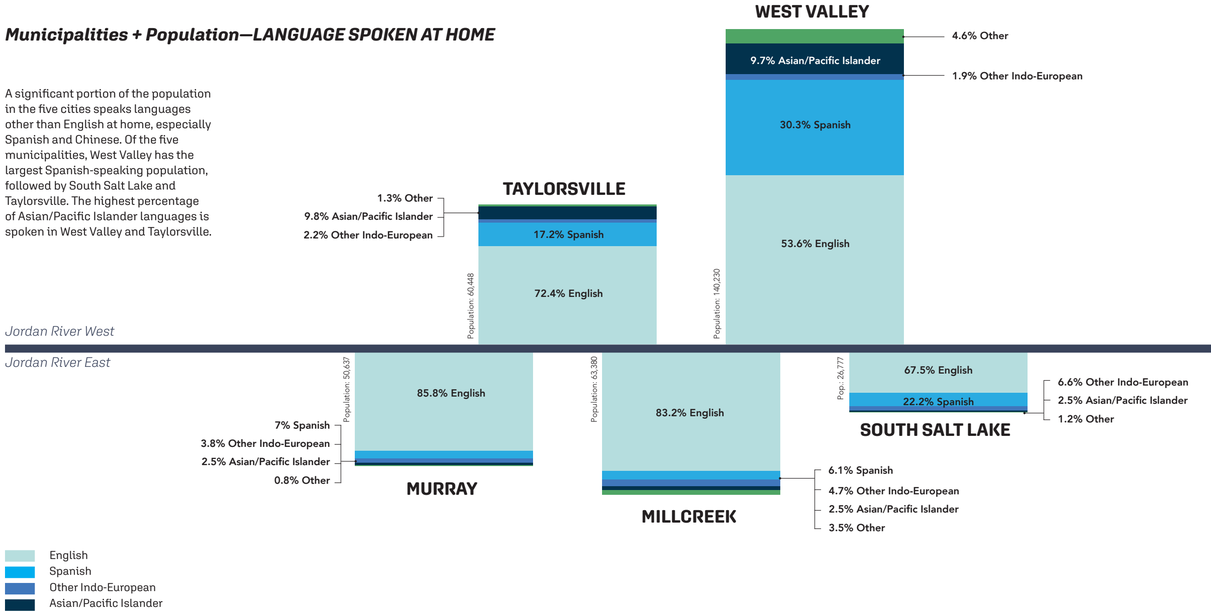
The site has a high concentration of Hispanic/Latinx residents. West Valley contains the highest percentage of Hispanic/Latinx residents in the state. Taylorsville and South Salt Lake also have significant Hispanic/Latinx populations. In 2020 Utah was 16% hispanic/latinx.



SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Municipalities + Population—LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

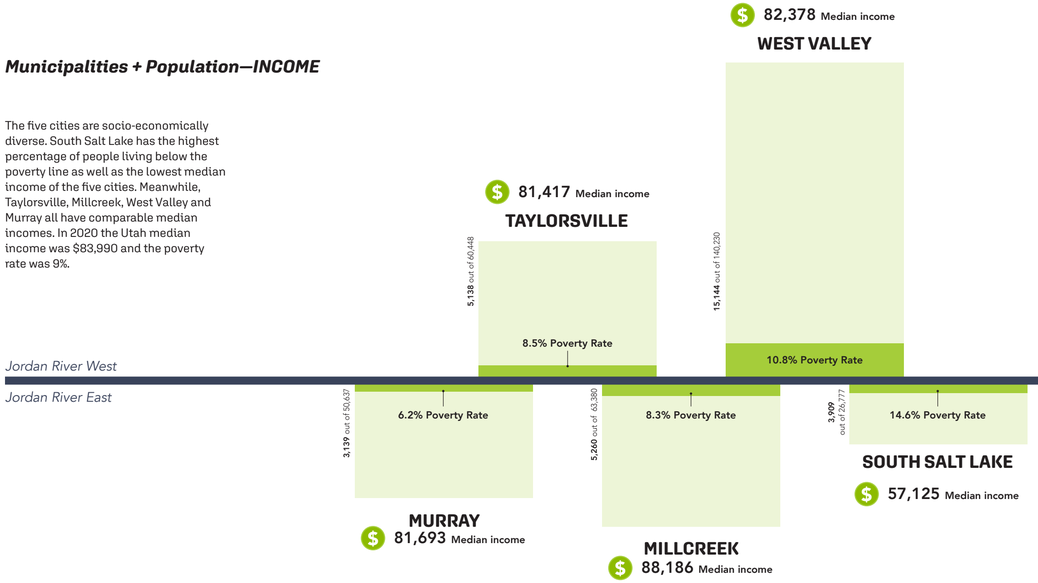
A significant portion of the population in the five cities speaks languages other than English at home, especially Spanish and Chinese. Of the five municipalities, West Valley has the largest Spanish-speaking population, followed by South Salt Lake and Taylorsville. The highest percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander languages is spoken in West Valley and Taylorsville.



SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Municipalities + Population—INCOME

The five cities are socio-economically diverse. South Salt Lake has the highest percentage of people living below the poverty line as well as the lowest median income of the five cities. Meanwhile, Taylorsville, Millcreek, West Valley and Murray all have comparable median incomes. In 2020 the Utah median income was $83,990 and the poverty rate was 9%.

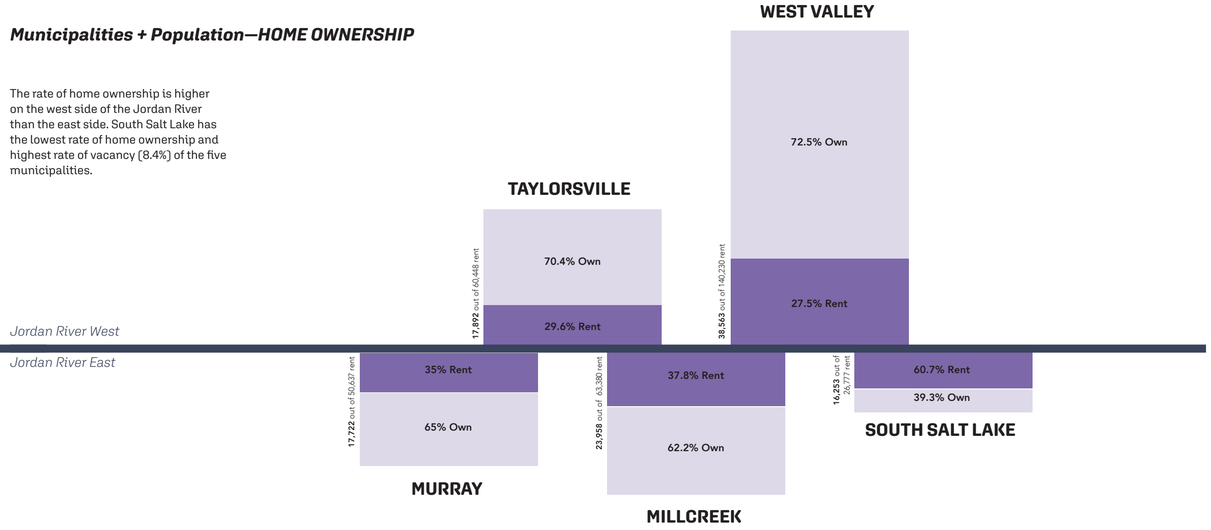


Population below poverty line
Population above poverty line

SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Municipalities + Population—HOME OWNERSHIP

The rate of home ownership is higher on the west side of the Jordan River than the east side. South Salt Lake has the lowest rate of home ownership and highest rate of vacancy (8.4%) of the five municipalities.



Renters
Home owners

SOURCE: 2020 U.S. CENSUS AND 2020 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Overview

Conclusion

The Central Jordan River Reconnect represents a critical step towards restoring both the ecological health and community value of the river corridor. This dynamic area spans several municipalities, each with its own unique challenges and opportunities, which necessitates a collaborative and tailored approach to ensure the project meets local needs while addressing shared regional priorities. By emphasizing ecological restoration, enhancing public access, and improving park amenities, this project aims to create a river system that benefits both people and wildlife.

A renewed focus on the river's natural habitats, particularly riparian zones, will improve water quality, support biodiversity, and offer recreational opportunities for residents. Ultimately, the project strives to weave together the region's natural, cultural, and recreational resources, ensuring that the Jordan River remains a vital and accessible resource for future generations. The Central Jordan River Reconnect project embodies a vision for a more resilient, connected, and thriving river corridor that strengthens the bond between the community and its environment.

Community engagement across the five municipalities and involving local stakeholders is vital to the planning process. Listening to residents' needs and incorporating their perspectives ensures that the project reflects the unique identities and priorities of each community. Collaborative involvement will foster a sense of ownership and ensure that solutions are not only effective but also widely supported, leading to a more successful and sustainable outcome for the river corridor.

A BEND IN THE RIVER AT LITTLE COTTONWOOD CONFLUENCE CREATES A GRAVEL SANDBAR WHERE VISITORS CAN GET DOWN TO THE WATERS EDGE .

VEGETATION ALONG THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER PROVIDE VITAL HABITAT AND HELPS TO STABILIZE THE BANKS.

VIEW OF PIONEER CROSSING PARK, OXBOW JAIL, AND 3300 S

Central Jordan River
RECONNECT

CONNECTED

Site Analysis

(Updated June 2025) December 2024 | Prepared by PORT

The Central Jordan River should be

CONNECTED

A well-connected Jordan River is vital for ensuring that surrounding communities can easily access and enjoy the park and its amenities. Our site analysis reveals a mix of transit and infrastructure conditions that impact connectivity to the river throughout the study area, particularly in the east-west direction. Movement along the river using the continuous Jordan River Trail provides great north-south access for pedestrians and cyclists, however, the lack of trail on both sides of the river and limited opportunities for crossing impacts its accessibility from nearby neighborhoods. The north and east sides of the river are relatively well-served by public transit, however walk times from transit stations are typically over 15 minutes. Access to the river by bike is disconnected and impacted by high traffic volumes and speeds on roadways. Other physical barriers like industrial areas, highways, rail yards, and large privately held land create physical battlers between communities and the river, particularly in South Salt Lake, West Valley, and Millcreek.

These obstacles, combined with a lack of continuous, protected pedestrian and bike pathways to the river, make it difficult for residents to reach the river. In some areas, the river feels completely cut off from the communities that surround it, limiting its potential as a recreational and social resource.

THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL CURRENTLY PROVIDES CONTINUOUS ACCESS ALONG THE RIVER, BUT TYPICALLY THE TRAIL IS ONLY ON ONE SIDE OF THE RIVER.

NEW PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE COMPLETED IN APRIL 2024 NEAR MEADOW BROOK GOLF COURSE JUST SOUTH OF W MEADOWBROOK EXPRESSWAY.

AT THE NORTH END OF THE STUDY AREAS THE JORDAN RIVER IS BORDERED BY THE UTA RAIL SERVICE CENTER AND CROSSED BY THE TRAX GREEN LINE

Connected

Vehicular Access

Most people presently access the Jordan River, its parks, and trails by car, with several major roads crossing through the central area. These roads are often wide, featuring 4 to 6 lanes of heavy traffic, making it challenging for visitors to safely enter and exit parks or trail access points. Given the volume of traffic and the road widths, it's crucial that trailheads, parking areas, and access points are clearly marked and easily visible from the main thoroughfares. Unfortunately, the Central Jordan River lacks adequate signage, gateways, and other directional markers, which can make it difficult for drivers to recognize when they are approaching key sites along the river.

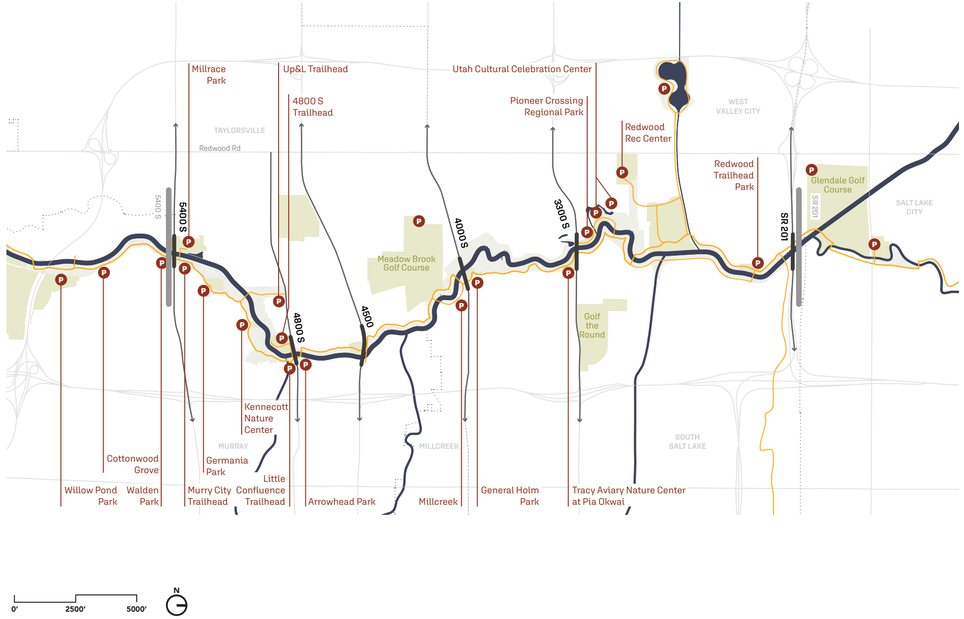
As a result, many pass by parks and trail access points without realizing they're nearby, or unknowingly drive over the Jordan River itself without being aware of its presence. This lack of visibility, combined with the difficulty of navigating wide, high-traffic roads, limits public awareness and creates significant barriers to accessing the area's natural and recreational resources, which could otherwise serve as valuable community spaces.

WEST MEADOWBROOK EXPRESSWAY BRIDGE OVER THE JORDAN RIVER

PARKING AREA AT PIONEER CROSSING PARK

Major Roads + Parking Areas

Numerous parking areas existing along the Jordan River, allowing ample room for drivers to get to the river and get on the trail. All of the parks and trailheads along the river have parking spaces associated with them, making driving access to the river easy and convenient.



Streets + Roadways

Images to the right show several bridges and road crossings along the Central Jordan River. These crossings could be important gateways into the park and river trail, however most of these crossings do not provide any direct access to the trail.

WEST TAYLORSVILLE EXPRESSWAY (4500 S) IS A 4 LANE EXPRESSWAY WITH 20,000-45,000 CARS PER DAY

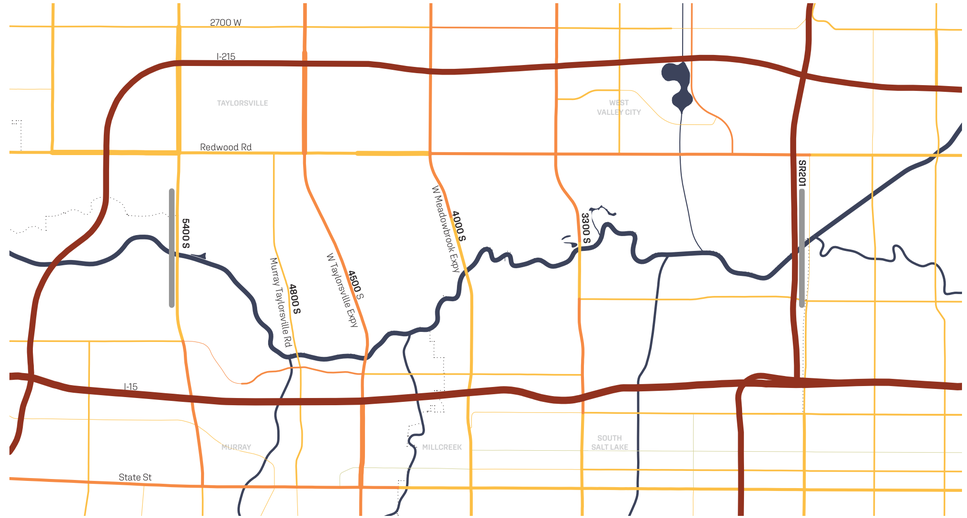
3300 S IS A SEVEN LANE ROAD WITH 20,000-45,000 CARS PER DAY

5400 S, A FIVE LANE ROAD, BOUNDS THE SOUTH END OF THE STUDY AREA AND HAS 20,000-45,000 CARS PER DAY

STATE ROUTE 201, A SIX LANE HIGHWAY, BOUNDS THE NORTH END OF THE STUDY AREA AND HAS 90,000-154,000 CARS PER DAY

Traffic Volume + Speed

Typically the major roads across and parallel to the Jordan River are fast moving and have a high traffic volume. Connector corridors like Redwood Road and State Street are important north-south connectors. SR-201 is the fastest and most used transit route that crosses our study area. Other vital east-west connections include 3300 S, 4000 S, 4500 S, and 5400 S.



Vehicular Bridges + Crossings

Images to the right show the variety of vehicular bridges that cross the Jordan River. Typically they are multiple lanes wide and have fast moving traffic. In many places it is easy for drivers to not even realize they are crossing a river at all.

ALONG MURRAY TAYLORSVILLE ROAD ARE TWO MARKED TRAILHEADS, CONFLUENCE PARK AND ARROWHEAD PARK, BUT THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL'S PRESENCE IS NOT CLEAR.

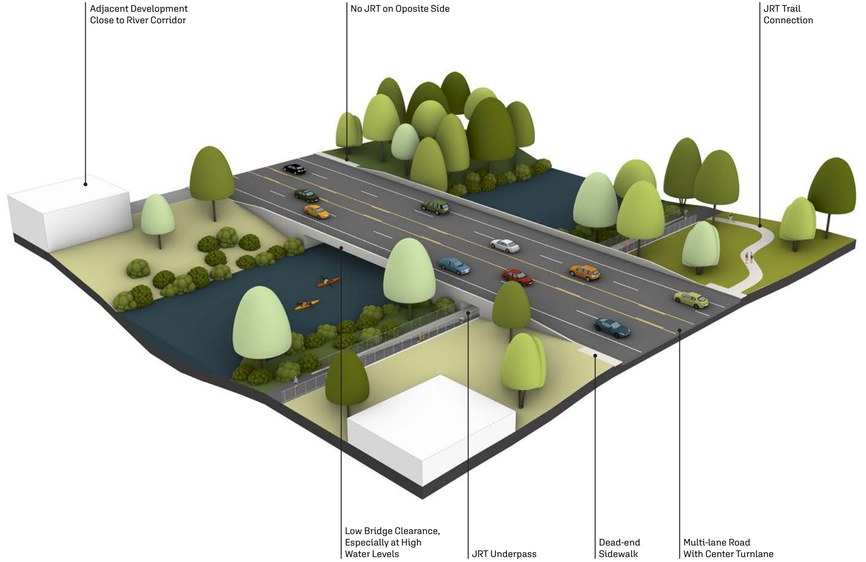
GENERAL HOLM PARK OFFERS GREAT TRAIL ACCESS BUT LACKS MAIN ROAD VEHICULAR ACCESS AND SIGNAGE DIRECTING CARS TO THE ENTRANCE VIA A SMALLER SIDE ROAD.

REDWOOD TRAILHEAD PARK'S PARKING AREA HAS OVERGROWN VEGETATION AND BROKEN OR MISSING STREETLIGHTS.

THE PARKING AREA AT PIONEER CROSSING REGIONAL PARK FEATURES SHADE TREES, STREETLIGHTS, AND WOODEN BOLLARDS.

Typical Vehicular Crossing

Typically, vehicular bridges within the study area provide little to no room for bikers or pedestrians. They also tend to be quite low to the river, creating a hazard for kayakers and canoers during high water. Many areas have the Jordan River Trail pass under vehicular bridges through concrete underpasses. This infrastructure is aging, and replacement bridges should be redesigned to foster better access under and across the bridge.



Connected

Public Transit

Public transit access to the Jordan River is a key component of connectivity in the study area, with varying levels of service across different municipalities. The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) operates an extensive network, including the TRAX light-rail system, FrontRunner commuter rail, and numerous bus routes, providing access to neighborhoods near the river. South Salt Lake, Millcreek, and Murray benefit from stronger transit connections, with high ridership along the TRAX and FrontRunner lines. These areas have well-connected transit nodes, offering easier access to the river and its recreational amenities.

The West Valley Intermodal Hub is another important station for residents using public transit, while the River Trail Station on the Green Line, though close to the trail, has relatively low ridership. Public transit service along Redwood Road in West Valley and Taylorsville also contributes to accessibility, though the connection to the river is less direct in these areas.

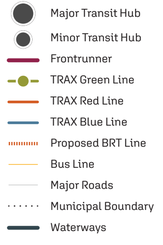
Despite these transit options, gaps in connectivity persist, particularly in areas like West Valley and Taylorsville, where industrial areas and highways limit access. Expanding public transit stops and enhancing connections to the river will improve access, offering residents more opportunities to enjoy the Jordan River's natural and recreational spaces.

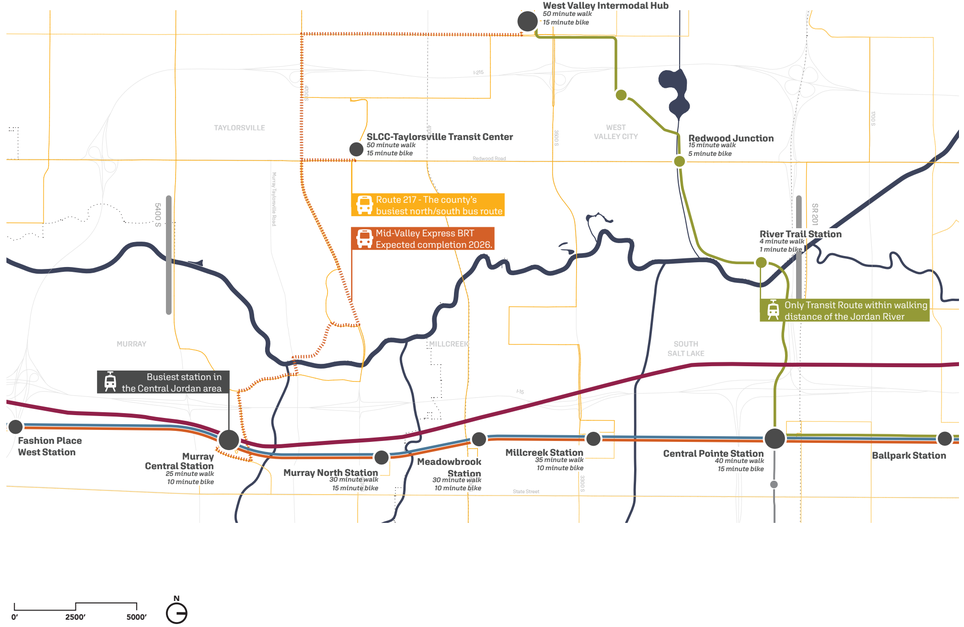
RIVER TRAIL STATION ON THE TRAX GREEN LINE IS JUST MINUTES FROM REDWOOD TRAILHEAD PARK ALONG THE JORDAN RIVER.

MURRAY CENTRAL STATION IS A MAJOR TRANSIT HUB SERVED BY THE FRONTRUNNER AND TRAX BLUE AND RED LINES. SOURCE: JAMES BELMONT PHOTOGRAPHY

Existing Transit Network

Our analysis highlights the existing transit nodes, pedestrian and bike infrastructure, and barriers such as highways and industrial areas that impact connectivity to the Jordan River across the study area. The map on the right also shows the relative accessibility of the river from surrounding neighborhoods, with stronger connections in South Salt Lake, Millcreek, and Murray, and more limited access in West Valley and Taylorsville.





Modes of Transit

The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) offers an extensive transit network across the Wasatch Front. The TRAX light-rail system covers 42.5 miles with 50 stations, including the Green Line, which connects Salt Lake City International Airport to West Valley Central via downtown. The FrontRunner commuter rail spans 83 miles from Ogden to Provo, serving Weber, Davis, Salt Lake, and Utah counties, with Murray Central Station as a key stop. UTA also operates over 400 buses on 120 routes across a 1,400-mile service area and the S-Line Streetcar, a two-mile modern trolley linking South Salt Lake to the Sugarhouse neighborhood in Salt Lake City.

THE TRAX GREEN LINE AT RIVER TRAIL STATION

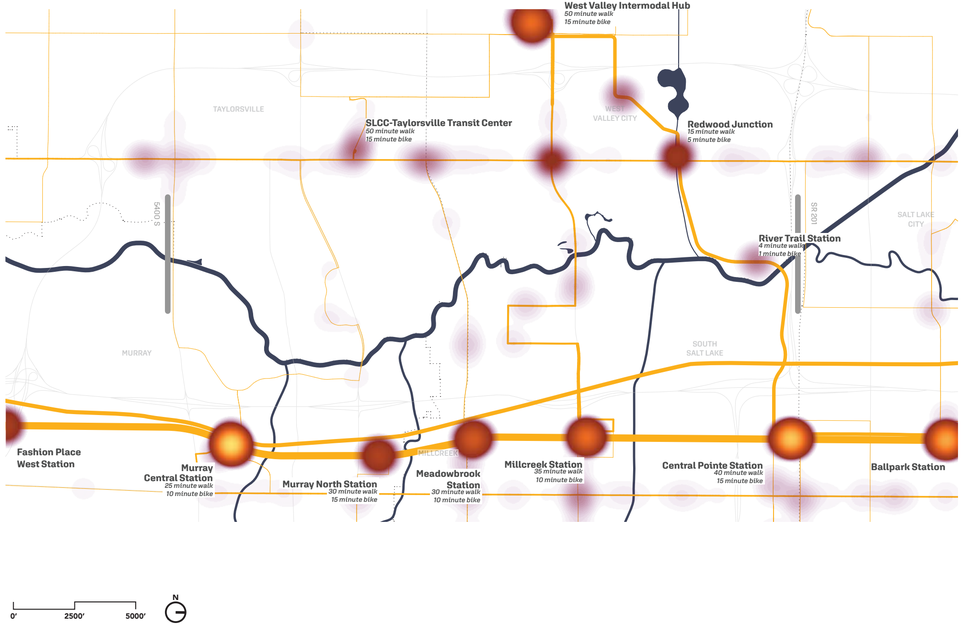
THE FRONTRUNNER AT SALT LAKE CITY CENTRAL STATION.
SOURCE: VISIT SALT LAKE

UTA ROUTE 200 ON STATE STREET RUNNING FROM NORTH TEMPLE TO MURRAY CENTRAL STATION.
SOURCE: THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

THE S-LINE STREETCAR BETWEEN SOUTH SALT LAKE AND SUGARHOUSE PARK.
SOURCE: PARLEY'S TRAIL WEBSITE

Ridership

The largest volume of ridership within the study area is a long the Trax and Frontronner lines that go through South Salt Lake, Millcreek, and Murray. The West Valley Intermodal Hub is also a highly used station for public transit riders. The closest stop to the trail, River Trail Station on the green line has low use. Redwood Road in West Valley and Taylorsville is also a public transit corridor.



Connected

Bike + Pedestrian

The Jordan River Trail provides continuous access for cyclists and pedestrians through the study area, offering valuable recreational and transportation opportunities. However, a key limitation is that the trail is located on only one side of the river in most areas, creating gaps in connectivity. Expanding the trail to both sides of the river would create a more cohesive and accessible route, enhancing the overall user experience. Pedestrian bridges play a vital role in bridging these gaps, with 10 non-vehicular bridges connecting the east and west sides of the river. These bridges are especially prominent in Taylorsville and Murray, where more trail mileage exists.

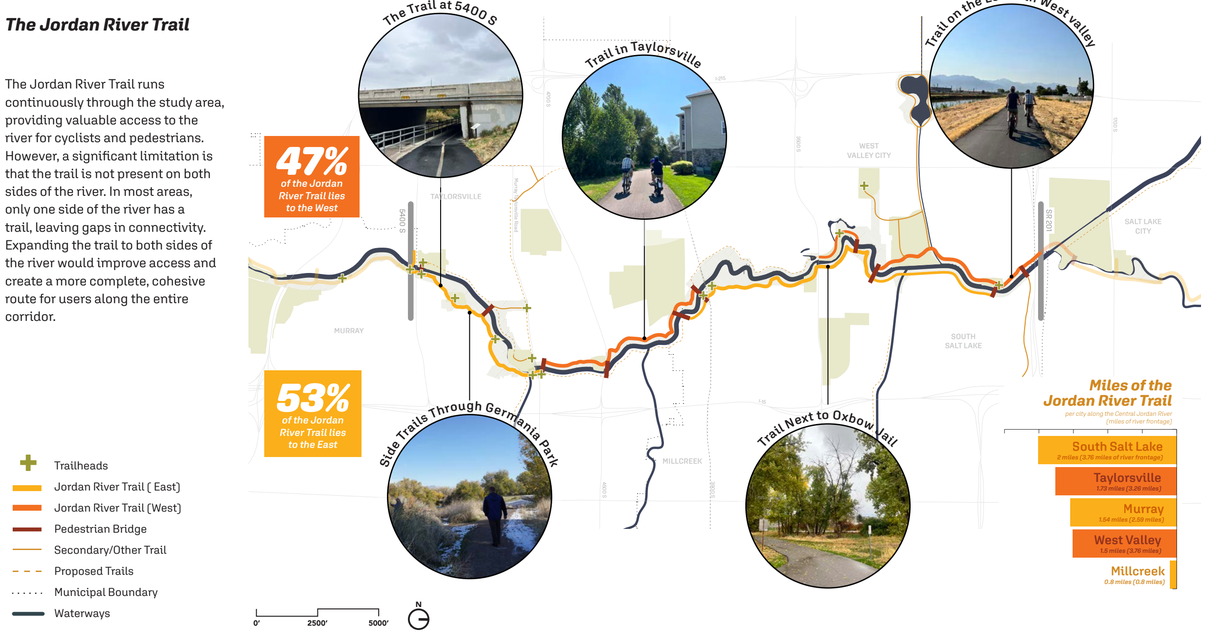
In addition to pedestrian bridges, six vehicular bridges offer additional connectivity for both cyclists and pedestrians. While bike infrastructure along the river itself is generally well-developed, connectivity to the trail from surrounding neighborhoods is less consistent. Some areas have strong bike lanes and paths, while others lack safe and direct routes for cyclists to reach the river. Expanding bike infrastructure leading to the river would improve access, making the area safer and more accessible for people who rely on cycling as a primary mode of transportation. Enhancing both trail connectivity and bike infrastructure will ensure the Jordan River remains a more accessible and sustainable public space.

THE NEW TRAIL CONNECTION AT PARLEY'S TRAIL LINKS MANY MILES OF TRAIL NETWORK

AT LITTLE COTTONWOOD CONFLUENCE THERE ARE NUMEROUS WELL USED SOFT SURFACE PATHS

The Jordan River Trail

The Jordan River Trail runs continuously through the study area, providing valuable access to the river for cyclists and pedestrians. However, a significant limitation is that the trail is not present on both sides of the river. In most areas, only one side of the river has a trail, leaving gaps in connectivity. Expanding the trail to both sides of the river would improve access and create a more complete, cohesive route for users along the entire corridor.



Pedestrian Bridges + Crossings

To the right is a variety of the types of pedestrian bridges present along the Central Jordan River. These non-vehicular bridges are predominantly located in Taylorsville and Murray where there is generally more mileage of trail. Because the trail is not on both sides of the river, these pedestrian bridges become vital connectors.

PIONEER CROSSING BRIDGE AT PIONEER CROSSING PARK

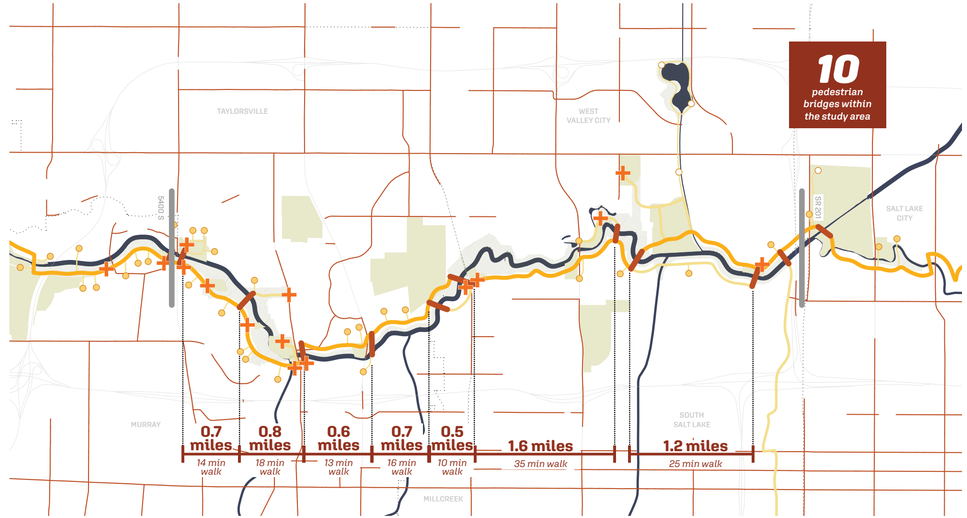
PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OVER THE WEST MEADOWBROOK EXPRESSWAY (4000 S)

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE IN GERMANIA PARK, AT WATERS EDGE CIRCLE

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE OVER LITTLE COTTONWOOD CREEK

Pedestrian Routes + Crossings

Crossings along the Central Jordan River play a vital role in connecting neighborhoods to the river, enhancing access for recreation and active transportation. There are a total of 10 pedestrian bridges linking the east and west sides of the Jordan River Trail, offering dedicated pathways for walkers, runners, and cyclists. Additionally, six vehicular bridges provide further opportunities to cross, supporting broader connectivity and integration across the area.



Bike Infrastructure Along the Trail

Bike infrastructure is crucial for providing safe, efficient access to the Jordan River, especially for residents who rely on cycling as a primary mode of transportation. Well-connected bike lanes and paths help bridge the gap between neighborhoods and the river corridor, encouraging more people to visit and enjoy the area. By improving bike infrastructure, we can promote sustainable transportation, reduce traffic congestion, and ensure that all community members, regardless of age or ability, can easily access the natural and recreational opportunities along the river.

THE NEW TRAIL CONNECTION AT PARLEY'S TRAIL LINKS MANY MILES OF TRAIL NETWORK

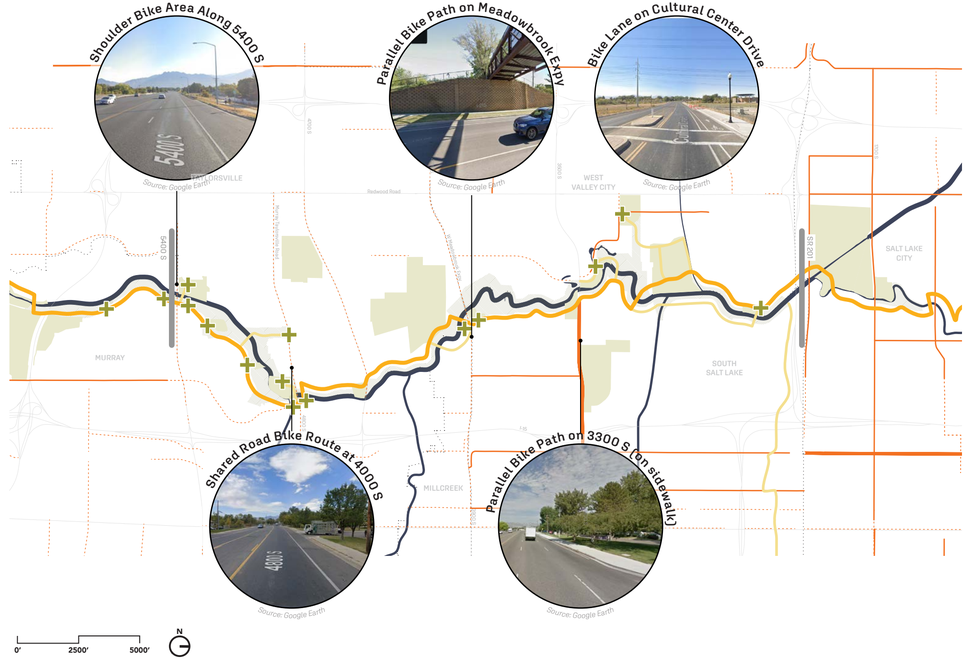
UNDERPASSES CREATE UNINTERRUPTED STRETCHES OF TRAIL

TRAILHEADS AND WAYFINDING IMPROVES CYCLIST EXPERIENCE ALONG THE TRAIL

MANY PARKS ARE LINKED BY THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL NETWORK, HOWEVER FEW PROVIDE AMENITIES LIKE BIKE RACKS OR BIKE FIX-IT STATIONS

Bike Infrastructure to the Trail

Bike infrastructure along the Jordan River is well-developed, with the continuous Jordan River Trail. However, bike infrastructure connecting to the river is less consistent. While some areas offer good connectivity, others lack safe and direct routes for cyclists to reach the river. Expanding bike infrastructure leading to the river would enhance accessibility, ensuring that cyclists can safely navigate to and along the river, making it a more connected and user-friendly space.



Connected

Trailheads + Access Points

Our analysis of the Jordan River corridor highlights the varying levels of trail access across the study area. In areas like Murray and Taylorsville adjacent residents enjoy strong connectivity, with numerous neighborhood access points and formal trailheads situated near parks. For many, getting onto the trail is as simple as walking a short distance to a nearby access point. In these regions, local infrastructure, including pedestrian and bike routes, supports easy movement to the river, encouraging increased use. However, in areas like West Valley and South Salt Lake, physical barriers such as highways, industrial zones, fences, and private property significantly limit access to the river. These obstacles create gaps in connectivity, making it more difficult for residents to reach the trail. Some residents have found creative ways to access the trail, including using their own backyards, but these informal routes are not accessible to everyone.

Improving access to the river, particularly in areas with limited connections, is essential for increasing public use. By reducing barriers and enhancing the number and visibility of access points, we can encourage more people to enjoy the natural beauty and recreational opportunities the Jordan River provides.

THE TRAILHEAD IN REDWOOD TRAILHEAD PARK IN WEST VALLEY CITY.

PICNIC SHELTERS AND A WATER FOUNDTAIN AT LITTLE COTTONWOOD CONFLUENCE.

Degrees of Access

In some areas of the study area getting on the trail is as easy as walking down the block to the neighborhood access point, however in other areas physical barriers like industrial zones, fences, or private land limits access. Improving local access to the river is vital to increasing its usage.

Jordan River Trail Access

There are numerous ways to access the trail, from neighborhood access points to formal trailheads located in parks. Some residents have gotten creative and provided personal access from their own backyards to the trail.

SOME RESIDENTS HAVE ADDED CUT-THROUGHS FROM THEIR BACKYARDS DIRECTLY TO THE TRAIL

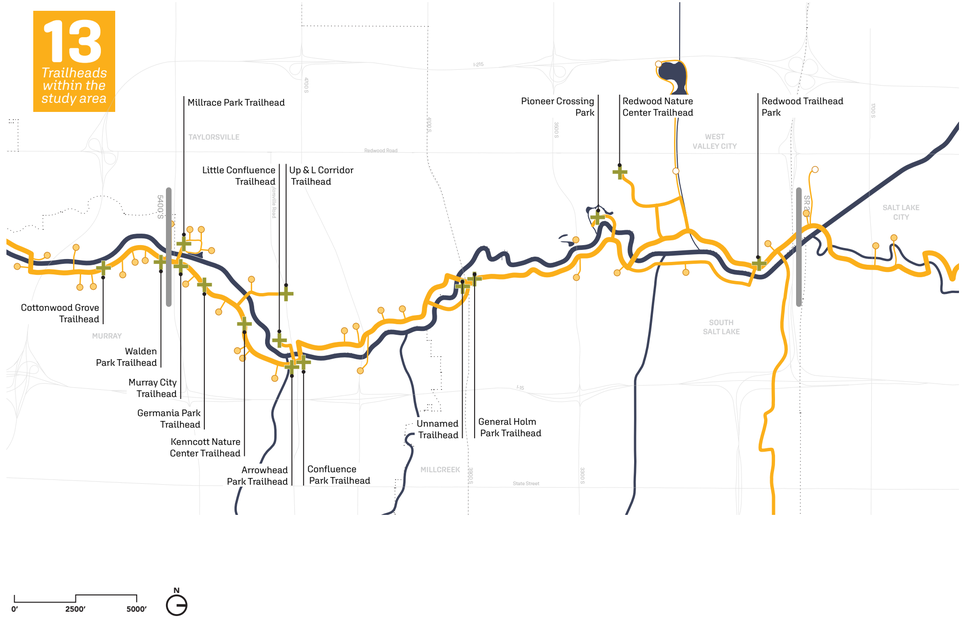
UNOFFICIAL TRAIL ACCESS IN SOUTH SALT LAKE INDUSTRIAL AREA

PARKING AND WAYFINDING SIGNAGE AT KENNECOTT NATURE CENTER TRAILHEAD

NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESS POINT IN MURRAY WHERE A LOCAL ROAD LEADS DIRECTLY TO THE TRAIL

Frequency of Access

Generally there are more access points that are closer together in the southern part of the study area. In Murray especially, there are numerous neighborhood access points where neighborhood roads lead directly to the trail. Other sections of the river, like those in West Valley, have much less access from surrounding residential areas.



Connected

Conclusion

Improving access and connectivity to the Jordan River is crucial for ensuring that surrounding communities can fully engage with this valuable resource. While some areas benefit from good transit and bike infrastructure, other regions face significant challenges due to physical barriers like highways and industrial zones. These obstacles limit the ability of residents to easily reach the river and its amenities. Additionally, the lack of clear signage and well-marked access points further complicates navigation. Enhancing connectivity through better infrastructure, clearer signage, and reducing barriers will ensure that the river is more accessible, benefiting the community as a whole.

Increased access to parks and open spaces is also proven to improve physical and mental health by encouraging outdoor activity, reducing stress, and fostering a stronger sense of community. Connecting residents to these natural spaces can significantly enhance overall wellness and quality of life. Furthermore, greater use of the river corridor could create more lasting stewardship of the river and a great connection between users and the park.

PIONEER CROSSING BRIDGE AT PIONEER CROSSING PARK

NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION TO THE TRAIL IN TAYLORSVILLE

GREEN LINE TRAX AT RIVER TRAIL STATION

Central Jordan River
RECONNECT

ECOLOGICAL

Site Analysis

(Updated June 2025) December 2024 | Prepared by PORT

The Central Jordan River should be

ECOLOGICAL

The Jordan River flows through one of Utah's most urbanized landscapes, yet it remains a rare and crucial ecological resource. Over the years, human interventions—including dam operations at Utah Lake, channelization, dredging, and levee construction—have significantly altered the river's natural flow and disconnected it from its floodplain.

These changes have not only reshaped the river's physical landscape but also introduced a range of water quality issues, from pollution caused by urban runoff to erratic flow rates that strain the river's ecosystems. As a result, the Jordan River today faces considerable challenges in supporting its native flora and fauna while also providing a safe, accessible space for recreation.

Despite these pressures, pockets of the river corridor continue to support diverse habitats where native birds, mammals, and amphibians find refuge. Along certain stretches, visitors can still experience the natural beauty of the riverbanks and observe the presence of native wildlife. However, the health of these habitats varies greatly along the river's length; while some areas remain resilient, others suffer from severe degradation, with diminished ecological value due to altered flow patterns and human encroachment.

FALL COLOR ALONG THE JORDAN RIVER HIGHLIGHTS THE DIVERSITY OF PLANT SPECIES ALONG ITS BANKS

KAYAKING ON THE JORDAN RIVER PROVIDES A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RIVER MORPHOLOGY

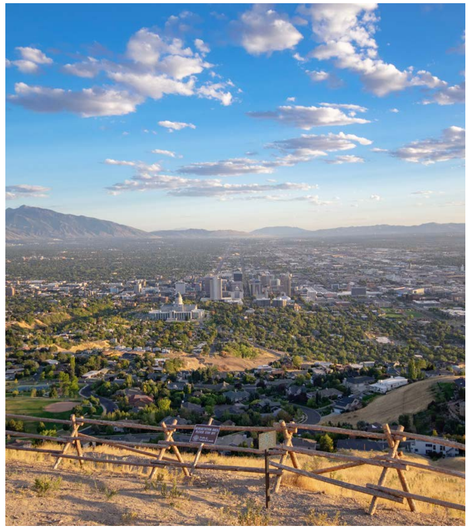
JUST NORTH OF GENERAL HOLM PARK CANOPY TREES AND SHRUBS OVERHANG THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER PROVIDING BANK STABILIZATION AND HABITAT.

Ecological

Jordan River Watershed

The Jordan River flows through a diverse and expansive watershed covering 3,805 square miles, bounded by the Wasatch Range to the east and the Oquirrh Mountains to the west. This watershed encompasses the highest elevations in the region, with the Wasatch Range towering over 11,000 feet and the Oquirrh Mountains reaching heights of more than 9,000 feet. Between these mountain ranges lies a series of sloping benches, each gradually descending from the mountains and dropping sharply to the next level. This unique topography channels water from the surrounding highlands into a network of streams, tributaries, and canals that ultimately converge in the Jordan River.

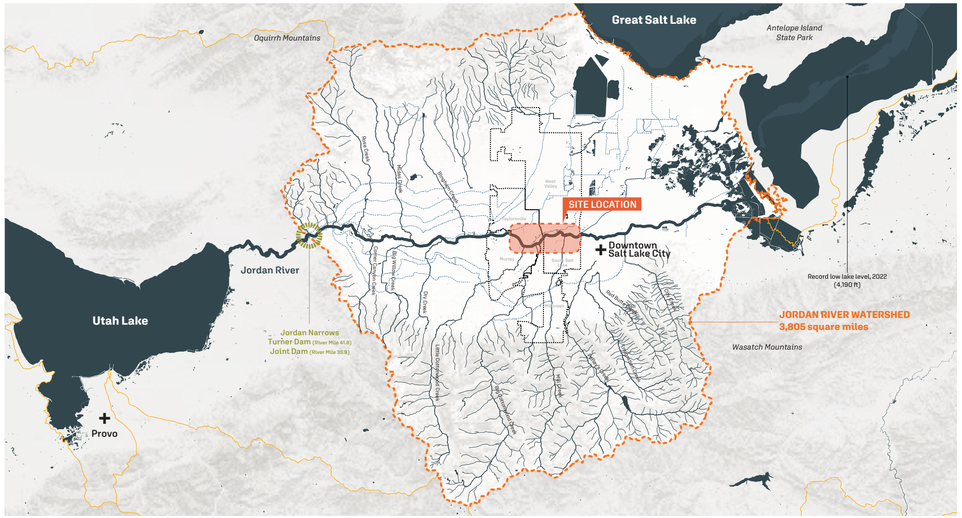
These natural features, along with the man-made water infrastructure, shape the river's flow and influence its overall health. The complexity and interconnectedness of this landscape mean that changes in any part of the watershed can have significant impacts downstream. To sustain the Jordan River as a resilient natural resource, it is crucial for municipalities, agencies, and communities across the basin to collaborate, taking a coordinated approach that respects the river's unique geography and ecological significance.



LOOKING SOUTH ACROSS THE SALT LAKE VALLEY FROM ENSIGN PEAK
SOURCE: CLIFTON, ADOBE STOCK

From Utah Lake to the Great Salt Lake

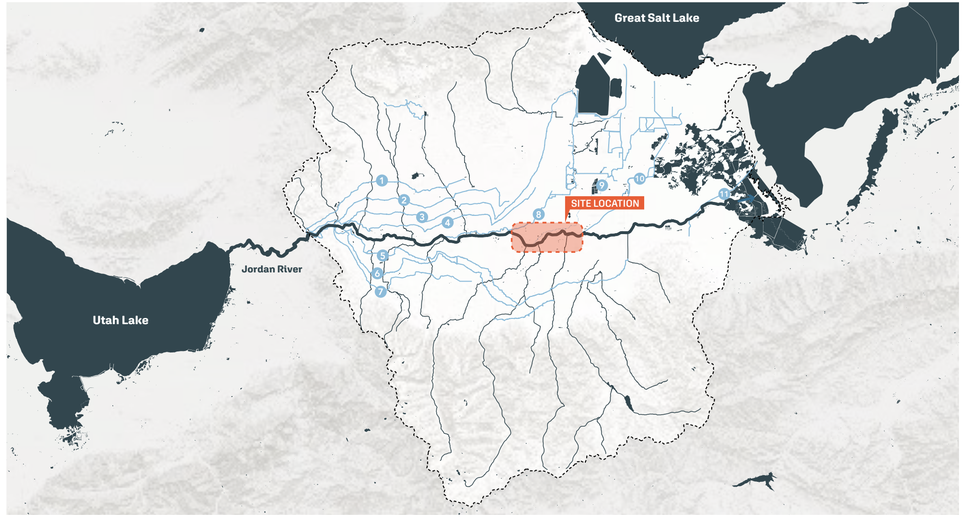
The Jordan River meanders for 51 miles, flowing north from the outlet of Utah Lake to the Great Salt Lake. Along its course, the river is fed by many tributaries, including the seven major creeks: Little Cottonwood, Big Cottonwood, Mill Creek, Parley's Creek, Emigration Creek, Red Butte Creek, and City Creek. Notably, all of the Jordan River's major tributaries originate in the Wasatch Mountains on the east side of the valley, with no major streams coming from the west side. This distinct pattern of flow highlights the river's connection to the surrounding mountain ranges and the uneven distribution of water sources in the region.



Salt Lake Valley Canal Network

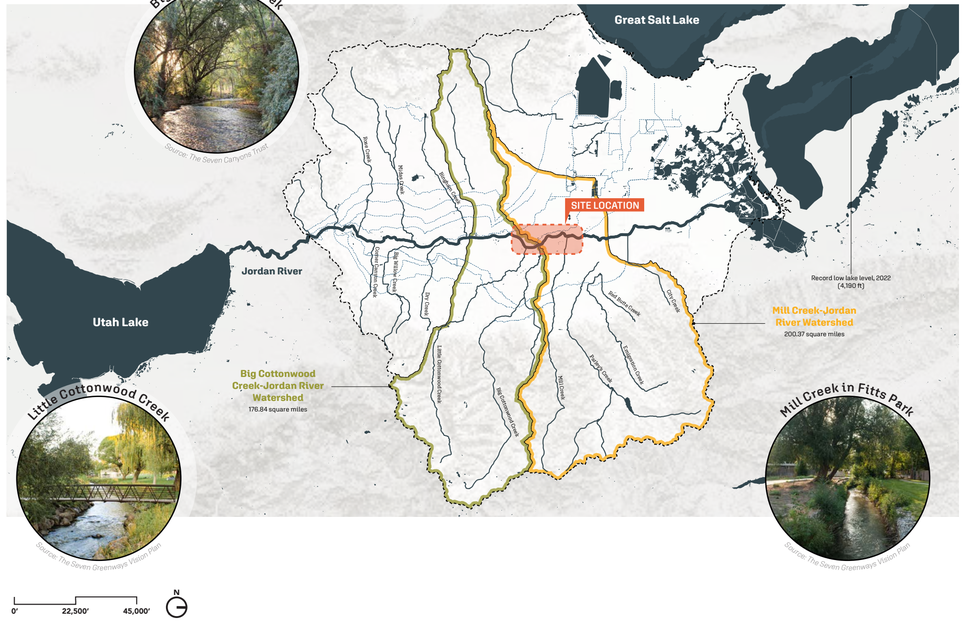
In the early settlement of the Salt Lake Valley, water was diverted from streams into a network of ditches to supply irrigation and household water. The earliest recorded diversions from the Jordan River date back to 1850, and by the turn of the century, seven major canals were redirecting water from both Utah Lake and the Jordan River. Today, this extensive system diverts water for agricultural, industrial, and municipal uses, influencing both water quantity and quality in the river and its surrounding ecosystem.

1. Provo Reservoir Canal
2. Utah Lake Distributing Canal
3. Utah & Salt Lake Canal
4. South Jordan Canal
5. Jordan and SLC Canal
6. East Jordan Canal
7. Draper Irrigation Canal
8. North Jordan Canal
9. ~~Brighton and North Point Canal~~ (Closed 2023)
10. Surplus Canal
11. Sewage Canal



Central Jordan River Watershed

The Central Jordan River is fed by the Big Cottonwood Creek-Jordan River and Mill Creek-Jordan River sub-watersheds. Big Cottonwood Creek, impacted by 1850s timber operations, is now a protected watershed and Salt Lake City's largest drinking water source. Mill Creek, once lined with mills, showed significant degradation by the 1990s, prompting restoration by the U.S. Forest Service and Salt Lake County. However, as Mill Creek flows through urban and industrial areas toward the Jordan River, it continues to face watershed health challenges.



Ecological

Site Hydrology

The Central Jordan River displays a complex array of hydrological features, including confluences, levees, canal diversions, and intersecting flood zones. Each of these elements plays a critical role in shaping the river's flow, water distribution, and flood dynamics.

Historically, the Jordan River interacted naturally with its floodplain, with periodic flooding that supported diverse habitats and riparian ecosystems. However, the construction of levees and expansion of urban development along its banks have gradually disconnected the river from its floodplain.

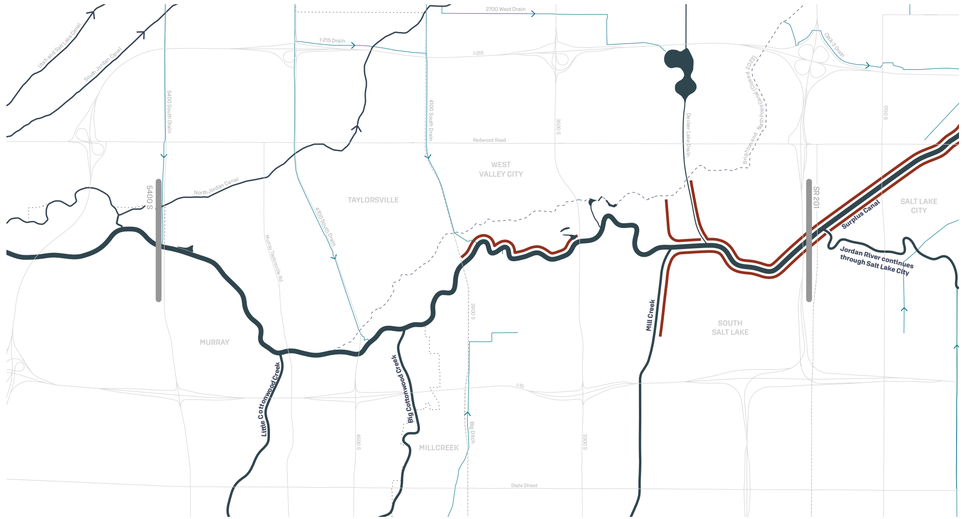
These modifications have reshaped the river's natural cycles, reducing its overall ecological function. The river's capacity to absorb and filter water, support wildlife habitats, and maintain riparian vegetation has diminished. The loss of these natural interactions not only affects the ecological health of the river but also impacts water quality and resilience across the valley. For future management and restoration efforts, acknowledging these changes will be essential in creating a more resilient river system that can better support both ecological and human needs.

THE SURPLUS CANAL AND JORDAN RIVER DIVERSION JUST NORTH OF STATE ROUTE 201.
SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON POST

THE WARM WATERS OF MILL CREEK MEET THE TURBID JORDAN RIVER
SOURCE: THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Waterways System

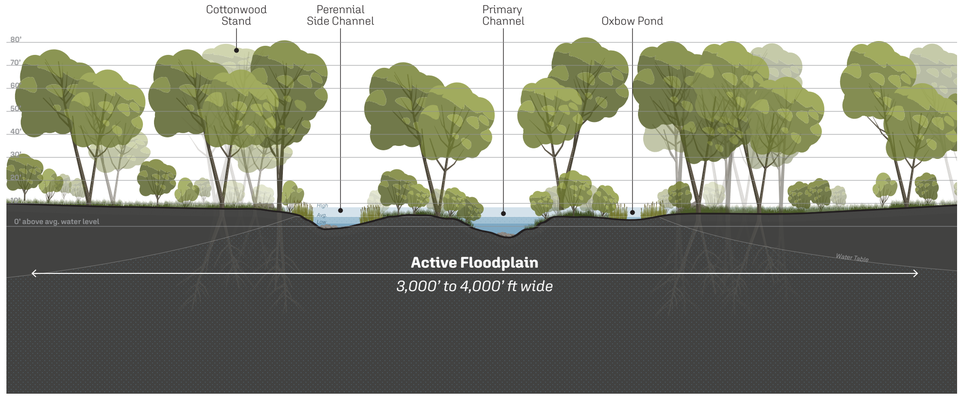
Within the study area there are numerous waterways that deliver water to the river or extract water from it. Three main creeks– Big Cottonwood Creek, Little Cottonwood Creek, and Mill Creek– flow from the Wasatch Range into the Jordan River. Numerous drains and ditches were constructed to drain areas that were historically floodplain but have now been filled in and developed. At the north end of the site the Surplus Canal diverts the majority of the water from the main channel of the Jordan River directly to the Great Salt Lake.



- Levees
- Canal
- Closed Canal
- Drain/Ditch
- Major Road
- Municipal Boundary
- Waterways

The River Historically

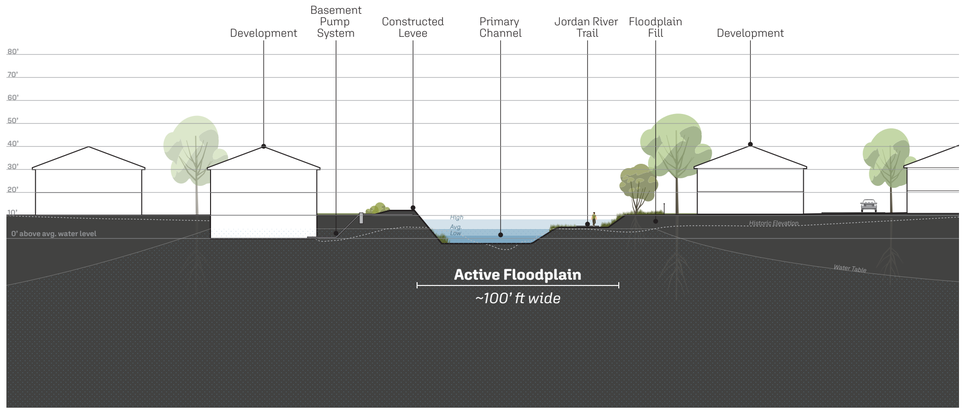
The valley gradient between Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake is approximately 0.1%, supporting the historic formation of a highly sinuous and meandering Jordan River channel with broad, active floodplains containing large wetlands and many side channels. Previously, the river meandered broadly across its floodplain. Episodic floods created new channels in the floodplain and cut off old meanders, leaving behind oxbow lakes in events called channel avulsions. In some areas, the unobstructed floodplain (excluding levees and development) is around 3,000 to 4,000 ft wide, suggesting the floodplain width has been reduced between 45%-97%



HISTORIC RIVER CONDITION (CONCEPTUAL)

The River Today

Historically, the rate and frequency of channel migration and avulsion would have been controlled by dense riparian vegetation that provided bank stability and hydraulic roughness across the floodplain. By the early 1900s, much of the riparian vegetation had been cleared, resulting in bank recession and channel widening. Urban encroachment during the 1900s and early 2000s also resulted in filled floodplain, armored banks, and levees built to limit flood risk. Similarly, portions of the Jordan River have been straightened and woody debris has been removed from the channel. These changes have created a more hydraulically smooth and simplified channel with limited floodplain connectivity and lacking the diversity and complexity found in the historical river and floodplain.

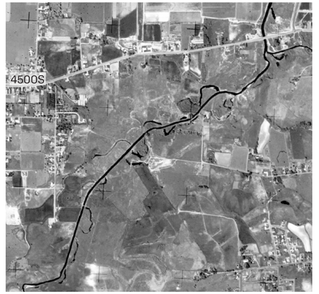


EXISYTING RIVER CONDITION (TYPICAL)

How We Got Here

1937

The Jordan River flowed through a wide and shallow floodplain. It meandered broadly across its floodplain by eroding its banks on the outside of a bend while depositing sediment on the inside of a bend. Episodic floods created new channels in the floodplain and cut off old meanders, leaving behind oxbow lakes in events called channel avulsions. The river supported a large area of wetlands that contributed to the biodiversity of the valley.



1970

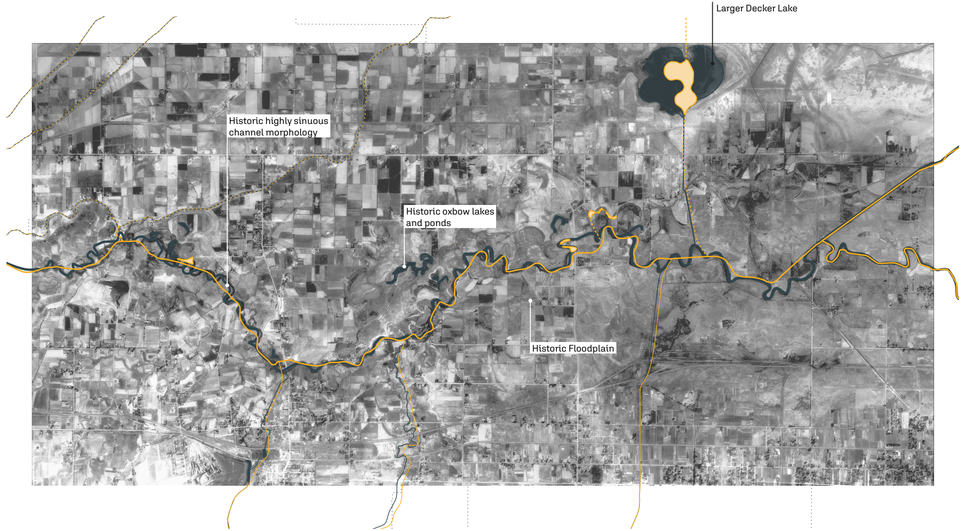
Development through the valley started to dramatically change the course of the Jordan River. Farmers moved into the fertile floodplain and created a series of canals and drains to irrigate crops, dramatically modifying the hydrologic system. To control flooding the river was dammed and channelized and the floodplain began to be filled. Much of the riparian vegetation had been cleared, resulting in bank recession and channel widening. In the aerial image above, you see the channelization of the river with remnant oxbow ponds at its edges.

Today

Development patterns shifted from predominantly farming to housing. The floodplain continued to be filled in, allowing development to occur closer and closer to the river. Constricting the river led to more dramatic flood events, such as the 1980s floods. In response, levees were built to limit flood risk and river banks were armored against erosion. Invasive species occupy much of the river's edge and the amount of riparian wetlands has been dramatically reduced.

The River in 1937

The image to the right shows the historic aerial of the river from 1937, overlaid with the centerline of the river we see today. In the patchwork of landscape around the river you can see the vast agricultural landscape that used to be adjacent to the river. At this time the river had a wide and shallow floodplain that allowed it to meander and change course frequently.



Flood Control Infrastructure

Federally Regulated Levees

These levees are regulated by the Army Corps of Engineers and are managed and maintained by Salt Lake County Flood Control. Per regulations, you cannot have any woody plants growing on the banks of the levee. The levees are maintained to prevent flooding in adjacent and downstream urban areas.

Non-federally Regulated Levees

These levees have been built to protect development adjacent to the river, but are not regulated by the Army Corps of Engineers. Often the homes behind these levees still have basement flooding issues due to high groundwater, so they require frequent or continual pumping.

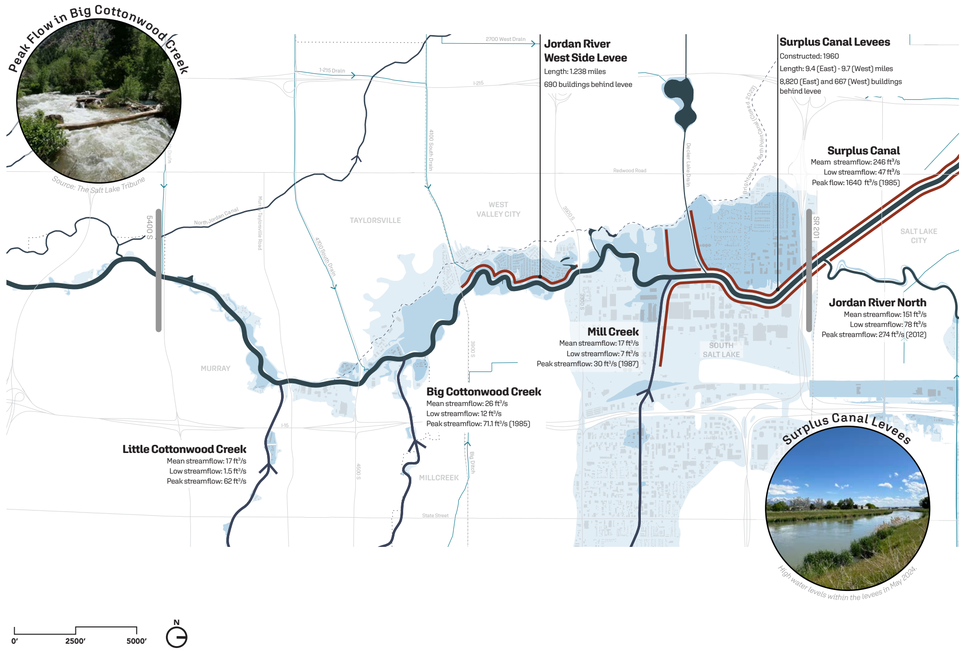
Stormwater Infrastructure

Stormwater outfalls, like the one pictured above, are concrete or metal structures that direct stormwater directly from city streets into the river. If these structures are underwater during flood events the floodwaters back up into communities. Any containments that have been picked up by stormwater are delivered directly into the river, impacting water quality.

Flow Volumes + Flooding

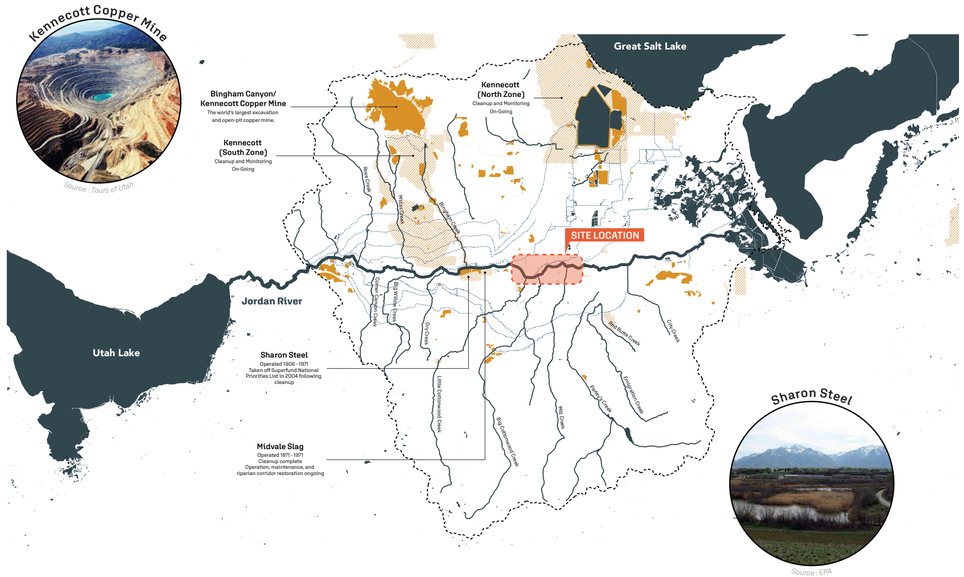
The Central Jordan River and its tributaries experience major flow fluctuations, impacting flood risk and water quality. FEMA-designated flood zones with 1% and 0.2% risks contain key levee systems, such as the Jordan River West Side and Surplus Canal Levees, which protect thousands of structures. Big and Little Cottonwood Creeks show the largest flow variations. Meanwhile increased runoff from nearby neighborhoods can cause rapid, debris-filled surges in all three creeks. Understanding these flow patterns and flood risks is essential for resilient planning, water management, and ecological restoration in river corridor.

- 1% Chance of Flood
- 0.2% Chance of Flood
- Building Within Flood Zone
- Levee
- Canal
- Closed Canal
- Drain/Ditch
- Major Road
- Municipal Boundary
- Waterway



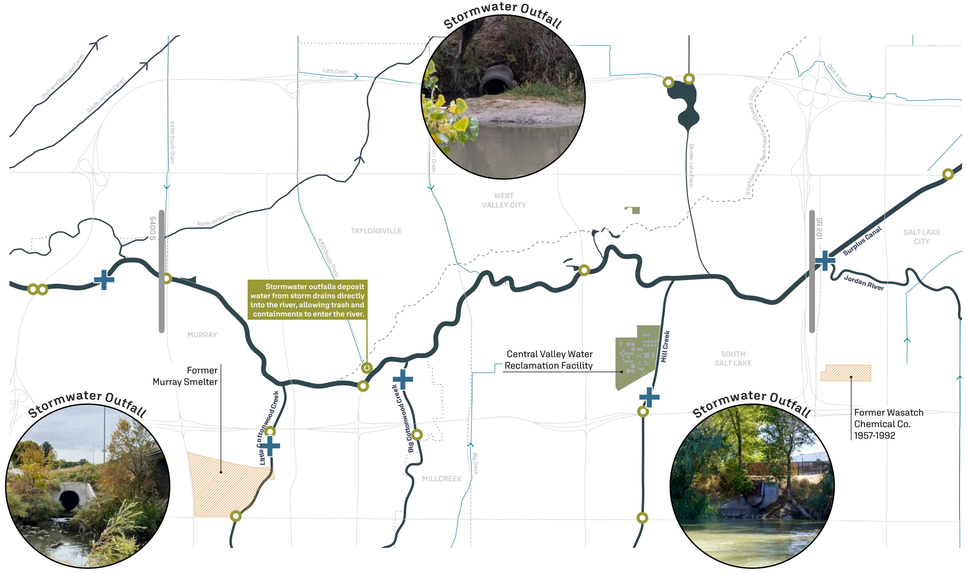
Water Quality at the Watershed

At the watershed level, water quality of the Jordan River is highly impacted by industrial activity. Superfund and mining sites have contaminated both surfacewater and groundwater. The water quality in Utah Lake is similarly impacted, so water flowing into the Jordan River is already compromised. Improving water quality needs to be addressed at the watershed level in order to be effective.



Water Quality in the Central Jordan River

Within the Central Jordan River area there are both point-source and non-point-source pollutants. One EPA Superfund site (a highly contaminated site) sits adjacent to Little Cottonwood Creek. Meanwhile, numerous stormdrains deposit unclean stormwater directly into the river. Green stormwater infrastructure can help eliminate or reduce these containments. However, water quality issues cannot be entirely solved without larger watershed-wide management.



Ecological

Three Reaches

Although the Central Jordan River is impacted by similar factors that affect sediment, vegetation, and bank stability throughout its course, its characteristics change as it flows through different communities. The river can be roughly divided into three reaches—the upper, middle, and lower reaches—each with its own unique geomorphological and ecological features shaped by both natural processes and human modifications. These reaches highlight the complexity of managing the Central Jordan River and underscore the need to balance ecological health with the practical limitations imposed by surrounding infrastructure and urban development.

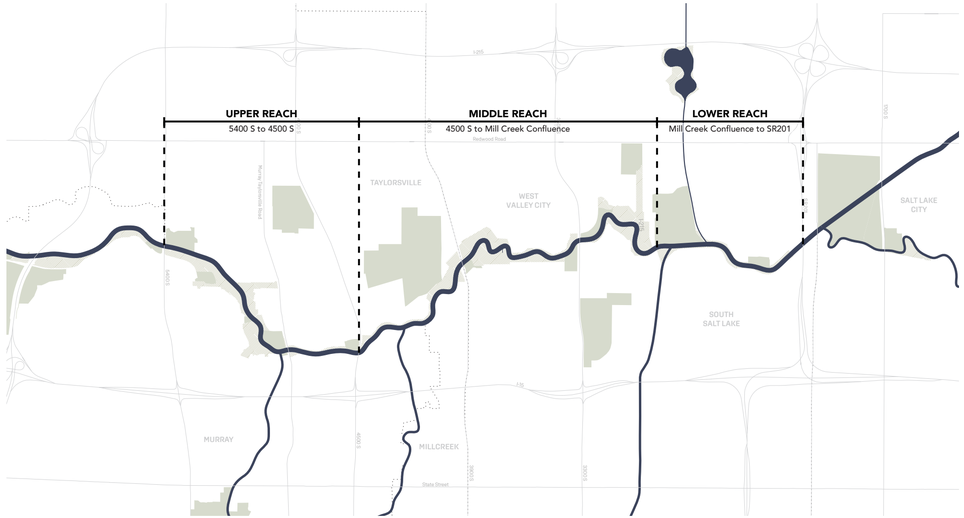
THE UPPER REACH - THE JORDAN RIVER NEAR GERMANIA PARK
WITH THE MILLRACE PARK POND IN THE FOREGROUND

THE MIDDLE REACH - THE JORDAN RIVER NEAR PIONEER CROSSING
REGIONAL PARK WITH PIONEER BRIDGE IN THE FOREGROUND

THE LOWER REACH - THE JORDAN RIVER NEAR STATE ROUTE 201
WITH KHADEEJA ISLAMIC CENTER IN THE FOREGROUND

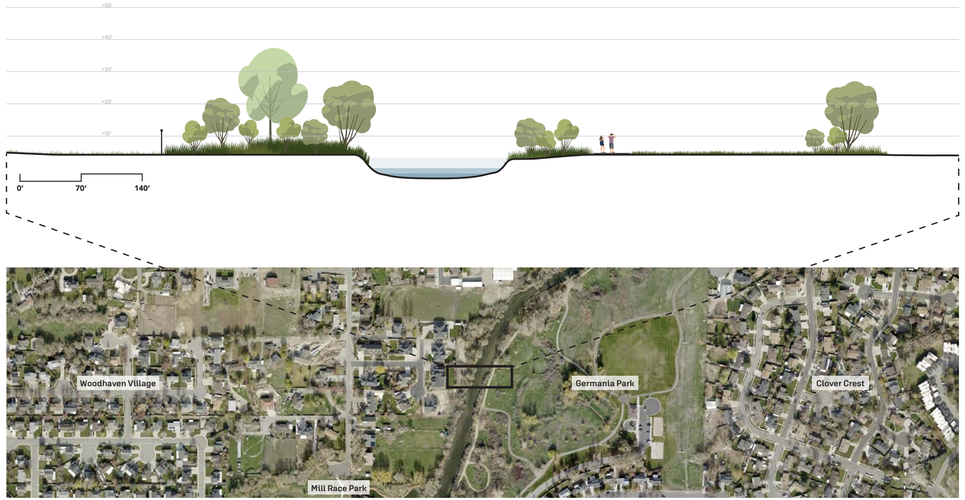
Extent of the Reaches

The Central Jordan River can be divided into three distinct reaches: the upper, middle, and lower reaches. The upper reach stretches from 5400 South near Millrace Park to 4500 South (West Taylorsville Expressway). The middle reach extends from 4500 South to the confluence with Mill Creek. The lower reach runs from the Mill Creek confluence to the State Route 201 overpass. Each of these reaches presents unique characteristics and challenges that are shaped by the river's interaction with its surrounding environment and infrastructure.

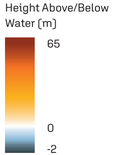


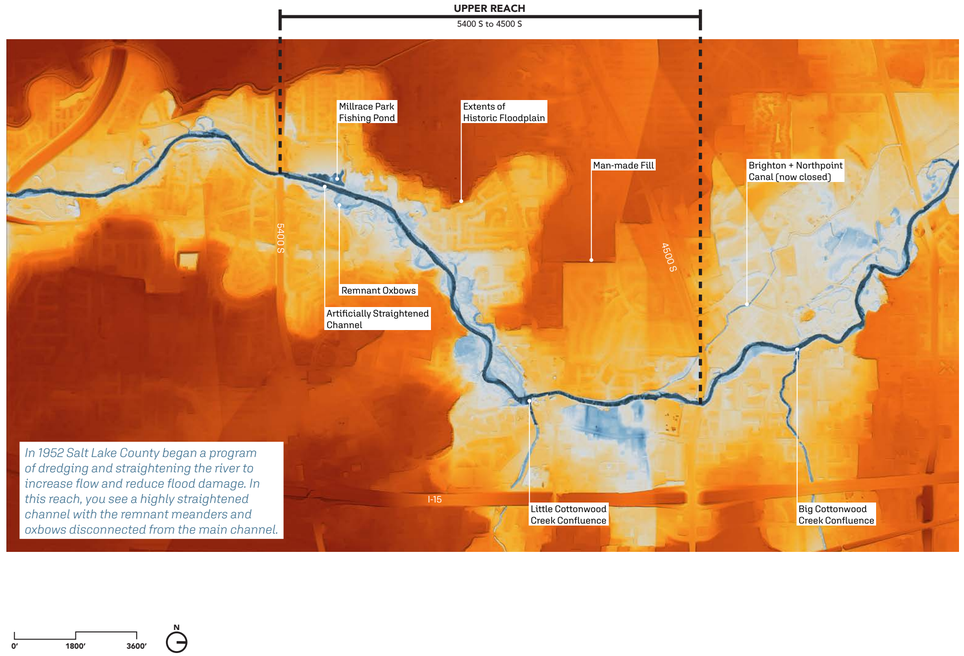
Upper Reach

This section of the river is relatively straight, with only slight natural curves, and has a simple, single-channel structure that remains consistent throughout. The channel is generally wide and shallow, ranging between 25 and 40 feet across, with only a few deeper pool areas. A significant amount of gravel flows through this part of the river, as shown by gravel bars and past dredging near the Little Cottonwood Creek junction, though most of it continues downstream except where it can settle in wider parts of the channel.



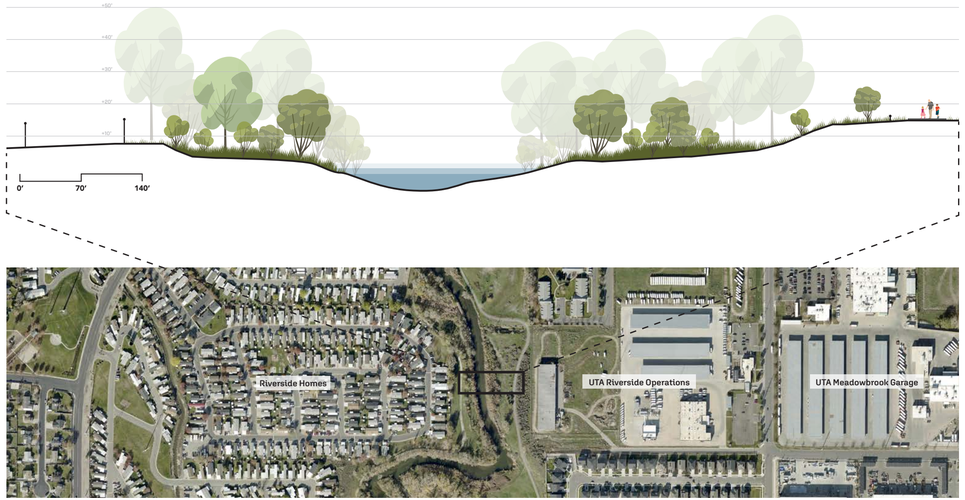
The channel's size, combined with disconnected levees, limits the river's ability to naturally overflow into nearby areas, although homes on the left bank near Little Cottonwood Creek have basements that sometimes flood, due to their location on a former flood path. Several low-lying areas on the floodplain remain undeveloped, while higher ground typically has urban or suburban infrastructure. Stormwater has been directed into a floodplain wetland near the Kennecott Nature Center, filtering out sediments and other contaminants before reaching the Jordan River. Most other storm drains, however, empty directly into the Jordan River and its tributaries.



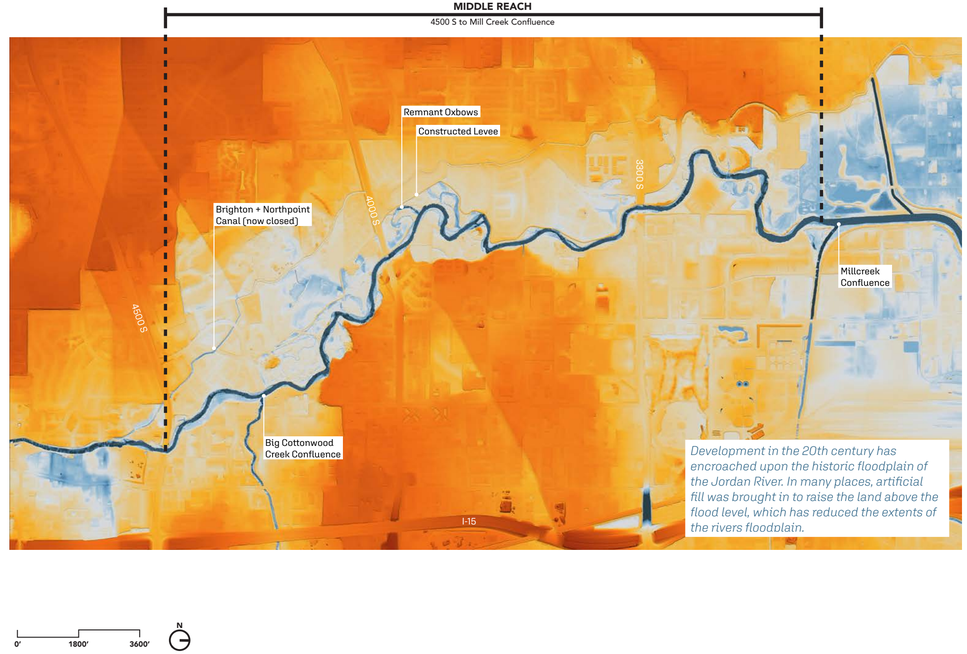


Middle Reach

As the river flows downstream, it becomes more confined, with banks frequently reinforced by rock riprap. The channel follows a moderately winding, single path, alternating between deep pools and shallow riffles. The width varies along its course. Narrower sections, around 50-60 feet wide, form pools over 6 feet deep, while wider areas, roughly 80-100 feet, create shallow riffles less than a foot deep. Narrow sections are often caused by vegetation growth, especially Russian olive, while wider sections lack dense vegetation, leading to some bank erosion and widening. Small gravel islands also form in these wider areas. This stretch of the river has well-defined bends that can reach up to 800 feet in length, while tighter bends, under 65 feet in radius, create backwater zones during high flows, leading to deep pools and bank erosion.

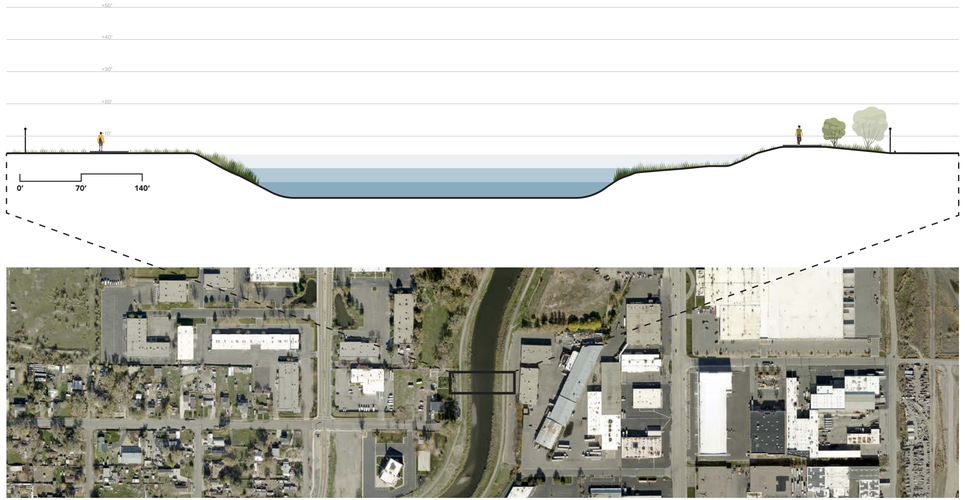


LiDAR mapping reveals abandoned meanders throughout the floodplain, especially near the West Meadowbrook Expressway. These old channels and other features of the floodplain have been separated from the river by levees or filled in for development. FEMA maps show that significant portions of the 100-year floodplain have been built upon, leaving these areas at risk of flooding despite the levees and reinforcement. The width of the accessible floodplain varies, from around 100 feet to more than 1,300 feet as the river gradient flattens. However, the overall floodplain width without obstructions is about 3,000-4,000 feet, suggesting the floodplain has been reduced by 45-97% due to levees, fill, and development.

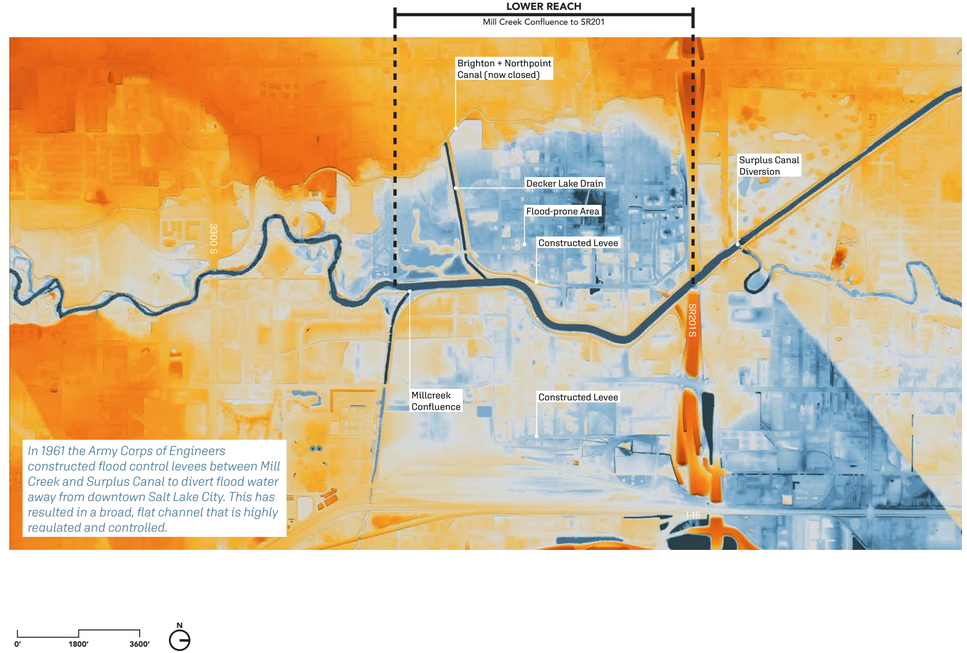


Lower Reach

In the lower part of the river, levees tightly contain the river's flow, and there's little to no vegetation along the banks to help stabilize them. Regulations require these levees to be clear of trees and other woody vegetation. This has led to over-widening of the channel to an average of 120 feet and a flat, uniform riverbed. The wide and shallow riverbed without vegetation increases the temperature of the water and decreases available habitat for aquatic species. The floodplain is also narrow, reduced to about 1.5 times the channel width, or roughly 175 feet, due to levees and nearby development. Although the riverbed materials haven't been directly observed, it likely consists of gravel with more sand and silt than upstream.



Much of the original floodplain, now cut off by levees, has been developed, which limits the river's ability to connect with its floodplain or naturally shift its course over time. Together, the levees and the surrounding development create major obstacles to restoration, leaving few options for returning this part of the river to a more natural state.



In 1961 the Army Corps of Engineers constructed flood control levees between Mill Creek and Surplus Canal to divert flood water away from downtown Salt Lake City. This has resulted in a broad, flat channel that is highly reaulated and controlled.

Ecological

Key Habitats

The Central Jordan River is part of the Central Basin and Range Ecoregion, which supports diverse habitats, including lowland riparian areas and wetlands. These ecosystems are vital for numerous species, especially birds, as the site lies along a critical migration corridor. Despite covering less than 0.2% of Utah's total area, lowland riparian habitat is among the most important in the state, particularly for avian species. This section highlights the ecoregion's characteristics, key habitats, and the species that depend on these areas, emphasizing their ecological significance and the need for preservation.

ANIMAL TRACKS ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER

Acres of Wetland Along the Central Jordan River

Forested/Shrub Wetland	Freshwater Emergent Wetland	Herbaceous Riparian Wetland	Freshwater Pond
188 acres	*65 acres*	*30 acres*	*18 acres*
Wetlands associated with woody plants such as willow thickets or cottonwood clusters.	Wetland type dominated by developing vegetation and commonly associated with ground-water discharge (seeps and springs).	Wetalnds dominated by non-woody, grass-like vegetation.	

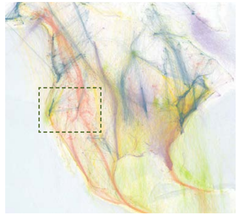
Habitat Areas + Key Species

The wetlands along the river provide essential habitats for diverse species and play a critical role in the river's floodplain. Various wetland types, such as riparian, forested, emergent, and freshwater ponds, cover significant areas within the project site. Together with the Jordan River, these wetlands support species of greatest conservation need, as outlined in the Utah Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. They also offer vital ecological functions, including water filtration, wildlife habitat, and flood management, all of which contribute to the river's environmental health.

Bird Migration

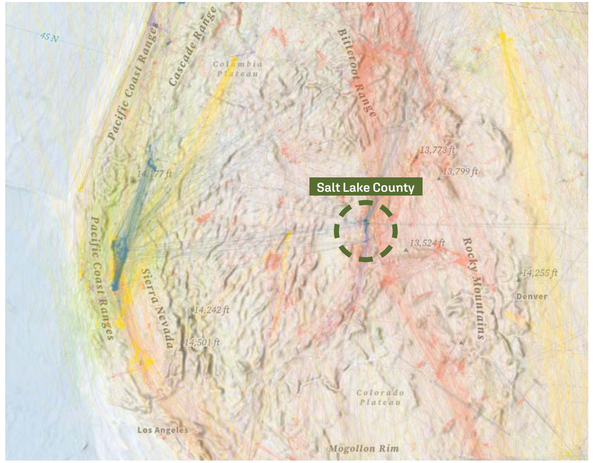
The Great Salt Lake and Jordan River in Utah are critical habitats for migrating birds, providing essential stopover points along the Pacific and Central Flyways. Without these sites, many migrating birds would face significant challenges in completing their seasonal journeys, making these habitats essential for their survival.

Source: Audubon Bird Migration Explorer Map



Migration Destinations from Salt Lake County

Country	Species
United States	77
Canada	39
Mexico	35
Nicaragua	8
Guatemala	7
Honduras	6
Columbia	6
Panama	6
Peru	5
El Salvador	5



- Landbirds
- Raptors
- Shorebirds
- Waterbirds
- Waterfowl

Avian Species on Site

These wetland areas offer abundant food sources, such as insects, algae, and aquatic invertebrates, which are vital for replenishing energy during long migratory journeys. The diverse ecosystems along the river provide safe resting areas, shelter, and nesting sites for numerous species, including shorebirds, waterfowl, and songbirds.

- Freshwater Pond
- Forested/Scrub Wetland
- Herbaceous Riparian Wetland
- Freshwater Emergent Wetland
- Parks
- Golf Courses
- Major Road
- Municipal Boundary
- Waterway

Invasive Plant Species

A plant is considered native to a location if it has evolved in that region, which results in relationships with other species around it. Some non-native species are not problematic for the local ecology (these are called adapted species), however other species create issues because they grow aggressively and/or create conditions where native species cannot grow. These invasive species provide little to no habitat value to local insects, birds, and other animals and thus disrupt the local food chain and reduce the overall available habitat.

Common Reed

Phragmites australis

Common Reed is an extremely aggressive and hard to remove invasive species. It prefers damp soil to standing water and often creates dense stands of 6-12' tall reeds that can spread 16' or more per year. Because it spreads so rapidly and displaces other valuable wetland plants that provide essential habitat to aquatic species its presence is of particular concern.

Russian Olive

Elaeagnus angustifolia

Russian olive is a deciduous tree native to Eurasia that was introduced in the early 1900s. It is a highly competitive tree which crowds out native species. While its distinctive silvery leaves are beautiful, they provide little to no habitat value to other species.

Saltcedar

Tamarix spp.

Saltcedar, otherwise know as tamarisk, is a deciduous shrub that is a highly problematic invasive species in much of the western United States. It uses a huge amount of water per day, which lowers the water table and leaves behind high concentrations of salt, which discourages the growth of other species.

Protected Species

Currently, there are no endangered species who are known to occupy the study area. However, threatened or endangered species could occur given the right circumstances. Providing quality habitat for these species could improve their status as well as the species that depend on them. Numerous species not listed here are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

SOURCE: National Audubon Society

Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Bald Eagles have a special status as a protected species under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Their numbers have rebounded since they were originally listed on the Endangered Species List, and they were delisted in 2007. Providing quality fishing and nesting habitat is still crucial to maintaining this majestic species. Bald eagles are currently present along the Jordan River, but the quality and quantity of habitat available could be improved.

SOURCE: Butterfly Conservation

Monarch Butterfly

Danaus plexippus

The Monarch butterfly is listed as a candidate species for federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. Monarchs depends on certain pollinator plants, specifically milkweed, which can form in the Jordan River wetlands and wet meadow habitats adjacent to the river. Providing such habitat is critical to Monarch population recovery. According the USFWS the probability of extinction for western monarchs by 2080 is greater than 95%.

SOURCE: National Audubon Society

Yellow-Billed Cuckoo

Coccyzus americanus

The Yellow-Billed Cuckoo is a small bird listed on the Endangered Species list. It requires a dense multi-story riparian canopy for its habitat. The Jordan River floodplain is not large enough to provide breeding habitat, but if the riparian forest was more developed, they could potentially use it for migration to more suitable breeding habitats.

Management Practices

Maintaining the river in its current configuration requires human imputs like dredging and bank stabilization. This is because development has encroached upon the river's floodplain, often times very close to the main channel, so the location of that channel must be maintained. This work is often undertaken by Salt Lake County.

Dredging

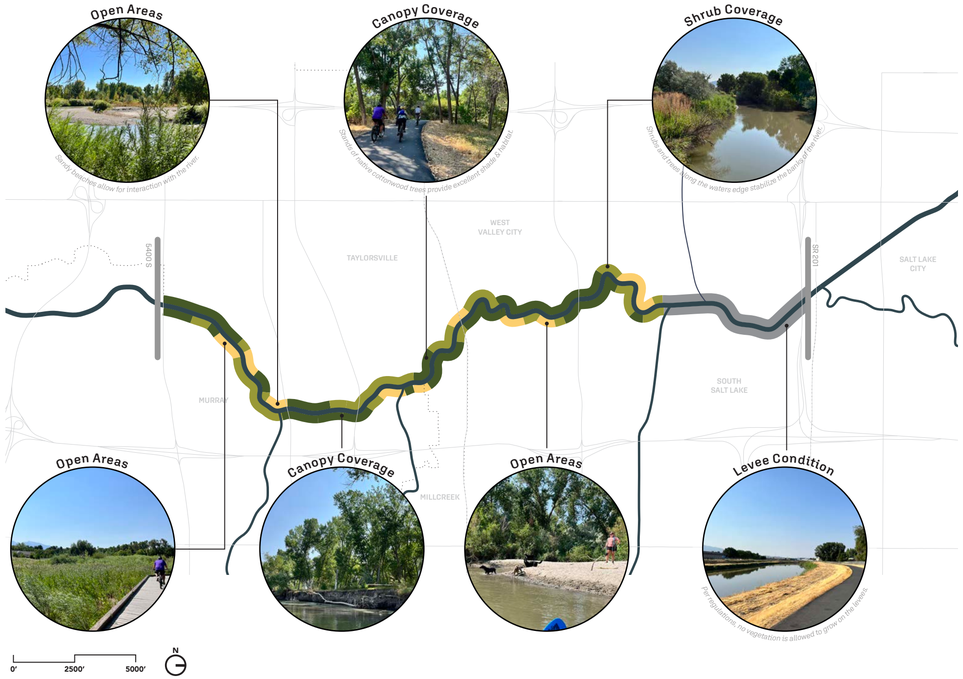
As rivers meander, they naturally pick up sediment along the outside of a bend and deposit it on the inside of a bend. This process contributes to the creation of the river channel and generally forms a broad, meandering floodplain. However, because the river has been channelized and disconnected from its floodplain excess sediment builds up in particular bends. Because of this dredging is required to keep the main channel clear for flood control.

Bank Stabilization

Rivers naturally want to move and change course over time, however development within the floodplain has restricted how much the river is able to move. Because of this, some of the river's banks have severely eroded and have required stabilization to try to combat the erosion. Shown here are large wood 'lunkers', woody debris placed along the bank to provide structure to the edge.

The River's Edge

Along the 7-mile study area, the conditions along the rivers edge, including the vegetation cover, bank conditions, access, and maintenance, vary widely. At the south end, wetland vegetation with fuller canopy coverage dominates. While at the north end, the presence of federally regulated levees dictates that no tall vegetation is allowed to be present. These conditions affect the experience of trail users, the quality of habitat available, and the water quality itself.



Ecological

Geology + Soils

Geology and soils play a significant role in shaping the ecology of a landscape. The Jordan River's geology influences the formation of the river's banks, erosion patterns, and the types of habitats present. Soils, particularly alluvial soils, are key in supporting plant and animal life. Alluvial soils are formed from sediments deposited by flowing water, typically in riverbeds, floodplains, and deltas. These soils are rich in nutrients, making them highly fertile and supporting diverse ecosystems.

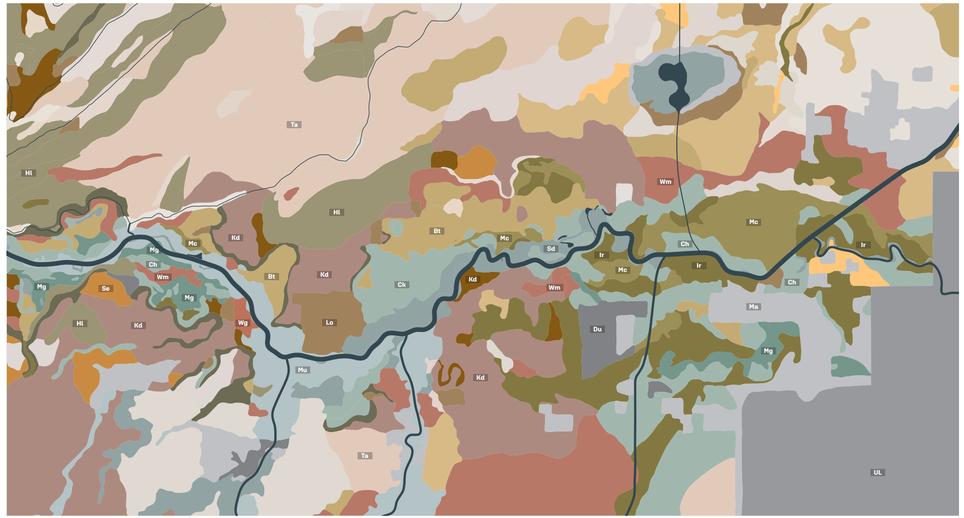
Along the Jordan River, alluvial soils are continually moved and reshaped by the river's flow. During periods of high water, such as spring runoff, the river erodes upstream sediments, carrying them downstream and depositing them as it slows. This constant movement of soil creates dynamic habitats, with different zones of moisture and fertility. Over time, this process contributes to the formation of wetlands, riparian zones, and fertile floodplains that support a variety of plant and animal species. However, because the Jordan River is so disconnected from it's natural hydrologic cycle, this process is impeded. In many places the river has eroded banks, which leads to too much suspended sediment, which impacts water quality for organisms to thrive. Working with, not against, these processes is essential to create a thriving Central Jordan River.

FINE GRAVELS BUILD UP ALONG THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN RIVER

THE LAYERS OF THE SOIL HORIZONS ARE VISIBLE ALONG AN ERODED BANK

Soils

- Wm - Welby silt loam
- Wg - Wasatch loamy coarse sand
- Mc - Magna silty clay
- Mg - Magna silty clay, peaty surface
- Mu - Mixed alluvial land
- Sa - Saltair silty clay loam
- Sd - Sandy alluvial lands
- Se - Sandy borrow pits
- Ta - Taylorsville silty clay loam
- Kd - Kidman very fine sandy loam
- Lo - Loamy borrow pits
- Bs/Bt - Bramwell silty clay loam
- Ch/Ck - Chipman silty clay loam
- Hl - Hillfield loam
- HtF2 - Hillfield-Taylorsville complex
- Ir - Lewiston loam
- Kd - Kidman very fine sandy loam
- De - Deckerman fine sandy loam
- Ma - Made land
- UL - Urban land
- Du - Dumps



- Municipal Boundary
- Waterway

0' 2500' 5000' N

Ecological

Conclusion

The ecology of the Central Jordan River in Utah is deeply influenced by its riparian habitats, which are vital for maintaining biodiversity and supporting ecosystem functions. Historically, the river's interactions with its floodplain provided diverse habitats for numerous species, contributing to a thriving riparian ecosystem. However, urban development and infrastructure changes, such as levees and canal diversions, have disrupted these natural processes, reducing the river's ability to absorb floods, filter water, and sustain wildlife.

Riparian zones along the Jordan River play an essential role in stabilizing riverbanks, filtering pollutants, and providing critical habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. The loss of these natural interactions has led to a decline in ecological health and water quality, which further strains the area's resilience. Enhancing riparian habitats is crucial for improving the river's ecological function.

For future management, focusing on restoring riparian areas and reconnecting the river with its floodplain will enhance both ecological health and resilience. By addressing the ecological challenges caused by urban development and hydrological modifications, we can create a more balanced and sustainable river system that meets both environmental and human needs in the long term.

THE SURPLUS CANAL AND JORDAN RIVER DIVERSION JUST NORTH OF STATE ROUTE 201.
SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON POST

THE DARK WATERS OF MILL CREEK MEET THE JORDAN RIVER.
SOURCE: THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

VIEW FROM LITTLE COTTONWOOD CONFLUENCE AREA

Central Jordan River
RECONNECT

ACTIVE

Site Analysis

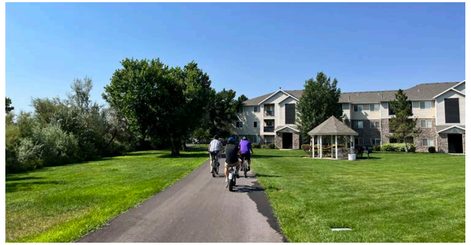
(Updated June 2025) December 2024 | Prepared by PORT

The Central Jordan River should be

ACTIVE

Within the 7-mile stretch of the Central Jordan River, more than 10 public parks offer a wide range of recreational opportunities. These parks feature active recreation like playgrounds and sports fields, as well as spaces for passive activities such as birdwatching and fishing. Additionally, water-based recreation—including kayaking, paddle boarding, and canoeing—is growing in popularity, reflecting an increasing desire for dynamic outdoor experiences along the river. The Jordan River Trail, a cherished feature stretching 45 miles, further enhances the area by attracting walkers, runners, bikers, and skaters.

Despite these strengths, gaps in park amenities and connectivity remain. The Jordan River Trail, while continuous, primarily runs along one side of the river at a time, presenting opportunities to extend the trail to both sides and improve accessibility. Furthermore, some stretches of the river lack sufficient amenities, leading to uneven usage and engagement across the area. Addressing these gaps—such as adding new recreation opportunities, picnic areas, and water access points—will be essential for activating underutilized spaces and ensuring the park system is welcoming, equitable, and fully utilized.



THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL NEXT TO THE MAISON'S LANDING APARTMENTS PROVIDES DIRECT ACCESS FOR RESIDENTS

KAYAKING IN THE JORDAN RIVER NEAR THE BRIDGE AT 4800 S

RUNNING, BIKING, AND SKATING ARE SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR WAYS TO USE THE CONTINUOUS LENGTH OF THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL

SOURCE: TAYLORSVILLE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL SYSTEM WEBSITE

Active

Recreation + Open Space

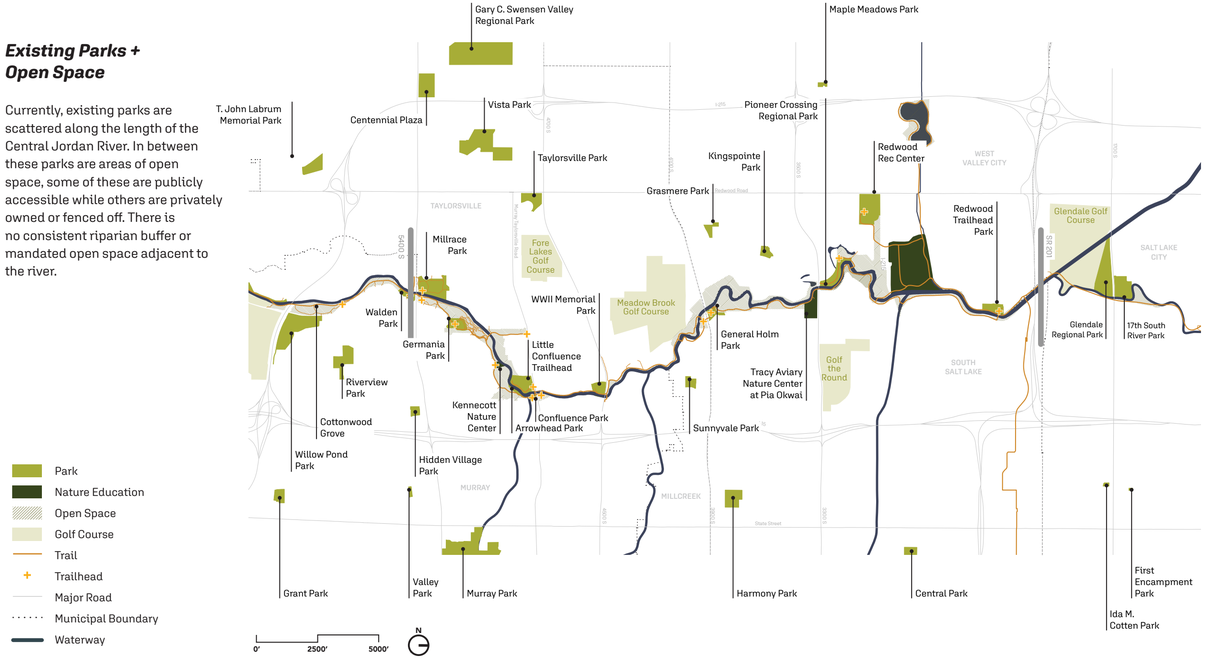
The Central Jordan River corridor is home to a variety of parks and open spaces, providing essential recreational and ecological benefits to the surrounding communities. This section highlights the existing parks along the river, key restoration areas aimed at enhancing natural habitats, and a breakdown of the different types of open spaces found along the river. These diagrams and images offer an overview of how open spaces are currently utilized and the role they play in both recreation and environmental stewardship, setting the stage for identifying opportunities to expand and enhance these areas in the future.

OPEN SPACE SURROUNDING THE OXBOW JAIL ALLOWS FOR TRAIL ACCESS, BUT LACKS OTHER AMENITIES

THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL CONNECTS MORE FORMAL PARKS LIKE THIS SEGMENT WHICH GOES THROUGH GERMANIA PARK

Existing Parks + Open Space

Currently, existing parks are scattered along the length of the Central Jordan River. In between these parks are areas of open space, some of these are publicly accessible while others are privately owned or fenced off. There is no consistent riparian buffer or mandated open space adjacent to the river.



Park Programming + Facilities

The most frequent types of program areas and facilties are walking and biking trails. Active programming like fields and courts for sports are concentrated in a few parks like Redwood Recreation Center and Germania Park. Most parks within the study area have playgrounds and trails.

Parks within 1/2 mile of the Jordan River

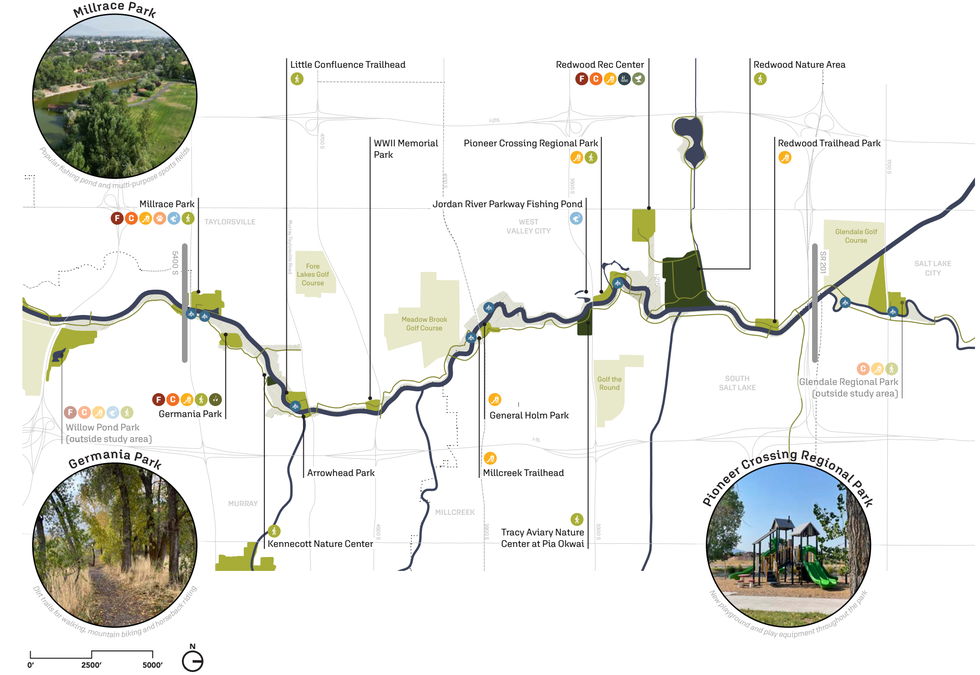
- 29 Miles of Multi-Use Trails
- 1 Community Garden
- 2 Fishing Ponds
- 6 Boat Launches
- 1 Swimming Pool
- 1 Dog Park
- 6 Baseball Fields
- 2 Multi-Use Fields
- 1 Soccer Field
- 7 Tennis/Pickleball Courts
- 2 Basketball Courts
- 1 Combo Basketball + Pickleball Courts
- 1 Sand Volleyball Court
- 7 Playgrounds

NEW PLAY FEATURES AT PIONEER CROSSING PARK

MULTI-USE FIELDS IN GERMANIA PARK

Park Programming + Facilities

Recreation amenities play a vital role in activating the Central Jordan River corridor, providing spaces for leisure, fitness, and community engagement. These pages showcase the existing recreation amenities throughout the site area, including playgrounds, sports fields, picnic areas, and water-based facilities such as kayak launches and fishing spots. By mapping these amenities, we can better understand how they support current use patterns and where gaps in recreational offerings may exist. This analysis will inform the future design of the park, ensuring that it meets the diverse needs of the community.



Park Amenities + Facilities

Amenities for the existing parks along the Jordan River include picnic pavilions, bathroom facilities, and water fountains. These facilities are intended to serve the local park system and are not sized to support a regional or destination park. Some facilities are in need of repair or refurbishment. Along the trail there are general no trash receptacles, benches, or shelters.

Park Facilities within 1/2 mile

9 Bathroom Facilities

8 Water Fountains

6 Picnic Pavilions

NEW BATHROOM FACILITY AT PIONEER CROSSING PARK

PICNIC TABLE ALONG THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL

PICNIC PAVILION AT MILLRACE PARK

Park Amenities + Facilities

Park amenities make public spaces nicer to use and allow users to stay for longer periods of time. Along the Central Jordan River facilities are more frequently located in Murray and Taylorsville, and are less frequent in South Salt Lake and West Valley.

Active
Water Trail

Increasing access to the Jordan River is crucial for fostering greater engagement with the waterway and enhancing its recreational value. This access encompasses both physical connections to the riverbanks and the ability to navigate the river by boat. By improving accessibility, more people can enjoy the river's natural beauty, engage in healthy outdoor activities, and support sustainable interactions with the environment. Creating formalized touch points along the river allows visitors easy access to the water, whether to walk along the shore, relax on sand bars, or venture out by boat. Enhanced signage and wayfinding at these points are key to encouraging increased engagement with the river.

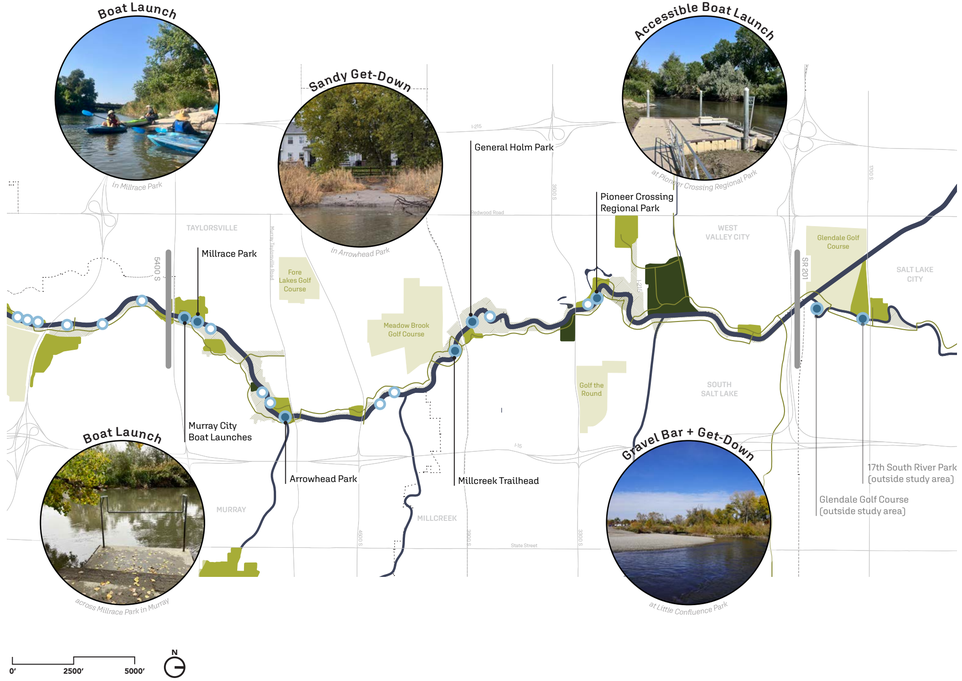
Canoeing and kayaking offer some of the most immersive and rewarding ways to experience the Jordan River. Salt Lake County has been working to improve boat access by formalizing launch points at strategic locations, which not only enhances conditions for recreational boaters but also legitimizes user-created access points and provides safer, more functional launches. Efforts are also underway to identify and mitigate navigational hazards such as dams, weirs, debris, and low-clearance bridges. Salt Lake County, in partnership with the Jordan River Commission, is collaborating on solutions to these challenges and providing additional resources, allowing paddlers to review water trail conditions before setting out on their trips.

KAYAKING UNDERNEATH THE PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE NEXT TO MEADOW BROOK GOLF COURSE.

KAYAKING NORTH WITH UTA'S JORDAN RIVER RAIL SERVICE CENTER IN THE DISTANCE.

Water Access

Within the Central Jordan River corridor, there are seven existing formal boat launches that provide access to the water. Additionally, several informal get-down points have been observed throughout the study area, reflecting the community's strong desire for greater engagement with the river. At many of these sandy or gravel access points, people were seen playing with dogs or allowing children to explore the environment. These informal access points highlight the need for improved infrastructure to support river use and ensure safe, convenient entry points for both paddlers and those on the shore, fostering better interaction with the river for all.



Active
Trails

The Jordan River Trail spans 45 miles, stretching from Utah Lake in the south to the Great Salt Lake in the north. It serves as the primary multi-purpose pathway running alongside the Jordan River, offering space for recreational activities, biking, and walking, while also acting as a vital commuting corridor for cyclists and pedestrians. As the backbone of an expanding regional trail system, the Jordan River Trail connects a wide array of communities across the Salt Lake Valley. This growing network of trails is designed to link residents to job hubs, cultural sites, and various recreational opportunities, including parks, public spaces, and sports facilities. Additionally, the trails integrate the urban areas with the nearby natural resources, creating seamless connections that extend from the valley floor into the vast open spaces and outdoor recreation opportunities of the surrounding mountains. By offering accessible routes for transportation, exercise, and exploration, the Jordan River Trail helps promote a healthier and more connected community while supporting the region's vision of a more sustainable and resilient transportation network.

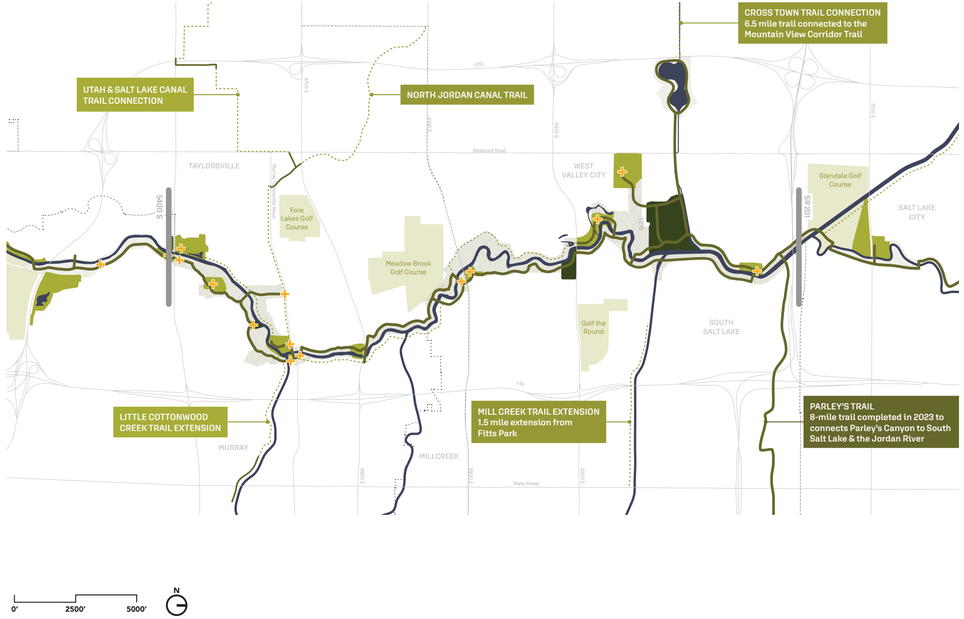
THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL IN GERMANIA PARK NEAR THE KENNECOTT NATURE CENTER.

PARLEY'S TRAIL CONNECTS THE JORDAN RIVER TO SOUTH SALT LAKE & PARLEY'S CANYON.
SOURCE: CRSA ARCHITECTURE

Existing + Proposed Trails

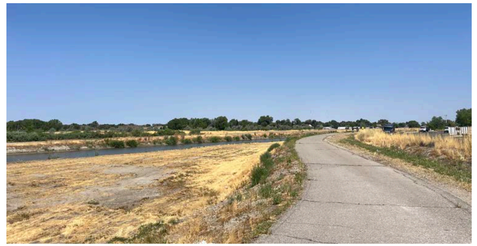
With the Jordan River Trail serving as the central feature of the regional trail network, expanding east-to-west connections between neighboring communities is a critical priority for future development. One of the most recent additions to this network is Parley's Trail, which connects the mouth of Parley's Canyon in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains to the Jordan River Trail. In addition, several proposed east-to-west connections, primarily following major tributaries, are currently in the planning stages, further enhancing the trail network and ensuring an interconnected system for residents and visitors.

- Park
- Nature Education
- Open Space
- Golf Course
- Existing Trail
- Proposed Trail
- Existing Trailhead
- Major Road
- Municipal Boundary
- Waterway



Trail Design

The trail is managed differently along its 7-mile length. In some areas each city maintains its own section of trail, while in other areas Salt Lake County is responsible for trail design and maintenance. This leads to inconsistencies in the trail's design and upkeep. The adjacency of the trail to the river is also variable. In some areas the trail has been placed too close to the river and is at risk of being eroded, while in other areas the river is not visible at all.

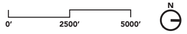


THE 10-FOOT-WIDE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL ATOP THE LEVEES HAS FREQUENT CRACKS AND SCRUBBY VEGETATION ENCROACHING IN SOME SECTIONS.

THE 12-FOOT-WIDE TRAIL IN PIONEER CROSSING REGIONAL PARK IS EQUIPPED WITH AMPLE PEDESTRIAN LIGHTING AND TRIMMED OF VEGETATION.

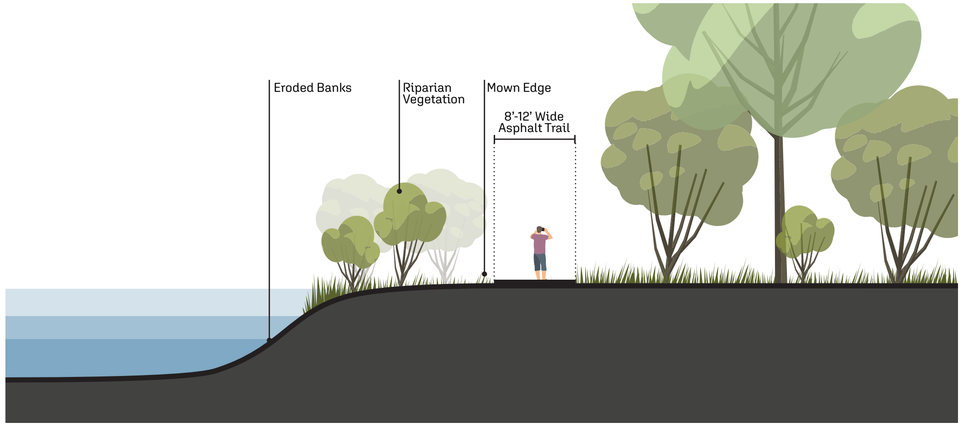
NORTH OF CONFLUENCE PARK IN TAYLORSVILLE, THE 11-FOOT-WIDE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL HAS VEGETATION TRIMMED BACK 4 FEET FROM THE EDGE.

GERMANIA PARK IN MURRAY FEATURES 12-FOOT-WIDE PATHWAYS WITH CLEAR TRAIL MARKINGS AND SIGNAGE FOR EASY NAVIGATION.



Typical Trail Conditions

Across the 7-miles of the Central Jordan River there are no consistent trail standards, however there are some conditions that are present throughout the majority of the area. Typically the trail is paved asphalt that is 8-12' wide with a mown strip on either side. Except where the trail goes through park areas there is no lighting. The trail is not plowed consistently in winter, so does not allow for year-round activities.



Active

Programming + Events

Programming and events in parks and public spaces play a crucial role in enhancing community engagement, promoting physical and mental well-being, and fostering a sense of connection among diverse groups. These spaces serve as hubs for cultural, recreational, and educational activities that cater to people of all ages and backgrounds. Events such as outdoor concerts, festivals, fitness classes, and farmer's markets create opportunities for social interaction and build a sense of belonging, while also stimulating local economies through increased foot traffic and tourism.

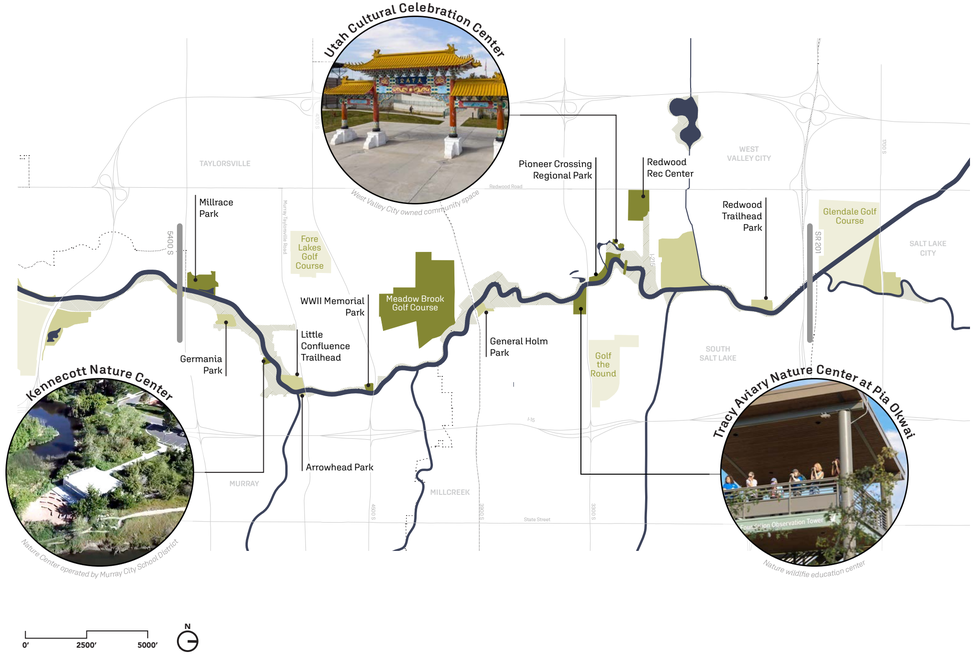
Organized activities help maximize the use of public spaces, transforming them into vibrant places that encourage active participation and healthy lifestyles. They provide accessible avenues for individuals to enjoy nature, exercise, or learn new skills. Public space programming also serves to make parks more inclusive by offering free or low-cost events for all, regardless of socioeconomic status. Well-executed events can also contribute to environmental awareness, community activism, and cultural appreciation. Increased programming along the Central Jordan River could increase visitorship, awareness, and stewardship for the river.

THE UTAH SYMPHONY AT THE UTAH CULTURAL CELEBRATION CENTER
SOURCE: THE UTAH CULTURAL CELEBRATION CENTER

GUIDED NATURE WALKS AT TRACY AVIARY NATURE CENTER AT PIA OKWAI
SOURCE: TRACY AVIARY

Gathering Spaces + Destinations

Destinations and anchor institutions play a vital role in providing amenities, attractions, and programming along the river. Currently, the three largest destinations are the Utah Cultural Celebration Center, the Tracy Aviary Nature Center at Pia Okwai, and the Kennecott Nature Center (only open to Murray public schools). Providing more destinations and gathering spaces could help to draw more people to the river and create a larger sense of community.



Events + Partnerships

Getting people out to the river is essential for it to be a valued public space. The Jordan River Commission makes this a focus of their programming, especially with events like Get to the River Month in September and the Golden Spoke Bike Ride. Partner institutions like the Utah Cultural Celebration Center can co-host events. More active programming and events could bring more visitors to the river and would require active and healthy partnerships between all the invested institutions and groups.

THE JRC'S ANNUAL GET TO THE RIVER MONTH KAYAK TRIP.
SOURCE: 'FESTIVAL CELEBRATES THE JOYS OF THE JORDAN RIVER', DESERT NEWS, SEPT 7 2018

THE JRC HOSTS VOLUNTEER EVENTS TO PICK UP LITTER OR PULL PUNCTURE VINE WEEDS ALONG THE TRAIL.
SOURCE: JORDAN RIVER COMMISSION, 2024

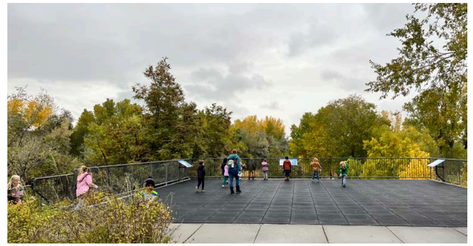
THE JRC AND THE UTAH CULTURAL CELEBRATION CENTER CO-HOST EVENTS AS A PART OF GET TO THE RIVER MONTH.
SOURCE: JORDAN RIVER COMMISSION, 2024

Nature Education

Education about the natural environment is an important part of creating stewardship for the land and parks. Currently, institutions like Tracy Aviary and the Kennecott Nature Center provide valuable nature based education and programming. Informational signage can also help to expand visitors' understanding of the landscapes around them. Signage and educational programming along the Central Jordan River could be expanded to include more visitors and cover broader areas.

EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE IN REDWOOD NATURE AREA EXPLAINS THE VITAL FUNCTIONS OF WETLANDS

TRACY AVIARY NATURE CENTER PROVIDES FREQUENT NATURE-BASED EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING.
SOURCE: TRACY AVIARY ON X



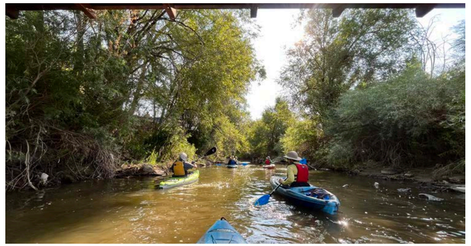
THE KENNECOTT NATURE CENTER PROVIDES AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM FOR STUDENTS IN THE MURRAY SCHOOL DISTRICT TO LEARN ABOUT THE RIVER

Active

Conclusion

The Central Jordan River currently provides great park amenities, programming, and gathering spaces. However, these amenities are often overlooked or not used. Increasing the quality and quantity of facilities, amenities, and events could help increase awareness and use of the river corridor. Expanding the current facilities like restrooms, water fountains, picnic pavilions, benches, trash cans, etc. will be vital to have a well functioning and hospitable regional destination. Meanwhile providing better amenities like boat launches, kayak rentals, bike rentals, various types of trails, and improved facilities for active recreation could draw new users.

Making a vibrant, active, and inclusive Central Jordan River will rely on balancing areas for active and passive recreation. Popular activities like biking and walking on the trails should continue to be invested in, while less popular activities like kayaking can be increased through better programming and improved facilities.



KAYAKING IN THE JORDAN RIVER, AT LITTLE COTTONWOOD CREEK

BIKES ON THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL IN TAYLORSVILLE

VIEW FROM THE TRAILS NEAR KENNECOTT NATURE CENTER

Central Jordan River
RECONNECT

STEWARDED

Site Analysis

(Updated June 2025) December 2024 | Prepared by PORT

The Central Jordan River should be

STEWARDED

TheCentral Jordan River Reconnect project presents a pivotal opportunity to redefine the relationship between the river and its surrounding communities, as well as between those agencies and organizations whose work impacts the river. As development continues to evolve along the river corridor, the necessity for a well-coordinated approach to park management, safety, and zoning becomes increasingly apparent. This project crosses through five different municipalities—South Salt Lake, West Valley, Taylorsville, Millcreek, and Murray—complicating administrative efforts and underscoring the necessity for cohesive strategies tailored to each area's unique regulations, priorities, and communities. The proximity of Salt Lake City further amplifies the importance of coordination between the county and each of the cities to ensure that park improvements and policies align effectively across jurisdictional boundaries.

Success will rely heavily on long-term collaboration among local governments, private property owners, park managers, social service providers, and community stakeholders. Engaging all stakeholders and maintaining alignment will be critical to achieving a unified vision for the park's management and upkeep. This complexity underscores the importance of ongoing partnerships that can adapt and evolve over time, ensuring that the park is sustainably stewarded for future generations. The success of the Central Jordan River Reconnect project depends on careful management and collaboration.

- Park Maintenance and Safety:
  Ensuring that the park is well-maintained, safe, and accessible is crucial. Regular upkeep and clear safety protocols will foster a welcoming environment for all visitors.

- Social Services and Collaboration:
  Working with local social service providers, alongside city and county agencies, is key to fostering well-being and cohesion for both residents and park users.

- Zoning and Land Use:
  Each municipality's approach to zoning varies, which results in inconsistent protections for the river's natural and recreational resources. Coordinating these efforts will create a cohesive and sustainable park system.

EACH MUNICIPALITY HAS A DISTINCT APPROACH TO ENGAGING WITH THE RIVER, SHAPED BY ITS COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND LAND USE PATTERNS.

Stewarded

Management + Maintenance

For the Central Jordan River Reconnect project, addressing safety concerns and ensuring consistent maintenance is vital to creating a functional and inviting park. Public safety issues, particularly near Salt Lake City and South Salt Lake, include reports of drug-related activity, homelessness, and limited law enforcement presence. Residents and stakeholders have emphasized the need for enhanced lighting, improved visibility, and more frequent patrols to increase safety along the trail.

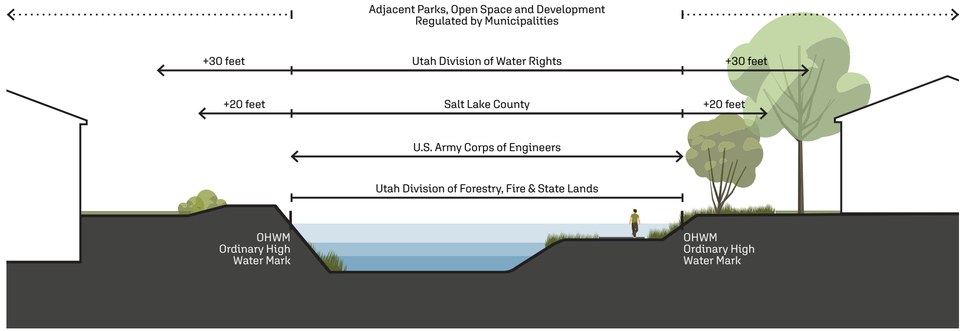
The amount of funding, staff, and capacity for maintenance also varies widely across the cities within the study area. Some cities, such as Murray, have invested in well-maintained trails and public open space along the river, resulting in more frequent use and the perception of the river as an asset to local residents. Other cities, such as South Salt Lake, have less capacity to put towards maintenance and upkeep along the river, and thus rely on help from Salt Lake County. This disparity underscores the need for a unified approach to maintenance and safety across the entire Central Jordan River to ensure all sections are safe, accessible, and enjoyable for visitors.

DREDGING OCCURS AT LITTLE COTTONWOOD CONFLUENCE TO MAINTAIN THE FLOODWAY

VEGETATION ALONG THE FEDERALLY REGULATED LEVEES HAS TO BE FREQUENTLY MOWN TO ABIDE BY ARMY CORPS REGULATIONS.

Management Jurisdictions

The following agencies have jurisdiction over the river: Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands; Utah Division of Water Rights (permitting stream alterations); Salt Lake County Flood Control (flood control permits); and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The following offices oversee management of the Jordan River: State Historic Preservation Office (cultural resource compliance); Utah Division of Water Quality; Utah Division of Water Resources; Utah Division of Wildlife Resources; Salt Lake County; and local municipalities.



Parks + Rec Departments

Across Salt Lake County, the five cities in the study area, and Salt Lake City, there is a huge variety in the quantity of parks space that each entity oversees. Millcreek for example, a newly incorporated city, has 2,855 residents per acre of parkland, whereas Murray has 206 residents per acre of park land. Each parks and recreation department will have different goals, capacity, and vision for how the Jordan River can become an integral part of their overall park system

SALT LAKE COUNTY
Population: 1.166 million

1,714 Acres of Park Land
38 Acres of Park Land in Study Area

1,038 Acres of Golf Course

20 Park Facilities

TAYLORSVILLE
Population: 60,448

42.8 Acres in Study Area
309.2 Acres of Park Land

3 Park Facilities

WEST VALLEY
Population: 140,230

8.7 Acres in Study Area
181.6 Acres of Park Land

433 Acres of Golf Course

4 Park Facilities

SALT LAKE CITY
Population: 199,587

860.2 Acres of Park Land

1,016 Acres of Golf Course

MURRAY
Population: 50,637

79.8 Acres in Study Area
246.2 Acres of Park Land

144 Acres of Golf Course

3 Park Facilities

MILLCREEK
Population: 63,380

4.2 Acres in Study Area
22.2 Acres of Park Land

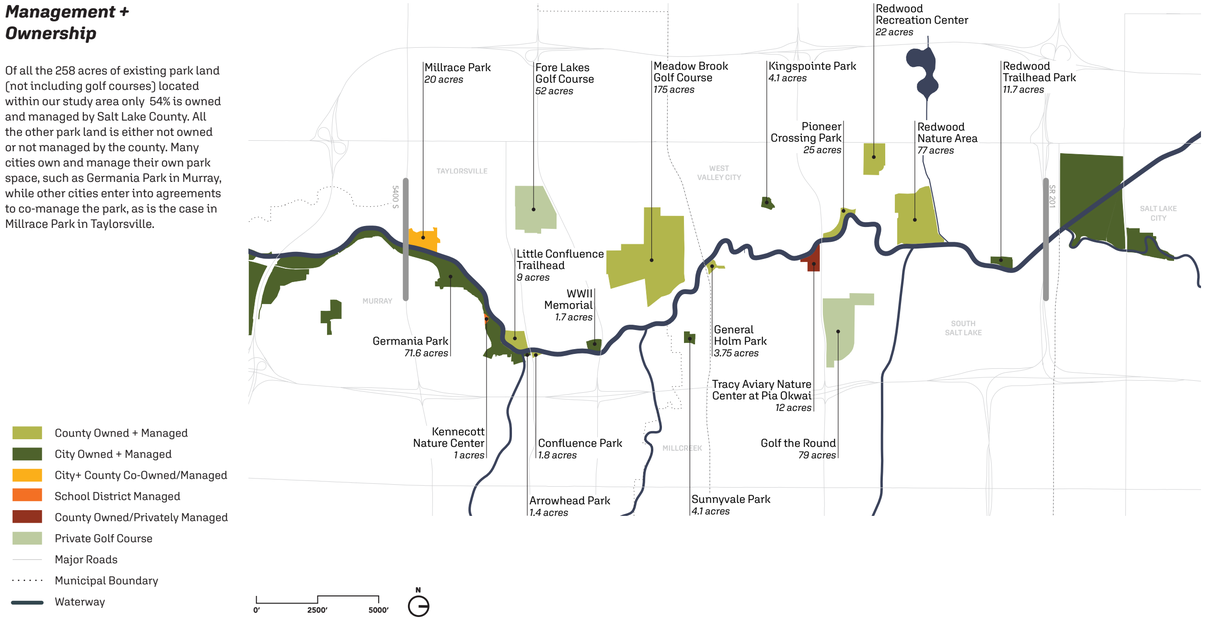
SOUTH SALT LAKE
Population: 26,277

25.2 Acres of Park Land

3 Park Facilities

Management + Ownership

Of all the 258 acres of existing park land (not including golf courses) located within our study area only 54% is owned and managed by Salt Lake County. All the other park land is either not owned or not managed by the county. Many cities own and manage their own park space, such as Germania Park in Murray, while other cities enter into agreements to co-manage the park, as is the case in Millrace Park in Taylorsville.



- County Owned + Managed
- City Owned + Managed
- City+ County Co-Owned/Managed
- School District Managed
- County Owned/Privately Managed
- Private Golf Course
- Major Roads
- Municipal Boundary
- Waterway

Stewarded

A Culture of Volunteering

Salt Lake County, semi-governmental organizations like the Jordan River Commission, and non-profits like Tree Utah have a strong history of collaborating to coordinate volunteer efforts to improve the river corridor. These partnerships can fund and direct helpful volunteer activities like pulling puncturevine weed, or removing trash from the river. Beyond that, these partnerships can be critical in helping to develop a public that cares for and stewards the river.

The more that residents of Salt Lake County view the river as an asset to be protected and cared for, the more impactful and valuable public space along the river becomes. Other organizations like the Tracy Aviary Nature Center at Pia Okwai, Seven Canyons Trust, the Trust for Public Lands have also been partners in hosting volunteer events and fostering a sense of stewardship and community for the Jordan River.

#LOVEYOURWATERSHED INITIATED CREATED BY JORDAN RIVER COMMISSION TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNITIES TO LEARN ABOUT STORMWATER AND WATER QUALITY.
SOURCE: JORDAN RIVER COMISSION

EARTHDAY VOLUNTEER SOCIAL MEDIA POST
SOURCE: JORDAN RIVER COMISSION INSTAGRAM

CLEAN UP EVENT AT MILL CREEK CONFLUENCE
SOURCE: SEVEN CANYONS TRUST

PUNCTURE VINE PULLS HELP REMOVE THE NUISANCE WEED
SOURCE: JORDAN RIVER COMISSION

TREE UTAH VOLUNTEERS PLAN NUMEROUS SAPLINGS ALONG THE JORDAN RIVER
SOURCE: TREE UTAH

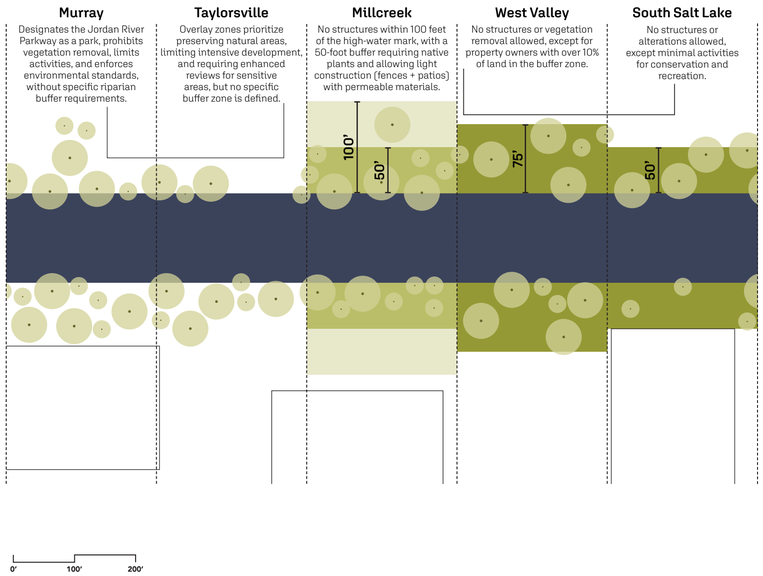
NUMEROUS GROUPS VOLUNTEER WITH THE JRC IN CLEAN UPS AND PLANTING DAYS
SOURCE: JORDAN RIVER COMMISSION

Stewarded

Riparian Buffers

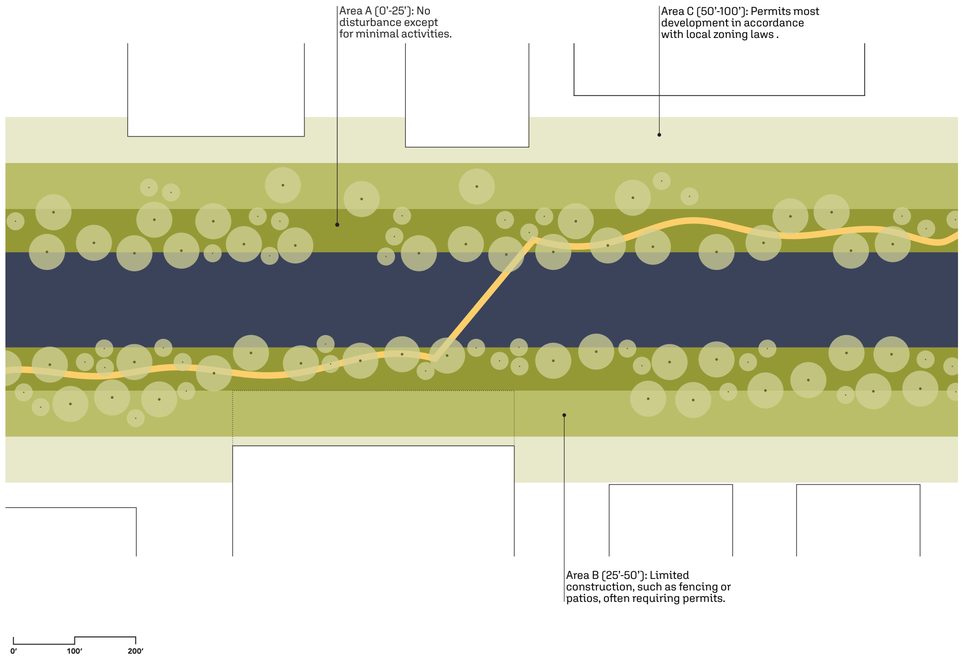
Riparian buffers are ordinances that protect a certain offset of the river from certain development activities. They can range from quite loose recommendations for best planning practices, to strict regulations that direct how development along the river corridor is allowed to proceed. Many municipalities or counties across the United States use riparian buffers to protect the vital habitat along rivers and streams, as well as to ensure the ecological benefits of maintaining these areas, such as reduced downstream flooding and filtering out pollutants. Riparian buffers that maintain vegetation along the banks of the river or stream can also aid in limiting erosion, reducing sediment load, creating ecological niches for particular species, improving water quality, and protecting valuable wetland habitat. Often, buffers use three zones with set offsets from the rivers banks to determine what practices should and shouldn't be allowed within those areas. These typically create a gradient of protection for waterways that is the most restrictive near the banks, and less restrictive as you move away from the river's edge. While riparian buffers can be crucial policy tools for the protection of waterways, their implementation can be complicated by the fact that rivers are dynamic and move over time. Thus, ensuring that there is adequate room for the river to meander within the boundaries of the riparian buffer is important when determining the width of the buffer zone.

Current Riparian Buffers



Riparian Buffer Best Practices

The Jordan River Commission released a guide for how communities can implement riparian buffers and other protections for the Jordan River in 2013, called Best Practices for Riverfront Communities. In this document they advocate for communities to implement buffers with a focus on creating buffers of at least 50' wide. As they note, buffers of 150' to 200' provide the greatest opportunity for the provision of habitat, recreation, and flood control.



Stewarded

Land Use + Zoning

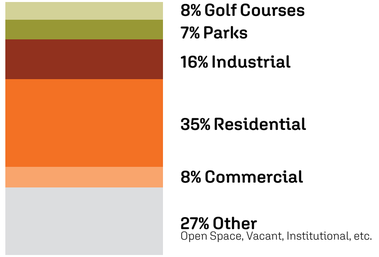
Our analysis of land use and zoning patterns along the Central Jordan River reveals a diverse and varied approach to how municipalities utilize land adjacent to the river. The following key findings illustrate the differing relationships between the river and surrounding communities, while tying in lessons learned from previous planning efforts.

- Residential Zoning Dominates the West: In West Valley and Taylorsville, large parcels along the west side of the river are predominantly zoned for mobile homes, with a mix of single-family and multi-family residential areas on both sides of the river. These residential zones are well-positioned to benefit from enhanced river access and improved recreational amenities.

- Limited Commercial Presence: Commercial land uses are notably scarce near the river. Most commercial activity is concentrated further east along I-15 or west along Redwood Road, leaving the riverfront largely free of commercial development. This creates an opportunity to maintain the river's natural and recreational character while still supporting nearby residential communities.

- Industrial and Institutional Concentrations in South Salt Lake: The northeastern portion of our study area, particularly in South Salt Lake, features large industrial parcels adjacent to the river. This area is also home to major institutional and government-run facilities, including the Salt Lake County Metro Jail, Oxbow Jail, Central Valley Water Reclamation Facility, and Union Pacific Roper Terminal. These land uses present challenges for future riverfront development, as they may deter new investment and residential growth in the immediate vicinity.

- Residential Focus in Taylorsville and Murray: The southern part of the study area, particularly in Taylorsville and Murray, is more residential in character. These areas benefit from a greater number of residents living within walking distance of existing trail access points, presenting a significant opportunity for community engagement and park use.

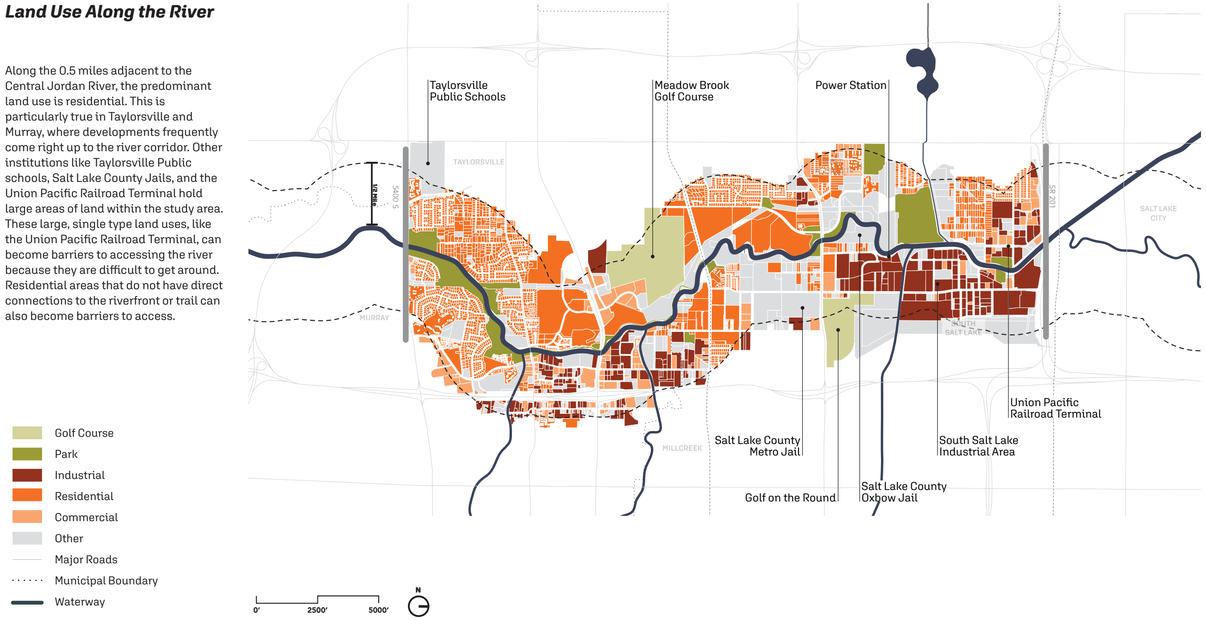


8% Golf Courses
7% Parks
16% Industrial
35% Residential
8% Commercial
27% Other
Open Space, Vacant, Institutional, etc.

PERCENTAGE OF LAND USE WITHIN A HALF-MILE OF THE RIVER

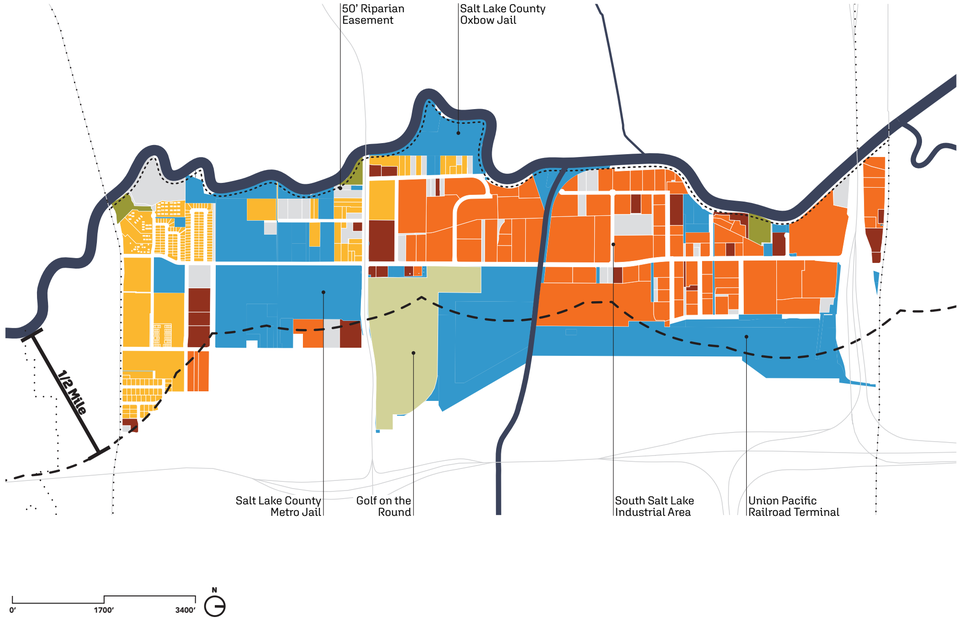
Land Use Along the River

Along the 0.5 miles adjacent to the Central Jordan River, the predominant land use is residential. This is particularly true in Taylorsville and Murray, where developments frequently come right up to the river corridor. Other institutions like Taylorsville Public schools, Salt Lake County Jails, and the Union Pacific Railroad Terminal hold large areas of land within the study area. These large, single type land uses, like the Union Pacific Railroad Terminal, can become barriers to accessing the river because they are difficult to get around. Residential areas that do not have direct connections to the riverfront or trail can also become barriers to access.



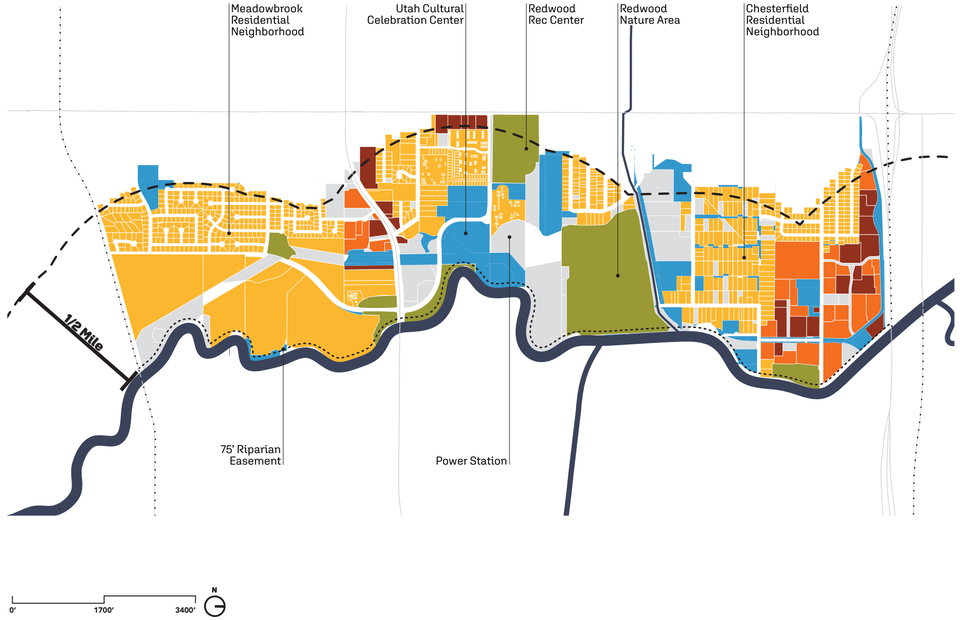
Current Land Use: South Salt Lake

Current land use in South Salt Lake within ½ mile of the river is a mix of institutional and industrial use, with a small amount of residential use on the southern side. South Salt Lake is the smallest community in all of Salt Lake County but has a large amount of land dedicated to Salt Lake County institutional uses like the Metro Jail and Oxbow Jail. Downtown South Salt Lake is disconnected from the river by I-15 and the railroad terminal, which makes connections like 3300 S all the more vital.



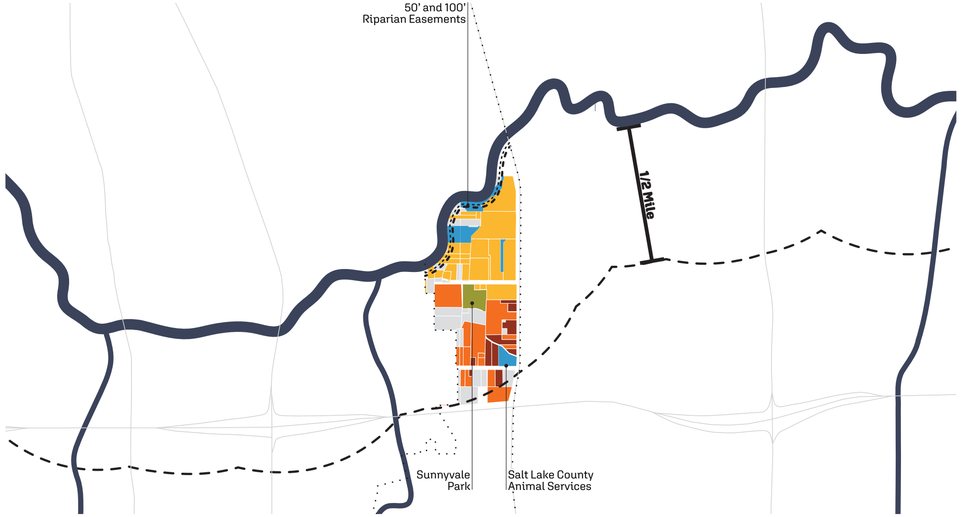
Current Land Use: West Vallley City

Current land use in West Valley within ½ mile of the river is largely residential, with some industrial, commercial, and institutional land use, particularly in the north. Large land users in the area include the Utah Cultural Celebration Center, Redwood Rec Center and Nature Area, and a power station. Larger developments of mobile homes occupy the areas adjacent to the river in the south, while single family homes are predominantly in the north.



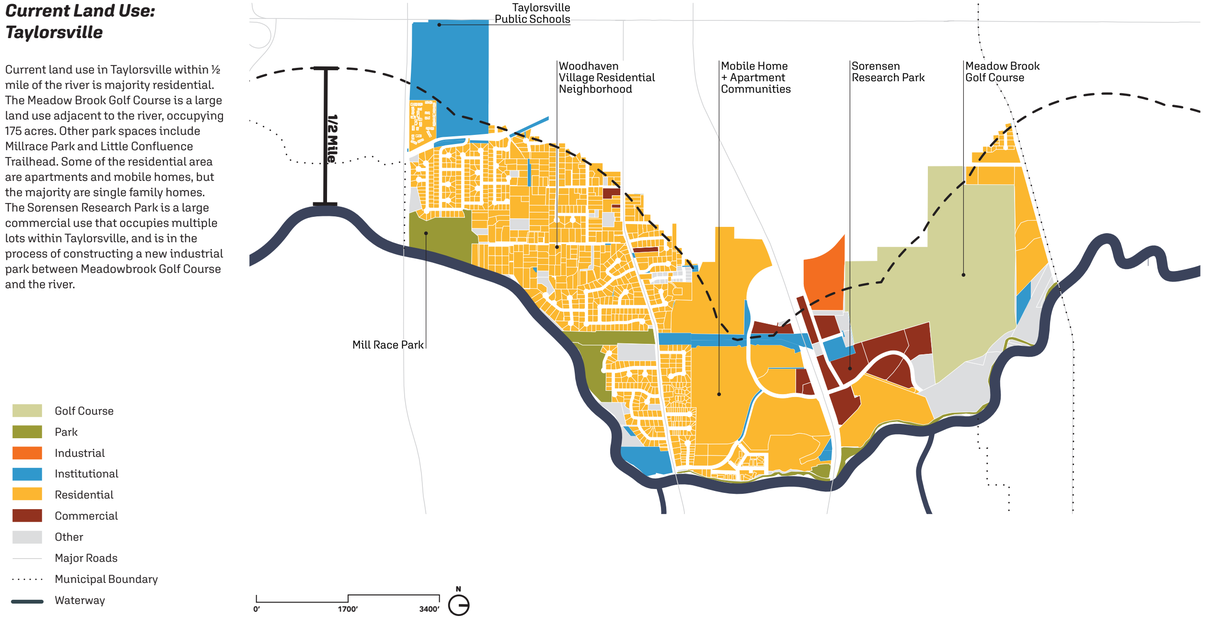
Current Land Use: Millcreek

The section of Millcreek that touches the Jordan River is quite narrow. Current land use in within ½ mile of the river is a mix of residential, industrial, commercial, and some smaller areas of institutional land use. There are no large plots of land in this area, and the only open park space is Sunnyvale Park.



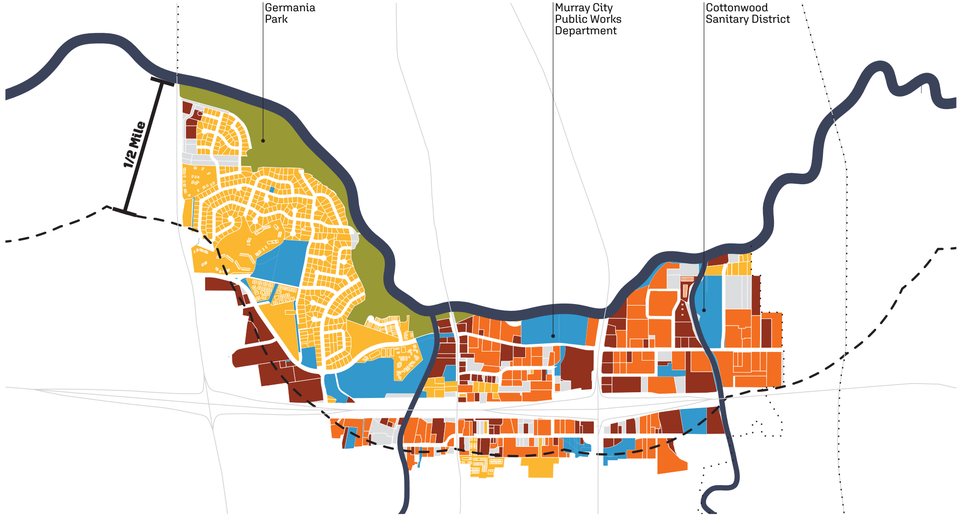
Current Land Use: Taylorsville

Current land use in Taylorsville within ½ mile of the river is majority residential. The Meadow Brook Golf Course is a large land use adjacent to the river, occupying 175 acres. Other park spaces include Millrace Park and Little Confluence Trailhead. Some of the residential area are apartments and mobile homes, but the majority are single family homes. The Sorensen Research Park is a large commercial use that occupies multiple lots within Taylorsville, and is in the process of constructing a new industrial park between Meadowbrook Golf Course and the river.



Current Land Use: Murray

Current land use in Murray within ½ mile of the river is a mix of residential, park space, institutional, commercial, and industrial. South of Murray Taylorsville Road is primarily single family residential, while north of this is a mixed industrial and commercial area that includes the Murray City Public Works building and Cottonwood Sanitary District. Germania Park and Kennecott Nature Center create a large area of park space between Murray Taylorsville Road and 5400 S.



LAND USE ADJACENT TO THE JORDAN RIVER

Stewarded

Community Well-Being

Working with local social service providers, alongside city and county agencies, is key to understanding the dynamics that shape both public safety and community well-being in the Central Jordan River corridor. The presence of unhoused individuals, reports of drug use, and broader public safety concerns are well-documented issues in the study area.

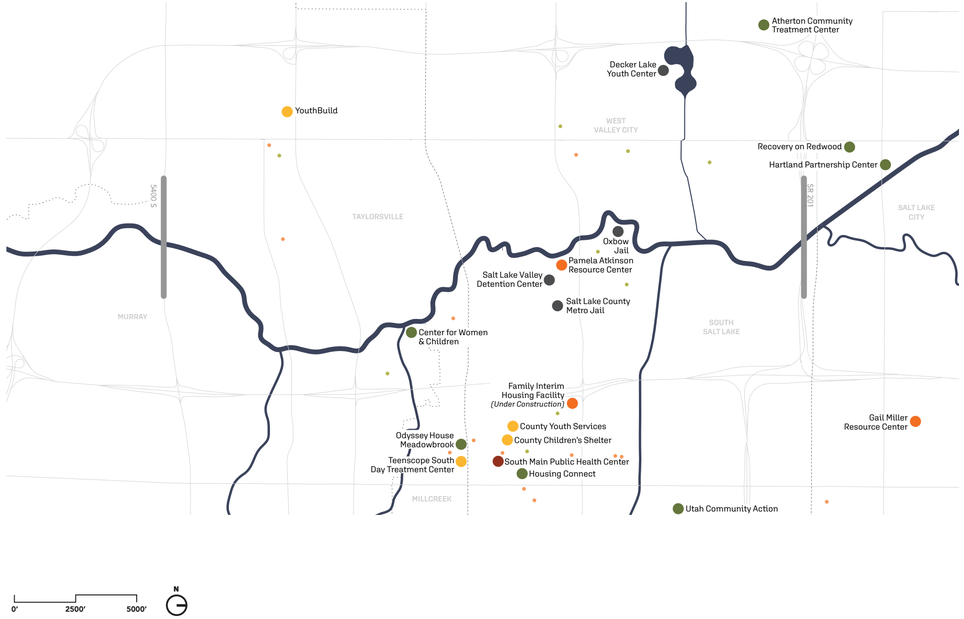
These issues have direct implications for how the future park will be designed and managed, as public perceptions of safety can influence how frequently the park is used and how it integrates with surrounding communities.

PAMELA ATKINSON RESOURCE CENTER
SOURCE: AJC ARCHITECTS

THE JORDAN RIVER WITH OXBOW JAIL IN THE FOREGROUND

Service Providers + Resource Centers

Throughout the study area there are a wide range of types of service providers and resource centers. The Pamela Atkinson Resource Center is a valuable center for single men that is operated by The Road Home and provides crisis services such as beds, showers, meals, and connections to job development and mental health resources. As the population of unhoused people has grown, centers like this as well as long-term housing are important steps in Utah's Housing First model.



Centers of Community Resources

Hubs for community resources often occupy larger plots of land and create destinations within the urban fabric. They are integral to the overall health and wellbeing of a community and can be valuable partners in the development of open space and recreative amenities for public health and wellbeing.

SOUTH MAIN PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER
SOURCE: UNIVERSITY OF UTAH HEALTH

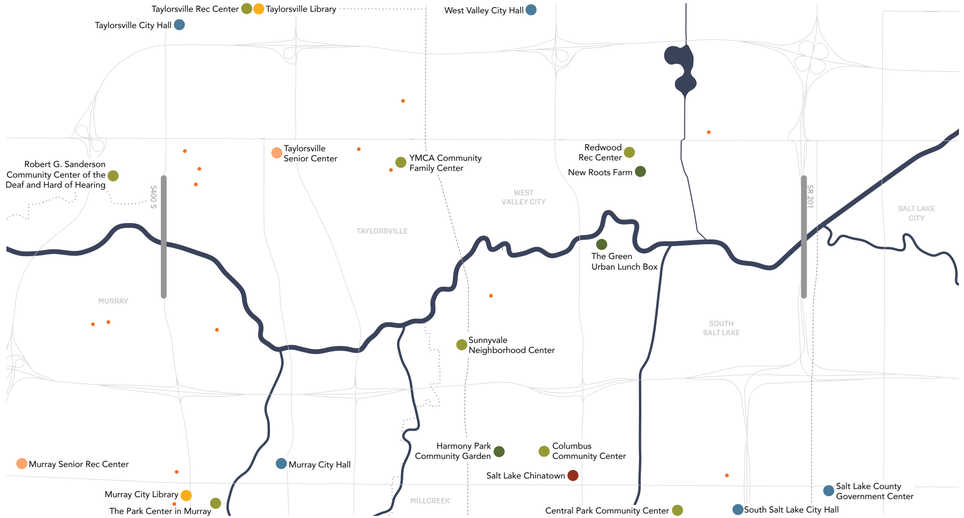
THE HUB OF OPPORTUNITY
SOURCE: ENVISION ENGINEERING

THE UTAH FOOD BANK
SOURCE: MILL HOUSE MEDIA

GAIL MILLER RESOURCE CENTER
SOURCE: SHELTER THE HOMELESS

Community Resources

Local places for community gathering are an important part of the urban fabric. Libraries, rec centers, senior centers, community gardens and other county, city, and independent institutions provide valuable programming and services. These spaces can serve as anchoring institutions with a community and help to foster connection. Redwood Recreation Center and New Roots Farm are two providers that are directly linked to the Central Jordan River Study Area.



- Local Government
- Community/Rec Center
- Senior Center
- Library
- Community Garden
- Community Group
- School
- Major Roads
- Municipal Boundary
- Waterway

Stewarded

Public Perception

The Central Jordan River evokes mixed perceptions among Salt Lake County Residents. Often, the river and adjacent trail are seen as being a great natural resource that provides green space, habitat, and an urban respite for visitors. However, perceptions abound that the river is unclean and unsafe. In some places within the study area the limited maintenance has led to overgrown vegetation (particularly invasive vegetation) that limits sightlines and increases feelings of unease for visitors. In other areas the lack of trashcans along the trail and the presence of debris in the river reinforces the idea that this is a highly impaired and dirty landscape. Since lighting is not present along the entire length of the trail many users limit their activities to daylight hours for fear of safety concerns. The presence of an unhoused population residing along the river further increases safety concerns for some visitors.

All of these concerns compound to create a perception that for some, means that the river is not safe or is not worth visiting. Tackling these conditions and changing the often long-held public perceptions about the river will require sustained investment, outreach, and education.

A TOY CAR IN THE JORDAN RIVER ON THURSDAY, SEPT. 26, 2024.
SOURCE: RICK EGAN | THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

BEND IN THE RIVER PARK'S POOR MAINTENANCE IS PICTURED ALONGSIDE THE JORDAN RIVER IN SALT LAKE CITY ON THURSDAY, SEPT. 19, 2024.
SOURCE: FRANCISCO KJOLSETH | THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

News Coverage

News coverage of the Jordan River gives an insight into how Utahns view the Jordan River and its adjacent trail. While some news coverage might sensationalize the issues present along the trail, these conversations are part of the public dialogue about how the river is cared for and maintained. Throughout the majority of articles, there is a clear message that residents would like to see the river better cared for.

The Jordan River Trail isn't living up to its potential. The Tribune's 'Trail of neglect' series explores why, and what might change.

The river and its trail play host to unsheltered homelessness and rampant drug activity in Salt Lake City, but new ideas are on the table that could change how residents interact with the corridor.

The Salt Lake Tribune | Jose Davila IV| Nov. 1, 2024, 8:00 a.m.

Utahns want a cleaner, more wild Jordan River, with improved safety.

A survey taken as more Utahns enjoy the Jordan River during the coronavirus pandemic shows they want the urban waterway cleaned up and made more accessible.

The Salt Lake Tribune | Tony Semerad | Oct. 5, 2020, 10:28 a.m

Increasing number of garbage islands forming on Jordan River.

Environmental advocates, along with golfers at a Salt Lake City course, have noticed more and more "garbage islands" forming on the Jordan River recently.

Fox13 News | Jenna Bree | Sep. 18, 2023, 11:58 p.m.

Salt Lake City parks are getting new funding. But can upkeep stay on top of new assets?

Residents often criticize the city's maintenance of its existing parks, but new funding is coming.

The Salt Lake Tribune | Jose Davila IV and Jordan Miller | Sep. 29, 2024, 8:00 a.m.

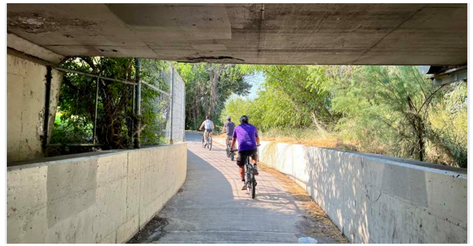
The Jordan River Trail is a bit nicer south of Salt Lake City. Why is that?

The Jordan River Trail runs for over 46 miles, 35 of which lie south of Utah's capital.

The Salt Lake Tribune | Jose Davila IV | Oct. 21, 2024, 5:00 a.m.

Sightlines Along the Trail

In many areas of the trail underpasses, dense vegetation, fences, or other physical barriers decrease visibility along the trail. The lack of visibility in these areas can increase feelings and perceptions of the trail being unsafe.



DARK UNDERPASSES, FENCES AND HIGH VEGETATION LIMIT VISIBILITY ALONG THE JORDAN RIVER TRAIL.

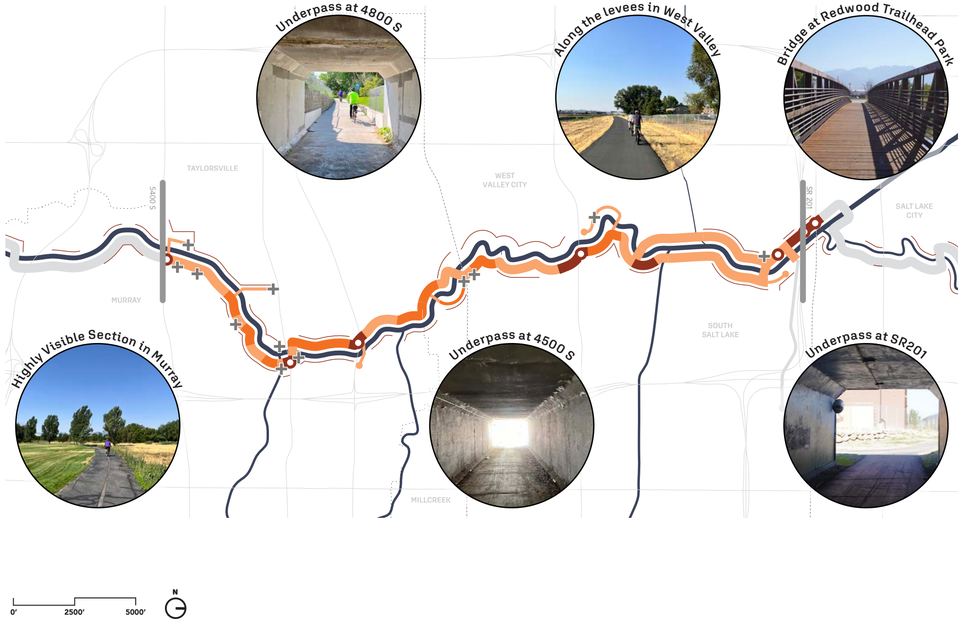
HIGH VISIBILITY NEAR RESIDENTIAL AREAS.

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES OFFER SAFE ROAD CROSSINGS AND BETTER VISIBILITY COMPARED TO TUNNELS AND UNDERPASSES.

FENCING BETWEEN THE TRAIL AND PRIVATE PROPERTY RESTRICTS ACCESS AND LIMITS SIGHTLINES FROM NEARBY DEVELOPMENTS.

Visibility Along the Trail

The graphic to the right classifies segments of the Jordan River Trail based on the visibility along these segments. Low visibility areas are often coupled with areas of enclosure like underpasses and fences, while high visibility areas typically have mid to low height vegetation, and have more space on either side of the trail.



Lighting Along the River

The Jordan River Trail is unlit, except for areas that run through existing city or county parks. This limits the use of the trail to daytime hours, and particularly impacts people who do or might use the trail as a commuting corridor.

SOLAR POWERED LIGHTING ALONG PATHS IN PIONEER CROSSING REGIONAL PARK.

PARKING AREAS LIKE REDWOOD TRAILHEAD PARK ARE EQUIPPED WITH LIGHT POLES, THOUGH NOT ALL ARE OPERATIONAL.

MANY STRETCHES OF THE TRAIL LACK ANY LIGHTING, WITH WOODED AREAS RECEIVING ONLY MINIMAL SPILLOVER FROM NEARBY DEVELOPMENTS.

TRAIL TUNNELS AND UNDERPASSES ARE COMPLETELY UNLIT, CREATING PINCH POINTS WITH VERY LOW VISIBILITY.

Trash + Debris Along the River

Debris and trash within and along the river corridor has long been an issue, and increases the perception that the river is not cared for. The river has historically been used by industries as well as individuals as a dumping ground, and the legacy of that is still event in some places today.

TRASH VISIBLE WHILE KAYAKING ALONG THE RIVER

FREQUENTLY TRASH GETS CAUGHT IN THE WOODY DEBRIS ALONG THE RIVER BANKS

TRASH STUCK IN RIPARIAN VEGETATION CAN BE DIFFICULT TO ACCESS AND CLEAN UP

THE JORDAN RIVER COMISSION ORGANIZES CANOE CLEAN UPS ALONG THE RIVER

Stewarded

Conclusion

The Central Jordan River is a vital natural resource that offers both ecological and recreational benefits, but its stewardship and perception are complicated by ongoing challenges. While it provides green space, habitat, and a much-needed urban respite, areas of the river and its adjacent trail suffer from limited maintenance, overgrown vegetation, trash, and debris. These conditions contribute to the perception that the river is unclean and unsafe, with issues such as poor visibility, a lack of lighting, and the presence of an unhoused population further deterring potential users. These challenges are particularly prominent in certain areas, where safety concerns and the need for consistent upkeep have made the trail less inviting.

This planning study aims to improve the river's condition to address these issues through enhanced maintenance, better safety measures, more collaboration amongst stakeholders, and engagement with the communities surrounding the river. However, the success of this initiative depends on long-term collaboration across multiple agencies, municipalities, organizations, and stakeholders. A unified approach is needed to ensure that the river is accessible, safe, and well-cared for, with policies that protect both the natural environment and the well-being of local communities. With continued investment and coordination, the Central Jordan River can become a cleaner, safer, and more inviting space for all to enjoy.

DREDGING OF THE CHANNEL AT LITTLE COTTONWOOD CONFLUENCE

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ALONG THE RIVER
SOURCE: SEVEN CANYONS TRUST

VIEW ALONG THE TRAIL IN GERMANIA PARK

SALT LAKE COUNTY
PARKS & RECREATION

port

with:
Rio ASE
Ecosystem Services
PROS Consulting
PSOMAS
Horrocks Engineers
Zions Public Finance