

UTAH WATERSHEDS COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES



Meeting Information

January 12, 2026

1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Department of Natural Resources Auditorium
1594 W. North Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84116

Meeting Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RejPI9tWDG4>

Council Members present

- Scott Paxman, Chair, Reclamation Projects
- Sterling Brown, Vice Chair, Utah Lake Watershed Council
- Cody Allred, West Colorado River Watershed Council
- Laura Briefer, Jordan River Watershed Council
- Nathan Daug, Bear River Watershed Council
- Kris Hamlet, Utah Division of Emergency Management
- Joel Williams, Utah Division of Water Resources (non-voting member)
- Dustin Jansen, Utah Division of Indian Affairs
- Rikki Hrenko-Browning, Industrial Interests
- Andy Nickle, Sevier River Watershed Council
- Mike Noel, Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council
- Brett Palmer, West Desert Watershed Council
- Warren Peterson, Water Attorney
- Marcelle Shoop, Environmental Conservation Interests
- Rick Smith, Weber River Watershed Council
- Teresa Wilhelmsen, Utah Division of Water Rights/State Engineer (non-voting member)
- Bill Winfield, Southeastern Utah Watershed Council
- Peggy Killian, proxy for Dex Winterton, Uintah Watershed Council
- Tammy Pearson, Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council
- Robert Moore, Utah Association of Special Districts

Council Members not present

- Joel Ferry, Utah Department of Natural Resources
- Tim Davis, Utah Department of Environmental Quality
- Victor Iverson, Utah Association of Counties
- Ken White, USU Extension Vice President
- Kelly Pehrson, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
- ValJay Rigby, Agricultural Interest

Others present

- Carly Payne, Watershed Councils Coordinator
- Ashley Sampson
- Rachel Shilton
- Stephanie McGinnis
- Joel Williams
- Thomas Moore
- Eric Dixon
- Todd Stonely
- Shalaine De Bernardi
- Sarah Shechter
- Keith Larsen
- Rachel Balek
- Alisa Meyer
- Soren Simonsen
- Nathan Lunstad
- Belva Parr
- Laura Vernon

Meeting Minutes

1:08 - 1:10 p.m. - Welcome and roll call (Chair Scott Paxman)

Chair Scott Paxman led introductions of attending Utah Watersheds Council (UWC) members.

1:10 p.m. - Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council report (Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council)

Kanab Creek/Virgin River Watershed Council's presentation was rescheduled for the next Utah Watersheds Council meeting.

1:10 - 1:34 p.m. - Sevier River Watershed Council report (Andy Nickle with Sevier River Watershed Council)

Andy Nickle reported on behalf of the Sevier River Watershed Council. The council met three times this past year, including a tour of the Richfield area and Piute Canal. While this was the best attended meeting, it raised concerns regarding interest, participation and purpose. The Utah Watersheds Council explained that the primary goal of these local watershed councils is to build relationships and trust and to provide a venue to resolve conflicts. There was further discussion concerning responsibility and authority as it overlaps between the watershed councils, water users associations and water rights owners. To improve collaboration and attendance, it was suggested to schedule meetings for both groups on the same day within close proximity to better confer on related issues. It was also discussed that these meetings are intended to coordinate with other partners, including state and federal partners, with emphasis on the U.S. Forest Service. It was suggested to identify topics of concern at the start of each meeting to determine formal agenda items for subsequent meetings and to focus on topics of interest to stakeholders, such as farming, ranching and groundwater.

Paxman stated that anyone with ideas or suggestions should email himself or Carly Payne.

1:34 - 1:49 p.m. - Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council report (Tammy Pearson with Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council)

Tammy Pearson presented on behalf of the Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council. She highlighted several initiatives happening within their basin, including participation in the State Water Plan and a potential joint meeting with the Sevier River Watershed Council. The council took tours to both Parowan Canyon and Brian Head, where they learned about restoration efforts after wildfire. She shared similar concerns to those discussed by the Sevier River Watershed Council. Geographical barriers may also be impacting engagement, so improvements for virtual options were discussed, as well as alternating

meeting locations to different areas within the watershed. It was also suggested to combine efforts with other groups that share similar interests.

1:49 - 2:15 p.m. - State Water Plan update (Stephanie McGinnis with Utah Division of Water Resources)

Stephanie McGinnis, with the Utah Division of Water Resources, provided an update regarding the State Water Plan, which will be completed by the end of this year. Their team has met with local watershed councils to encourage engagement in the State Water Plan.

McGinnis recapped the plan and its current status. She requested the Utah Watersheds Council and local watershed councils to review the first draft of the plan, which will be sent out in late spring. She asked the councils to provide specific feedback regarding the recommendations at the end of each chapter.

It was suggested that the Utah Watersheds Council dedicate a meeting to review and discuss the draft.

The Utah Division of Water Resources plans to publish the draft for a public comment period in July 2026.

2:15 - 2:25 p.m. - Pre-legislative session update (Joel Williams, Utah Division of Water Resources)

Joel Williams gave an update on upcoming water related bills that will be introduced during the 2026 Utah Legislative Session.

Carly Payne will continue to send a weekly email update to all watershed councils to track legislation throughout the legislative session.

2:25 - 2:49 p.m. - Unified Water Infrastructure Plan comment period (Keith Larsen)

Keith Larsen with Bowen Collins and Associates gave a brief update on the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan. The draft plan was emailed to all Utah Watersheds Council members on Friday, January 9, 2026. Comments must be submitted by Friday, January 30, 2026, at 5 p.m.

Council Member Briefer left the meeting. Her alternate, Soren Simonsen, took her place.

2:49 - 2:51 p.m. - Strategic planning for future council meetings

Due to time constraints, the council skipped this agenda item. Chair Paxman instructed council members to email himself and Carly Payne with ideas or priorities for future council meetings. Payne previously distributed the list of suggested topics and asked members to consider those as they think of priorities for future meetings.

2:50 - 2:55 p.m. - Council business:

Approval of Meeting Minutes, October 14, 2025

Rick Smith moved to approve the October 14, 2025, meeting minutes. Bill Winfield seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Confirmation of local watershed council reporting schedule for 2026

- April 9, 2026: West Colorado River, Southeastern Utah, Great Salt Lake, Kanab Creek/Virgin River
- July 9, 2026: Bear River, Weber River, Utah Lake
- October 6, 2026: Jordan River, Uintah, West Desert

Paxman expressed appreciation for the local council reports, including when they discuss their challenges.

Confirm next meeting on Thursday, April 9, 2026 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. at DNR Auditorium in Salt Lake City, Utah

All 2026 meetings are currently planned to be held in Salt Lake City; however, Paxman noted the council is open to being hosted in other watersheds.

Tammy Pearson offered to host the council in Beaver with a tour of Beaver County's Shared Stewardship project.

2:54 - 2:56 p.m. - Public Comment

Belva Parr thanked Payne for the legislative update emails she has been sending to the watershed councils.

2:56 p.m. Adjourn

Soren Simonsen moved to adjourn the meeting. Marcelle Shoop seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Beaver-Cedar Watershed Council 2025 Annual Report



February 10th Meeting @ Enoch City Offices

- Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) project successes and application process presentation:
- * Nic Braithwaite of DWR presented various successful projects and mentioned that if anyone has an idea for a project, they should get in touch with him to get started. He and his agency, along with various other agencies, are skilled at steering potential project ideas to help them align better with what the approval committee is seeking.***
- * Nic recommends selecting someone from this council who can commit to attending the remaining two WRI meetings this year and possibly becoming a ranker next year.
- * The group would like to tour a completed WRI project as part of the next council meeting in May, along with a 30-minute discussion on the State Water Plan with Stephanie McGinnis, the State Water Plan Manager from the Division of Water Resources.
- * It was suggested that Kimball Holt could present at a future meeting on evapotranspiration differences between trees and grasses.


May 12th Meeting @ the Beaver County Commission Chambers

- At the May 12, 2025 Cedar-Beaver Watershed Council meeting, State Water Plan Manager Steph McGinnis outlined updates to the State Water Plan, including statutory changes requiring more frequent updates and mandatory collaboration with local entities such as watershed councils. The plan will feature nine chapters, including a new Basin Perspectives section based on local input, and aims to guide water-related decision-making at all levels. A survey will be distributed within 1–1.5 weeks to collect detailed, location-specific feedback, with results informing the plan and Chapter 8 in particular. Council members were encouraged to complete the survey, volunteer for a subcommittee to synthesize results, and assist with upcoming public scoping meetings. The plan is targeted for publication in December 2026. A project tour near Three Creeks reservoir followed.

May Meeting @ Beaver County Commission Chambers



Engagement - Subcommittee







- Vet and synthesize basin perspective survey submissions
- Request council feedback
- Meet remotely with WRe staff to discuss council recommendations for basin perspective content
- Provide initial review of WRe basin perspective content


Basin Perspective Help

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Unified Water Infrastructure Plan



- Water infrastructure entities that are seeking state funding need to add their project information to the Infrastructure Project Database to be eligible



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August 7th Meeting @ Enoch City Offices

- The Cedar-Beaver Watershed Council met to review ongoing and upcoming initiatives across the basin. Members approved previous minutes and discussed future meeting logistics, including the possibility of a joint session with the Sevier Watershed Council in November.
- Becca Frei presented survey findings informing the State Water Plan, highlighting water scarcity, groundwater depletion, and agricultural optimization successes. Plans were finalized for a public scoping meeting on October 1, 2025, in Cedar City to gather community input.
- Presentations on community and ecosystem challenges emphasized collaboration, water reuse, and watershed resilience. Jason Bradshaw outlined progress on the Parowan Valley Recharge Project and related flood mitigation efforts, supported by local and federal funding. The meeting concluded with site tours of local watershed restoration projects

Tour up Parowan Canyon, WRI projects and the Brian Head fire impacts & rehabilitation

Survey highlights for communities

Challenges

- growth and increased need for water, cost of infrastructure upgrades and repairs, state laws focused on Wasatch Front harm southern communities, groundwater management plans

Needs

- increased collaboration between public water suppliers and community partners, water reuse projects, education on waterwise landscaping, adopt ordinances to qualify for state funding for water conservation

Successes

- Cedar City groundwater recharge projects

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1:17 PM | Cedar/Beaver Watershed Council Meeting and ...

Participants: Becca Frei, Rick Webster, Terri Hartley, Amy Dickey, Cedar City

Survey highlights for healthy watersheds

Challenges

- Water quality impairments, pinyon-juniper encroachment, wildfire, decreasing groundwater recharge

Needs

- Increased collaboration among local, state, and federal partners. Sharing ideas and success stories across watershed councils and other entities.

Successes

- Watershed Restoration Initiative projects in the area

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Participants: Becca Frei, Rick Webster, Terri Hartley, Amy Dickey

Survey highlights for agriculture

Challenges

- water scarcity, concern for water rights curtailment, stress from developers, groundwater depletion

Needs

- increased funding for ag optimization projects, research into less water-intensive crops, understand impacts of ag optimization on groundwater recharge (USU study underway)

Successes

- Many successful ag optimization projects

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Participants: Becca Frei, Rick Webster, Terri Hartley, Amy Dickey

Tour up Parowan Canyon, WRI projects and the Brian Head fire impacts & rehabilitation



Former Iron County Commissioner Alma Adam's Tour of Impacts & Coordination Efforts after the Brian Head Fire



November 13th Online Meeting

- Due to the death of Jennifer Marshall, one of our dedicated Council members, our November 10th meeting was rescheduled for a quick online meeting.
- Minutes from the August meeting were approved.
- Next meeting was scheduled for January 16th.
- Elections for Board members and leadership will be on the agenda for the January meeting

State Water Plan Update: Progress and Next Steps

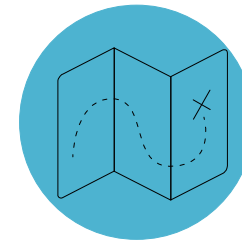
Division of Water Resources



Stephanie McGinnis | State Water Plan Manager
Division of Water Resources

Thank You

- Collaborative agencies
 - Directors
 - Staff
- Watershed councils
- Water conservancy districts
- WRe staff

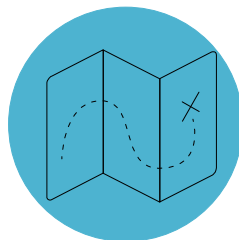


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Grounding: Utah Code § 73-10-15

- Framework to support informed decision-making
- Identify available water resources
- Recommend strategies
- Informed by local input

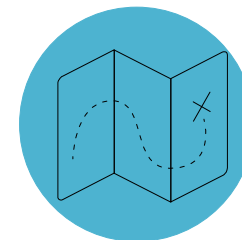


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Grounding: Utah Code § 73-10-15

- Consistent with existing state water policy (§ 73-1-21)
- References the UWIP
- Fosters communities and businesses
- Facilitates local agriculture
- Addresses outdoor recreation
- Provides for a healthy environment

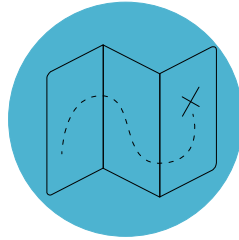


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Plan Vision

A safe, reliable water supply that sustains urban and rural communities, supports the economy and protects the environment now and into the future.

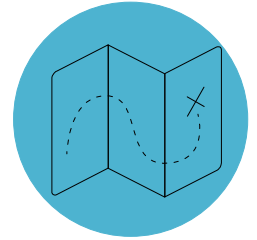


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Planning Principles

- Water Security
- Collaboration
- Stewardship

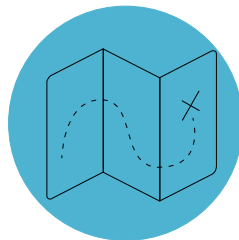


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Planning Principles

- Water Security
 - Prioritize decisions that reduce risk and ensure a safe, reliable, and resilient water supply under changing climatic, hydrologic, demographic, political and economic conditions

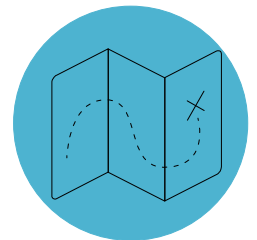


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Planning Principles

- Collaboration
 - Prioritize coordinated planning, shared responsibility, and aligned action across agencies, jurisdictions, sectors and partners

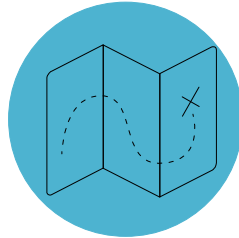


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Planning Principles

- **Stewardship**
 - Prioritize the responsible, efficient, and sustainable use of water to meet the needs of current and future generations



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Timeline



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Watershed Council Meetings

- Challenges
- Needs
- Successes
- Support for the public scoping meetings



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Watershed Council: Challenges

- **Challenges**
 - Water supply reliability and uncertainty
 - Watershed degradation and ecosystem stress
 - Pressure from growth and land use change
 - Capacity constraints



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Watershed Council: Challenges

- Water supply reliability and uncertainty
 - Increasing hydrologic variability
 - Declining groundwater levels and surface water reliability



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Watershed Council: Challenges

- Watershed degradation and ecosystem stress
 - Wildfire risk and post-fire impacts
 - Invasive species
 - Water quality concerns tied to land use change, recreation pressure, loss of riparian and wetland areas



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Watershed Council: Challenges

- Increasing pressure from growth and land use change
 - Population growth increases need for additional infrastructure
 - Balancing economic development with watershed protection and agricultural needs



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Watershed Council: Challenges

- Capacity constraints
 - Insufficient funding
 - Insufficient coordination
 - Limited staff time
 - Limited technical expertise



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Water Talks

- One held in each basin
- Approx. 250 attendees



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Present Time

- Drafts completed of most chapters
- Working with watershed councils to identify a success to highlight in the plan



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Chapter 1: Introduction

- Establishes the vision, purpose and goals
- Sets the framework for how the plan builds on previous plans and successes

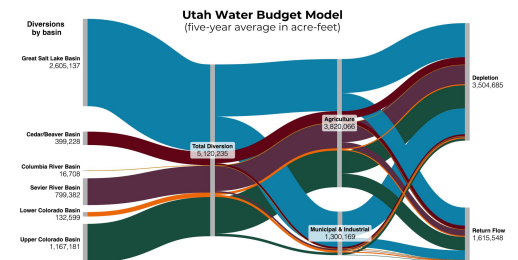


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Chapter 2: Water in Utah

- Constraints
- How supply and use are measured
- Current supply and use



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Chapter 3: Planning for Uncertainty

- Drivers of change
 - Climate
 - Population
- Adaptation strategies
 - Technology
 - Conservation
 - Policy
 - Management



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Chapter 4: Water Administration

- Who manages Utah's water
 - Role of state, regional and local entities
- Key laws, compacts and decrees
- Water rights
 - Federally reserved water rights
- Innovations in management and planning



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Chapter 5: Healthy Watersheds & Ecosystems

- Describe role of natural systems
- Connect watershed health to water quality, supply reliability, costs, etc.
- Identify threats (wildfire, invasives, etc.)



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Chapter 6: Vibrant Communities

- Importance of long-term planning
- Improve demand management
- Expand and optimize supply



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Chapter 7: Productive Agriculture

- Programs and funding opportunities
- Best management practices
 - Off-farm
 - On-farm



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Chapter 8: Basin Perspectives

- Devote 2-3 pages to each basin
 - Challenges
 - Needs
 - Successes



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What's Next

- Internal partner review (March)
 - Review and refinement
- External partner review (April)
 - Ground-truth recommendations
 - Provide feedback to support implementation



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Thank you.

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January 12, 2026

Utah Watersheds Council

Unified Water Infrastructure Plan (UWIP)



UWIP Legislative Timeline

- **March 1, 2026** – UWIP adopted by WDCC
 - Before adopting WDCC **must** provide draft to Utah Watersheds Council
 - Sent January 9, 2026 via email from Carly Payne
 - Comments Required by January 30, 2026



UWIP Summary

- UWIP Background
- Existing Funds and Historic Use
- UWIP Project List
- UWIP Recommended Funding Prioritization Requirements
- Recommendation to Legislature
 - Funding Level
 - Agency Funding Distribution



UWIP Recommended Funding Level

- Total Funding Requested: \$420 Mn/year
- Recommended Funding Level: \$200 Mn/year
 - Existing Reliable Funds: \$100 Mn/year
 - Additional UWIP Funding: \$100 Mn/year

| Agency | First \$50 Million (50% of WIF Funds) | | Second \$50 Million (second 50 percent of WIF Funds) | | Total Funding From WIF | |
|--------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| DDW | 40% | \$20 Mn/yr | 50% | \$25 Mn/yr | 45% | \$45 Mn/yr |
| DWQ | 30% | \$15 Mn/yr | 40% | \$20 Mn/yr | 35% | \$35 Mn/yr |
| WRe | 30% | \$15 Mn/yr | 10% | \$5 Mn/yr | 20% | \$20 Mn/yr |
| | Total | \$50 Mn/yr | | \$50 Mn/yr | | \$100 Mn/yr |



Next Steps

- Watersheds Council to Review UWIP
 - Received Document January 9, 2026
 - Comments Due January 30, 2026 at 5 pm
 - Comment PDF or email comments to rvalek@bowencollins.com
- UWIP Adopted March 1, 2026
- UWIP Funding Available July 2027 (If Approved)



Comments/Questions

