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Restoring the Great Salt Lake Ecosystem

April 30, 2026

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Restoring the Great Salt Lake Ecosystem

The Great Salt Lake—located in Utah—is the largest saline lake in the United States. The Great Salt Lake supports wetland habitat for shorebirds, migratory birds, and waterfowl. The lake also supports several economically important activities for the region, including tourism, recreation, the brine shrimp (*Artemia* sp.) industry, and mineral extraction. Over the past two decades, water levels in the lake have decreased, largely due to less water flowing into the lake, drought, and increasing temperatures. In October 2022, water levels in the lake were measured at record lows. In the past three years, water levels have risen, but they are still at levels considered harmful for the ecosystem.

Concern over sustained low water levels in the Great Salt Lake is shared by stakeholders and some Members of Congress due to the economic, environmental, and associated health impacts of low water levels, among other concerns. Decreasing water levels and increased salinity can adversely affect the lake's ecosystem, disrupting fish and wildlife populations and exposing dry lake bed to the air. In some areas, exposed lakebed contains toxic sediments. Winds and dust storms can aerosolize soils and transport toxins to areas inhabited by humans, potentially leading to health issues.

The State of Utah is spearheading efforts to increase water flows to the Great Salt Lake and restore the ecosystem in and around the lake. The state established the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner in 2023 and tasked the commissioner to create a plan for restoring the lake. In 2024, the commissioner released *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan*, which aims to restore the lake while balancing ecological, economic, and societal interests. The state government also implemented regulations that aim to maintain water flows into the lake and several measures to address water conservation that aim to help the lake retain or receive more water.

One federal government initiative by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and some national-level programs address ecosystem restoration and water levels in the Great Salt Lake. In 2025, Reclamation provided $50 million to Utah to fund voluntary water transactions, water conservation, and ecosystem restoration to benefit the lake. The Trump Administration requested $1.0 billion for the Department of the Interior (DOI) for FY2027 to lead a comprehensive federal restoration program. The governor of Utah also requested funds from the Administration to restore the lake, and the Utah state legislature passed a resolution asking for federal involvement in lake restoration.

Congress may consider several issues to address the restoration of the Great Salt Lake, including (1) whether to appropriate funding for science and monitoring to inform lake restoration, (2) whether to support state efforts to increase water flows to the lake, (3) monitoring and evaluating air quality and public health concerns caused by exposed lakebed, and (4) whether to authorize and appropriate funds for a federal or joint federal-state lake restoration initiative.

SUMMARY

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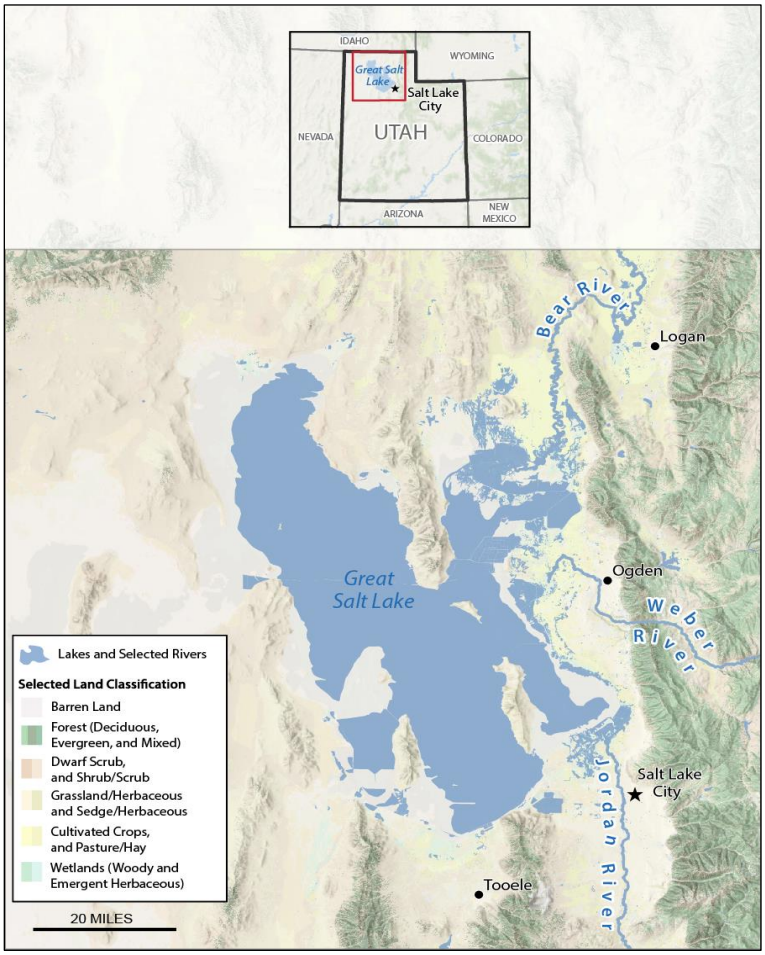
Background

The Great Salt Lake—located in Utah—is the largest saline lake in the United States (**Figure 1**).[1] The lake also supports wetland habitat for shorebirds, migratory birds, and waterfowl.[2] According to scientists, a healthy and functioning Great Salt Lake ecosystem increases precipitation, suppresses toxic dust storms, and can support 80% of Utah's wetlands.[3]

Figure 1. The Great Salt Lake



Source: Created by CRS using data representing the Great Salt Lake in December 2016, from the Utah Geospatial Resource Center, https://gis.utah.gov/data/water/lakes-rivers-dams/; U.S. Geological Survey National

[1] At a historic average elevation of 4,200 feet, the lake covers approximately 1,700 square miles. At its recorded high-water level, it covered approximately 3,300 square miles; at its recorded low-water level, it covered approximately 800 square miles. State of Utah, Great Salt Lake, "About," accessed January 3, 2026, https://greatsaltlake.utah.gov/about.

[2] Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Basin: Connections, Challenges and Solutions*, February 2, 2024, https://greatsaltlake.utah.gov/great-salt-lake-basin-story-map. Hereinafter, Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Basin.* The lake and surrounding areas support an estimated 10 million birds that represent over 300 species.

[3] Benjamin W. Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake from Ongoing Collapse*, Brigham Young University, January 4, 2023, https://pws.byu.edu/GSL%20report%202023. This is a peer-reviewed report by academic scientists that was supported by federal and state grants. Hereinafter, Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake.*

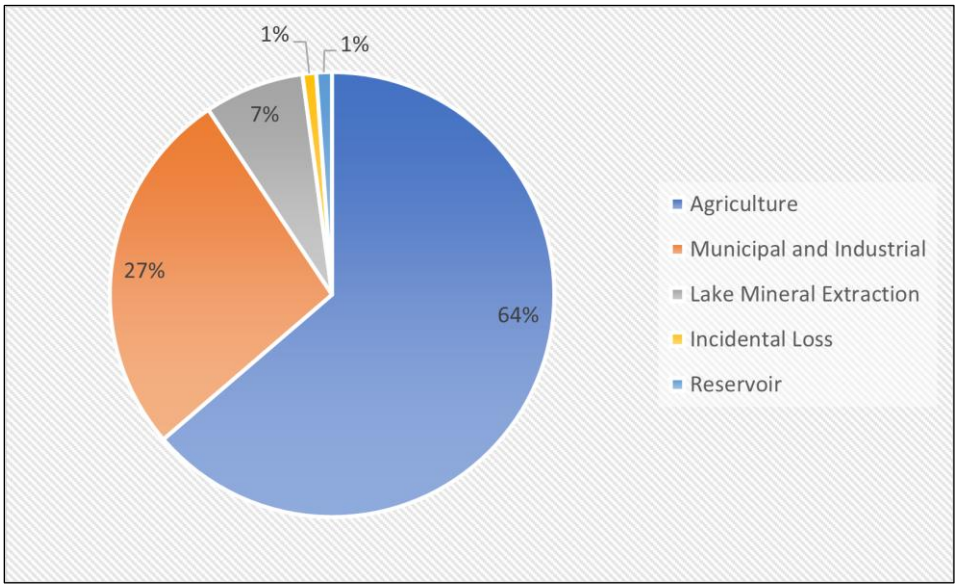
Hydrology Dataset, https://www.usgs.gov/national-hydrography/national-hydrography-dataset; Multi-Resolution Land Characteristics Consortium, https://www.mrlc.gov/; and Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), Terrain and Multi-Directional Hillside dataset.

The lake also supports several economic activities for the region, including tourism, recreation, the brine shrimp (*Artemia* sp.) industry, and mineral extraction.[4] Economic activities associated with the lake annually contribute approximately $1.9 billion to $2.5 billion to Utah's economy and provide about 14% and 40% of the world's magnesium and brine shrimp eggs (used for aquaculture), respectively.[5]

The lake and communities living within the Great Salt Lake Basin rely on water flowing from nearby mountains into the lake,[6] largely via the Bear, Jordan, and Weber Rivers. The Bear River provides approximately 64% of inflows to the lake; the Jordan and Weber Rivers provide 20% and 16% of inflows, respectively.[7] Some river flows are diverted for agriculture, municipal, and industrial water use activities, with the remaining water entering the lake (see **Figure 2**). The lake also receives water from groundwater flows, direct precipitation, wastewater treatment plants, and smaller tributaries.[8]

Figure 2. Proportion of Human-Related Uses of Water Depleted Before Entering the Great Salt Lake

(Annual average percentage depletion from 2000 to 2025)



Source: Adapted by CRS with data from the Utah Division of Water Resources, *Water Budget*, 2026.

[4] Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Basin*.

[5] Utah Division of Water Resources, "Great Salt Lake," https://water.utah.gov/great-salt-lake/; Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake;* and Great Salt Lake Advisory Council, "Great Salt Lake," https://lf-public.deq.utah.gov/WebLink/ElectronicFile.aspx?docid=11306&eqdocs=DWQ-2021-013131&dbid=0.

[6] Seasonal snowfall in the nearby mountains provides approximately 90%-95% of water for the Great Salt Lake Basin. Utah Department of Water Resources, "Snowpack," https://water.utah.gov/snowpack/.

[7] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary, A Synthesized Resource Document for the 2025 General Legislative Session*, January 17, 2025, https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/GSL-Jan2025.pdf. Hereinafter, Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

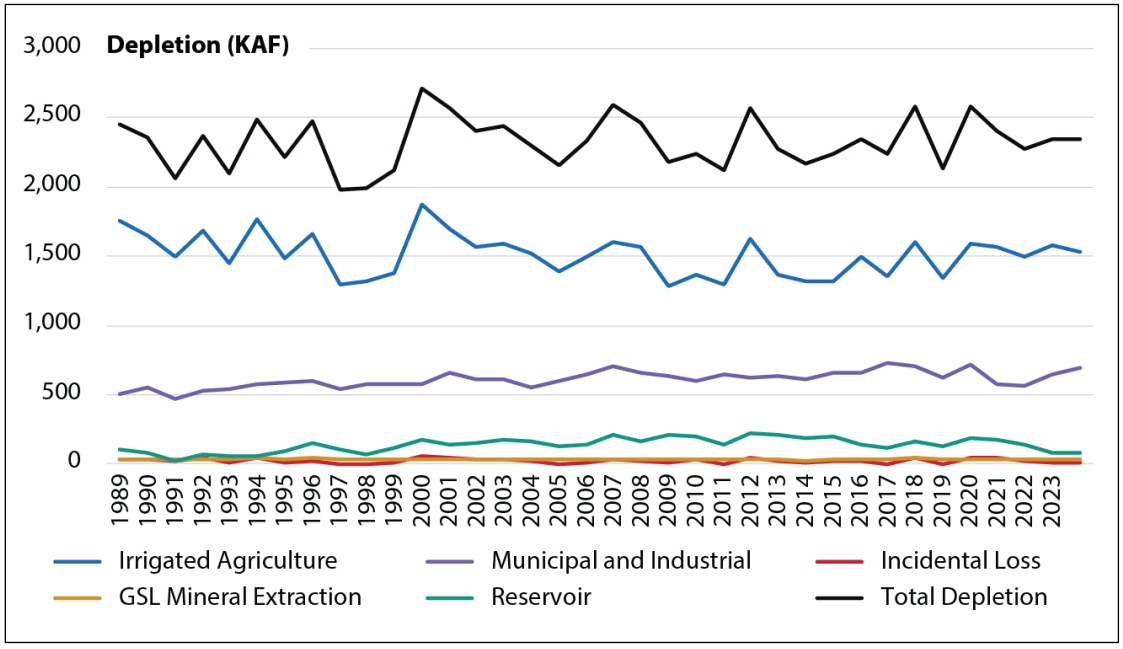
[8] Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Basin*.

Notes: Depletion is the water removed by humans for agricultural, municipal, industrial, and extractive uses, etc., before it enters the lake. Natural losses (e.g., evaporation) of water also affect water levels. These and other factors constitute the overall demand on water entering the lake. The total water supply depends on the amount of precipitation and runoff (e.g., snow melt), which is variable. Any water remaining after depletion by these factors flows into the Great Salt Lake.

Over the past two decades, water levels in the Great Salt Lake have decreased, largely due to less water flowing into the lake because of drought and increasing average air temperatures (e.g., higher air temperatures lead to greater evaporation of lake and upstream reservoir waters).[9] Irrigated agriculture is the dominant human activity depleting water entering the lake. Water consumption by irrigated agriculture has remained fairly consistent over a 34-year period (1989-2023), depleting an average of approximately 1.5 million acre-feet of water per year. (See **Figure 3**.)

Figure 3. Depletion of Water Entering the Great Salt Lake by Human-Related Uses

(In Thousand Acre-feet, 1989 to 2023)



Source: Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary, A Synthesized Resource Document for the 2025 General Legislative Session*, January 17, 2025, https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/GSL-Jan2025.pdf.

Notes: KAF = thousand acre-feet. (An acre-foot is approximately the amount of water to cover one acre of land to a depth of 1 foot.) Reservoir depletion is loss of water in upstream reservoirs due to evaporation.

The Great Salt Lake is a saline terminal lake (i.e., no outflows) that has experienced cyclic fluctuations in water levels since they were first recorded in the late 19th century.[10] Variation in water levels is exemplified by record high water levels measured in 1986, which scientists

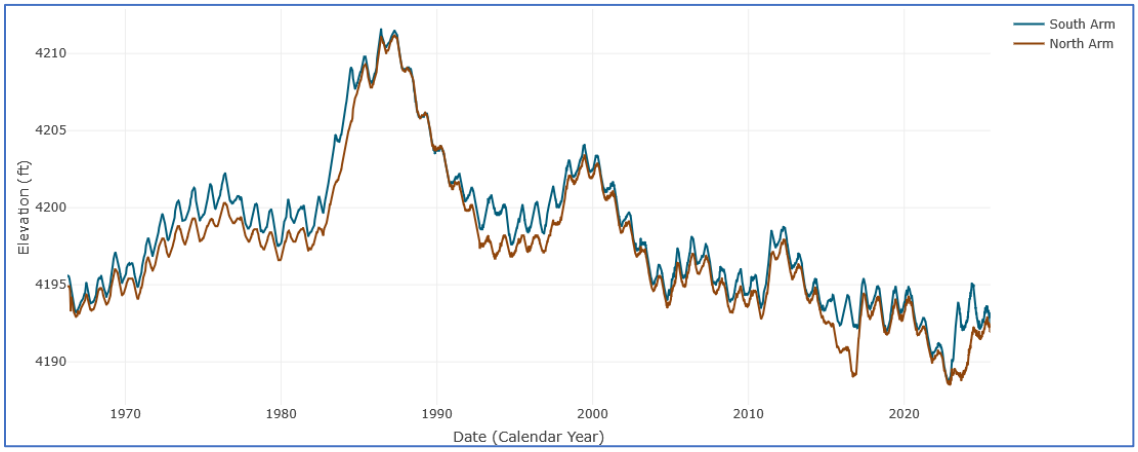
[9] Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Basin*.

[10] Water enters the lake containing dissolved minerals, mostly salts. Because the lake has no outflows, as the water evaporates the salt concentration increases as the minerals and salts accumulate over time. Increasing salt concentrations over millennia have resulted in portions of the lake experiencing *hypersaline* conditions (i.e., waters saltier than typical seawater). Utah Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, *Final Great Salt Lake Comprehensive Management Plan and Record of Decision*, March 2013, https://ffsl.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/OnlineGSL-CMPandROD-March2013.pdf. Hereinafter, Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Comprehensive Plan*.

attributed to unusually high rainfall and snowmelt over successive years beginning in 1982.[11] This record high water had a surface water elevation of 4,212 feet (ft), which translated into a lake surface area of 2,300 square miles.[12] (Surface water elevation is the height of the water level in relation to mean sea level and is not a measure of the depth of the water body.) Conversely, in October 2022 water levels in the lake were measured at record lows, with a surface water elevation of approximately 4,188 ft.[13] This record-low water level translated to a lake surface area of approximately 890 square miles (**Figures 4 and 5**).[14] Since then, high levels of precipitation have brought the lake elevation up by approximately 3 feet, which is still below healthy levels for the ecosystem, according to scientists.[15] The surface water level elevation in 2025 was approximately 4,191 ft, which is considered relatively unhealthy for the ecosystem, according to scientists.[16]

Figure 4. Average Annual Water Surface Elevation of the Great Salt Lake

(In feet, 1966-2025)



Source: Utah Division of Water Resources, *Great Salt Lake Conditions*, Overview, July 8, 2025, https://water.utah.gov/great-salt-lake-elevation/.

Notes: Surface water elevation is the height of the water level in relation to mean sea level and is not a measure of the depth of the water body. High water levels in 1986 were attributed to heavy precipitation and snow levels in the preceding years. The Great Salt Lake is divided into a North Arm and a South Arm by a railroad causeway. Each arm is considered a distinct ecosystem with variation in salinity and lake levels. The South Arm is less saline than the North Arm due to comparatively higher freshwater inflows from rivers.

Decreasing water levels and increased salinity can affect the Great Salt Lake ecosystem.[17] Higher-than-average salinity can lower populations of brine shrimp and flies, which are important prey

[11] Ted Arnow and Doyle Stephens, *Hydrologic Characteristics of the Great Salt Lake, Utah: 1847-1986*, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Water Supply Paper 2332, 1990, pp. 10-11.

[12] Surface water elevation is the height of the water level in relation to mean sea level and is not a measure of the depth of the water body. J. Wallace Gwynn, *Great Salt Lake: An Overview of Change*, Utah Department of Natural Resources, 2002.

[13] USGS, "Great Salt Lake Hydro Mapper: Salinity and Lake Levels," access April 17, 2026, https://webapps.usgs.gov/gsl/index.html. Hereinafter, USGS, "Great Salt Lake Hydro Mapper."

[14] USGS, "Great Salt Lake Hydro Mapper."

[15] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

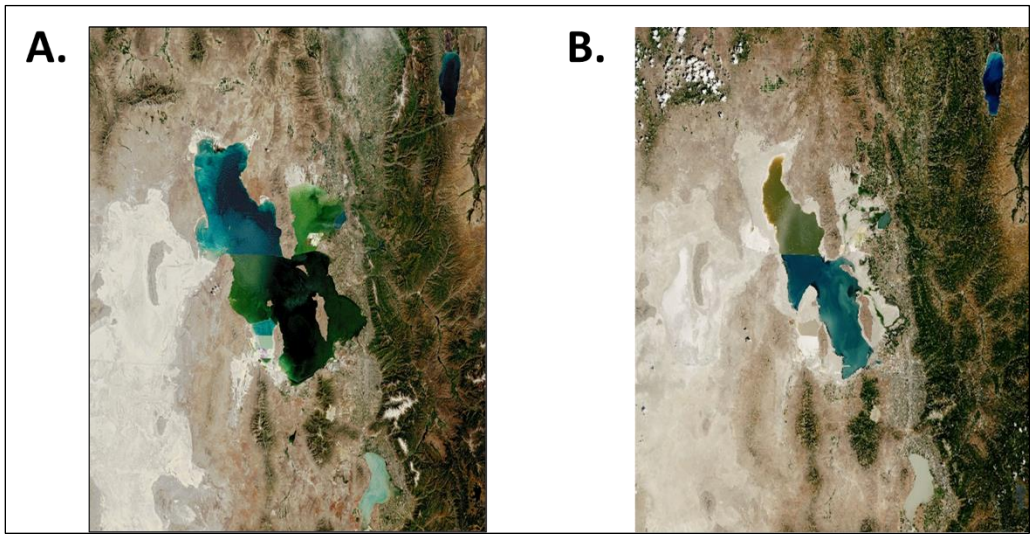
[16] Utah Division of Water Resources, "Great Salt Lake Conditions, Overview," July 8, 2025, https://water.utah.gov/great-salt-lake-elevation/.

[17] Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Comprehensive Plan*. In addition, see Brian D. Barnes and (continued...)

for wildlife and birds. Higher-than-average salinity can also alter lake habitats and ecosystem functioning, which can affect several other species. For example, high levels of salinity can limit available breeding and resting habitat for migratory birds; more broadly, lake food webs can become fragmented or restructured.[18] Decreasing water levels can also expose areas of lake bed which may contain toxic sediments.[19] Winds and dust storms can stir up exposed lake bed and transport toxins to areas inhabited by humans, potentially leading to health issues.[20]

Figure 5. Comparison of the Great Salt Lake at its Highest (A.) vs. Lowest (B.) Level

(Highest level was in 1985 and lowest level was in 2022)



Source: NASA Earth Observatory, *The Great Sinking Lake*, 2022, https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/150187/the-great-shrinking-lake.

Notes: This is satellite imagery from the Landsat Program.

Concern over sustained low water levels in the Great Salt Lake is shared by stakeholders and some Members of Congress due to the economic, environmental, and associated health impacts of low water levels.[21] For example, one study estimated that declining water levels in the lake could result in annual losses of approximately 6,500 jobs and $1.7 billion to $2.2 billion in annual costs (in 2019 dollars).[22] Some stakeholders have asserted that the lake could disappear if restoration or

Wayne A. Wurtsbaugh, "The Effects of Salinity on Plankton and Benthic Communities in the Great Salt Lake, Utah: A Microcosm Experiment," *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, vol. 72, no. 6 (June 2015).

[18] Utah Department of Natural Resources, *Great Salt Lake Comprehensive Plan.*

[19] These substances include arsenic, mercury, nickel, lead, and other pollutants. For example, see Aspen Sorenson et al., "Arsenic Mobilization at the Water-Shore Interface of a Shrinking Saline Lake," *Science of the Total Environment*, vol. 999 (October 14, 2025).

[20] Kevin Perry, *Description of Costs of Potential Dust Control Options for Great Salt Lake*, The Wilkes Center for Climate Science and Policy, February 12, 2026.

[21] For example, see Rep. Blake Moore, "Congressman Blake Moore's Legislation to Help Save the Great Salt Lake Heads to the President's Desk," press release, December 20, 2022, https://blakemoore.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-blake-moores-legislation-help-save-great-salt-lake-heads; and Kelli Rusnak et al., *Understanding the Great Salt Lake Shrinkage: Stakeholders*, Ballard Center, University of Utah, 2025, https://ballardcenter.byu.edu/00000196-caec-dd5d-a7de-dfeeb5280000/the-current-state-of-great-salt-lake.

[22] ECONorthwest, *Assessment of Potential Costs of Declining Water Levels in Great Salt Lake*, prepared for the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council, 2019, https://lf-public.deq.utah.gov/WebLink/ElectronicFile.aspx?docid=392796&eqdocs=DWQ-2019-012913.

measures to increase water flows are not implemented.[23] Other stakeholders, including the governor of Utah, have stated that the lake will not disappear during their watch.[24] The state and other stakeholders have begun to address these concerns with programs and initiatives to restore the lake ecosystem and increase water levels. Some in Congress have also indicated support for restoring the lake by introducing legislation (e.g., S. 378) and signing pledges to support restoration.[25] The federal government has supported restoration by providing funding through the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to implement some lake restoration activities. In 2026, the Trump Administration indicated its concern for the lake's condition and suggested that it would support restoration.[26] This is reflected in the Administration's FY2027 request for $1.0 billion for the Department of the Interior to restore the Great Salt Lake.[27]

This report summarizes state and federal Great Salt Lake restoration activities and discusses issues that Congress might consider, such as funding scientific research, authorizing and funding federal agencies to help restore water flows to the lake, addressing exposed lakebed and air quality issues, and authorizing a federal restoration initiative.

State Restoration Activities

In 2025, Utah expressed its commitment to restoring the Great Salt Lake by signing the *Great Salt Lake 2034 Charter*.[28] The charter identifies the commitments needed to improve the lake by 2034 and commits the State of Utah to fund restoration and water conservation activities in and around the lake.[29] In 2023, the state government implemented regulations that aim to maintain water flows into the lake at then-current levels.[30] The regulations were supported, in part, by a gubernatorial proclamation to suspend new water depletions from the Great Salt Lake Basin, thereby limiting new diversions from rivers that empty into the lake.[31] The suspension does not pertain to water rights or appropriations that existed prior to the date of the proclamation, and does not apply to new applications for water use that meet certain criteria (e.g., water for nonconsumptive uses and for mitigation plans to offset water depletions).

The state has also implemented several water conservation-related measures that aim to help the lake retain or receive more water. For example, the state has allocated funding for gauges and buoys to monitor water and ecosystem conditions, and tightened regulations on mineral extraction

[23] For example, see Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake*, p. 9.

[24] Ben Winslow, "'On My Watch We Are Not Allowing the Lake to Go Dry,' Utah's Governor Says of Great Salt Lake," *Fox 13 Salt Lake City*, January 11, 2023, https://www.fox13now.com/news/great-salt-lake-collaborative/on-my-watch-we-are-not-allowing-the-lake-to-go-dry-utahs-governor-says-of-great-salt-lake.

[25] Rep. Blake Moore, "Congressman Blake Moore Signs Great Salt Lake 2034 Charter," press release, September 26, 2025, https://blakemoore.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-blake-moore-signs-great-salt-lake-2034-charter.

[26] President Donald J. Trump, "Speech at the White House Governor's Dinner," press release, February 21, 2026.

[27] Office of Management and Budget (OMB), *Budget of the U.S. Government for Fiscal Year 2027*, April 3, 2026, p. 34, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/budget_fy2027.pdf. Hereinafter, OMB, *Budget of the U.S. Government for Fiscal Year 2027*.

[28] Governor Spencer Cox, *The Great Salt Lake 2034 Charter*, State of Utah, September 24, 2025, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IfncRxoNZexdizC677iGm7pZUolgRu-w?usp=sharing.

[29] The signing of the charter also resulted in financial pledges from nongovernmental donors, including $100 million each from The Great Salt Lake Rising and Ducks Unlimited, respectively.

[30] Governor Spencer Cox, *Proclamation 2022-01: Suspending New Appropriations of Surplus and Unappropriated Waters in the Great Salt Lake Basin*, State of Utah, November 3, 2022, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t7p28lcV13aLFzbK5tm6LYwkXVZ-7tlw/view. Hereinafter, Governor Spencer Cox, *Proclamation 2022-01*.

[31] Governor Spencer Cox, *Proclamation 2022-01*.

and spray irrigation.[32] In 2025, the Utah state legislature allocated $1 million in funding for a Great Salt Lake Long-Term Water Program that would support a water lease system and the construction of infrastructure for water conservation and delivery.[33] The state, in partnership with other entities, also created several initiatives that aim to directly and indirectly restore the lake, including the Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan, Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan, and Great Salt Lake Water Enhancement Program. These efforts are discussed below.

Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan

The state established the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner in 2023 and tasked the commissioner to create a plan for restoring the lake. In 2024, the commissioner released *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan*, which aims to restore the lake while balancing associated ecological, economic, and societal interests.[34] The plan specifies activities that can be done in the short term (within a year), medium term (1-5 years), and long term (6-30 years). Short-term actions in the plan reflect existing initiatives, partnerships, and programs. Some example activities include voluntary actions to reduce water usage, monitor water usage, and increase water supplies to the lake through water conservation and augmentation (e.g., reducing agricultural irrigation), among others. Medium-term actions include implementing water conservation strategies contemplated by other plans, creating a development model that values water and protects the lake, optimizing water efficiency for agriculture, and augmenting water supplies through various technologies.[35] Long-term actions include building large-scale infrastructure, such as transbasin diversions, and refining water augmentation projects (e.g., building new water reservoirs).[36]

Some additional aspects of the plan include

- coordinating efforts of state, federal, and public stakeholders;
- providing more water to the lake while balancing competing needs;
- conserving water use among several sectors (e.g., agricultural, municipal, and industrial); and
- protecting air and water quality, and using the best available science to implement water management decisions.

The plan also addresses science and socioeconomic issues. For example, the plan calls for a Great Salt Lake Strike Team to conduct research on economic and ecological issues associated with the lake and serve as a point of contact for managers to access academic expertise.[37] The plan also calls for the commissioner to establish a target range for lake elevation between 4,198 and 4,205 feet, which represents the range in elevation needed for the lake's long-term health, according to scientists. Additionally, the plan tasks the state engineer with developing an agenda for water distribution to and from the lake. The plan does not contain any binding commitments.[38]

[32] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[33] SB. 2, New Fiscal Year Supplemental Appropriations Act, https://le.utah.gov/~2025/bills/static/SB0002.html.

[34] Brian Steed, Great Salt Lake Commissioner, *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan*, Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner, January 15, 2024, https://greatsaltlake.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/Great-Salt-Lake-Strategic-Plan-1.pdf. Hereinafter, Steed, *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan.*

[35] Steed, *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan.*

[36] Steed, *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan.*

[37] Steed, *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan.*

[38] Steed, *The Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan*

The Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan

The state, through the Utah Division of Water Resources (DWR), is also preparing the Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan (GSLBIP), which is a collaborative effort between Reclamation and the Utah DWR. Specifically, the GSLBIP aims to assess the current water supply, forecast need for additional water supplies, and determine strategies for managing water supply. The first phase of this effort created a work plan (issued in April 2024), which provides a roadmap for completing the GSLBIP by 2026.[39] (The GSLBIP is intended to inform decisions made under the 2024 Strategic Plan discussed above.) The following groups and entities are involved in creating the GSLBIP:

- Great Salt Lake Commissioner—responsible for overseeing state actions and coordinating state agencies restoring the lake.
- Project Team—Reclamation and Utah DWR staff that are developing the GSLBIP.
- Advisory Group—state and federal agency representatives with an interest in managing lake water resources.
- Steering Committee—various stakeholders with diverse interests, engaged in reviewing and advising the Project Team.
- Watershed Councils, including the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council—various water-related experts that provide a forum for a discussion of policy and watershed issues.[40]
- Water users, technical teams, and public participants.[41]

Funding for the work plan and GSLBIP development consists of $5.0 million from the State of Utah and $3.2 million from Reclamation.[42] Within the first year of the GSLBIP (2024), the Utah DWR began several projects to support water resource decisions, such as determining the costs of agricultural optimization and water leasing.[43]

Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Program and Trust

The Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Program was created by the Utah legislature in 2023. The program provided $40.0 million to set up the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust to increase water quantity and improve water quality for the lake and its wetlands.[44] The

[39] Utah Division of Water Resources and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *Work Plan for the Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan*, April 8, 2024, https://water.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GSLBIP-Work-Plan-FINAL-4-8-24.pdf. Hereinafter, Utah Division of Water Resources and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *Work Plan for the Great Salt Lake Basin.*

[40] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, "Great Salt Lake Advisory Council," https://deq.utah.gov/great-salt-lake-advisory-council/great-salt-lake-advisory-council.

[41] Utah Division of Water Resources and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *Work Plan for the Great Salt Lake Basin.*

[42] Funding from Reclamation comes from its Basin Study Program, which is a component of the WaterSMART Program. For more information, see U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *WaterSMART Basin Study Program*, U.S. Department of Interior, April 2024, https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/bsp/docs/BasinStudy_FactSheet.pdf.

[43] Utah Division of Water Resources, *Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan 2024 Year in Review*, 2025, https://water.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/GSLBIP-2024-Review.pdf.

[44] For more information, see Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, "Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Program," https://ffsl.utah.gov/state-lands/great-salt-lake/great-salt-lake-watershed-enhancement-program/.

trust is managed by the National Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy.[45] A Trust Advisory Council was also established in 2023 to provide guidance to the trust for funding projects and planning its direction. The trust released a five-year strategy (2024-2028) that aims to protect and restore 20,000 acres of wetlands and secure at least 100,000 acre-feet of new water flows.[46] The trust estimates that implementing the strategy will require between $110.0 million and $145.0 million in additional funding.[47] In 2024, the trust and the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands (FFSL) partnered to fund four restoration projects with a total of $6.5 million.[48] In 2025, these entities provided an additional $3.0 million to protect and restore habitat and improve hydrology in the Great Salt Lake ecosystem.[49]

Selected Federal Restoration Activities

Federal and nonfederal stakeholders are advocating for greater federal involvement in Great Salt Lake restoration. The Trump Administration has proposed $1.0 billion for the Department of the Interior (DOI) to lead a comprehensive federal restoration program.[50] This request also included a directive that would allow the Secretary of the Interior to transfer funds to any agency within DOI or to any other federal department or agency to carry out restoration activities.[51] Utah state leaders have also called for federal involvement in restoring the lake: the governor requested funds from the Administration for lake restoration,[52] and the state legislature passed a resolution asking for federal involvement.[53]

To date, the federal government is indirectly involved with Great Salt Lake restoration. There is no federal or federal/state ecosystem restoration initiative for the lake that is similar to other large-scale aquatic ecosystem restoration initiatives in the western United States, such as those for Lake Tahoe, the Salton Sea, the Platte River, or the Missouri River. Federal agencies are primarily supporting Great Salt Lake ecosystem restoration through national-level programs that provide monitoring and research, ecosystem restoration, and water conservation**.** The following sections provide summaries of selected restoration and monitoring activities conducted or funded by federal agencies. (This list is not intended to be comprehensive.)

[45] *Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust Grant Agreement*, https://ffsl.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/Final-GSLWET-Agmt-FFSL-NAS-TNC-signed.pdf.

[46] The goals of the program are incorporated into the *Great Salt Lake Strategic Plan*.

[47] Communication with the National Audubon Society, May 14, 2024.

[48] Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, "Announcement—New Funding Available to Restore and Protect Wetlands to Benefit Great Salt Lake Hydrology," press release, 2024, https://ffsl.utah.gov/state-lands/announcement-new-funding-available-to-restore-and-protect-wetlands-to-benefit-great-salt-lake-hydrology/.

[49] Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust, "$53 Million Funding Opportunity for Great Salt Lake and its Wetlands," July 23, 2025, https://www.gslwatertrust.org/news/press-release-53-million-funding-opportunity-for-great-salt-lake-and-its-wetlands.

[50] OMB, *Budget of the U.S. Government for Fiscal Year 2027.*

[51] Some examples of participating agencies include the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. OMB, *Budget of the U.S. Government for Fiscal Year 2027.*

[52] Annie Knox, "Trump Promises to Work with Utah to Make its Salt Lake 'Great Again,'" *Utah News Dispatch*, February 23, 2026, https://utahnewsdispatch.com/2026/02/23/trump-promises-to-work-with-utah-make-salt-lake-great-again/.

[53] State of Utah Legislature, H.C.R. 9, Concurrent Resolution Addressing the Great Salt Lake.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Reclamation is the lead federal agency supporting Great Salt Lake restoration and conservation efforts. In 2025, Reclamation provided $50.0 million for a water delivery program in the Great Salt Lake Basin using funds from the FY2022 budget reconciliation measure commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-169).[54] The Utah Department of Natural Resources and the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner plan to use the federal money to fund projects in three categories: [55]

- Voluntary water transactions—These transactions provide compensation for voluntary reductions in water consumption and water diversions.
- System conservation projects—Voluntary projects that reduce consumptive water loss by improving water distribution infrastructure (e.g., lining canals).
- Ecosystem and habitat projects—Restoration projects that address issues caused by drought in a river basin or inland water body.

This funding is to complement $3.0 million for ecosystem restoration provided by the State of Utah and the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust in 2025.[56]

Outside of this funding, Reclamation operates a number of facilities in the Great Salt Lake Basin, such as the Arthur V. Watkins Dam/Willard Bay Reservoir (part of the Weber Basin Reclamation Project) and the Deer Creek Dam and Reservoir (part of the Provo River Reclamation Project).[57] Reclamation also operates Jordanelle Dam and Reservoir, part of the Central Utah Project's (CUP's) Bonneville Unit. The CUP provides a transbasin diversion to the central part of the state from the Colorado River Basin in northeastern Utah. Reclamation has also funded studies to plan for water supply and demand in the Great Salt Lake, including $3.2 million in funding in FY2022 from its Basin Study Program to support the GSLBIP (see discussion above). Reclamation used this funding to provide technical assistance, provide water leasing and acquisition tool development, and coordinate with various stakeholders to identify potential solutions to basin issues. Overall, Reclamation reported funding 239 projects and 8 plans in Utah through various parts of its WaterSMART Program from 2010 to 2025, and many of these efforts directly or indirectly tied to Great Salt Lake management.[58] Congress expanded Reclamation's authority for Great Salt Lake conservation efforts under the Great Salt Lake Stewardship Act (P.L. 118-169). The act amended the Central Utah Project Completion Act (CUPCA, P.L. 102-575, Titles II-VI) to authorize the Department of the Interior to use unexpended CUPCA funds from P.L. 102-575 to carry out water conservation measures in the Great Salt Lake Basin.[59]

[54] U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), "Biden-Harris Administration Announces $50 million for Drought Mitigation in the Great Salt Lake Basin," press release, December 2, 2024, https://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/news-release/5038.

[55] Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust, "$53 Million Funding Opportunity for Great Salt Lake and its Wetlands," press release, July 23, 2025, https://www.gslwatertrust.org/news/press-release-53-million-funding-opportunity-for-great-salt-lake-and-its-wetlands. Hereinafter, Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust, "$53 million Funding Opportunity for Great Salt Lake."

[56] Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust, "$53 million Funding Opportunity for Great Salt Lake."

[57] For more information on these facilities, see U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "Projects and Facilities," June 5, 2024, https://www.usbr.gov/projects/.

[58] U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "WaterSMART Program Data Portal," https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/bf5c5357e7044e0c80d5a55788d1db34/.

[59] Traditionally, CUPCA funds have been limited to efforts related to Colorado River Basin diversions.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) conducts some restoration and monitoring projects in and around the Great Salt Lake. Some projects are coordinated through the FWS Utah Ecological Services Field Office, which provides technical assistance to other federal and state agencies, industry, and the public on fish and wildlife conservation. Some activities include assessing the effect of contaminants on fish and wildlife, restoring wetlands, conserving migratory birds,[60] and monitoring species listed under the Endangered Species Act.[61] FWS manages the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, which is located northeast of the lake. The refuge's marshes form some of the largest freshwater components of the lake ecosystem, providing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.[62] In 2026, the Utah legislature approved a sale of approximately 22,300 acres of state-owned land to the federal government for $60.0 million to generate funds to benefit the lake.[63] The land is adjacent to the federal Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge.

U.S. Geological Survey

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has collected water surface elevation data from the Great Salt Lake periodically since 1875, and continuously since October 1902.[64] The USGS Utah Water Science Center has continued monitoring and research regarding water quantity and quality in the lake, and displays monitoring data from such efforts on the Great Salt Lake Hydro Mapper website, in partnership with the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council.[65] In addition, the USGS monitors changes in the spatial extent of the lake through Landsat satellite images, and has updated lake bathymetry and lidar measurements that provide elevation-area-volume relationships.[66] USGS activities in the lake also include tracking migratory bird movement, analyzing aquatic invertebrate prey resources, and monitoring water quantity, quality, and use.[67] The USGS states that it supports additional Great Salt Lake scientific work funded by partners, including federal and state agencies.[68]

Congress authorized the USGS to assess and monitor the hydrology of saline lakes in the Great Basin, which includes Great Salt Lake, and the migratory birds and other wildlife dependent on those habitats through the Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-318). The act authorized the establishment of the Great Basin States Assessment and Monitoring Program to inform and support coordinated management and conservation actions in

[60] For example, in 2023, FWS received a grant from the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust (GSLWET) to monitor flows from the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge to the Great Salt Lake. See GSLWET, "Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust Wetland Protection and Restoration Grant Awards," November 7, 2023, https://www.gslwatertrust.org/news/press-release-trust-awards-funding-to-protect-and-restore-more-than-13000-acres-of-essential-great-salt-lake-wetlandsnbsp.

[61] FWS, "Utah Ecological Services Field Office," https://www.fws.gov/office/utah-ecological-services/what-we-do.

[62] FWS, "Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge," https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bear-river-migratory-bird.

[63] H.J.R. 30, House Joint Resolution to Approve the Transfer of Land, https://le.utah.gov/~2026/bills/static/HJR030.html.

[64] USGS, "Great Salt Lake Elevations and Areal Extent," https://www.usgs.gov/centers/utah-water-science-center/science/great-salt-lake-elevations-and-areal-extent. Hereinafter, USGS, "Great Salt Lake Elevations and Areal Extent."

[65] USGS, "Great Salt Lake Hydro Mapper," https://webapps.usgs.gov/gsl/index.html; USGS, "New One-stop Shop Webpage for All Things Great Salt Lake," July 28, 2022, https://www.usgs.gov/news/state-news-release/new-one-stop-shop-webpage-all-things-great-salt-lake.

[66] USGS, "Great Salt Lake Elevations and Areal Extent." For more information on Landsat, see CRS Report R46560, *Landsat 9 and the Future of the Sustainable Land Imaging Program*, by Anna E. Normand.

[67] CRS correspondence with USGS on March 29, 2024.

[68] CRS correspondence with USGS on March 29, 2024.

the Great Basin to benefit saline lake ecosystems, migratory birds, and other wildlife.[69] The act authorized $5 million annually from FY2022 through FY2027 to establish the Assessment and Monitoring Program.[70] In 2022, the USGS established the Saline Lake Ecosystems Integrated Water Availability Assessment (IWAA) to monitor and assess the hydrology of terminal lakes in the Great Basin and the migratory birds and other wildlife dependent on those habitats.[71] Scientists from across the USGS formed the Saline Lake Ecosystems IWAA Team and, in 2023, published an integrated science strategy to guide USGS data collection and assessment activities at terminal lakes in the Great Basin.[72] (See **Figure 6** for a map of the Great Basin study area.) In 2025, the USGS monitored water quantity, water quality, waterbird aquatic prey food resources, and remote sensing at terminal lakes in the Great Basin as part of the IWAA; some of the work was performed by collaborators, such as collecting aquatic food samples at the Great Salt Lake.[73]

[69] See **Figure 6**.

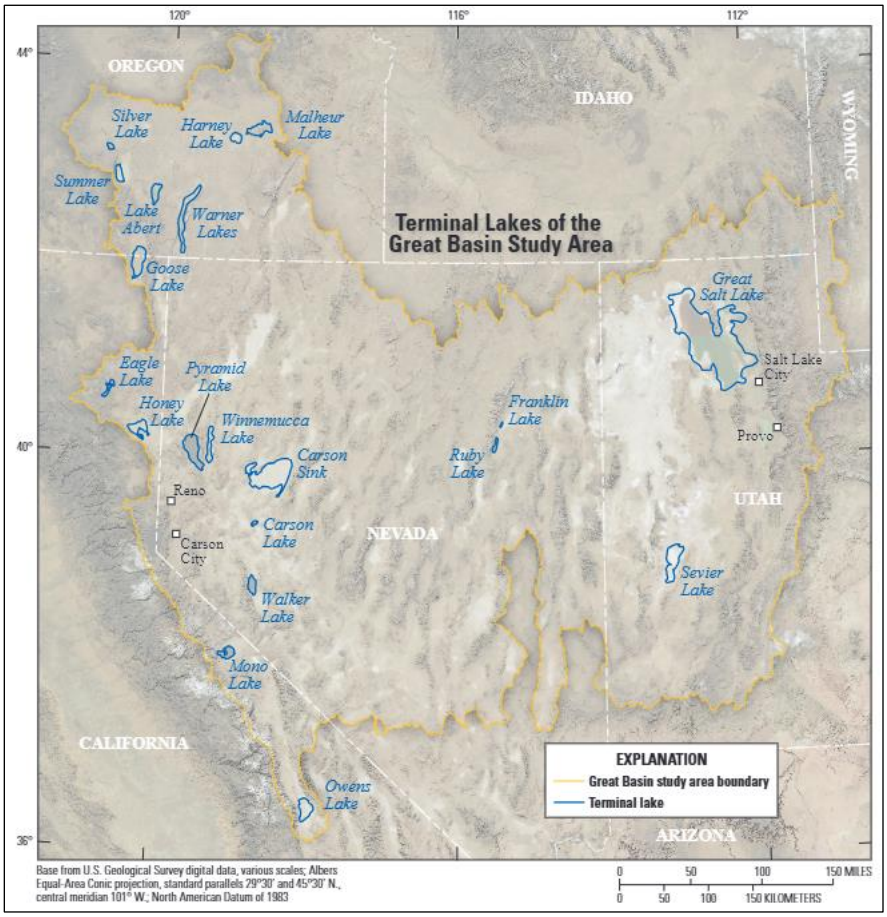
[70] The program is to inform and support coordinated management and conservation actions to benefit those saline lake ecosystems, migratory birds, and other wildlife. The act directed the Secretary of the Interior to work with government agencies, universities, and other stakeholders to establish a multiyear work and implementation plan for the program.

[71] In FY2022, the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 117-103 recommended no less than $1.25 million to establish the IWAA. In FY2023, FY2024, and FY2026, the explanatory statements accompanying enacted appropriations laws recommended $1.75 million for the IWAA for each of those fiscal years. CRS was unable to identify a funding amount specified for the regional IWAA study program in FY2025. For more information on the Integrated Water Availability Assessment (IWAA), see USGS, "Saline Lakes Ecosystems Integrated Water Availability Assessment," https://www.usgs.gov/special-topics/saline-lakes-ecosystems-integrated-water-availability-assessment. The regional IWAA study program is conducted jointly between the USGS's Water Resources Mission Area and Ecosystems Mission Area.

[72] R.J. Frus et al., *Integrated Science Strategy for Assessing and Monitoring Water Availability and Migratory Birds for Terminal Lakes Across the Great Basin*, United States, 2023, USGS Circular 1516, https://doi.org/10.3133/cir1516. P.L. 117-103

[73] USGS, "2025 in Review: The Saline Lake Ecosystems Integrated Water Availability Assessment," January 22, 2026, https://www.usgs.gov/special-topics/saline-lake-ecosystems-integrated-water-availability-assessment/news/2025-review.

Figure 6. Map of the USGS Great Basin Study Area



Source: R.J. Frus et al., *Integrated Science Strategy for Assessing and Monitoring Water Availability and Migratory Birds for Terminal Lakes Across the Great Basin, United States*, 2023, p. 6, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Circular 1516, https://doi.org/10.3133/cir1516.

Notes: The Great Basin in the western United States is an arid to semiarid region with a network of terminal lakes, which are labeled. The salinity of the terminal lakes ranges from fresh (salinity less than 0.3% saline) to hypersaline (more than 5% saline).

Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has provided funding through its Wetland Program Development Grants to support wetland restoration in the Great Salt Lake.[74] Wetland Program Development Grants are used to assist state, territory, tribal, and/or local government agencies in developing or refining programs to protect, manage, and restore wetlands.[75] The aim in building these programs' capacity is to increase the quantity and quality of wetlands by conserving and restoring wetland acreage and improving wetland conditions. EPA administers grants to implement projects that support core elements of a wetland program, including monitoring and assessment, regulatory activities, restoration and protection, and water quality standards.

[74] CRS correspondence with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on May 1, 2024. USASPENDING.gov data as of April 2026 shows that the work under these EPA grants is active.

[75] For more information, see EPA, "Wetland Program Development Grants and EPA Wetlands Grant Coordinators," https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/wetland-program-development-grants-and-epa-wetlands-grant-coordinators.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) does not have an active program for restoring the Great Salt Lake. However, Section 8143 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-263) authorized the Secretary of the Army to carry out a program to monitor and assess the hydrology of saline lake ecosystems in the Great Basin, including Great Salt Lake, and to inform and support federal and nonfederal management and conservation activities to benefit those ecosystems. The law authorized $10.0 million annually for the activity; CRS has not identified any funding or implementation of such a program by USACE.

Issues for Congress

Congress may consider several issues to address Great Salt Lake restoration. Congressional action could focus on selected issues, including (1) science and monitoring to inform lake restoration, (2) modifying water flows to the lake, (3) addressing air quality and public health concerns caused by exposed lakebed, and (4) whether to authorize a federal restoration initiative for the lake.

Science and Monitoring to Inform Restoration of the Great Salt Lake

According to some stakeholders, Great Salt Lake restoration may depend on a scientific understanding and monitoring of (1) changes in the ecosystem due to natural and human-induced drivers, (2) factors causing fluctuations in lake water levels, and (3) restoration practices that would restore the lake to a desired state.[76] Some stakeholders argue that federal science-based programs should expand Great Salt Lake hydrological monitoring efforts (e.g., of evapotranspiration, wetlands, water flows, salinity, exposed lakebed) to inform decisionmakers and increase coordination between federal and state entities.[77] A counterargument could be that state monitoring in collaboration with local and nongovernmental organization efforts might be sufficient to address the scientific questions related to the lake.

Congress could address knowledge gaps in the Great Salt Lake ecosystem by authorizing and funding federally led or funded scientific activities. Options could include providing appropriations to match existing authorized levels of funding in support of Great Salt Lake science, creating new authorizations and appropriations for scientific study, or maintaining the status quo. For example, Congress could direct appropriations to the Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Assessment and Monitoring Program, administered by the USGS, for expanding Great Salt Lake data collection, monitoring, and assessment activities. Another option could be to establish a scientific advisory committee or panel to advise and organize scientific research. A science committee or panel could provide advice and support to federal and state agencies on scientific and technical issues and act as a forum for the exchange of scientific information about the lake among federal and nonfederal stakeholders.

An example of a scientific advisory committee that provides recommendations for restoring the Long Island Sound is discussed below.

[76] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[77] Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake.*

Long Island Sound Partnership

The Long Island Sound Partnership has a Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) that provides objective scientific and technical guidance for restoration activities. The committee consists of engineers, scientists, and representatives from federal and state agencies, academia, industry, and private organizations. Some specific duties include developing recommendations for research, monitoring, and assessment; peer review of technical products; providing recommendations on work plans; and providing a forum to determine emerging issues, exchanging ideas, and identifying funding opportunities. The Long Island Sound STAC's recommendations have been implemented in the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, which guides restoration activities, and the Science Needs Document, which outlines scientific needs for restoring the Long Island Sound.

Source: Long Island Sound Partnership, "Science and Technical Advisory Committee," https://lispartnership.org/about/committees/science-technical-advisory-committee/.

Other options for congressional consideration could include the following:

- Establishing a federal science center for the Great Salt Lake that could be administered by USGS or Reclamation. A science center could facilitate a cooperative and consistent approach to collecting, storing, and presenting scientific data; designing and implementing scientific projects; and creating a scientific plan for studying and monitoring the lake ecosystem. The USGS administers science centers in some large-scale ecosystems, such as the Great Lakes (Great Lakes Science Center) and portions of the Chesapeake Bay (Maryland-Delaware-District of Columbia Water Science Center).[78]
- Authorizing a grant program that supports Great Salt Lake scientific studies and monitoring. Such a program could fund science and monitoring efforts conducted by nonfederal entities, such as the state of Utah, universities, and nongovernmental organizations. Efforts to collect, organize, and synthesize data could be done by state agencies, in contrast to a federal science center or program.
- Leaving the responsibility for Great Salt Lake scientific studies and monitoring to state, local, or private entities.

Modifying Water Flows to the Great Salt Lake

According to some stakeholders, one of the primary requirements for restoring the Great Salt Lake is to increase water flows into the lake from surrounding tributaries to increase and maintain the lake's water levels at a healthy range.[79] Some scientists estimate that an additional 800,000 acre-feet of water per year over 30 years is needed to restore the lake to healthy levels.[80] Some methods for increasing water flows to the lake include reducing flows diverted from tributaries upstream of the lake, implementing water conservation practices for upstream water users, conducting water augmentation (e.g., new reservoirs, groundwater extraction), and reducing invasive phragmites vegetation.[81]

State and local stakeholders have initiated efforts to increase flows into the lake. Utah, for example, has passed legislation aimed at reducing water use and diversions from tributaries.

[78] For more information on USGS Science Centers, see USGS, "Science Centers," https://www.usgs.gov/science/science-centers.

[79] Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake,* and Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[80] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[81] Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake.*

Further, the state administers initiatives for water conservation, such as the Agricultural Water Optimization Program for farmers, and educational outreach for residents to lower water use.[82] At the local level, various entities are donating water flows from upstream storage to the lake through efforts led by the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust. For example, in 2024, the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District, the Church of Latter-day Saints, and the trust donated an additional 10,000 acre-feet of water.[83]

Congress may consider which federal programs could supplement state and local efforts to reduce water use in the Great Salt Lake Basin. Federal initiatives could address water use inside and outside the basin. For example, irrigated agriculture in the basin covers 1.4 million acres (approximately 6% of the watershed). Utah has 63% of this agricultural land, followed by 31% in Idaho, 5% in Wyoming, and 1% in Nevada.[84]

Among its options, Congress could direct Reclamation to continue or expand its existing efforts to compensate users for temporary or multiyear voluntary reductions in water diversion or consumptive water use. Congress could also authorize and fund Reclamation to create an environmental water account (EWA).[85] An EWA would aim to add flexibility to water diversions and regulations to allow for additional water supplies to be used for ecosystem restoration. Reclamation would use the EWA to annually acquire, bank, and transfer water and arrange for its conveyance to the Great Salt Lake. For example, an EWA could bank water through financing conservation or recycling projects. This approach is similar to a proposal in the GSLBIP, which calls for temporary water leasing. Under this program, Reclamation would compensate irrigators for reducing consumptive water use or creating surplus water for implementing water conservation or recycling.[86]

Congress may also consider whether to use federal assistance other than Reclamation programs to increase water conservation on agricultural lands with the goal of increasing Great Salt Lake water supplies.[87] Congress could choose to provide direct appropriations for these activities, such as those provided under the IRA. It could also consider expanding agency-specific authorizations for water conservation measures within the Great Salt Lake basin, as did P.L. 118-169. Water conservation on agricultural lands could also be addressed by agricultural conservation programs implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).[88]

Scientists assert that invasive phragmites (perennial reed grasses, *Phragmites australis*) in and around Great Salt Lake inhibit water flow to lake and reduce water availability by consuming twice as much water as native grasses. The State of Utah has been removing the invasive grass

[82] Utah Dept. of Agriculture and Food, "Agricultural Water Optimization Program," https://ag.utah.gov/conservation-division/agricultural-water-optimization/.

[83] National Audubon Society, "10,000 Acre-Feet of Water to Benefit Great Salt Lake, Jordan River, Birds, Habitats and Communities," press release, September 17, 2024, https://www.audubon.org/news/10000-acre-feet-water-benefit-great-salt-lake-jordan-river-birds-habitats-communities.

[84] Abbott et al., *Emergency Measures Needed to Rescue Great Salt Lake.*

[85] For an example of an environmental water account, see Reclamation, "Environmental Water Account," https://www.usbr.gov/mp/ewa/index.html.

[86] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[87] For example, see Jackelyn Alessi, *Irrigation Management Techniques to Optimize Water on Utah Farms*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2024, https://www.fws.gov/project/irrigation-management-optimize-water.

[88] RCPP provides financial and technical assistance for state, multistate, or watershed-scale projects. The program creates partnership opportunities to target and leverage federal conservation funding for specific areas and resource concerns. For more information, see CRS Report R40763, *Agricultural Conservation: A Guide to Programs*, by Megan Stubbs.

through herbicides, mowing, and trampling. According to one source, these treatments reduced approximately 88% of phragmites cover around Utah Lake, upstream of Great Salt Lake, in 2025.[89] After phragmites removal, scientists note that areas must be maintained and, in some cases, native vegetation should be restored to prevent reestablishment.[90] According to scientists, phragmites cover around Great Salt Lake is between 20,000 and 30,000 acres. While state efforts have been promising, efforts to eradicate phragmites and keep them from regenerating are ongoing.

Congress has a range of potential options on this issue. For example, Congress might consider funding phragmites removal and native vegetation restoration as part of a lake restoration strategy. This effort could increase available water for the lake and prevent exposed lakebed from being aerosolized. Reclamation could coordinate with Utah to conduct aquatic ecosystem restoration and invasive species removal through its authorization for the WaterSMART program.[91] FWS and the Bureau of Land Management could continue and expand phragmites removal from the lands they manage within the Great Salt Lake basin.[92] FWS and BLM could restore lands they manage with native vegetation. FWS is authorized to restore ecosystems, including those in and around desert terminal lakes, such as Owens Lake in California, where FWS and other stakeholders are restoring habitat to lower dust released into the atmosphere and support fish and migratory birds.[93]

Alternatively, Congress could choose not to address water flowing into the Great Salt Lake at the federal level and leave efforts largely to the state and local governments. As discussed earlier, Utah is actively trying to increase water flows to the lake by restricting some sources of diversion and acquiring water rights from stakeholders. For example, in 2026, Utah secured the purchase of a mining company along with water rights to approximately 144,000 acre-feet per year.[94] Some note that the water right could be used to restore the lake, but the state has not clarified how it intends to use the water rights as of the publication of this report.

Air Quality and Public Health

As the Great Salt Lake recedes, previously inundated soils become exposed to air and may aerosolize. The effect of aerosolized soils on air quality is amplified because the lake is largely a terminal lake with little water outflow. Heavy metals—such as lead, iron, copper, arsenic, aluminum, and mercury—and minerals accumulate in the lakebed.[95] Once the lakebed dries, these toxins can be carried by aerosolized soils, leading to poor air quality for the local and regional

[89] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[90] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[91] For example, see 33 U.S.C. §2330(a)(4), which authorizes certain activities to enhance drought resilience.

[92] The FWS is removing phragmites from the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. See Megan Nagel, "Prescribed Fire Fights Invasive Species at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, https://www.fws.gov/story/prescribed-fire-fights-invasive-species-bear-river-migratory-bird-refuge#:~:text=Across%20the%20Great%20Salt%20Lake,removal%20of%20the%20invasive%20plant.

[93] Some efforts are outlined in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Owens Basin Wetland and Aquatic Species Recovery Plan, Inyo and Mono Counties, California*, 1998, https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/980930b.pdf.

[94] Great Salt Lake Collaborative, "Utah Just Bought U.S. Magnesium for $30 million. Now What?," press release, January 29, 2026, https://greatsaltlakenews.org/latest-news/fox-13/utah-just-bought-u-s-magnesium-for-30-million-now-what.

[95] Jacob M. Cowley et al., "Pro-inflammatory effects of inhaled Great Salt Lake dust particles," *Particle and Fibre Toxicology*, vol. 22 (January 16, 2025).

population.[96] Wind and air currents can lift the aerosolized soil into the atmosphere, where it can stay suspended for hours to weeks and travel up to thousands of miles.[97] (See **Figure 7**.) Dust can be a significant health and environmental issue,[98] according to several scientists, and might lead to air quality mitigation costs under the Clean Air Act (CAA; 42 U.S.C. §§7401 et seq.).[99] As of 2025, over 800 square miles of Great Salt Lake lakebed are dried and exposed to air.[100] Of this area, some scientists note that certain spots have a higher potential to produce dust that may affect communities during storms.[101]

[96] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, "Understanding Great Salt Lake Dust and Air Quality," July 18, 2025, https://deq.utah.gov/air-quality/great-salt-lake-dust.

[97] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[98] For example, dust can accelerate snowmelt, which can change the timing of water flows. Dust can also affect airways and cause inflammation in humans, among other health effects. See Jacob M. Cowley et al., "Pro-Inflammatory Effects of Inhaled Great Salt Lake Dust Particles," *Particle and Fiber Toxicology*, vol. 22, no. 2 (January 16, 2025).

[99] Reuben Attah et al., "Assessing the Oxidative Potential of Dust from the Great Salt Lake," *Atmospheric Environment*, vol. 336, no. 1 (November 2024).

[100] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[101] Carter Williams, "Dust Hot Spots: Where is Great Salt Lake's Toxic Dust Most Likely to Originate?" *KSL.com*, September 21, 2022, https://www.ksl.com/article/50479944/dust-hot-spots-where-is-great-salt-lakes-toxic-dust-most-likely-to-originate-. Hereinafter, Williams, "Dust Hot Spots."

Figure 7. Dust Transport from the Great Salt Lake Lakebed

Source: Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*, A synthesized resource document for the 2025 General Legislative Session, January 17, 2025, https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/GSL-Jan2025.pdf.

Notes: Dust from the Great Salt Lake can quickly cross state lines into Utah's neighboring states, and has the potential to reach states farther away, depending on particle size and wind. This graph shows the spread of dust in winds that are greater than 25 miles per hour. Orange arrows indicate the directions dust particles typically move.

Particulate matter and dust can be harmful for human lungs, especially if they contain toxins, according to scientists.[102] Multiple studies have found a connection between exposure to particulate matter in Utah's Wasatch Front and a higher occurrence of hospital admissions for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.[103] The presence of minerals and heavy metals in aerosolized soils could also harm human health, although scientists have yet to determine how

[102] Environmental Health Program, *Dust from the Great Salt Lake Dry Lakebed: A Possible Health Risk for Communities in Northern Utah*, U.S. Geological Survey, August 28, 2025, https://www.usgs.gov/programs/environmental-health-program/science/dust-great-salt-lake-dry-lakebed-a-possible-health. Hereafter, Environmental Health Program, *Dust from the Great Salt Lake Dry Lakebed.*

[103] For example, Reuban Attah, Kamaljeet Kaur, and Kevin D. Perry, et al., "Assessing the oxidative potential of dust from Great Salt Lake," *Atmospheric Environment*, vol. 336 (November 2024).

much exposure is considered dangerous to humans across all ages.[104] One study's results indicated that children under six years old are more vulnerable to health hazards from ingesting dust compared with older children and adults.[105] Some scientists, however, assert that dust from exposed lakebed should be considered as a "potential concern," rather than an imminent concern.[106] The Utah Department of Environmental Quality stated the following:

> While sediments from the Great Salt Lake have elevated levels of compounds like arsenic, historical data from over a decade of monitoring shows no increase in airborne arsenic or other heavy metals as lake levels have decreased. The highest arsenic levels detected are well below health thresholds, approximately 100 times below those set by California's health standards.[107]

Scientists also note that there is a need for more measurements and analyses of how Great Salt Lake dust and its spread affect humans.[108] Some experts propose a higher density of dust monitoring over larger regions to provide more data on the extent of the issue and inform residents of the region about air quality.[109] Scientists say that dust from the lake travels to counties without dust monitoring programs, including counties in other states.[110]

Dust originating from exposed lakebed in the Great Salt Lake is largely composed of particulate matter, which is regulated by the CAA. The State of Utah is following the National Ambient Air Quality Standards established by the EPA and has a state implementation plan to address particulate matter and other air pollutants.[111] According to the state, it is in attainment for all particulate matter regulations.[112] If particulate matter increases beyond the state's capacity to stay within attainment, the state could be in violation of the CAA and subject to mandated compliance measures, which could prove costly.[113]

Congress could authorize and fund federal agencies to help state efforts to remain in CAA compliance. For example, Congress may consider authorizing and directing federal agencies to monitor and report air quality around the Great Salt Lake and surrounding regions. This monitoring and reporting could complement state efforts, such as the Utah Dust Observation and Research Network.[114] Congress might also consider authorizing and funding federal agencies to conduct research on the human health effects of airborne dust from the lake. Some experts recommend additional research to develop a better understanding of the health impacts of

[104] Environmental Health Program, *Dust from the Great Salt Lake Dry Lakebed.*

[105] Environmental Health Program, *Dust from the Great Salt Lake Dry Lakebed.*

[106] Carter Williams, "Toxic Dust Hot Spots," *KSL.com*, September 21, 2022.

[107] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, *Understanding Great Salt Lake Dust and Air Quality*, July 18, 2025, https://deq.utah.gov/air-quality/great-salt-lake-dust.

[108] Carter Williams, "Dust Hot Spots."

[109] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[110] Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[111] A state implementation plan under the Clean Air Act provides for the implementation, maintenance, and enforcement of national ambient air quality standards for pollutants. For more information on regulations for states under the Clean Air Act, see CRS Report RL30853, *Clean Air Act: A Summary of the Act and Its Major Requirements*.

[112] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, "Dust EPA Standards and Dust Metal Health Guidelines," April 3, 2026, https://deq.utah.gov/air-quality/dust-epa-standards-and-dust-metal-health-guidelines.

[113] Brigham Daniels et al., "Great Salt Lake and the Future of Environmental Law," *University of Colorado Law Review*, vol. 96 (2025), pp. 745-809.

[114] This network has 13 existing stations and is scheduled to expand to 22 stations. The network's aim is to identify dust sources, measure dust composition, assess potential health risks from dust, inform the public of dust events, and help support dust mitigation.

exposed lakebed.[115] Conversely, Congress might also consider letting affected states monitor dust plumes from the lake.

A related option for Congress would be to consider whether to aid ecosystem restoration efforts on exposed lakebed in the Great Salt Lake to reduce dust from entering the air. Restoration could include delivering more water to the lake and planting vegetation with minimal water needs to secure lakebed soils.[116] Similar efforts are underway in the Salton Sea in California. For example, one initiative aims to restore approximately 30,000 acres of Salton Sea habitat by 2028. Approximately 15,000 acres of this total are to be aquatic restoration projects that aim to convert exposed lakebed areas to pond habitat for fish and wildlife, or wetland habitat.[117]

Authorizing a Federal Ecosystem Restoration Initiative

Utah is taking the lead in restoring the Great Salt Lake Basin with assistance from the federal government and other stakeholders. Federal efforts to restore the Great Salt Lake are largely limited to selected restoration activities on federal lands and grants provided by federal programs that operate at the national level. There is no annual dedicated federal funding for a restoration initiative that directly addresses the lake. The allocation of $50.0 million in IRA funds for Reclamation to expend on Great Salt Lake restoration efforts could also lead to greater federal involvement in restoration. This funding, combined with increasing water scarcity and other issues that face the lake, has prompted some policymakers and stakeholders to call for increased federal involvement in restoration efforts.[118] For example, the Trump Administration requested funding for FY2027 to create a comprehensive federal ecosystem restoration initiative. According to the request, this initiative would involve other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the EPA, and aim to improve water flows into and within the lake, restore ecosystems, remove invasive species, and address toxins in the lakebed.[119]

Congress might consider several options for increasing federal involvement in restoring the Great Salt Lake: (1) authorizing a federal restoration initiative to provide dedicated funding for restoration, and to formalize coordination and cooperation among the federal government, the State of Utah, and other stakeholders to conduct restoration activities; (2) providing appropriations to Utah to supplement the state's restoration resources; and (3) appropriating additional funding for existing federal programs and specifically directing those programs to conduct Great Salt Lake restoration.

Congress might also consider not authorizing a federal ecosystem restoration initiative for the Great Salt Lake and largely keeping restoration a state responsibility. Under this option, the state could direct and fund restoration activities and solicit grants from the federal government for specific actions or activities.[120] Federal agencies could continue to conduct restoration on federal

[115] Brian Maffly, *Great Salt Lake is Rebounding but Dust Monitoring Needs Improvement*, January 15, 2025, https://attheu.utah.edu/research/great-salt-lake-is-rebounding-but-dust-monitoring-needs-improvement/.

[116] According to the Great Salt Lake Strike Team, "conserving, dedicating, and delivering additional water" to the lake is essential to preventing growth of dust hotspots and continued exposure of the lakebed. Great Salt Lake Strike Team, *Great Salt Lake Data and Insights Summary*.

[117] Salton Sea Management Program, *Salton Sea Long-Range Plan*, California Natural Resources Agency, December 2024, https://saltonsea.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Salton-Sea-Long-Range-Plan-Final-Mar-2024.pdf.

[118] As discussed earlier, the governor of Utah has stated that his administration is preparing a request for $1.0 billion in federal funds to aid restoration efforts. In addition, the Utah state legislature passed a resolution that requests the federal government to partner with the state in restoring the Great Salt Lake.

[119] OMB, *Budget of the U.S. Government for Fiscal Year 2027*.

[120] Several federal programs provide funding to states for restoration activities. For example, the Wildlife Restoration (continued...)

lands, such as phragmites removal in the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (managed by FWS). The latter option might reflect some stakeholder perspectives that caution against further federal involvement in restoration and assert that restoration activities should largely be conducted and financed by state and local entities.[121]

If Congress considers authorizing a federal restoration initiative, the framework could be based solely on federal activities or on joint federal-state activities to restore the lake. Components to consider for a federal restoration initiative might include

- a governance structure to manage and implement federal restoration efforts;
- coordination among federal agencies and among the federal government, Utah, and other stakeholders;
- an advisory board;
- a plan or approach for implementing and funding restoration activities; and
- a program or office to conduct science and implement monitoring.

A federal Great Salt Lake restoration initiative could emulate other federal laws that authorize large-scale ecosystem restoration in various regions around the country, such as the Florida Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Salton Sea, Lake Tahoe, Puget Sound, and Great Lakes.

Governance Structure

A federal restoration initiative would need a governance structure to manage and implement restoration activities. Congress could consider some potential approaches for carrying out a federal restoration initiative, such as

1. authorizing a lead federal agency such as the Reclamation or USACE to implement restoration projects and coordinate with other federal agencies, Utah, and nonfederal stakeholders;
2. authorizing an initiative that multiple federal agencies implement;
3. authorizing a federal-state partnership that directs the federal government to directly coordinate and collaborate with Utah in planning and implementing restoration activities; or
4. authorizing federal agencies to implement restoration activities that follow a state plan or initiative.

Program, managed by FWS, provides grant funds to the states' and insular areas' fish and wildlife agencies for projects to restore, conserve, manage, and enhance wild birds and mammals and their habitats.

[121] For example, see Dennis Willis Price, "Letter: Utah Broke the Great Salt Lake, so Utah Should Fix It—Without Federal Dollars," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 8, 2026, pp. https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/letters/2026/03/07/letter-utah-broke-great-salt-lake/.

Lead Federal Agency. A lead federal agency approach could provide greater federal autonomy for conducting restoration activities, provide Congress with a single agency on which to focus oversight, and potentially allow for the lead agency to coordinate with State of Utah and other federal agencies involved in restoration.[122] Challenges to a lead federal agency approach might include

- lack of authority to coordinate all federal efforts for restoration;
- competition with other preexisting mandates and responsibilities in other agencies; and
- the possibility that a single federal agency might not hold expertise in all of the missions and skill sets required or have authority to work on federal and state lands not under its jurisdiction.

Multiple Federal Agencies. Congress might consider authorizing multiple federal agencies to implement a Great Salt Lake restoration initiative. Multiple federal agencies could be authorized to implement different parts of a restoration initiative that matches their authority and expertise. For example, the Calfed Bay-Delta Authorization Act (Calfed; P.L. 108-361) authorizes different restoration activities for various federal agencies, including Reclamation, USACE, EPA, FWS, and others. Under Calfed, the authorizations for federal agencies are grouped into various categories, including water storage, water conveyance, water use efficiency, water transfers, integrated regional water planning, ecosystem restoration, watersheds, water quality, science, and diversification of water supplies. Multiple agency involvement could allow for broader expertise to address restoration and collaboration that could allow for complementing, as opposed to duplicating, restoration efforts. In practice, if agencies do not agree on restoration activities or how they are implemented, then a multiagency initiative could be ineffective.

Federal-State Collaboration. Congress could direct a lead federal agency or agencies to directly collaborate with the State of Utah to implement restoration activities. This approach could authorize a cost share between the federal government and the State of Utah for restoration activities, or require Utah to provide land for restoration projects receiving federal government funds. A formal collaboration might also involve seeking concurrence from Utah for implementing a restoration plan or specific restoration activities. The federal government and the State of Florida are taking a similar approach to restoring the Florida Everglades. Under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program,[123] the primary nonfederal sponsor of the program is the South Florida Water Management District, a regional state agency that assists in the implementation, study, construction, management, and monitoring of restoration projects.[124]

A variation to this approach is for Congress to authorize a restoration and governance framework created by federal, state, and other entities. For example, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Interior, acting through Reclamation and in partnership with states and federal agencies, to implement the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP).[125] The PRRIP aims to restore parts of the Platte River ecosystem, namely by increasing river flows during certain

[122] A lead federal agency approach is used for some Geographic Programs administered by the EPA (e.g., Puget Sound restoration program and Great Lakes restoration program, among others). For more information on EPA-administered Geographic Programs, see EPA, "Geographic Programs," https://www.epa.gov/water-infrastructure/geographic-programs.

[123] The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan was authorized in Title VI of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-541).

[124] For more information on Everglades Restoration, see CRS In Focus IF11336, *Recent Developments in Everglades Restoration*, by Anna E. Normand and Pervaze A. Sheikh.

[125] P.L. 110-229, as amended by P.L. 116-94. See https://platteriverprogram.org/ for more information.

periods, protecting and restoring habitat for target bird species, and accommodating new water-related activities (e.g., water storage, diversions, and conservation).[126] The PRRIP was created and is being run by a governing committee consisting of federal, state, environmental, and water-user representatives.[127]

A federal-state collaboration could lead to greater coordination and reduce duplication of efforts. If there is a state-created comprehensive plan for restoration (e.g., the GSLBIP), Congress could authorize and direct federal agencies to conduct restoration activities that correspond with or follow the plan to foster collaboration. In some cases, a federal-state collaboration could lead to disagreements on priorities for restoration. For example, state priorities for restoration could be focused on stakeholder needs (e.g., increasing water storage), whereas federal priorities could lean toward habitat restoration of exposed lakebed.

State-Led Restoration Initiative. Another possible option is that Congress could authorize federal agencies to implement a restoration initiative that is consistent with a state plan or restoration activities. For example, in the Puget Sound, actions authorized under a federal ecosystem restoration initiative are to be consistent, to the greatest extent practicable, to a state-derived restoration plan known as the Action Agenda and other recovery and restoration plans for parts of the ecosystem.[128] This approach would separate the federal and state governing structures, but could aim to ensure that federal and state restoration efforts are consistent. This approach may face challenges if federal restoration objectives and priorities differ from state objectives.

Coordination Among Government Entities and Stakeholders

Great Salt Lake restoration activities may stretch across federal and nonfederal lands or waters and involve different jurisdictions. Restoration efforts might require coordination among stakeholders to be effective. Coordination aims to avoid duplication of restoration activities, provide a forum to discuss restoration, and promote collaboration among stakeholders. Congress might consider options to support coordination between federal and nonfederal entities in an ecosystem restoration initiative.

Congress may consider authorizing a multi-stakeholder task force or committee to facilitate coordination among federal and nonfederal stakeholders involved in restoration. A multi-stakeholder task force could consist of federal, tribal, state, and local government representatives, as well as stakeholders with special interests, such as environmental, agricultural, and mining representatives. This entity could be tasked with coordinating restoration activities among stakeholders; discussing ways to improve restoration or ways to study restoration; preparing a crosscut budget; preparing restoration, implementation, or science plans; and providing suggestions for improving the restoration initiative, among other things. Multi-stakeholder entities (e.g., task forces, committees, working groups, etc.) are authorized for several restoration initiatives. For example, Congress established a Lake Champlain Management Conference to help facilitate the efforts of the Lake Champlain Basin Geographic Program. The management

[126] This program was created by the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, *Final Platte River Recovery Implementation Program*, 2006, https://platteriverprogram.org/sites/default/files/PubsAndData/ProgramLibrary/PRRIP%202006_Full%20Program%20Document_Final.pdf.

[127] Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, *Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Cooperative Agreement*, October 24, 2006, https://platteriverprogram.org/sites/default/files/PubsAndData/ProgramLibrary/Cooperative%201997_Coop%20Agreement%20for%20Platte%20River.pdf.

[128] 33 U.S.C. §1267b.

conference is responsible for preparing a restoration plan and research program for the restoration initiative.[129]

Another possible approach is a federal agency-only task force. Its duties might include

- identifying opportunities to leverage federal resources with state or local resources to restore the Great Salt Lake;
- facilitating partnerships between federal and state governments for restoration;
- creating a strategic plan or action plan to organize federal restoration efforts;
- providing technical assistance and scientific resources to nonfederal stakeholders; and
- soliciting and addressing recommendations from stakeholders on how to improve restoration projects and activities.

For example, a federal task force authorized under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative creates an action plan every four years to guide restoration and coordinates work among federal agencies to implement the plan.[130]

Challenges to approaches that involve coordination include

- lack of consensus among agencies on implementing restoration activities;
- unreliability of annual federal appropriations; and
- delays in land transfers required for restoration activities.

Advisory Board

Several stakeholders are interested in the conservation and restoration of the Great Salt Lake, including state, federal, and local governments; nongovernmental organizations; private groups; and industries. Soliciting recommendations for implementing a restoration initiative and providing a forum for stakeholders to communicate their perspectives might be of interest to Congress. Congress could consider whether to authorize an advisory board or boards that address various subjects, similar to other large-scale ecosystem restoration initiatives that provide a forum for a variety of stakeholders to communicate their perspectives.[131] Most of these boards serve to collect and transmit recommendations on how to improve restoration. For example, the Long Island Sound Stewardship Advisory Committee includes representatives from federal, state, tribal, and local governments; nongovernmental organizations; academia; private groups and businesses; and commercial and recreational fishing interests. The committee evaluates applications for stewardship sites, develops management plans to address threats to those sites, acts to protect and enhance sites, and more.[132]

The State of Utah currently has an advisory board that lacks federal representation: the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council (GSLAC). The GSLAC was established in 2010 to advise the governor of

[129] 33 U.S.C. §1270(a), (d) and (e). For more information on the Lake Champlain Basin Program, see Lake Champlain Basin Program, "Lake Champlain Basin Program," https://www.lcbp.org/.

[130] See 33 U.S.C. §1268(c)(7). For more information on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), see CRS In Focus IF12280, *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)*, by Laura Gatz and Eva Lipiec.

[131] For example, the Great Lakes Advisory Board (GLAB) supports GLRI. The GLAB's 15 members provide advice and recommendations on GLRI and the implementation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada. For more information, see Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, *Great Lakes Advisory Board*, https://www.glri.us/sites/default/files/great_lakes_advisory_board_charter_2024.pdf.

[132] 33 U.S.C. §1269.

Utah, the Utah Department of Natural Resources, and the Utah Department of Environmental Quality on the sustainable use of Great Salt Lake water, protection of environmental health in and around the lake, and future development around the lake.[133] The GSLAC consists of 11 members appointed by the governor who represent several interests, including extractive industry, aquaculture, conservation, migratory bird protection, municipal governments, county governments,[134] and publicly owned treatment works.[135] The GSLAC also assists the FFSL, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, and the Utah Department of Natural Resources in achieving their lake restoration goals.[136] Congress could consider authorizing federal agencies to participate in GSLAC if allowable under state law.

Implementation

A federal restoration initiative could be implemented under different approaches that cover planning and funding for ecosystem restoration.

Planning for Restoration. Several large-scale ecosystem restoration initiatives use a comprehensive or periodic action plan to guide and implement restoration. Some initiatives, such as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP), have a holistic ecosystem restoration plan that aims to cover the duration of the initiative. For CERP, the restoration initiative was originally estimated to be completed approximately 30 years from its date of authorization. Other restoration initiatives have *action plans* that outline restoration projects and activities for shorter periods of time, such as five years. For example, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan provides a framework for restoring the Great Lakes over a five-year span.[137] The action plan provides a problem statement, a set of goals, interim objectives, progress measures, final targets, and principal activities for restoration under each of five focus areas.[138]

Funding Restoration. Congress appropriates funding that supports Great Salt Lake restoration to several federal departments and agencies through annual appropriations laws and supplemental appropriations (e.g., for Reclamation under the IRA). If Congress determines that more federal funding for Great Salt Lake restoration is a congressional priority, it may consider options such as the following:

- Establishing a grant program to fund lake restoration activities by nonfederal stakeholders such as state, local, tribal, and non-governmental entities. This program could be implemented by a federal agency or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

[133] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, "HB 343 Great Salt Lake Advisory Council," 2010, https://deq.utah.gov/water-quality/hb-343-great-salt-lake-advisory-council.

[134] The Great Salt Lake Advisory Council has a representative from each of Box Elder County, Davis County, Salt Lake County, Tooele County, and Weber County, all of whom are elected officials from the county governments.

[135] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, *HB 343 Great Salt Lake Advisory Council*, 2010, https://deq.utah.gov/water-quality/hb-343-great-salt-lake-advisory-council. Hereinafter, Utah Department of Environmental Quality, *HB 343 Great Salt Lake Advisory Council*.

[136] Utah Department of Environmental Quality, *HB 343 Great Salt Lake Advisory Council*.

[137] For the latest action plan, see Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, *Action Plan IV: Fiscal Years 2025-2029*, November 2024, https://www.glri.us/sites/default/files/glri-action-plan-4-202411-43pp_0.pdf. Hereinafter, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, *Action Plan IV*.

[138] Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, *Action Plan IV*. The principal actions in the action plan are not specific projects; rather, they are broad actions that address the objectives of the focus areas. Each year, federal agencies identify projects they plan to take to implement the action plan.

- Providing funding to the State of Utah, either directly or through a federal agency, to implement restoration projects and activities.
- Providing funding to federal agencies to conduct restoration projects and activities under a restoration initiative, as discussed above.
- Appropriating funds to individual federal agencies to conduct specific Great Salt Lake restoration activities (i.e., status quo).

Another option would be to increase federal resources for restoration without increasing appropriations. Congress could direct agencies to prioritize restoring the Great Salt Lake or inland saline lakes in existing national-level conservation and habitat restoration programs.

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