

HEALTHY HEADWATER'S SUCCESS STORY:

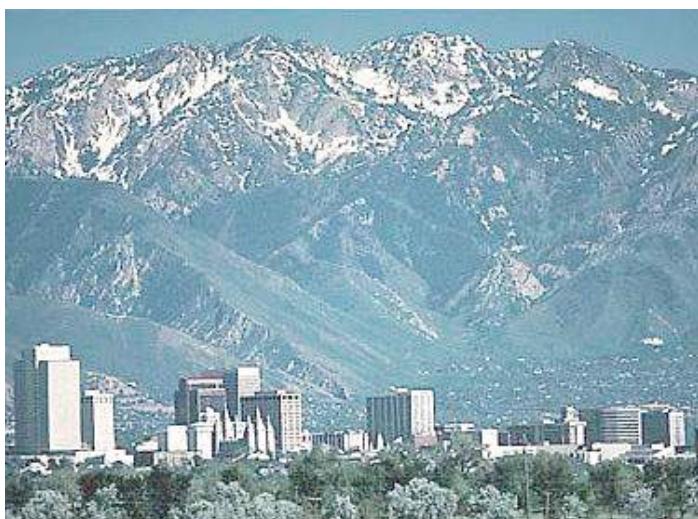
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH—REMEMBERING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR WATERSHED

Salt Lake City's historical tradition of watershed stewardship responds to new threats from climate change

Salt Lake City sprawls across the valley floor below the towering mountains of the Wasatch Front. In addition to a stunning backdrop and world-class recreation, the 11,000-feet-high peaks provide clean, reliable water supplies to growing population of more than a half million people.

This water comes almost entirely from melting snow—a virtual reservoir high in the mountains. Unfortunately, that reservoir is vulnerable to the impacts of a warming climate, which means more precipitation falling as rain in the winter, less reliable snowpack, and earlier, more rapid runoff in the spring. These changes could cause the city to face serious shortages and water quality problems in late summer and fall.

Salt Lake City leaders are responding to these threats with a diverse set of tools that establish the city as a West-wide leader in watershed protection. Among the most important of these tools is extra-territorial authority, enshrined in state law, to enforce water quality protection ordinances throughout the 185-square miles of the five Wasatch Front watersheds that provide its water. The City has used this authority to restrict a variety of activities including cattle grazing, sewage systems, and recreation. Laura Briefer, Special Projects manager for Salt Lake Public Utilities explains that while some of these restrictions have been controversial, experience has shown they are necessary: “In the past, when we’ve neglected our watersheds, we’ve paid a price in terms of water quality.”



Because the City recognizes it cannot adequately protect its water supply with regulation alone, in 1989 it established a second important tool, the Public Utilities Water Rights and Watershed Purchase Fund. The Fund uses a surcharge on water customers' monthly bills to purchase critical watershed lands and conservation easements from willing sellers. Over the years, the surcharge has grown from 25 cents a month to \$1.00, and will soon rise to \$1.50, providing about \$1.5 million each year to protect the watershed lands from development.

Profile of a Watershed Advocate:
Laura Briefer protects drinking water by building partnerships



As special projects manager for Salt Lake Public Utilities, Laura Briefer's responsibilities span numerous environmental sustainability projects for Salt Lake's public water supply—encompassing drinking water, storm water and sewer water.

Much of Briefer's work focuses on the projected impacts of climate change on Salt Lake City's water security. Declining mountain snowpacks and changes in runoff patterns threaten the City's year-round water supply. At the same time, population growth in the valley and the canyons increase the pressure on limited supplies and watershed health.

Briefer, a founding member of Carpe Diem West's Healthy Headwaters Working Group, speaks with authority on sustainability metrics, environmental restoration, and hydrological processes. But her real focus is on people—figuring out how to build durable relationships between an ever-changing cast of players in dozens of agencies and organizations whose work relates to the health of the watershed and its ability to respond to climate change. "We all see the writing on the wall for the need to enter into new types of partnerships to make our watershed more resilient," she remarks.

Briefer describes the 15,000 acres of protected lands as a critical part of the City's overall watershed management strategy. But she also acknowledges that land acquisition alone is not enough because "the pressures are so intense" from climate change, recreation development and other land uses. For this reason, the City is now looking at options to more intensively manage and restore lands it already holds, including removing structures, eradicating invasive weeds, and improving the water-holding capacity of wetlands, riparian areas, and meadows.

A third tool in the City's arsenal is a 1981 Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with the US Forest Service, under which the City pays for backcountry rangers and enforcement officers to protect watershed lands far outside of city limits. "It's a multiple-use area that we co-manage with the Forest Service," notes Briefer, who spends much of her time building and nurturing watershed partnerships.

The City's cooperative relationship with the Forest Service has deep roots. The first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, conferred with City officials in the early 20th century about the value of the new national forest system in protecting municipal water sources, and Congress enacted legislation in 1914 and 1934 directing the Forest Service to cooperate with the City to protect Wasatch Front watersheds. Although many western cities rely on Forest Service watersheds, few have such a direct role in managing them.

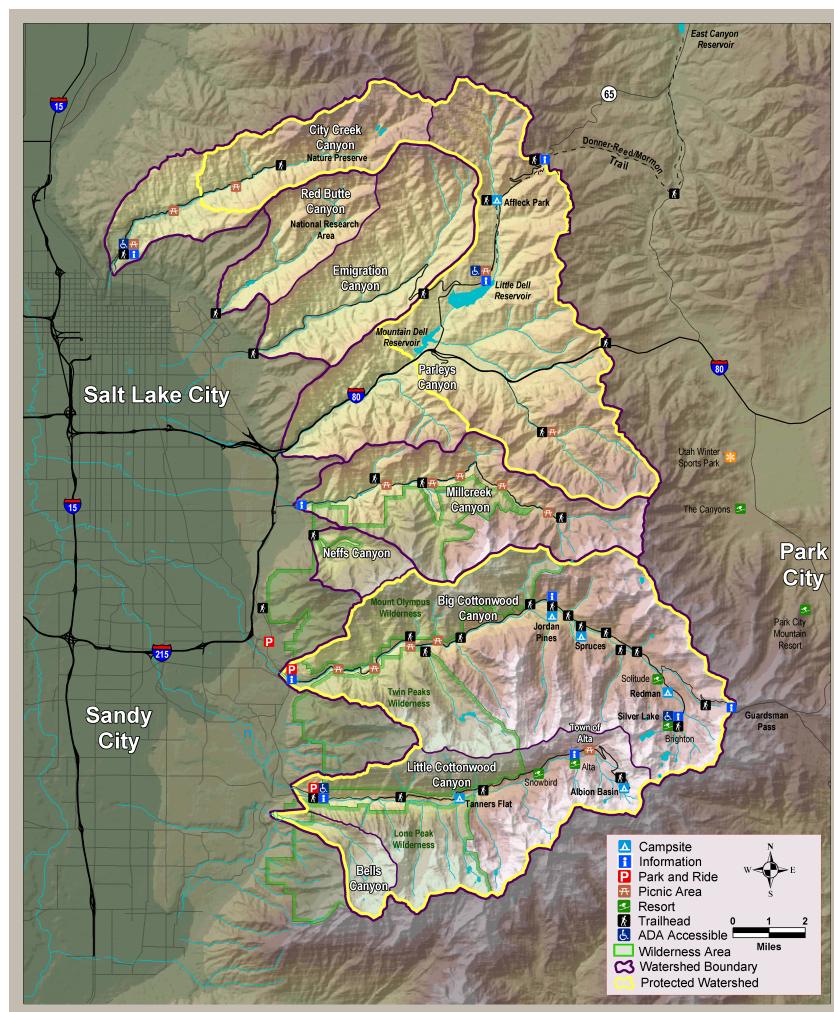
In addition to its rights under the MOU, the City weighs in on emerging public land management policies. Reflecting a broader, long-term strategy for watershed protection and climate change adaptation, Salt Lake City supported federal legislation in 2010 that would have protected wilderness areas in the high country, and has advocated related protections in national forest planning processes. The wilderness bill will be reintroduced this year, and the somewhat unlikely bedfellows who came together to support it have created the Wasatch Water Legacy Partnership to pursue a comprehensive strategy of restoration, education, and land acquisition in the municipal watershed.

City officials also keep a close eye on private development in the Wasatch Front watersheds. For example, the City recently blocked a proposed residential development by football legend Steve Young on the grounds it would threaten water quality in Little Cottonwood Canyon. The City also consistently weighs in on development proposals related to the canyons' world-class ski areas, ensuring compatibility with watershed protection priorities.

Salt Lake City's modern watershed protection efforts are the continuation of a long tradition. Municipal leaders as far back as 1873 actively opposed mining and related development in the headwaters of City Creek out of concern that the activity would "foul the waters leading into the City." Brigham Young himself envisioned a city in which "every garden, house, lot or room may be abundantly supplied with cold water from the mountains at pleasure." While these pioneers might not recognize the teeming metropolitan center that now dominates the land, they would surely sit comfortably with the notion of City leaders vigorously protecting the source of this water—a legacy of stewardship that reflects a deep commitment to homeland and community.

For additional information:

Salt Lake City Public Utilities Watershed Protection Program, www.slcgov.com/utilities/watershed.htm



Carpe Diem West leads a network of water decision makers and scientists in the American West that is developing collaborative, innovative actions and policies to create water security for our communities, the food we grow, our economy and our environment.

Carpe Diem West's Healthy Headwaters Project is an alliance of upstream land managers, downstream water utilities, and conservation advocates whose goal is to increase the climate resiliency of the headwaters systems that provide the West's drinking water.

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