

The Nature  
Conservancy



40 Years in Utah

**2024**

**CHAPTER UPDATE**

*Gift and Estate Planning*

## Create Your Conservation Legacy

What does tomorrow hold for the world we love? We are grateful for the thousands of forward-thinking individuals who have made a gift for the future by including The Nature Conservancy in their estate plans. Each year, more than 20% of the total funds raised come from gifts like these. They truly make a difference for our world. You can make a lasting impact for nature by including The Nature Conservancy in Utah as a beneficiary in your will or estate plan.

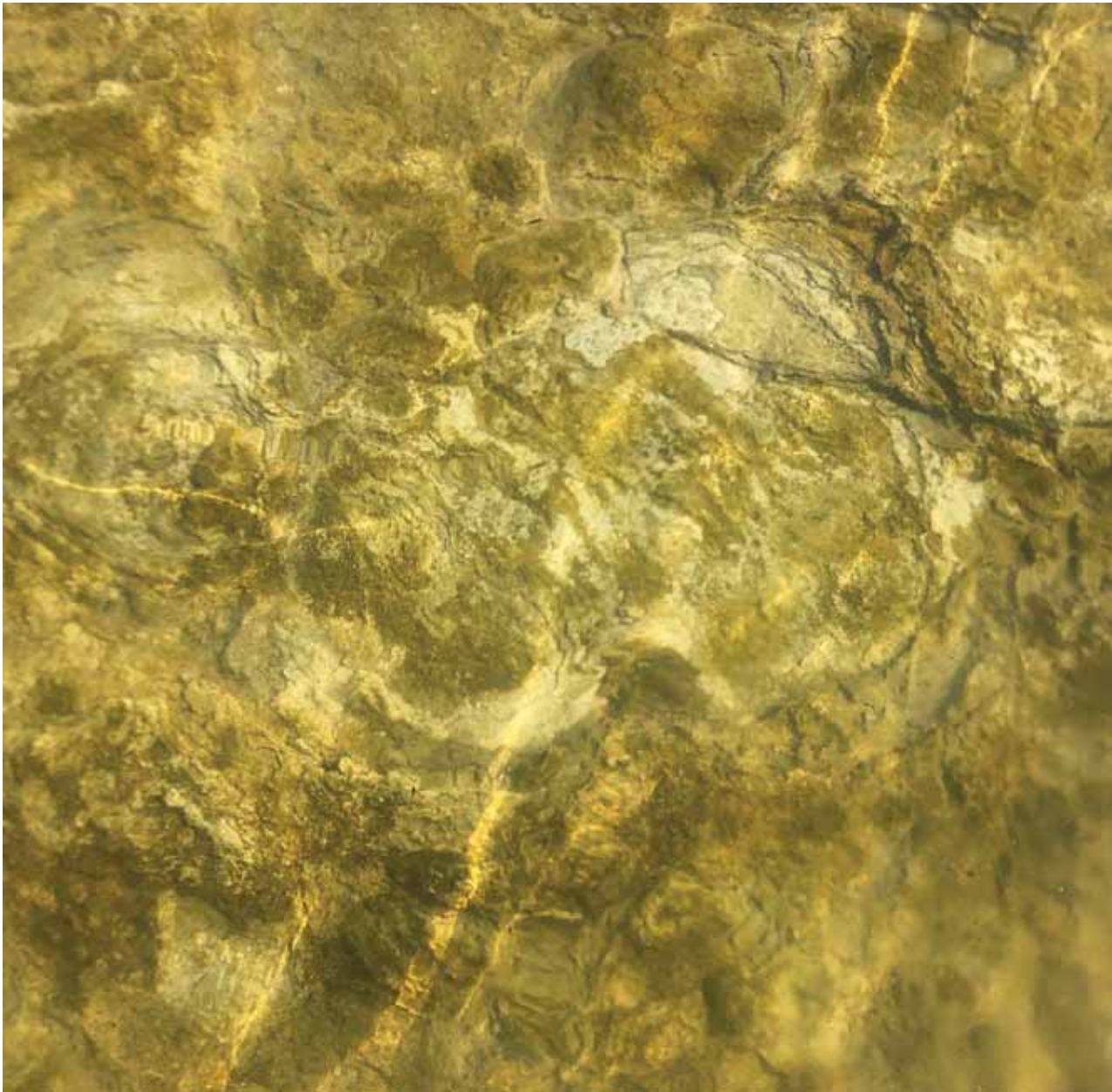
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**To create your own legacy for nature, contact Anna Zanetti, Associate Director of Development, TNC in Utah, at (801) 238.2328 or [anna.zanetti@tnc.org](mailto:anna.zanetti@tnc.org).**

**ON THE COVER:** The Strawberry River in northeastern Utah is part of the Colorado River watershed. TNC's acquisition of approximately 5,600 acres protected 14 miles along the river from development—this land was transferred to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources for long-term conservation. Our efforts along this river exemplify TNC's enduring impact in Utah since our chapter's founding in 1984. © Harold E. Malde

## Conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends.

At TNC we work to protect unique and essential ecosystems like those found in Great Salt Lake, home to these remarkable microbialites. These particular ones were left high and dry in late 2022 but are under water again after the Lake rose. They are coming back to life. They don't look like much, but they are at the base of the GSL food chain. Brine shrimp and brine flies depend on them. In turn, millions of birds feed on the shrimp and flies. They are one of the oldest forms of life on Earth dating back 3.5 billion years in the fossil record. Microbialites are made of algae and bacteria and contain significant amounts of calcium carbonate—the primary component of limestone.



© JIM BREITINGER/TNC

**GREAT SALT LAKE MICROBIALITES** off of Antelope Island's Buffalo Point.



**IN JANUARY 2024**, I was honored to begin my new role leading a dedicated team doing incredible conservation work across Utah. From the red rock of the Colorado Plateau to the soaring mountains of the Wasatch Front to the vast Great Basin,

Utah is a magical place. With this Chapter Update, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Utah and the many supporters who made our recent *Nature Unites Us* Campaign a resounding success—thank you for your overwhelming generosity and trust in TNC! We are proud of our legacy of accomplishments and yet our work is never done—our commitment to conserving Utah’s lands and waters is stronger than ever.

As you will read in this update, our work in Utah is grounded in strategic engagement and collaboration with a broad base of key, influential partners. True collaboration takes time, time to build relationships based on trust. TNC is able to earn trust because we have steadily built credibility, not by jumping into the spotlight, but by showing progress towards shared goals.

We direct our resources to policies and on-the-ground actions aimed at making a difference: protecting water resources for nature and people; securing and increasing resiliency of our rangelands and forest systems; mitigating climate change; and deepening community engagement and outreach.

For TNC in Utah, we take with us into this new era the invaluable trust our partners place in us and a foundation of steadfast support from our members and donors. Along with our entire team, I look forward with great hope as we establish aspirational goals. While the challenges here in Utah and across our planet are urgent and daunting, together we can help build a thriving future for people and nature.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Kitchens".

**Elizabeth Kitchens**  
Utah State Director

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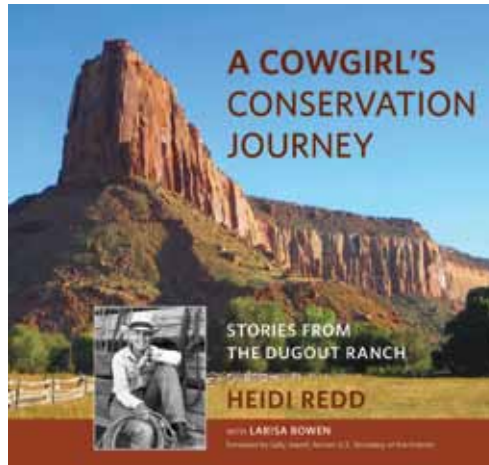
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### Heidi Redd's New Memoir

We teamed up with iconic Utah cowgirl Heidi Redd to publish a beautiful new book featuring stories from Heidi's life full of adventure at the historic Dugout Ranch, the largest private inholding in Bears Ears National Monument. *A Cowgirl's Conservation Journey* details Heidi's life-changing partnership with TNC to save this special place. Learn more and **get your copy at [nature.org/utahcowgirl](https://nature.org/utahcowgirl)**. Book sales support TNC but are not tax-deductible.

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“Heidi’s deep connection to these landscapes comes alive through her stories.”

— Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell

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## PROTECTING WATER FOR PEOPLE & NATURE



**AMERICAN AVOCET** foraging for food.

### Our One & Only Great Salt Lake

Utah has enjoyed two unusually wet winters. Does that help Great Salt Lake? Definitely. Has the Lake recovered? Unfortunately, no. It took decades for the Lake to drop to historic lows, and it will take years of strategic, sustained efforts to restore and protect it. For TNC's Utah Chapter, the Lake remains a top conservation priority, and this year, thanks to new partnerships and heightened attention from both the State and the public, we made important progress.

**Improving Flows.** The Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust is an historic effort by the State of Utah to secure more water for the Lake and to enhance its critical wetlands. As co-managers of the Trust, TNC and National Audubon Society made key

strides in the last year. The Trust has helped to secure 64,000 acre-feet of water for the Lake and set an ambitious goal to reach 100,000 acre-feet of water annually through 2029 with a combination of delivering new flows and protecting existing flows. The Trust also awarded \$8.5 million in grants for wetlands protection and restoration. Combined, these projects will benefit more than 13,000 acres of critical Lake habitat. Still in its early stages, the Trust is focused on delivering long-term, lasting results for the Lake. TNC knows it will be one critical tool, among many, to improve the Lake's future.

**Life-Sustaining Wetlands.** With the Great Salt Lake ecosystem strained, it's more important than ever to sustain healthy wetlands and uplands, which benefit wildlife and people. Our Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve provides the perfect place for us



CENTER: **PEOPLE VISITING THE SPIRAL JETTY** on the north arm of Great Salt Lake. Note the red water which is from microorganisms that thrive in the high-salinity of this part of the Lake. RIGHT: **SNOWY EGRET** resting along the Bear River.

to restore and construct functioning wetlands by using strategic management interventions that mimic nature's processes. This year we worked on three important wetlands projects, including a unique collaboration with the Utah Department of Agriculture to improve the preserve's flood irrigation system on 250 acres—saving water, benefitting birds and ensuring more water reaches the Lake. We've also launched another project at West Layton Marsh, where we will be installing water control structures, levees and low-tech processed-based restoration tools to create and restore wetlands, open water and wet meadow habitats in a 250-acre area of the preserve. Not only do these projects help us control invasives and protect precious water flows, but they also create reliable nesting and feeding habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, waders, songbirds and other wildlife.

### Recent Great Salt Lake Policy Wins

The quality of the legislation this year shows Great Salt Lake remains a priority for Utah lawmakers and constituents. TNC and our partners helped advance critical policies for nature.

**HB453** creates incentives for the Lake's mineral extraction companies to reduce the amount of water they use and protects water that is dedicated to GSL from being taken out for mineral extraction.

**SB18** is an important continuation of efforts to save water that would have been diverted and consumed under older and less efficient irrigation systems. If farmers save water through agricultural optimization, they can now put it toward another beneficial use, including dedicating it to GSL.

**HB11** adds to efforts to reduce water use on non-functional turf by restricting government entities from using overhead spray irrigation in new or reconstructed landscaped areas.

## **Crisis in the Colorado River Basin**

As ground zero for climate change in the United States, the Southwest—and the Colorado River—face increasing drought and heat. By 2050 experts predict the river's flows could shrink by as much as 31 percent. TNC is the only non-profit working within and across all seven states and Mexico to tackle water scarcity in the Colorado River Basin. The Colorado River makes up approximately 27 percent of Utah's current water supply, providing water to approximately 60 percent of Utah's population, including the Wasatch Front, through an intricate network of aqueducts, pipelines and reservoirs. Here are some highlights from our work this year:

**Piloting Water Management on the Price River.** TNC led the creation of Utah's first water bank on the Price River, which allows TNC and partners to lease water for environmental purposes. This first-of-its-kind water bank is being used as a demonstration project for scaling up water banking to other watersheds and to test the feasibility of a future Demand Management Program in the Utah. Water banking activity also led to new legislation that recognizes instream flows as a beneficial use. We are continuing to work with the Carbon Canal Company to pipe, store and release a portion of canal water into the Price River to improve flows for six rare fish species while benefitting local agriculture.

**Work on the Virgin River.** Near Zion National Park, on a key stretch of the Virgin River, we opened our new Sheep Bridge Nature Preserve. The preserve offers a revamped trail system with educational signage showcasing the stunning river corridor, which supports more than 100 bird species and other wildlife. TNC continues to help fund a lease for instream water with the Shivwits Band of Paiutes to maintain water flows into the Santa Clara River, a tributary of the Virgin. We're also making steady progress with partners on the modernization of the town of Hurricane's water delivery system, with the goal of protecting important river flows to benefit communities, agricultural producers and native fishes such as the endangered woundfin and Virgin River chub.

## **Protecting the Provo River Delta**

TNC purchased a third easement on a property near spawning habitat for the threatened june sucker, contributing to a massive partnership effort to restore the interface between the Lower Provo River and Utah Lake. Easements ensure that the land surrounding the Provo River Delta remains free from development, serves as a sanctuary for wildlife species and preserves historical agricultural uses. We have another strategic easement purchase in the Delta planned for next year.

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### **Baby Razorback Suckers**

In fall 2023, scientists counted 51 juvenile razorback suckers in the fish nursery at TNC's Scott and Norma Matheson Wetlands Preserve in Moab. The Colorado River's high flows benefitted these at-risk fish, and TNC's nursery sheltered them at a crucial stage of development.





**THE COLORADO RIVER**  
near Moab.

## Saving the Sagebrush Sea

TNC's Sagebrush Sea Program is working across six states to protect and restore the Sagebrush Sea. Once a vast and thriving ecosystem across the West, sagebrush has been fragmented and overrun by invasive annual grasses, which fuel dangerous, atypical fires. The loss of the Sagebrush Sea hurts America's ranchers and rural communities and threatens the more than 350 species of native plants and animals who rely on it for survival.

This year in Utah, TNC joined forces with the Bureau of Land Management to investigate how restoring western watersheds can sustain healthy sagebrush ecosystems. Through TNC's Canyonlands Research Center, this spring we installed beaver dam analogs and other low-tech restoration structures in Indian Creek and North Cottonwood Creek at TNC's Dugout Ranch. Our goal is to restore stream function, helping the creeks meander naturally and replenish the adjacent upland sagebrush communities.

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### New Funding to Protect Greater Sage-Grouse

In late 2023, TNC secured two major grants for conservation easements to protect thousands of acres of sagebrush habitat in northwestern and eastern Utah for greater sage-grouse and many other species that depend on this at-risk ecosystem. The easement projects—in partnership with ranching families—are underway in 2024.



**SAGEBRUSH LANDSCAPE.**

© THOMAS LEE

## Restoring Western Forests

A nationwide policy of forest fire suppression and the increasing effects of climate change have put our forests—and our communities—at risk. Dry forests in Utah and across the West are now overgrown with fuel that can cause larger, more intense and more dangerous wildfires. This past winter, members of TNC's prescribed fire crew joined USDA Forest Service fire teams in the Dixie National Forest in southwest Utah to assist in fuel reduction work, including prescribed fire in the Pine Valley Ranger District. Another crew was on the ground in the Uinta-Wasatch Cache National Forest in June, helping with pile burning and broadcast burning. By managing the natural process of fire on the landscape, we can help to protect our communities and improve habitats for native plants and animals. Our work in Utah is part of TNC's effort to increase the resilience of 50 million acres of dry forests in the West by 2030.

## Sustainable Ranching in the Era of Climate Change

Working at the historic Dugout Ranch, TNC's Canyonlands Research Center (CRC) program partners, including academic institutions, land managers and state and federal research agencies, are testing, modeling and sharing strategies and tools to improve the resiliency of dryland ecosystems. Who's benefitting? Land managers in the American Southwest and beyond. One of CRC's most unique elements is the use of TNC's Dugout Ranch and its cattle herd for research on sustainable ranching in the face of climate change impacts.

This year the CRC team tested precision ranching tools, including virtual fencing, body condition scoring with artificial intelligence (a way of measuring a cow's body fat), and water monitoring sensors combined in one platform as part of the ongoing Sustainable Southwest Beef Coordinated Agriculture Project, run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Through this program, the Dugout is one of five ranches in the Southwest where scientists and ranchers are researching novel strategies for enhancing the sustainability of rangelands and livestock. The research team hopes to share the CRC's findings to help other ranchers make use of technology to keep the range healthy, prevent herd losses and save money. The CRC team also worked with the Utah Department of Agriculture to pilot and monitor different irrigation technology and practices at the Dugout Ranch to share lessons learned. We are continuing the latest phase of our research on Raramuri Criollo cattle, working with Utah State University to study



© STUART TRUCKMAN

### THE DUGOUT RANCH.

the behavioral differences between Red Angus and a Criollo hybrid. Our goal is to determine if Raramuri Criollo, an eco-regional breed that originates in an isolated region of the Copper Canyon of northern Mexico, could put less stress on the arid ecosystem of the Colorado Plateau than traditional European cattle breeds. This work has ramifications for climate adaptation of agriculture, arid rangeland health and food sustainability and sovereignty.

## Partnership with Utah Clean Energy

This year, TNC continued to partner with and support Utah Clean Energy (UCE) to address climate and clean energy issues in Utah. UCE's collaborative approach has made it easy to work together to implement awareness campaigns and support Utah's Congressional delegation and state legislature. UCE has helped build relationships with rural Utah residents and opinion leaders, as well as faith-based organizations. The relationship has also enabled us to influence Utah's statewide plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and secure federal funding opportunities to implement climate and clean energy infrastructure.



© ANDREA NELSON/TNC

**STUDENTS ON**  
a Wings and  
Water field trip  
at the Great Salt  
Lake Shorelands  
Preserve.

### **Indigenous Learning Exchange**

Seven Native American students from six tribal affiliations and six different academic institutions participated in TNC's NATURE (Native American Tribes Upholding Restoration & Education) program through the Canyonlands Research Center during the summer of 2023. The students spent 7 weeks in the classroom and in the field at the Dugout Ranch, interacting with some of the leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous scientists and practitioners working in the region. This unique learning-exchange, run in partnership with Utah State University-Blanding, is designed to support the next generation of Indigenous leaders from the Four Corners Region with skills in natural resource management.

### **Youth Education at Great Salt Lake**

Through the *Wings & Water* wetlands education program we hosted more than 1,500 fourth graders over the past year from the Wasatch Front at TNC's Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve. The program offers an immersive, hands-on learning experience focused on Great Salt Lake ecology. Run in partnership with Utah State University Botanical Center, *Wings & Water* will soon have an online learning component available to students worldwide.

### **The Biocrust Project**

Created by artist Jorge Rojas and Dr. Sasha Reed through the Artist-in-Residence Program at TNC's Canyonlands Research Center, this unique exhibition was on display for four months at the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art in Salt Lake City. Featuring Indigenous, scientific and environmental perspectives, the audio-visual installation introduced visitors to the value and vulnerability of biocrust.



© ALEC LYONS

**BIOCRUST** is a complex community of lichens, mosses, and cyanobacteria.

## Razorback Sucker Mural

In partnership with the Utah Wildlife Federation and artist Chris Peterson, TNC supported the creation of a mural, located in downtown Moab, featuring the razorback sucker, an at-risk Colorado River fish. The mural is part of the Federation's effort to raise awareness statewide about Utah's wildlife. A QR code on the mural directs people to a website with more information on TNC's efforts to help protect this species and its vulnerable habitat along the Colorado River.

## Recreation Stewardship Program

Through the Canyonlands Research Center, TNC worked with the Access Fund to support the Indian Creek Climbing Steward Program, which sponsors specially trained stewards to live in Indian Creek and engage with climbers in the area, sharing information and best practices for respectful visitation that reduces their impact on the local lands and waters.

## Live Kestrel Cam

By June 2024, more than 2,500 viewers tuned in to see a family of nesting kestrels this year. Inconspicuously located above a nest box at TNC's Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve, our camera provided an up-close look at the growth and fledging of five young raptors who hatched this spring. For seven years, the live cam has been a fun and effective way for us to engage with wildlife fans throughout Utah and beyond.

## Ski for Nature at Snowbird

In March, we teamed up with Snowbird and welcomed the public to a program on Great Salt Lake featuring GSL Deputy Commissioner Tim Davis. Snowbird shared a special screening of *The Last Resort*, a new documentary by filmmaker Michael Fleischner that explores the Lake from many perspectives—including that of a ski resort.

## Deep Dive into the Caribbean

At a *Conservancy Voices* donor event in April, we offered Utahns the chance to learn about one of TNC's most exciting global programs. Dr. Steve Schill, the lead scientist of TNC's Caribbean Division, gave the inside scoop on our latest work with partners to map undersea habitats and better protect the world's coral reefs.



TOP: **NEW MURAL** in Moab featuring the razorback sucker.  
BOTTOM: **SKI FOR NATURE** at Snowbird.

# WE DID IT! Celebrating TNC's *Nature Unites Us* Campaign

July 1, 2020 - December 31, 2023



Thanks to you, we've reached a remarkable conservation milestone. TNC's *Nature Unites Us* Campaign raised \$41,286,000 in private and public funds and land gifts. Over the past four years, your support for this statewide initiative protected and restored vulnerable Utah lands and waters, advanced conservation science and scored major policy wins in the arenas of water management and climate readiness. You also enabled TNC to expand programs that are educating and inspiring diverse nature advocates of all ages throughout Utah. We are so grateful for your commitment to TNC's mission, which has never been more important. All of us benefit from a world where people and nature can thrive.

## Conservation Highlights From the Campaign

- Launch of the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust
- Utah's first-ever water bank on the Price River
- Freeport Drain project creates wetlands at Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve
- Sheep Bridge Nature Preserve opens to the public with expanded visitor trails and added interpretive signs
- Landscape Conservation Forecasting on Boulder Mountain
- Santa Clara River water lease with Shivwits Band of Paiutes
- Historic agreement with the Jicarilla Apache Nation to lease water on the San Juan River
- Creation of the NATURE Indigenous learning program through the Canyonlands Research Center program
- Support for Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation to restore sacred lands along the Bear River
- Landmark policy changes in Utah: instream flow reform, water banking, split-season leasing, the Navajo-Utah Water Rights Settlement, saved water as beneficial use, and the Great Salt Lake Basin Integrated Plan
- Support for TNC's global priorities, including grasslands in Mongolia, tribal lands in South Dakota, the Great Bear Rainforest in Canada and the Africa Affinity Group for Women and Girls

### **Nature Unites Us by the Numbers**

**\$41,286,000 raised in public and private funds for conservation statewide and beyond**

Private Lands & Waters Protected in Utah  
**4,584 acres**

Public Lands & Waters Protected in Utah  
**8,149 acres**

Along Great Salt Lake

**58 acres** of newly created wetlands

**2,810 acres** of improved and restored wetlands



## Nature Unites Us Major Donors

### \$1,000,000 and above

Janet & David Deisley	Jennifer Speers
George S. & Dolores Doré	U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Eccles Foundation	Utah Reclamation Mitigation &
Curtis & Dianne Oberhansly	Conservation Commission

### \$500,000 and above

Anonymous (2)	Lawrence T. & Janet T. Dee Foundation
Backcountry	Darrell Moore
ESRR Impact Endowment Fund at the	National Audubon Society
Chicago Community Foundation	The Steiner Foundation, Inc.
Florence J. Gillmor Foundation	Utah Office of Economic Development

### \$100,000 and above

Anonymous (9)	Don & Mary Ann Garner	Betsy Thornton
Altabank	Walter Gove	Utah Department of Natural
Alternative Visions Fund	Hank & Pat Hemingway	Resources
Eric & Cyndi Baughman	Jim Holland	Utah Climate Action Network
Beagle Charitable Foundation	Janet Q. Lawson Foundation	Utah Department of Agriculture
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*With thanks, as well, to over 9,000 additional individual, corporate and foundation contributors too numerous to list here.*



40 Years in Utah

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**Learn more about TNC's impacts in Utah over  
the last 40 years at [nature.org/utah40](http://nature.org/utah40)**

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