

2024 Spring

Hello and happy spring!

I hope this email finds you well and excited to check out what wonders another wet spring has brought for us. I wanted to take a moment to share some updates and announcements from the world of wetlands.

First, I am really pleased to announce that the Utah Geological Survey was recently awarded three new EPA Wetland Program Development Grants! Thank you to everyone who provided input and support for our proposals. We are still working on finalizing our assistance agreements, but hope to begin work on these projects soon. I've included a description of each project below, along with other wetland news.

Happy reading!

Wetland Protections in Utah

This project will consist of two major parts. The first part will be writing a new Wetland Program Plan. These are voluntary plans encouraged by the EPA that outline what a program wants to accomplish over a particular period of time; our [past plan](#) covered the years 2018-2023. We are hoping for a lot of input from stakeholders in identifying high priority needs for Utah's wetlands. Second, we will evaluate current and potential protections for Utah's wetlands. At the federal level, we will evaluate the implications of the Sackett v. EPA Supreme Court ruling on how wetlands are protected in Utah. At the local and state levels, we will review administrative code and agency policies and interview local and state officials working for planning or regulatory agencies to understand existing programs working with wetlands and options for new programs. Contact me (dmenez@utah.gov) for more information.

Updating and Applying Wetland Monitoring Tools

Utah has two wetland assessment methods that were developed over the last decade, one from the UGS for monitoring wetlands at an ecoregional or watershed scale and a second from the Utah Division of Water Quality for monitoring Great Salt Lake wetlands. Now that the Wetland Program is consolidated into one agency at the UGS, we will adapt these protocols into a single method for monitoring wetland health in the Central Basin and Range ecoregion. Once the method is updated, we will test how well the tool captures wetland changes from management decisions and restoration at a variety of locations within the region. We will also develop a user-friendly guide for using the updated wetland assessment tool in applied settings. This project also has an environmental justice component that involves engaging with underserved communities in the Tooele Valley to learn about their environmental concerns and needs. Contact Becka at beckad@utah.gov for more information.

Duchesne Basin Mapping Project

UGS will update and enhance NWI mapping within the Duchesne Basin to reflect current wetland extent and better describe wetland characteristics. This work continues UGS efforts to provide accurate wetland spatial data to support informed resource decisions. The project also includes two novel studies: a remote-sensing analysis evaluating patterns of wetland change over time and a site-specific assessment of threats and stressors to headwater wet meadows. For the wet meadow threat assessment, we hope to work closely with biologists, resource specialists, and others to develop a workflow that will be helpful for identifying restoration opportunities. Contact Pete (pgoodwin@utah.gov) for more information.

Great Salt Lake Issues Forum

The Great Salt Lake Issues Forum will be held from May 8-10, 2024. The theme this year is “Great Salt Lake: To Preserve and Protect in Perpetuity, How Are We Doing?” This is a great opportunity to learn more about and connect with folks working on Great Salt Lake. Keynote speakers include Great Salt Lake Commissioner Brian Steed, Wildlife Biologist Don Paul, and FFSL Director Jamie Barnes. Learn more and register [here](#).

Wetland Seed Resources

Dr. Karin Kettenring’s lab has recently come out with two resources that will be a great help for anyone interested in collecting native wetland plant seeds for restoration work. The guide [Native Wetland Plant Seed Collection and Cleaning Guide](#) was just recently published. Though the guide focuses on species common in the Intermountain West, many included species are widespread across North America. Also check out [Seed Viability Testing Guide for Common Wetland Plant Species](#). Both guides are free to download.

USFWS Status and Trends Report

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently released the [2009-2019 Wetlands Status and Trends National Report](#). The report found that wetland loss across the United States has increased by more than 50% since the previous study period (2004-2009), primarily due to drainage and fill. Loss disproportionately affected vegetated wetlands while total area of ponds actually increased. The report concludes that “our Nation’s remaining wetlands are being transformed from vegetated wetlands, like salt marsh and swamp, to non-vegetated wetlands, like ponds, mudflats, and sand bars.”

Update on Post-Sackett Wetland Regulation

As I am sure many of you know, the Sackett v. EPA Supreme Court decision in May 2023 will affect which wetlands are regulated under section 404 of the Clean Water Act. We are just starting to get the information we need to understand how the change in regulations will affect wetland and stream regulation in Utah. For now, we can look to past studies to get a general understanding of the potential scope of change. [Greenhill and others \(2024\)](#) created a model to estimate how wetland protection changed after the Navigable Waters Protection Rule (NWPR)

was established by the Trump administration in 2020. They estimated that the NWPR led to the deregulation of 690,000 stream miles and 35 million wetland acres across the United States. Another great resource is the [Modeling Federally Protected Waters and Wetlands StoryMap](#) created by St. Mary's University, which provides great background on the issue and estimates protections in three watersheds under different regulatory scenarios.

For those that want to dive into more of the technical details, I strongly recommend watching the November 15, 2023 [webinar](#) put on by the Army Corps and EPA. It provides the most detail I've seen about how the federal government will be implementing the changes. If you want to do the full deep dive, you can see all of the approved jurisdictional determinations (ADJs) made by the Sacramento district of the Army Corps [here](#). Starting in March of this year, the ADJs include more detailed analysis about how they made their decision about whether or not a wetland or stream was regulated under section 404 of the Clean Water Act.