



# GREAT SALT LAKE

WATERSHED ENHANCEMENT TRUST

IMPACT REPORT | 2025





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# A YEAR OF PROGRESS AND PARTNERSHIP



**Marcelle Shoop**  
Executive Director

Reflecting on the first three years of the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust's operations, the National Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy recognize that the Trust's work and successes are defined by the contributions and common purpose of our many partners – striving for a healthy Great Salt Lake and wetlands system.

These partners include Trust Council members, the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner, and the Utah Divisions of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and Wildlife Resources, and many others that are integral to dedicating water to the lake.

The Trust's voluntary water transactions in 2025 were nearly 72,500 acre-feet of water. Ensuring that water makes its way to the lake and its wetlands is essential, and that is a key focus of the team's work in developing transactions and working with state agencies to monitor flows. Water deliveries through the Jordan River benefited riparian vegetation and recreation on the path to Great Salt Lake and timed to support the research of the Utah Division of Environmental Quality to assess the influence of increased water flows on water quality. And, this past year, our partnerships delivered significant water to Willard Spur when needed in the late summer to support fall bird migration.

In addition to the Trust's work delivering water to the lake, the Trust supported wetland grants in 2023 and 2024 that improved habitat and improved water control structures at inflow points and in wetland areas. These upgrades can eliminate water delivery bottlenecks and highlight the importance of improving the connection and productivity of the whole ecosystem, rather than restoring isolated areas.

Throughout the world we have witnessed the decline of saline lakes and the devastating impacts on nearby communities and wildlife. As we face similar challenges in our own backyard, individual efforts and collective action are needed to secure the health of the lake and its wetlands for the future. In 2026, we look forward to advancing the efforts of individuals and communities in conserving water to benefit Great Salt Lake.

We are heartened by the state's leadership and commitment to the Great Salt Lake 2034 Charter and to restore the lake's health and protect the lake for generations to come, as well as the commitment of significant funding from private sources. Through our work with the Trust, the National Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy intend to continue to build strong partnerships and help achieve Utah's 2034 goals.

Thank you.

Marcelle Shoop, *Executive Director*



# PARTNERSHIP AT OUR CORE

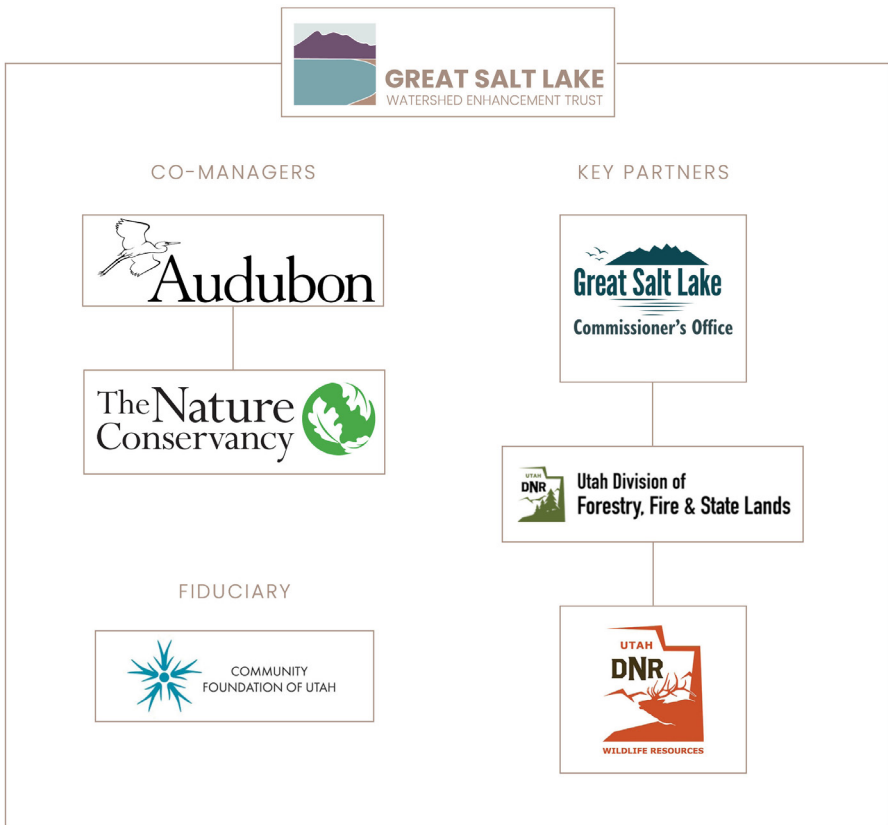
Preserving Great Salt Lake and its wetlands for future generations requires coordination across a wide range of organizations and individuals. Throughout 2025, the Trust expanded and diversified its network of partnerships, working with canal companies, water conservancy districts, agricultural producers, Tribes, state divisions, community members, and other nonprofits focused on the conservation of Great Salt Lake.



Representatives from our partners, Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints joined the Trust and state biologists on an airboat tour. The group witnessed first-hand the positive impacts that Jordan River flows bring to Farmington Bay, including its importance to fall migrating shorebirds and waterfowl.



National Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy joined Governor Spencer Cox, Senate President Stuart Adams, and House Speaker Mike Schultz and U.S. Representative Blake Moore, and others in signing the Great Salt Lake 2034 Charter—signaling important collaboration and commitment to one of our most iconic and vital natural resources.



We are grateful for the continued support of our key partners at the Utah Divisions of Wildlife Resources and Forestry, Fire and State Lands, and the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner.

# TRUST COUNCIL UPDATE

*“The Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust is helping bring more water to Great Salt Lake and its wetlands, which are crucial for millions of birds that rely on this ecosystem and the health of the surrounding communities. The work of the Trust, including the exciting progress in both water transactions and wetland protection, is an important piece in a larger conservation strategy to protect and restore this priceless resource.”*

-Tim Brown, Trust Council Member

The ten-member [Trust Council](#) is comprised of experienced leaders from a diverse range of interests, who provide guidance and leadership on matters related to the Trust’s mission and objectives, helping to set the strategic direction of the Trust. Importantly, in 2025 the Great Salt Lake Commissioner joined the Trust Council. Highlights from 2025 include:

- Trust Council members provided advice and approved new transactions for Great Salt Lake
- Tim Hawkes appeared in a new film about the Trust and its impact in the web of work at Great Salt Lake
- Thomas Wright [published an op-ed](#) in the Deseret News highlighting the Trust’s work and impact
- Increased coordination between the Trust, its Council and the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner

## **Agriculture**

Spencer Gibbons, *Utah Farm Bureau*

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## **Aquaculture**

Tim Hawkes, *Great Salt Lake Artemia*

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## **Conservation Organization Dedicated to the Preservation of Migratory Waterfowl**

Thomas Wright, *Ducks Unlimited*

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## **Conservation Organization Dedicated to the Protection of Non-Game Avian Species**

Tim Brown, *Tracy Aviary*

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## **Conservation Organization Working on GSL Issues**

Jordan Nielson, *Trout Unlimited*

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## **Mineral Extraction**

Joe Havasi, *Compass Minerals*

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## **Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner**

Brian Steed, *Great Salt Lake Commissioner*

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## **Private Landowner Adjacent to Great Salt Lake**

Jack Ray, *Rudy Duck Club, South Shore of Great Salt Lake*

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## **Wastewater Treatment Facilities**

Jill Jones, *Central Davis Sewer District*

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## **Water Conservancy District**

Darren Hess, *Weber Basin Water Conservancy District*

# PROGRESS IN 2025 — FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY

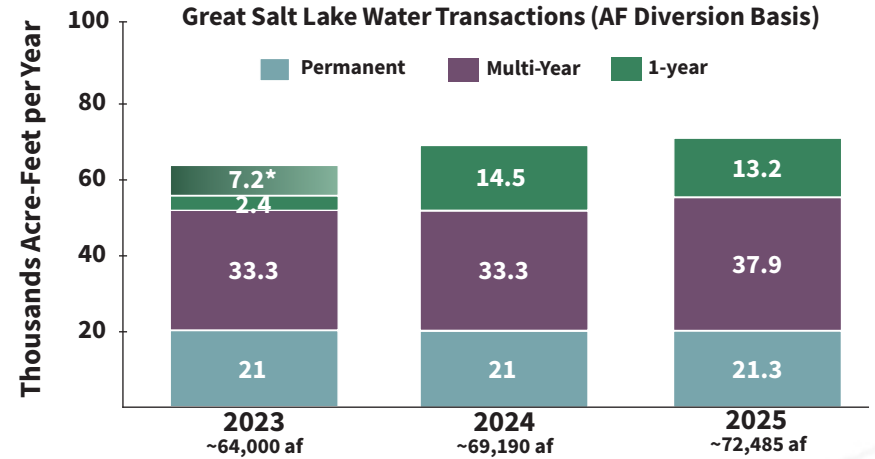
As Great Salt Lake faces a pivotal moment — continuing low water levels and concerning salinity levels — the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust adopted a [Five-Year Strategy](#) in 2024 to guide its efforts in addressing the challenges facing Great Salt Lake and its wetlands. The Trust, with support from its partners, has made strong progress toward meeting those goals, especially with water transactions and habitat protection and restoration.

## WATER TRANSACTIONS

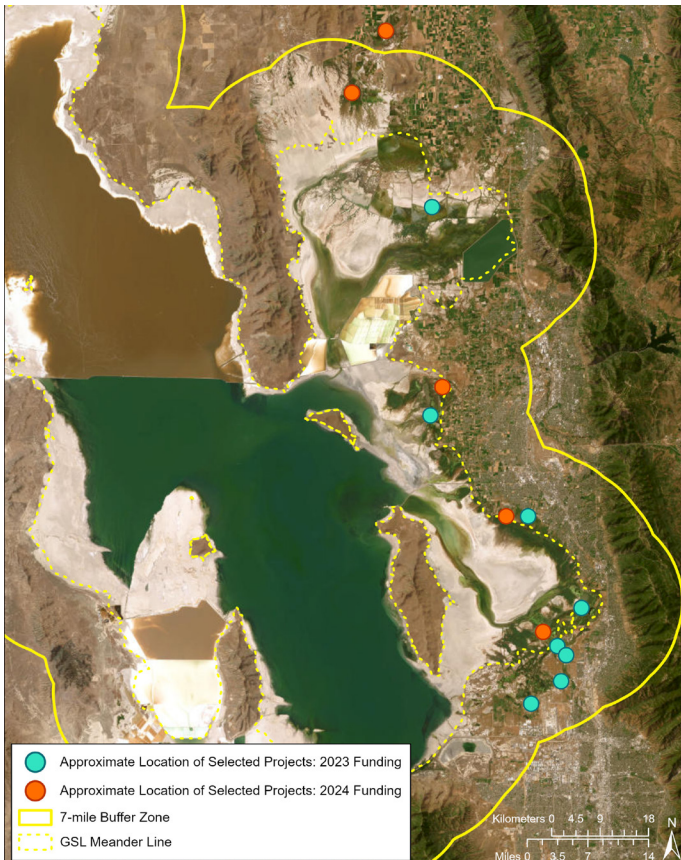
**Objective:** Protect existing or secure additional flows of 100,000 acre-feet per year (diversion basis)

**Progress Update:**

- ~72,000 acre-feet of water transacted in 2025
- ~200,000 acre-feet of water transacted for the lake since 2023
- ~700,000 acre-feet of water transactions under current arrangements anticipated between 2026-2035



\*Includes a transaction of 7,213 af that was approved in 2023 but could not be delivered during season



## PROTECTING AND RESTORING WETLAND HABITAT TO BENEFIT LAKE HYDROLOGY

**Objective:** Protect or restore at least 20,000 acres of wetlands and associated habitat surrounding Great Salt Lake.

**Progress Update:**

The Trust and its partner, Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands enacted the Wetland and Habitat Grant Program in 2023 and 2024 to fund projects that will preserve and enhance Great Salt Lake wetlands. Highlights from these programs include:

- \$14 million awarded to 12 projects
- ~19,000 acres of restoration in progress
- \$8.2 million in matching funds from partners/grantees
- Projects include water control and canal improvements to enhance water delivery and improve water management to treat invasive phragmites

# PROGRESS IN 2025 — FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY



## FLEXIBLE WATER DISTRIBUTION

**Objective:** Identify key water distribution bottlenecks and contribute to improving at least five of them.

**Progress Update:**

Through the Wetland and Habitat Grant Programs in 2023 and 2024, many bottlenecks have been identified and improved with funding. A few include:

- Replaced the Burton Dam in the Lower Jordan River System to improve water control options.
- Replaced the Sewage Canal outflow structure in the Lower Jordan River to increase water flow capacity, allowing wetland managers to deliver water into Farmington Bay.
- Repaired the South Run levee in the Ogden Bay Waterfowl Management Area, protecting critical managed wetland habitat and maintaining a viable South Run of the Weber River which delivers water to Great Salt Lake.
- Completed flow studies in the lower Bear River leading to the installation of a new USGS gage at Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge to help understand water flow.
- Coordinated inflows study with Utah State University and the Trust to monitor small flows on the east side of Great Salt Lake and its wetlands. This is part of a larger study to both quantify smaller flows to the lake and wetlands and discern the sources of these flows.

*Burnham Dam: before (top photo) and after (bottom photo) structure replacement*

## LEVERAGED FUNDING

**Objective:** Leverage or match 25 percent of total expended state grant money.

**Progress Update:**

Throughout 2025, the Trust continued to collaborate with partners to leverage public and private funding and engage more broadly across the Great Salt Lake Basin. This included engaging with stakeholders, leveraging the state grants funds with other match, including valued water donations and other in-kind contributions, and providing a 1.4 to 1 match to state grant expenditures.

This is just a snapshot of the progress the Trust has made working with its many partners throughout the year. The rest of this report highlights some of the most impactful projects and moments from 2025.

# SAVING WATER MEETS SAVING LAND



The Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust, in partnership with Summit Land Conservancy and the historic Huntsville Abbey Farm, collaborated to send approximately 635 acre-feet of water to Great Salt Lake (anticipating approval in early 2026). [This creative collaboration](#) is an important example of working with agriculture to deliver water to the lake—no fields are being taken out of production. Instead, fields have been switched to native plants and dry farming techniques enabling the saved water to benefit Great Salt Lake.

The Huntsville Abbey Farm, a beloved landmark in Utah, was once home to the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity, a Trappist Cistercian monastery established in 1947. In 2022, Summit Land Conservancy, in partnership with Ogden Valley Land Trust, completed a permanent conservation easement on 1,050 acres of the Abbey, ensuring the farm would be kept open for agricultural use. The Trust's involvement was the final piece in the puzzle to actualize this water transaction for the lake.

This innovative approach of sharing water is a groundbreaking example of how visionary solutions can bring partners together across sectors to help Great Salt Lake. As explained by Spencer Gibbons, Chief Executive Officer of the Utah Farm Bureau, conservation easements like this might not work for every farm but investing in solutions that keep farmers farming and also send water to the lake can inspire the next chapter of partnerships across the Great Salt Lake Basin. The Trust's involvement was a key piece in the puzzle to actualize this water transaction for the lake.



*“This type of partnership is one of those mutually beneficial ideas that just makes sense. We’re not losing any farming or production. Instead, we’re utilizing the land more efficiently by switching our less productive fields to dry farming techniques which enables us to keep the land in production and send that saved water to help Great Salt Lake.”*

**-Bill White, Owner of Huntsville Abbey Farm**

## MOVING WATER MOVES RESEARCH FORWARD

Preserving and increasing water flows is essential for the health of Great Salt Lake. Improving water controls and delivery options bring a [multitude of other benefits](#) to the lake and its wetlands, especially when strategically timed.

Additional flows can improve riparian and wetland habitats for the 12 million migratory shorebirds, waterfowl and other waterbirds that depend on Great Salt Lake every year. Increased water flows can also aid with salinity management in the South Arm, mitigate the spread of invasive phragmites, and in some cases, improve capacity to control the spread of botulism and other diseases, especially late in the water season when dry, warmer conditions persist.



*“The timing for this study was serendipitous. UDWQ waited a long time to have the required elevated flows to conduct this research, and this year’s late-season release came through in the nick of time.”*

-Jodi Gardberg, Section Manager for the Utah Division of Water Quality’s Watershed Protection Section.

For a second consecutive year, a partnership between the Trust, Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Utah Divisions of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and Wildlife Resources led to a sustained and strategically timed [release of water](#) from Utah Lake through Jordan River to Great Salt Lake.

This new water also provided an opportunity for the Utah Division of Water Quality to conduct the [Jordan River Flushing Flow Study](#)—research aimed at better understanding the health of Jordan River’s waters and the impact of using water flows to mitigate adverse ecological conditions. This study was the culmination of nearly 15 years of research, modeling, and planning to improve water quality in the Jordan River.





BEFORE



DURING



AFTER

## IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GSL

The Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust is focused on the [protection and restoration of wetlands and habitats](#) in Great Salt Lake’s surrounding ecosystem to benefit the hydrology of Great Salt Lake. It has facilitated two rounds of wetland funding in [2023 and 2024](#). With a total of twelve ongoing projects, the benefits of this work include improved water conveyance, protected and additional water flows, improved monitoring and measuring, protected and created habitat, enhanced water filtration and water control to improve habitat, and treating invasive species including phragmites that impact water loss and habitat.

In 2023, Ducks Unlimited was awarded funding through the Trust’s Wetlands Protection and Restoration Funding program to restore water management infrastructure including replacing the dam on the [State Canal](#). This dam provides 90% of all water inflows into Farmington Bay Waterfowl Management Area.

Replacing this critical water management infrastructure on the Jordan River watershed helps:

- Ensure the long-term ecological resiliency of Great Salt Lake
- Maximize efficiency for water managers
- Improves capacity of the delivery infrastructure to deliver more water

*“What used to take me hours of travel and labor to manage how the water is moving through the State Canal, now takes me minutes and is far safer than ever before. This improvement is a game-changer, not only for Farmington Bay Wetland Management Area, but for Great Salt Lake at large.”*

-Dave England, Farmington Bay WMA Manager

## WETLAND FUNDING REVIVES KEY HABITAT

After receiving funding from the Trust's 2023 Wetland Restoration Program, this year The Nature Conservancy (TNC) completed the construction of the [Peregrine Pond at their Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve](#). The land that makes up the Preserve was once part of a large, healthy wetland ecosystem. After the mid-1980s when Great Salt Lake hit its high-water point, the perfect conditions existed to enable the takeover of phragmites, choking out the native plant community. Additionally, the transition from the surrounding agricultural lands to urban communities over the years led to less water flowing into the shallow ponds, and the aggressive invasion of phragmites led to even less open water habitat.

TNC's goal was to re-establish the hydrologic and ecologic functions in this part of the Shorelands Preserve and thereby reduce phragmites' footprint and impact on native plants and animals. Today, less than two years later, TNC's efforts have transformed the dysfunctional phragmites stand into a healthy wetland complex.

- Benefits of the restored wetland include:
- Improved water quality
- Mitigation of stormwater flow events
- Improved groundwater recharge
- Diverse native species growth
- Greater precision in phragmites management
- Restored habitat for migratory shorebirds

*“Standing here two years ago, none of these species were present. In fact, the phragmites were so thick, one could not see past it to the island. We knew that with the funding from the Trust, this entire landscape could be transformed into something beautiful. We did not expect it to happen so quickly or completely.”*

-Mike Kolendrianos,  
TNC Great Salt Lake  
Shorelands Preserve Manager



## GREAT SALT LAKE TAKES CENTER FIELD

When it comes to the future of Great Salt Lake, it's not just conservationists who are concerned. Physicians, teachers, scientists, state leaders, parents, economists, and even professional athletes are thinking about the impact of a shrinking lake.

Marking a pivotal moment for Utahns, the Utah Royals FC decided to support efforts to conserve Great Salt Lake in 2025 with a [significant donation to the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust](#) and sported a custom Great Salt Lake kit design for the player's uniforms this season. The team and America First Credit Union came together on the field during the season's opening match to present representatives from Audubon and TNC with a giant check during halftime.



*“We hope this donation and partnership encourages other Utahns across the state to consider the impact they can have for Great Salt Lake. We are an outdoor sport and community and we know the health of the Great Salt Lake is imperative to health of our state, our fans and our teams.”*

-Kyle Schroeder, Vice President of Community and Player Engagement, Utah Royals

The donation provided an opportunity to encourage other Utahns across the state to consider the impact they can have for Great Salt Lake. This donation, and others received throughout the year, exemplified the impact of collaboration and the importance of recognizing the role we all play when it comes to the future of Great Salt Lake.



*Bronti DeRoche*

*Marcelle Shoop*

*Adam Wickline*

*Shaela Adams*

*Trip Armstrong*

*Max Malmquist*

## THANK YOU FROM OUR TEAM

2025 brought growth to both the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust's team and our scope of work across the Great Salt Lake Basin. This year we worked with more and a greater diversity of partners, transacted more water for Great Salt Lake than ever before, and witnessed the impacts of completed wetland projects for the greater ecosystem.

From moments observing hemispheric numbers of shorebirds during spring and fall migration, exhilarating mornings taking partners on airboat rides through the wetlands in Farmington Bay and Willard Spur, conversations with partners about the impact of even the smallest water transaction in the ecosystem, and the colorful sunsets that you only see at Great Salt Lake, the natural beauty of the Lake and connection between this ecosystem and the communities surrounding the lake provided endless reminders throughout the year why this work is so important.

The team is grateful for the opportunity to work with so many incredible partners to not only amplify the impact of our work—only one strategy of many needed to address the challenges facing Great Salt Lake—but the greater web of work happening throughout the watershed. We remain steadfast to the preservation of the lake and its wetlands and look forward to another year ahead.

On behalf of [National Audubon Society](#) and [The Nature Conservancy](#), thank you.