

WFRC

WASATCH FRONT REGIONAL COUNCIL REGIONAL OPEN SPACE PLANNING STUDY



Jordan River Parkway

A partnership between:

Wasatch Front
Regional Council

and

US Geological Survey,
Biological Resources

Utah State University
College of Natural
Resources,

Utah Division
of Wildlife Resources,

Marriner Eccles
Foundation,

Envision Utah,

Quality Growth Commission,

Swaner Design



Morgan Valley



Great Salt Lake

2003

Phase II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAN

Executive Summary	p. 5-6
Chapter 1 – Introduction	p. 7-12
Why Create an Open Space Plan?	
Project History and Participants	
Public Process and Input	
What is a Regional Open Space Plan?	
Chapter 2 – Assessment	p. 13-20
Population & Growth Trends	
Landscape at a Glance	
Protected, Public and Unbuilt Land	
Existing Programs & Tools	
Major Challenges	
Chapter 3 – Plan and Recommendations	p.21-58
Planning Process	
Regional Open Space Priorities	
County-by-County Open Space & Recommendations	
Chapter 4 – Implementation Strategies	p. 59-62
Strategic Plan	
Call for Support	
What Next?	
Appendix – Sources and Credits	p. 63-71
GIS Mapping Data	
Contacts	
Definitions	
Economic Benefits of Open Space	
Funding and Support Resources	

MAPS

Map 1	Conceptual Regional Open Space Map	p. 24
Map 2	WFRC Regional Open Spaces	p. 26
Map 3 - 7	Weber County Open Spaces	p. 31-33
Map 8 -12	Morgan County Open Spaces	p. 37-39
Map 13 -17	Davis County Open Spaces	p. 43-45
Map 18 - 22	Salt Lake County Open Spaces	p. 49-51
Map 23 - 27	Tooele Valley Open Spaces	p. 55-57
Map 28 - 31	Tooele County Open Spaces	p.58

Executive Summary



The Wasatch Front Regional Open Space Planning study is a first step toward protecting a network of important open spaces across Weber, Morgan, Davis, Salt Lake and Tooele Counties. Through meetings with planners and city leaders, workshops with the public and surveys and extensive mapping, a vision for the region was created that identifies issues, resources and connections from a scale and perspective never before attempted. While this plan at this broad scale is never exhaustive, it is comprehensive. It is extremely useful for showing different municipalities and agencies what other communities are doing and for highlighting the sentiments and ideas held in common. This study lays out the facts for each community to interpret and act on to achieve their goals. It is hoped that this is useful not only to local leaders, but to policy makers at state and regional levels and in other government agencies. This report is a call for support and action by all, and it will take a combined effort to reach the high expectations of this area's residents.

This public process affirmed that residents of this region value a wide diversity of open spaces and resources—from mountainsides to shorelines, farmlands to urban lots—and strongly support protecting them. As the metropolitan areas come close to exhausting their supply of easily buildable land, development is starting to enter more critical and sensitive areas that have long provided buffers from hazards such as flooding and earthquakes, and supplied important services like aquifer protection, stormwater absorption, trails and fresh foods. There is so much to protect and time is running out, and the region still has very few plans in place and almost no funding established to take on this challenge.

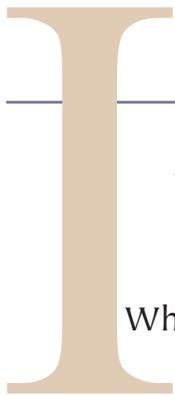
Several steps are critical to achieving the goal of a regional open space network. Public awareness—promoting the goals of this plan and the strategies to achieve them—is the foundation for communities taking action. Because resources and open space systems stretches across boundaries, regional coordination is also important to help communities share strategies and create a strong force to push for more planning and funding. Coordination at an even larger scale to protect entire natural systems is just as important. A WFRC area forum should also include public land management agencies and coordinate with other regional entities such as Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG) and Bear River Association of Governments. WFRC is advised to either continue its coordination role or create a regional forum to do so.

Ultimately, it is up to individual communities to create their own plans and adopt own strategies. Comprehensive open space programs can take years to fully implement, but once in place, reap benefits well beyond their cost. Programs should encompass planning tools to protect sensitive lands and funnel development into the most suitable locations, acquisition tools for opportunities to protect land outright, and funding to purchase land and to pay for the staff needed for planning, maintenance, enhancements and education. All fair and successful programs

rely on a comprehensive approach as well as a broad base of support. Because the benefits will be shared all every component of a community should be expected to contribute – citizens, developers, landowners, municipalities and managing agencies. Legislative action should also be considered to generate statewide support for these programs.

This report outlines the reasons and the methods for acting now to protecting important landscapes and resources. Chapter One of this study explains the purpose and need for a regional open space study. Chapter Two assesses the Wasatch Region's needs and outlook on open space resources and protecting them. Chapter Three displays and describes a desirable open space network, both across the region and in each of the five counties that constitute it. Chapter Four outlines strategies to achieve this goal and the Appendix contains numerous resources and facts to support such an effort.

Introduction



Why Create an Open Space Plan?
Project History and Participants
Public Process and Input
What is a Regional Open Space Plan?



Why Create an Open Space Plan?

The Wasatch Front is experiencing the most rapid growth in its history as mentioned previously, growth by numbers of people—a projected jump from 1.4 to 2.2 million residents by the year 2030¹— and land for development is being consumed at a staggering pace. More and more, citizens are asking their leaders to protect the character of their community and the places they care about. A recent Dan Jones survey indicated that quality of life, open space, and walkable communities are the highest priorities the priorities of Utahns, second only to education. Protecting open space is a goal agreed to by 87% of residents² and a majority surveyed are willing to pay at least a quarter percent tax to help these efforts.³ Citizens have voiced support for protecting critical lands for the health, safety and welfare of residents.⁴ As well, they expect leaders to seek solutions to growth challenges, such as being fiscally responsible in extending and paying for new infrastructure. Unbuilt land requires fewer public services and performs valuable natural functions, such as stormwater absorption and temperature cooling, and raises the quality of life in a community. The economic value of such “green infrastructure” has been quantified (see appendix) and should be taken seriously.

Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC or the Council) is responsible for coordinating much of the infrastructure across the five-county region it serves. For years, it has coordinated transportation plans, construction and upgrades and has helped communities discuss and plan for population growth and impending land use changes. In this role, the Council has come to realize that their transportation projects have the ability to shape communities, for better or for worse. The Council is aware that they can be a more effective and positive force by considering land uses just as integrally as transportation factors. In recent years, the council established the Regional Growth Committee with the charge to address and evaluate growth related issues in the region with the hope of improving the overall quality of life for its residents. This committee came to realize that open spaces and development are intertwined and must be addressed as a part of the

¹ Wasatch Front Regional Council projections 2005-2030.

² Wirthlin Associates, *Envisioning the Future of the Greater Wasatch Area*, March 2000.

³ Dan Jones and Associates, Inc., *Envision Utah Study*, January 2002.

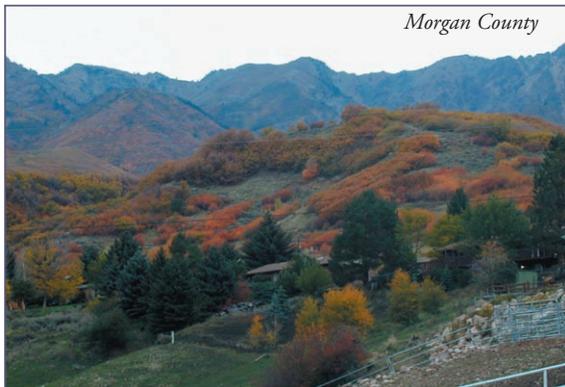
⁴ Dan Jones and Associates, Inc., *Study conducted for the Davis County Comprehensive Hillside Plan*, August 2002.

land use mosaic to protect the region's quality of life. A separate Open Space Sub-Committee was thus formed, charged with finding a way to define and identify regional open spaces and explore possibilities for protecting it.

A critical first step is to understand the regional context and importance of open lands. This plan, prepared for the WFRC Open Space Sub-Committee is the second step in an extensive study of the region's open lands to promote the creation of a green infrastructure network for the region. The next step – implementing this plan – is absolutely essential and should be undertaken immediately before cost escalates and opportunities disappear forever.

Project History and Participants

The Wasatch Front Regional Council's Regional Growth Committee, chaired by Commissioner Carol Page, started this planning process by creating an Open Space Sub-Committee in March of 2000. At that point they contracted with Swaner Design and Utah State University's (USU) College of Natural Resources to conduct the first step of this planning process—defining and mapping regional open spaces and identifying the issues that surround them. The scope of work included: defining the meaning of regional open space, researching and analyzing the cultural and biophysical aspects of the Wasatch Front region; defining and assembling a GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping database; reviewing and summarizing existing public surveys on open space; defining and proposing a conceptual open space pattern; identifying conflicts between



conceptual open space and development; and identifying implementation strategies to protect open space. This phase of work concluded with a report by USU's College of Natural Resources entitled "*Alternative Futures for Utah's Wasatch Front*," which highlights different resources of concern and alternative models of protection, reflecting diverse public opinions on preservation priorities. The extensive GIS mapping database created by USU was used as the basis for the work in the

following phase as WFRC proceeded to help make these plans a reality across the entire Wasatch Region.

With issues identified and a base of information established, the next step was to involve the general public in further identifying and prioritizing resources to inform an actual plan for a regional open space network. The WFRC, Swaner Design and USU partnership continued their work with a number of steps to involve constituent communities and citizens, outlined in the Public Input and Process section on the following page.

This project was made possible over the first two phases by generous funding from the Wasatch Front Regional Council, matching funds from participating counties, a grant from the Quality Growth Commission and in-kind services donated by Utah State University with the support of

the US Geologic Survey, Biological Survey. Additional support was contributed by the Mariner Eccles Foundation, Envision Utah, and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. Swaner Design was hired as the project consultants to coordinate the project. Without this alliance of concerned partners, this plan could not have been completed to this point, nor can it carry on. Ongoing cooperation will be essential for its success and implementation.

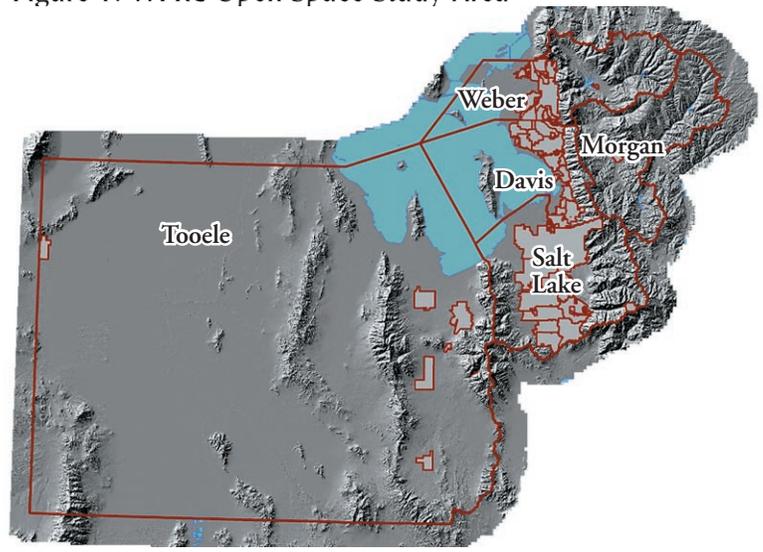
Primary team members on this phase included planners George Ramjoué and Aric Jensen and on behalf of Wasatch Front Regional Council; Sumner Swaner, Sharen Hauri and Rachel Fenton, land planners with Swaner Design; and Profs. Richard E. Toth, Thomas C. Edwards and Robert J. Lilieholm coordinating the efforts and students of Utah State University. Many thanks are also due to the members of the leadership team, and the cities and citizens who participated, lent their support and provided input to this effort.

Public Process and Input

With a region encompassing 10,000 square miles comprised of five counties (Weber, Morgan, Davis, Salt Lake and Tooele - see Figure 1) and 59 municipalities, public involvement was a daunting task. Budget limitations demanded simplifying the process as much as possible. To garner commitment from municipalities, every city and county was asked to contribute a representative planner, mayor or involved citizen to join a leadership team as a liaison between the project team (WFRC, Swaner Design, USU) and their local leaders and citizenry. The leadership team became the main vehicle to enlist public participation and convey the sentiments of their constituents to the project team. They were involved in shaping the workshop format, participating at their county's workshop, and reviewing the planning study report. They also participated in a workshop amongst themselves, to pilot the format, and create their vision for the region.

Leadership team members submitted names of interested stakeholders from their community, to whom the project team sent personal invitations to the workshops. The project team also sent direct invitations to the mayors, city councils, and planning commissions of each municipality. A series of articles in newspapers across the region, highlighted the project, invited the public to attend a workshop in their county. A total of 149 citizens attended one of five workshops in October and November 2002 to contribute their input and learn about the plan.

Figure 1: WFRC Open Space Study Area



At the workshops, citizens were offered open space models created in the first phase of the study by USU. Prioritizing was based on how desirable the level and type of protection was in their community. They were also asked to prioritize the resource elements that made up each of these models, such as agricultural lands, or streams, to convey what the county residents placed most importance on. Then, they identified on maps specific places and resources worth protecting, and, while doing so, were asked to record these ideas in individual written surveys. Evaluations were also conducted as part of the workshop to assess how participants felt about the plan and the workshop process, and to guide next steps. The results are summarized in Chapter 3. More detailed surveys and evaluation results, as well as GIS mapping data are available on the CD distributed with this report. Recommendations were also drawn from this input to guide communities to the next step—implementation. These materials were distributed to the leadership team as well as the Open Space Sub-Committee for final review and approval and additional copies are available from WFRC.



Salt Lake County workshop participants

What is a Regional Open Space Plan?

As a regional plan, this effort was conducted in comprehensive terms using very broad strokes to define and identify open space resources. Regional plans such as this are inherently rough and make no claims of complete accuracy. Instead, they point the way toward more refined plans at a countywide or local community level. Stretching beyond the plan created, the effort strove to boost understanding of shared resources and common issues across boundaries; present a cohesive vision for jurisdictions, land management agencies and landowners; and establish a unified strategy for communities to use in developing their own regulatory tools. The planning process – gathering as much input and considering as many issues as possible – was emphasized instead of the product, the plan currently in hand. Every community included is strongly encouraged to use this foundation to create a more specific plan or a cooperative plan with neighboring communities to meet their own needs and realities.

This Regional Open Space Planning Study is not a plan until it is implemented by a community. It not only sets goals for the next decade or two, but creates a blueprint for the ultimate goal of protecting a network of open spaces and resources as well as enhancing communities, which may take fifty or even a hundred years, and change over time. Thus, the conceptual plan included here suggests a desirable pattern of growth and preservation, understanding that individual communities and projects will influence the eventual outcome, but that the spirit and function of the landscape should be maintained. The recommendations in this study are guiding principles by which a community could start their own open space program. Some areas identified for

green spaces on the map are currently built, or would need restoration to function to their fullest. Such ideas are suggestions and ultimately long-term goals not meant to be desired and forced on a location, but achieved only as it makes sense. For example, most stream corridors are identified for protection, even in places where the water is piped underground. By identifying the corridor now, future development can be designed so that the stream may be re-surfaced and restored as a tree-lined corridor in the future.

Definition of Regional Open Space

For the purpose of this study, Regionally Significant Open Space is defined as land which is important to residents for its actual or perceived cultural, ecological, agricultural or recreational values and meets the following criteria:

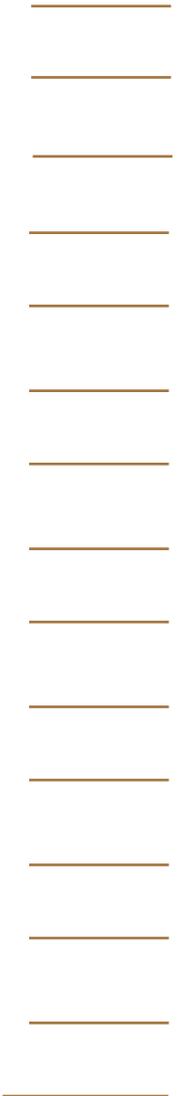
- Contributes to the unique character of the region.
- Ecological importance.
- Contributes to recreation and tourism.
- Crosses jurisdictional lines or is of multi-jurisdictional interest.

Identify areas for their regional importance to people and their demands on natural systems. Many places are highlighted on this map, indicating they are worthy of preservation or at least special consideration when development happens.

An open space network is a voluntary effort that takes the contributions of everyone in the community, citizens, landowners, developers and city leaders alike. The green on the map simply highlights areas that residents value and would likely work to protect given the opportunity.

The green on the map does not restrict building in an area, nor that the public wants to purchase and take responsibility for that land. Just the opposite is typically true – most communities have a very limited capability to buy and maintain lands

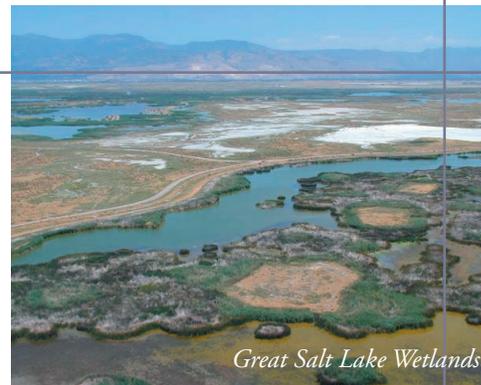
and prefer landscapes that take care of themselves or are tended to by the people who own the parcel. This plan has no authority or intentions to take land, development rights, or control away from landowners. But it does have the goal of guiding development in a positive direction, for the benefit of residents and for the health and future well-being of this region. Several examples of plans that have implemented strategies for these different stakeholders are named in the “Resource Contacts and Model Plans” section in the Appendix.



Assessment

II

Population & Growth Trends
Landscape at a Glance
Protected, Public and Unbuilt Land
Existing Programs & Tools
Major Challenges



Great Salt Lake Wetlands



Population and Growth Trends

Protecting open space is a pressing issue because population growth along the Wasatch Front is growing, and at a much higher rate than the national average. According to the Wasatch Front Region Small Area Socioeconomic Projections published in 2001, the WFRC region is projected to grow by over 50%, in the next twenty five years ,from 1.4 million people in 2005 to nearly 2.1 million in 2030. This is shown in Table 1 below and Figure 2 on the following page.

Table 1: Wasatch Region Population Projections

County	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Salt Lake	914,190	1,028,508	1,136,706	1,223,218	1,308,787	1,383,907
Davis	261,297	292,173	322,395	346,203	369,640	392,003
Weber	201,850	227,032	251,782	271,369	290,204	307,350
Tooele	42,450	50,333	58,487	65,852	73,413	80,938
Morgan	7,856	8,829	9,810	10,659	11,552	12,453
Total	1,427,643	1,606,875	1,779,180	1,917,301	1,053,596	2,176,651

source: *Wasatch Front Small Area Socioeconomic Projections: 2005-2030*

Population will not be evenly dispersed. Salt Lake County dominates, with more than half the population. For the entire WFRC region, while Morgan and Davis Counties together contain less than 5%. Yet, growth rates in Salt Lake County and Davis County are expected to be much slower than the outlying areas of Weber, Morgan and Tooele Counties, who have far more room to grow. Their projected increases of 56%, 58% and 91% respectively will likely be adjusted even higher as more population moves in and other areas approach build out. In general, the density of housing and businesses decreases with distance from downtown Salt Lake City, Ogden and Davis County employment centers. The majority of growth will be in the form of single residential units. Lower density, single-use development not only consumes more land, it places people farther from job centers, placing additional demands on the land for road and transit networks. As growth presses into less well developed areas of southwestern and northwest Salt Lake County, northwestern

Davis county, western Weber County, and Tooele County, municipalities are urged to find ways to make these communities more self-sufficient while incorporating green infrastructure as feasible.

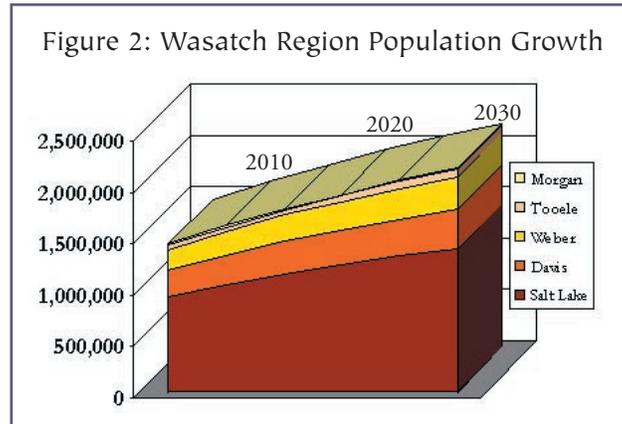
Average household sizes vary slightly between counties, but the WFRC region average of 2.85% per house which is currently lower than Utah's statewide average of 3.13 (the highest in the nation), yet still 10% higher than the national average 2.59 persons per household. Utah

is following the national trend of shrinking household sizes, with an average of 2.70 projected by the year 2030 for the WFRC region. Shrinking household sizes can cause population densities to drop, making less efficient use of infrastructure and services as describe above, unless redevelopment projects add projects of greater than average density. Also, smaller household sizes mean more land is needed to house a given population unless lot sizes are reduced. Fortunately many residents surveyed in this study were The trend of shrinking household sizes should make cities reconsider their zoning densities.

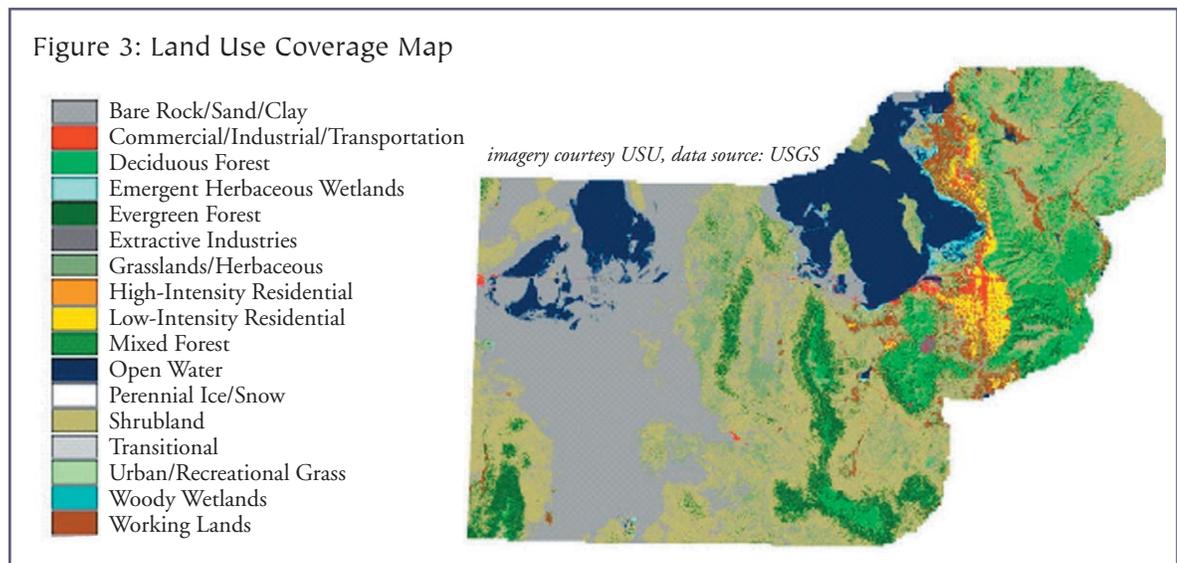
These trends highlight some of the most significant reasons for regional open space and land use planning. First, areas with the most population have both the strongest demand for open space and place the greatest strain on remaining unbuilt land. Second, areas with lower populations have the richest supplies of open lands and resources but a small tax base and citizenry overwhelmed by such a large challenge. A broad strategy can help bring open spaces across the region into public use drawing from a wider support base. Finally, coordinated land use and transportation can ease pressure on many unbuilt lands allowing time and thought for including them in an open space network.

Landscape at a Glance

The region studied is a cross-section of life in northern Utah, stretching from the Great Salt Lake across valleys to the east and south, up and over the Wasatch Mountains into secluded alpine valleys. The metropolitan area stretches along a crescent of flat land for sixty miles along the eastern shores of the lake, and heading west through pockets of development alternating with forgotten landscapes. Two major forces shaped this landscape. The first was geologic folding, creating a basin and range pattern of long valleys oriented north to south separated by steep mountain ranges. The second force was ancient Lake Bonneville with its many levels over prehistoric times, creating benches at different water levels, collecting sediments on a flat valley floor and evaporating into the current Great Salt Lake. The streams that cut the canyons flowing into the former bed of the lake left deltas of sediment at the mouths of each canyon as they flowed towards the lake. Evidence of the past is clearer in some places than in others, but traces of these elements are nearly universally desired for protection.



Because this region spans wildly fluctuating topography, a third force has shaped this landscape significantly – weather and climate. A number of microclimates and life zones are encountered, from barren desert to dry plains to high desert to alpine with distinct vegetation, geology and wildlife. Different microclimates are created by varied terrain from valley floors at 4,000 ft. to mountain peaks over 11,000 ft. As storms approach from the northwest and southwest, they traverse arid rangelands before hitting the Great Salt Lake and the Wasatch Mountains. Weather systems passing over the lake often pick up. As clouds approach the mountains, they drop progressively more rain and snow, creating a gradient of precipitation and vegetation types. Tooele County is the driest part of the region, with vast expanses of completely barren land. At the opposite end, Morgan and east Weber Counties host lush agricultural valleys and reservoirs that capture the up to 60 inches of precipitation that can fall in the mountains each year. Apart from these extremes, there is a noticeable difference moving from west to east across the valley. The difference may only range from approximately 12 inches of precipitation up to 20 inches, this two-thirds increase is enough to shift an arid landscape from sage and grasses to trees and shrubs. Elevation also creates a huge shift as higher elevations capture more water, but also endure colder temperatures. A final component, aspect, is simply a shift in the compass direction toward which a slope points, but makes a striking visible difference. South and west facing slopes receive substantially more direct sunlight, making them much warmer and drier. These subtle shifts not only affect vegetation, but wildlife has also adapted to using certain areas for certain needs, and often rely on multiple habitats in close proximity for survival.



As Figure 3 shows, vegetation ranges from barren and salt playa areas to scrub brush and sage desert to grasslands at low elevation up to gambel oak and sagebrush on the foothills into alpine environments of aspen, fir and pine at higher elevations and cooler aspects. The most diverse habitats and vegetation is found in riparian areas along the waterways that cross the region. Water is a rare resource in the high desert and these strings of cottonwoods, willow, and occasional wetland plants are a rare treat for animals and people alike. Dense trees and shrubs

used to line the banks of the Jordan, Weber and Ogden Rivers and likely every stream that flowed into them, but are today fragmented by piped streams, development, and invasive weeds. The life of the stream itself—aquatic animals and insects and fish—also relies on this protection from the sun and pollutants. Wetlands frequently line streams and old stream corridors, but are most significantly found along the Great Salt Lake. The lake and the Jordan River combined are a globally significant migration corridor for millions of shorebirds every year. All components of the lake system, from mud flat to wetland to upland are needed to supply the needs of the different wildlife that visits these landscapes, whether once a year or all year long. Beyond their vegetation, these areas are often interfaces for groundwater as it either drops into aquifers or upwells to the surface. The lingering farmlands of our region are often found in this same general zone because water is more available and the flood hazard is more imminent. Farmlands line most of the Great Salt Lake and stretches of the Jordan, Weber and Ogden Rivers. While providing food for people, agricultural land is also a tremendously important secondary habitat and buffer from development for many animals. A partial list of wildlife found across the region are noted in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4:
Wildlife of the Region:**



**Federal Threatened
& Endangered:**

peregrine falcon
bonneville cut-throat trout
grey wolf

**State Sensitive
Species:**

spotted frog
least chub
western burrowing owl
ferruginous hawk
white faced ibis
Bonneville
cutthroat trout
pocket gopher

Commonly seen:

Mammals
mule deer
mountain lion
mountain goat
moose
fox
bobcat

coyote
beaver
badger
gopher mice
groundhog
porcupine
jackrabbit
pronghorn antelope
elk
mink
muskrat
squirrel
rat
raccoon
skunk

Birds
raptors/hawks
eagles
waterfowl/ducks

great blue heron
sand hill crane
canadaian geese
shorebirds
turkey
quail
dove
pheasant
rock chucks
grouse sage and blue
vultures
turkey

Reptiles & Fish
frogs
rattlesnake
brown trout

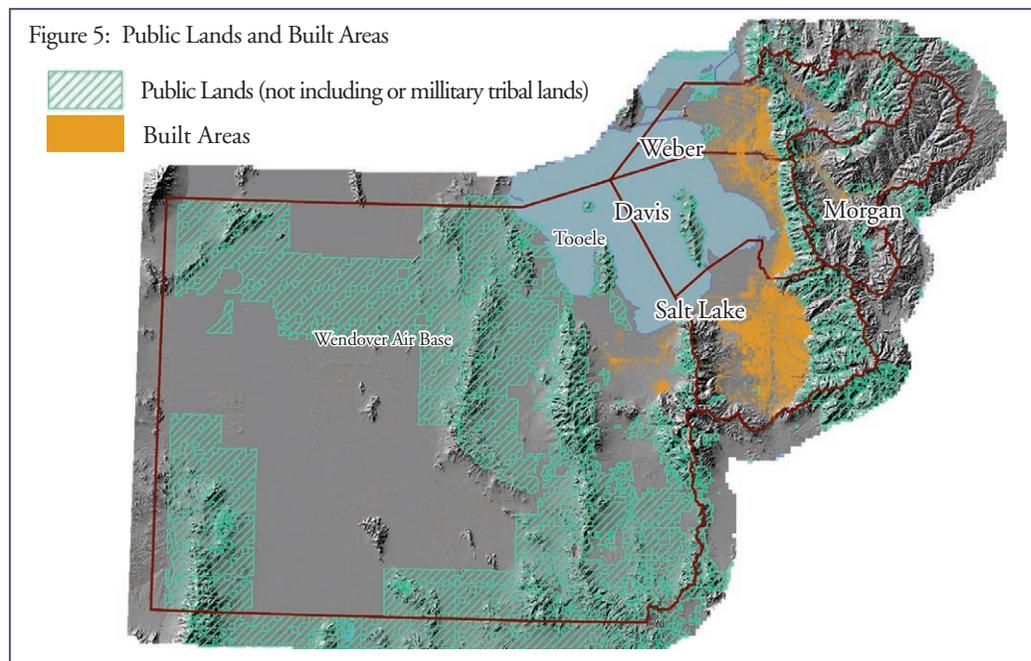
Another important location for recharging aquifers are the foothills where runoff from the mountains seeps into less solid soils. Major faults run roughly along the same line, the most notable being the Wasatch Fault. These are not the only areas susceptible to earthquakes, however. Because the soils of the valley floor are largely loose sediments, they are highly prone to liquefaction, or shaking and subsidence, during earthquakes. There are several secondary faults on the valley floor that respond to movement along the major faults that could easily set off substantial liquefaction. Rockfall and landslides are also common along the foothills, especially when combined with faultline movement and erosion or large precipitation. Slopes over 12% are

especially prone to damage and instability when development is added. Many city standards allow building on up to 25-30% slopes which is a practical absolute maximum, but not necessarily a safe guideline. A final hazard to avoid are the floodplains that line streams and lakes. Geologic hazards must be taken seriously because they pose an immediate and unpredictable threat to human lives.

Protected, Public, and Unbuilt Lands

One of the greatest challenges to protecting open space in Utah is the perception that the state has a large quantity of public land. While 78% of the state is public or tribal land, Utah residents are concerned not just with quantities, but also with qualities. The WFRC area contains a substantial amount of public land, owned by the U.S. Forest Service in the Wasatch Range, and by the Bureau of Land Management in the Oquirrh Range. These areas are treasured by locals for hiking, biking, skiing, climbing and rich vegetation and wildlife. Yet they are but a slice of what this region has to offer. The Great Salt Lake is a wonderland of wildlife and wild vistas. Its valley was once a broad grassland with open vistas in every direction. This variety of landscapes and recreation opportunities offers something for every ability and interest. But it has been taken for granted. Nearly all of the valley except for the lake is privately held, making it extremely difficult to protect for public use. Much of the foothills are also private property, with the potential to cut off access off to residents who hike and bike along them. A vast majority of the Wasatch Back is also private land, including a surprising 97% of Morgan County, a rough and remote mountainous area. A wide spectrum and sprinkling of open spaces available to the public not only encourages a healthy lifestyle for our residents, but it promotes the health of these resources, not overburdening and degrading vegetation, water quality, or our experience in these well loved places.

Figure 5 below shows the relationship between public and private lands in the region as well as the pattern of areas that are built verses. unbuilt. The map shows what many overlook—the



vast majority of remaining buildable lands are in private hands and are under pressure for development. An effort was made to map all the publicly owned lands in the region, whether municipal parks, school grounds, or public facilities. This task proved too daunting for this study since frequent changes arrive with new properties and developments built every day. But it is a worthwhile exercise, to inventory and understand the breadth of open lands, and to draw attention to the need for communities to act now to ensure open lands are conserved in all corners of the region for people to utilize and enjoy for generations.

Existing Programs and Tools

While trails programs have begun gaining ground (Weber Pathways, Ogden River Parkway, Jordan River Parkway, Bonneville Shoreline Trail), they are only a part of the solution. Recent trails planning efforts have considered a regional perspective to make connections and share resources, modeled approach, but trails cover only a small slice of important landscapes, so additional efforts must be made to plan for other important resources. Larger patches of agricultural lands, habitat, and regional parks and open space are the nuclei of a system that makes the corridors worthwhile.

This open space planning study is one of the numerous first steps this region has taken to consider many types of open space at a very large scale. Other efforts at different levels are listed in the section “Model Plans” in the appendix, that have started transforming communities. Open space has long been considered in recreation plans often regulated to parks, and impact fees can be collected to preserve areas with public access. But the definition of open space has expanded far beyond parks. Many planning departments have adopted sensitive lands ordinances to protect the most critical lands and protect the public from hazards, like steep slopes, hillside areas (Davis County), wetlands (Davis County) and floodplains (Slat Lake County). In locations where mandating protection cannot be easily justified, communities have begun offering incentives. Programs to transfer development rights (Davis County, West Valley City), agricultural greenbelt zoning (West Valley City) and development incentives for including open space into plans (Draper, West Jordan) offer win-win situations for landowners/developers as well as communities. Agricultural protection such as greenbelt zoning incentives and 160-acre minimum lots sizes (Summit County) have also been instituted. Many communities have also partnered with non-governmental organizations, such as land trusts and conservation organization to negotiate the purchase of conservation easements (Utah Open Lands, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited) or help fund restoration. Some groups have found success partnering with government programs, such as the Rivers, Trails and Corridors program of the National Park Service (Weber Pathways) or the USDA’s Wetlands Restoration Program (Swaner Nature Preserve). Also many new alliances (Jordan River Conservation Forum, Davis County Shorelands Plan) have created new networks of support and combined efforts. There are also funds for planning and improvements in various state and federal funding programs, such as the LeeRay McAllister Open Space Fund and the Governor’s Trails Initiative Preservation and Federal and UDOT Transportation Enhancement Funds.

While programs such as these have set a precedent for better planning, funding remains a struggle. Such programs have succeeded in protecting a bare minimum, certainly not enough to maintain a high quality of life for the future. Further, these few efforts have already overextended existing planning and funding sources. It is painfully obvious to communities that are trying to start programs that demand exceeds supply and major changes are needed now.

Major Challenges

As mentioned previously, open space protection measures are beginning to take hold, but with the rapid pace of development, the unfortunate position “too little, too late”. The simple goal of instituting an open space preservation ethic in community planning is itself a time-consuming challenge. Political leaders and citizens are willing address on a popular issue that benefit everyone, but have many questions about building an open space system effort fairly and affordably. Awareness of the economic, social and ecological benefits (see appendix) is a first step, followed by education on the techniques available and creative strategies to achieve these goals. Success takes support from all sides, from elected officials to citizens and volunteer groups to city staff and landowners. Therefore programs should target and encourage all these parties to participate to maximize the potential for success.

After gaining political and social will to address this challenge, community members must craft protection and acquisition programs, and then follow with maintenance, restoration, and user amenities programs. Before a community gets into the business of protecting land, it should already be capable of caring for it. A community must determine in advance how a parcel will be owned and who will be responsible for maintaining it. Communities are advised to keep parcels in their existing care and ownership as much as possible to reduce costs and responsibility, but in turn, they should expect to assist owners in their preservation efforts. This stresses the need for city and agency staff who can concentrate specifically on the issue of open lands, to collaborate with partners to plan an open space network, identify parcels to protect within it, assist in preservation or restoration, and ensure on-going maintenance. An overarching issue that must also be addressed up front is access. Different types of open space welcome different levels of public use and not every parcel may benefit from people accessing it. For example, citizens often want to protect farmland and wildlife habitat but understand it or any public use at all can have a negative impact on the land. A public that understands the many ways an open space network benefits everyone and everything is more supportive of protecting all types of land, regardless of their ability to access it.

By far, the toughest challenge this region faces is funding these efforts. City and county funds are very limited, and restricted to some degree on how they are spent. Development impact fees have helped many cities build recreational facilities within or adjacent to new subdivisions, but are limited to recreational interests only. Few or no funds exist at a city or county level to protect other types of open space except in rare cases (Summit County). State and federal funds have broader uses, but are also hard to come by and usually require a local match. Communities must be willing to raise and utilize funds to first staff a broader open space program and then help

fund such as and restoration maintenance. This is money well-invested because it is a financial savings to communities in the long run and is vital to economic development. More information on the economic benefits of open space and potential sources of funding and assistance can be found in the appendix.

