



THE PIPELINE

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

July 2024

Message from Patrick Nelson, Watershed Program Manager

After extensive lobbying efforts by the leaders of the Salt Lake Valley, the Salt Lake Forest Reserve was created in 1904. The impetus to create this reserve, now part of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, was to protect the valley's drinking water supply. Back then, the main challenge was deforestation. All the trees had been cut down to be used in the development of the valley below as well as to shore up the mining tunnels.

The challenge to restore forest health was met by a strong partnership, led by Salt Lake City and the US Forest Service, centered on the Spruces Campground in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Once a tree farm, many of the trees grown here were planted all over the Wasatch Mountain environs nearby.

Areas you now know as protected watersheds, including City Creek, Parleys, Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, were all included in this forest reserve. The creeks that flow out of these canyons now make up 60% of the water supply for SLCDPU's drinking water service area that spans Cottonwood Heights, Millcreek City, Holladay and Salt Lake City. Sandy City also relies on Little Cottonwood for a portion of its water supply.

Now a century-plus later, the challenge has shifted. Trees are now being thinned instead of planted. The impact and aftermath of catastrophic wildfires in the watersheds and the water treatment plants that supply the cities of Aurora and Denver in Colorado clearly highlighted that mitigation of catastrophic wildfire is one of the top priorities for watershed and drinking water source protection.

Collaborating with partners such as the Salt Lake City Fire Department, the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, the Utah Division of Wildlife, Unified Fire, Unified Fire Authority, Sageland Collaborative, Save Our Canyons and others, SLCDPU is taking concrete steps towards protecting the water supply (in addition to its other programs) such as:

- 1. Fuels Reduction:** There have been multiple fires in the past years (2020, 2021) that started from Interstate I-80 in Parleys Canyon. Fuels reduction was completed in 2024 on hundreds of acres of SLCDPU and USFS managed lands south of the freeway. These efforts will help slow down the speed and severity of future fires, giving suppression teams more time to react during future fires. Additionally, this summer expect to see US Forest Service-led wildfire mitigation efforts in both Millcreek Canyon and Big Cottonwood Canyon.
- 2. Wildfire Mitigation Planning:** SLCDPU has integrated wildfire threat reduction into all planning efforts. SLCDPU will be completing the update to its 1999 Watershed Management Plan soon. This plan will recommend actions to help mitigate wildfire impacts, in addition to the actions that SLCDPU has already taken.
- 3. Fighting invasive weeds:** Invasive plants have been shown to both accelerate the speed of wildfires and compound their impacts, as seen by the role cheatgrass played in the 2007 Milford Flat Fire. SLCDPU actively removes invasive species with the help of volunteers, partner agencies and our incredible Watershed team.
- 4. Riparian Corridor Protection:** SLCDPU has partnered with various nonprofit organizations and agencies to create many beaver dam analogues in City Creek, Parleys and Big Cottonwood Canyons. These structures have been shown to slow down fires while preserving riparian areas during wildfires.
- 5. Funding Partnerships:** Along with the Weber Basin Water Conservancy District, SLCDPU is helping to fund a full-time position that supports collaboration between multiple water districts and the governmental agencies responsible for wildfire threat reduction. This position advocates for fuels treatment to protect the watersheds that provide drinking water for the various utilities in the partnership.

Salt Lake City enjoys delicious drinking water, thanks in large part to careful management and preservation of our water sources. Protecting these invaluable watersheds is key to maintaining the high quality of the water we drink today, and the water that will serve generations to come. We invite our community to take a role in protecting our watersheds.

Protect our watershed



Salt Lake City's Department of Public Utilities recognized as 2024 Water Company of the Year

In a June 2024 ceremony at Environment Analysts' Sustainability Delivery Awards, SLCDPU was recognized as the 2024 Water Company of the Year for its consideration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles in the planning, design, construction, and operational life of our infrastructure. We are uniting the needs of our SLC communities with care for our natural environment.

Two of our largest construction projects, the [New Water Reclamation Facility](#) and the [City Creek Water Treatment Plant Upgrades](#), are heavily focused on sustainability and resilience. Acknowledging the disproportionate financial burden to disadvantaged communities, we've utilized federal funding for these two generational projects to disperse costs to ratepayers while prioritizing community engagement.

We're employing a resilience-focused approach, prioritizing climate change and emergency management, public and environmental health, and long-term financial stability.



Holly Lopez (pictured at left above), SLCDPU's Policy and Public Affairs Administrator, and Will Peterson (pictured at right above), the West Water Strategy Lead for AECOM, accepted SLCDPU's Water Company of the Year award.

Project Updates

Salt Lake City's Department of Public Utilities manages a number of construction projects to maintain and improve our system. Many of these projects are smaller in scale but we've highlighted a few of our larger projects below. If you're interested in learning more about other SLCDPU projects, please [visit our website](#).



City Creek Water Treatment Plant (CCWTP): In June 2024, SLCDPU hosted representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) for a tour of the CCWTP construction site. As part of its Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities (BRIC) grant program, FEMA awarded Salt Lake City with \$36.7 million to address the significant upgrades needed at this critical facility to increase its resiliency to multiple natural hazards.



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