

Potential Direction and Path Forward for the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council

The Great Salt Lake Advisory Council met on December 9, 2008 for the purpose of reflecting on what the Council had heard to date regarding the state of the Great Salt Lake, how it is currently managed, and how the Council might best complete its charge from the Governor. The discussion focused on observations regarding the previous presentations, the current and emerging threats to the Lake, Council member's emerging vision for the Lake, what needs to be done to complete the Council's charge and how that work might be best organized in 2009.

The Council's dialogue resulted in the following description of the major threats or risks to the Lake, some key attributes of a vision for the Great Salt Lake, and an initial set of governance functions that any new governance body should attend to.

Threats and Risks to the Lake:

- The lack of sufficient water replenishing the Lake to support all interests
- The pressures on the Lake's water resources and wetland shoreline from population growth up-stream and development of the shoreline
- The lack of a comprehensive view of the Lake and its upland tributaries, resulting in the 'death by a thousand cuts' as actions are reviewed one-by-one instead of how they affect the big picture
- Fragmentation of the surface of the Lake, resulting in disruption of natural flows of water within the Lake
- The lack of sufficient scientific understanding of the processes of the Lake and how pollutants, land use practices, water resources, effects of climate change, and other stressors on the Lake are actually affecting it
- Public awareness and support for the Lake may not be sufficient to galvanize actions to protect and restore the Lake

Vision of the Lake:

- The key attribute of the appropriate vision of the Great Salt Lake is that of a 'healthy Lake' (The Council did not believe that its charge was to define a healthy lake but should outline the process, in light of any governance recommendations it may make, as to how such a definition should be developed.)
- The connections between the Lake itself and its watersheds to be understood in an ecosystem context, especially from a water resources perspective
- Uses of the Lake to be viewed in an integrated manner and how they contribute to/threaten the health of the Lake to be understood
- Processes/pollutants that impact the Lake to be understood in time to address them proactively
- Raise public awareness of the values of the Lake and supportive of efforts to preserve and enhance those values

What is needed to ensure that such a vision of the Lake can be realized:

- Ensure an ecosystem approach to managing the lake, not an issue-by-issue approach
- Have sufficient scientific understanding of the Lake and its ecosystem to direct needed research and enable tracking towards specific indicator outcomes for the Lake
- Coordinate planning and management of the Lake so that cross-cutting issues (such as water resources for the Lake, land use development patterns and transportation infrastructure, etc.) can be integrated into supporting the vision of the Lake
- Inform and engage the public in understanding the Lake, articulating its values and supporting the attainment of a healthy lake
- Advocate for the Lake, track and coordinate its overall management, direct needed scientific research, and keep score on how well the Lake is doing in terms of becoming/staying healthy

What Governance Functions are needed to support a healthy Great Salt Lake (an initial set):

- Define a healthy GSL in the context of its ecosystem
- Direct scientific research needed to understand the Lake and its processes and interactions within the ecosystem, identify trends and if necessary solutions
- Coordinate the on-going management functions at the local, state and federal level to focus on achieving a healthy GSL
- Make sure that issues such as water input and land use development affecting the lake get proper attention
- Engage and educate the public on the value of the GSL
- Advocate for sufficient dedicated funding to accomplish the above over time

The Council members determined that they should develop recommendations regarding any new possible governance body in light of this vision and the need for these functions. In order to do this, they created four subcommittees and assigned themselves to them. The four subcommittees and their members are listed in the table below.

TOPIC	WHOM	STAFF SUPPORT	OBJECTIVES
Governance Structure and Funding	Don Leonard, Leland Myers, Corey Milne, Ben Ferry	Bill Ross	Recommend structure including role, authority and representation.
Communication/Marketing	Neka Roundy, Bill Fennimore, Wilf Sommerkorn, Colleen Johnson	Jodi Gardberg	Develop plan for engaging the broadest possible stakeholder groups to get feedback on the GSLAC recommendations and legislative support
Science	Bonnie Baxter, David Livermore	Jim Kramer, Dave Grierson	Develop a model for future research efforts and collaboration.
Mission Statement	Leland Myers, Lynn de Freitas	Leah Ann Lamb	Recommend a mission statement for a future GSL Commission.

The subcommittees are to develop initial ideas for consideration at the Council's February meeting. After that, the Council will prepare a draft 'straw' set of recommendations for consideration at its March meeting. The Council hopes to have its draft recommendation completed in the April/May time frame so that it can be vetted with the Governor, the Legislature, local governments and the public in order for it to be finalized by the Fall, 2009. The Council agreed to an expanded meeting schedule to accomplish these tasks.