

The Nature Conservancy

What are your organization's interests and activities on Great Salt Lake?

The Great Salt Lake is a spectacular, world-class natural area and arguably Utah's most important and largest-scale wildlife site. The passage of millions of birds annually on this ancient migration route connects us with the people and wildlife of the northern and southern hemispheres, and reminds us of our responsibility to maintain "our" vital link in the chain of migratory sites in the Pacific Flyway.

TNC has been actively pursuing conservation of the Great Salt Lake and its associated wetlands/uplands since 1984. With private, public and corporate partners, TNC has helped complete 52 separate acquisitions, protecting 12,260 wetland acres in Salt Lake, Box Elder and Davis Counties. TNC itself is also a major landowner/land manager on the lake's shoreline, having preserved over 4,000 acres (approx. 12 shoreline miles) of high quality wetlands in Davis County – the Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve. The GSLSP hosts a visitor's center and mile-long boardwalk and viewing tower open to the public. TNC staff and volunteers also conduct free educational workshops/tours for Davis County 4th graders during the spring and fall seasons.

What pressures on the lake affect your organization?

The resources we work to preserve are totally dependent on (and a reflection of) a healthy, functioning lake system – including the lake body itself, the associated wetlands and uplands, and the health of the watershed tributaries which deliver water of sufficient quantity and quality to the lake. Some prominent threats include: loss of wetland and upland habitat through development and fragmentation, degradation of water quality and quantity, alteration of the larger lake processes, continued conflict between users, and a lack of good science with which to make responsible management decisions.

Are there opportunities for improvement with regards to agency management or impacts to the resource?

The current ongoing GSLAC process and its potential result is a tremendous opportunity to analyze and improve on our current management of the complex lake system. With thoughtful analysis and discussion, we believe there are certain changes that, if adopted, would satisfy the state's public trust responsibilities, ensure the sustainability of the lake system's beneficial uses, and lessen conflict around lake proposals. Key issues to be looked at for a successful result include: underlying mission clarification, additional scientific input on the definition of lake system health, a call for the most advanced planning and decision-making processes that integrate/compare the values of all beneficial uses, an increased use of science (monitoring/research) to generate data that is directly related to current and future management decisions, and thoughtful recommendations on the structure, authority and funding for a possible new GSL management entity.