

Great Salt Lake Commission – Science Advisory Panel

Feedback to the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council from the Science Subcommittee Regarding the Recommendations on the Creation of a Great Salt Lake Commission Science Advisory Panel

WORKING DRAFT APRIL 16, 2009

This addendum provides feedback from the Science Subcommittee to the Great Salt Lake Advisory Council (Council) regarding the establishment and on-going operations of a Science Advisory Panel. The Science Subcommittee collected this information in consultation with approximately 30 scientists [Bonnie and Dave: can the participants be listed or otherwise described in more detail in a footnote or appendix?] and resource managers from academia as well as federal and state agencies. The Science Subcommittee presented this information to the Council on March 18, 2009.

This feedback is intended for the Council's consideration (and subsequently the Commission's consideration) and is not intended to be part of the formal recommendations from the Council on the formation of the Commission.

SCIENCE ADVISORY PANEL TASKS

As described in the Council's *Recommendations to the Governor on the Creation of the Great Salt Lake Commission*, the Science Advisory Panel will support the Commission by providing scientific expertise, review, recommendations, and counsel on issues of importance to the Commission in the performance of its duties and responsibilities.

In addition to those tasks outlined in the Council's *Recommendations to the Governor*, several of the scientists interviewed indicated that two specific tasks might be of use for the Science Advisory Panel to undertake at the Commission's direction. These were:

- Work with other partners to create a master long-term repository of all Great Salt Lake research that is accessible and user-friendly. This repository could be similar to Yellowstone National Park's "[Center for Resources](#)"; and
- Initiate a comprehensive scientific planning (CAP or similar) process to further identify the key biological targets/systems unique to the Great Salt Lake ecosystem, how to measure the health of these targets/systems, the extent of threats and stresses to the Great Salt Lake ecosystem, the most effective strategies and actions to abate these threats and stresses, and the effectiveness of these strategies over time.

**Great Salt Lake Commission – Science Advisory Panel:
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SCIENCE ADVISORY PANEL NOMINATION, COMPOSITION, AND TERMS

The Council’s Recommendations to the Governor include guiding principles regarding the Science Advisory Panel’s membership. The Science Subcommittee offers the following additional considerations on this subject based on the feedback from the interviewees:

1. The Science Advisory Panel could potentially include expertise from outside the region as long as the expertise was germane to issues facing the Great Salt Lake;
2. Members should be chosen from a nominating process and be selected through consensus of the Commission;
3. A requirement for full disclosure of Science Advisory Panel member associations (employment, contracts, etc.) to support the guiding principle that, “...the expertise of the Science Advisory Panel is available to the Commission in a manner that avoids disqualifying conflicts of interests;”
4. The expected commitment level (e.g., number of required meetings) for Science Advisory Panel members should be appropriately scoped and communicated to potential/nominated members prior to their committing to serve on the Panel. (Tasks such as defining “ecosystem health” are monumental and it is important that clear expectations for the level of commitment are understood in advance.); and
5. To ensure continuity and create a comprehensive base of knowledge, (a) terms for Science Advisory Panel members should be long enough, likely at least 2 years; (b) there should be no term limits; and (c) members could sign a contract of commitment to serving on the Panel.

OPERATION OF THE PANEL

The Science Subcommittee offers the following ideas regarding Science Advisory Panel structure and operation based on the responses from the interviewees:

1. The Panel should be managed by an internally elected Chair;
2. The Chair should maintain responsibility for meeting the objectives of the Science Advisory Panel set forth by the Commission and for communicating with the Commission;
3. Decision-making options should be pursued in the following order: (a) consensus; (b) super majority with minority; and (c) majority and minority opinions. When applicable, all majority and minority opinions should be conveyed to the Commission; and
4. A procedure for removing someone who does not fulfill the stated commitment level should be identified.

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**FURTHER FEEDBACK TO PREVENT CONFLICTS OF INTEREST THAT COULD PREVENT THE
COMMISSION FROM HAVING ACCESS TO NEEDED EXPERTISE**

The pool of Great Salt Lake experts is not large. Many of the scientists who could serve on the Science Advisory Panel would also be conducting research that could potentially be funded by the Commission. Thus, to prevent conflicts of interests for serving members, the Science Subcommittee offers the following considerations based on the experience of the interviewees:

1. In cases where the Science Advisory Panel is asked to prioritize research grants, members involved in a grant proposal or the work that could be funded should recuse themselves from evaluation of the grant;
2. External reviewers should be used to add objectivity in reviewing individual grant proposals. In funding decisions, proposal reviewers should include at least one expert field scientist who is not a Science Advisory Panel member;
3. Members should report any perceived conflict of interest issues to the Commission Chair. Decisions as to whether the conflict can be resolved without disqualifying that member for either participating in review or actually receiving funding should be made by the Commission.
4. All Science Advisory Panel proceedings should be transparent and made available to the public.

OTHER ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Several other issues raised by the interviewees for consideration by the Commission include the following:

1. How the Science Advisory Panel should factor in the work of other Great Salt Lake science advisory groups (e.g., GSLEP-TAG and FFSL-TAG). It is assumed that these existing groups perform significant and highly needed services; thus the question is how the Science Advisory Panel would coordinate and interact with them;
2. Further guidance on if and how Science Advisory Panel members should be compensated for their work; and
3. How to fund the Science Advisory Panel's work in a stable, long-term manner through the Commission's funding source.