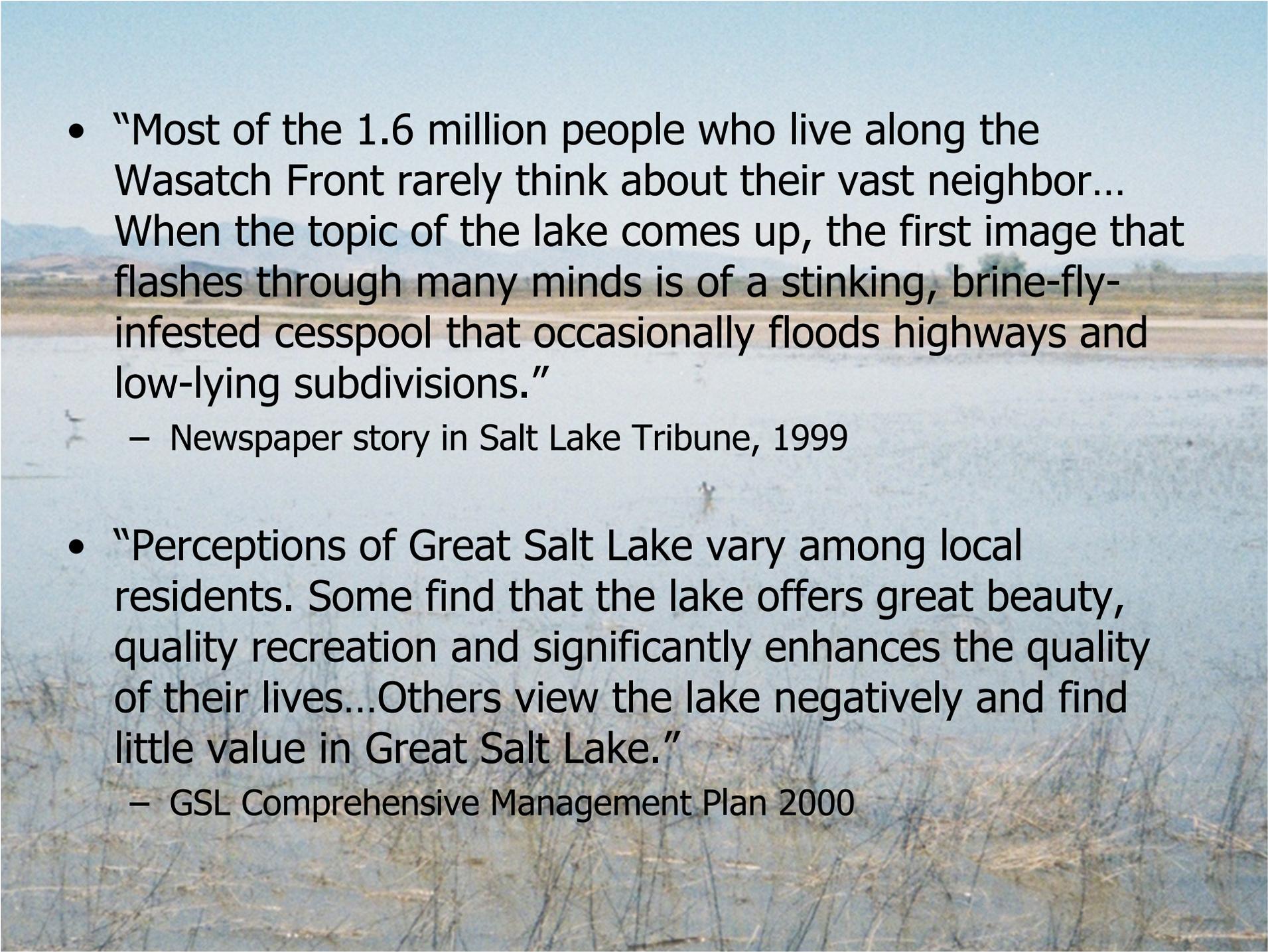


“Big, smelly, salty lake that I call home”: A study of residents’ perspectives & concerns on Great Salt Lake

Carla Koons Trentelman, Ph.D.

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Weber State University

carlatrentelman@weber.edu

- 
- “Most of the 1.6 million people who live along the Wasatch Front rarely think about their vast neighbor... When the topic of the lake comes up, the first image that flashes through many minds is of a stinking, brine-fly-infested cesspool that occasionally floods highways and low-lying subdivisions.”

- Newspaper story in Salt Lake Tribune, 1999

- “Perceptions of Great Salt Lake vary among local residents. Some find that the lake offers great beauty, quality recreation and significantly enhances the quality of their lives...Others view the lake negatively and find little value in Great Salt Lake.”

- GSL Comprehensive Management Plan 2000

Two primary research questions:

- What types of sense of place do those who live closest to GSL have?
 - The meanings the lake holds for them
- What distinguishes between people who see the lake differently?



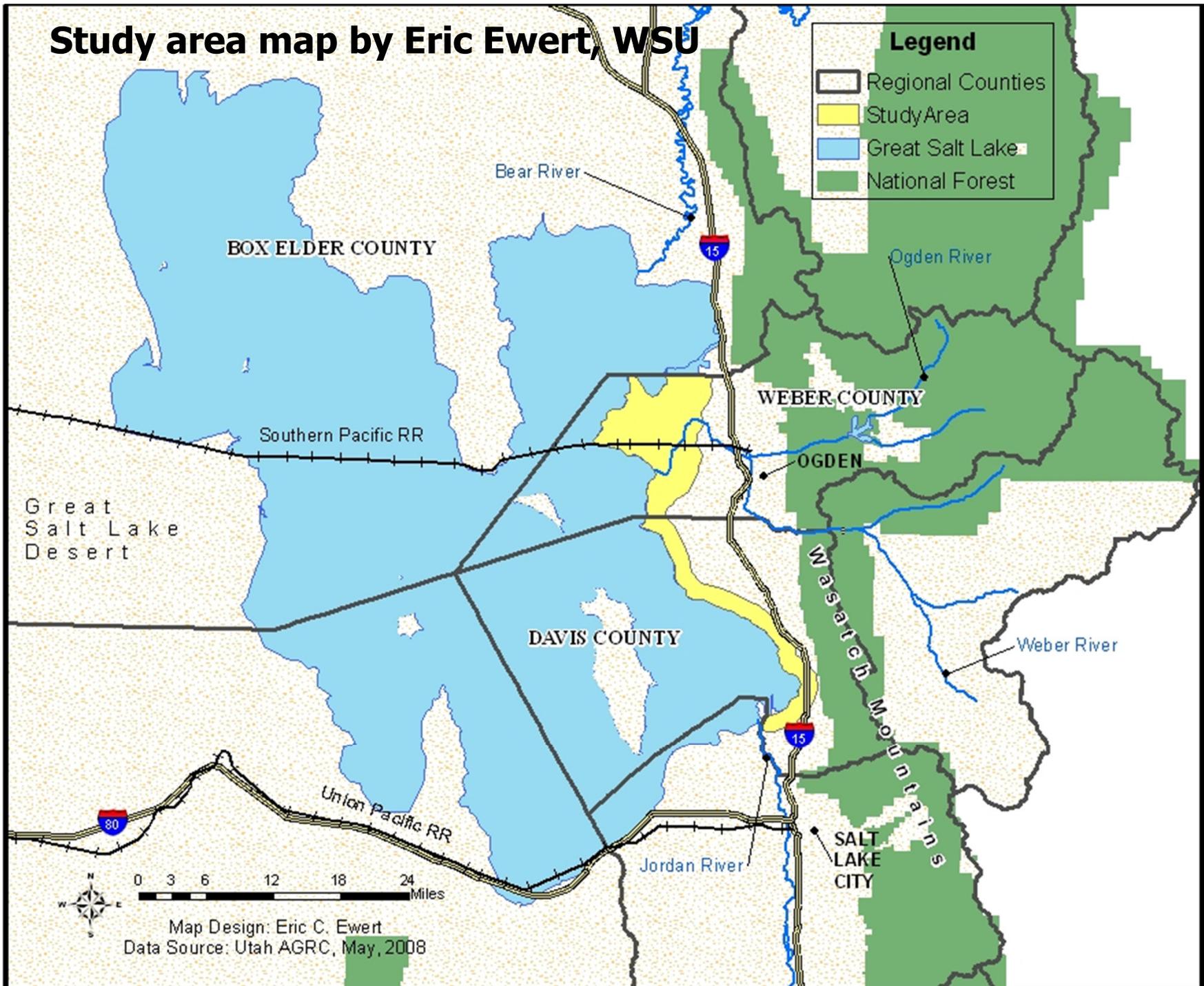
Qualitative Methods:

- **18 face-to-face interviews in Davis, Weber & Box Elder Counties**
 - 9 residential households (individuals or couples)
 - 6 GSL state park rangers or refuge managers
 - 3 county commissioners
- **2 focus groups:**
 - **10 Davis County residents (Syracuse)**
 - **6 Weber County residents (West Warren)**

Quantitative Methods:

- **Survey of residents living close to Great Salt Lake**
 - Drop-off/pick-up method
 - Conducted in July & August 2007
 - **83.7% response rate, with 381 completed survey questionnaires**
 - **Davis County: 80.9%; n = 182**
 - **Weber County: 86.5%; n = 199**

Study area map by Eric Ewert, WSU

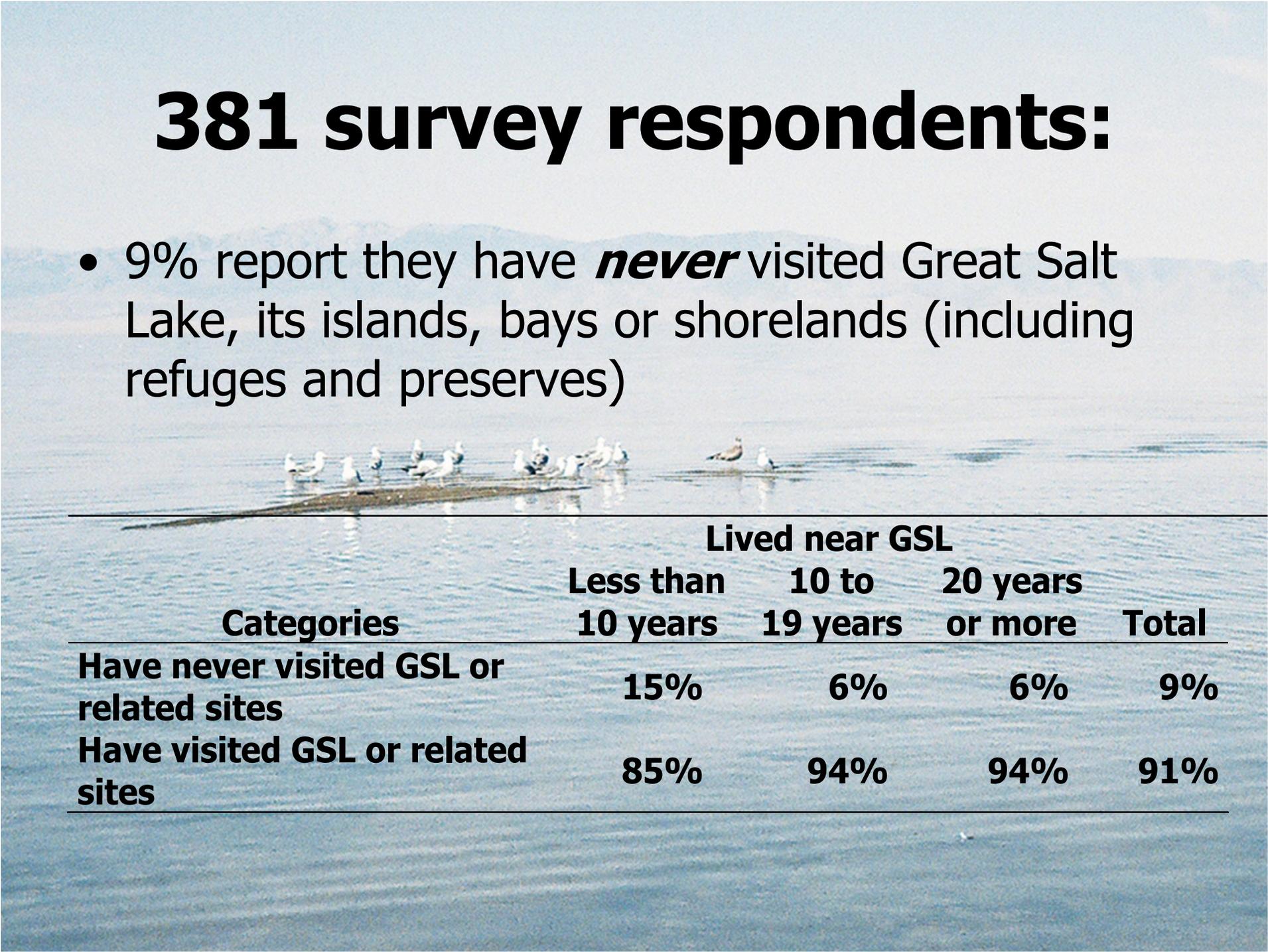


381 survey respondents:

- **Age range: 18-93, median age: 47**
- **89% own their home/land**
- **19% report their property (or other property very near by) has been in their family for more than 1 generation**
 - **10% for 3-5 generations; 7% since before 1900, 5% since between 1900 & 1939**
- **Respondents have lived close to GSL 0-88 yrs.**
 - **Median: 16 years**
- **26% spent at least 2 yrs of their childhood (between the ages of 7 & 17) living within 1-2 miles of GSL**

381 survey respondents:

- 9% report they have *never* visited Great Salt Lake, its islands, bays or shorelands (including refuges and preserves)



Categories	Lived near GSL			Total
	Less than 10 years	10 to 19 years	20 years or more	
Have never visited GSL or related sites	15%	6%	6%	9%
Have visited GSL or related sites	85%	94%	94%	91%

Meanings Themes—Qualitative work:

- Importance of family roots in GSL area
- Rural traits of the lake area
- It is a good place for children to grow up
- GSL-related recreation
- Appreciation of the environment
 - Including birds and other wildlife
- Ever-changing elevation & size
- Uniqueness of GSL
- A place to protect and preserve
- A place of community connections
- Also negative meanings & no particular meaning

Feelings about living near GSL:

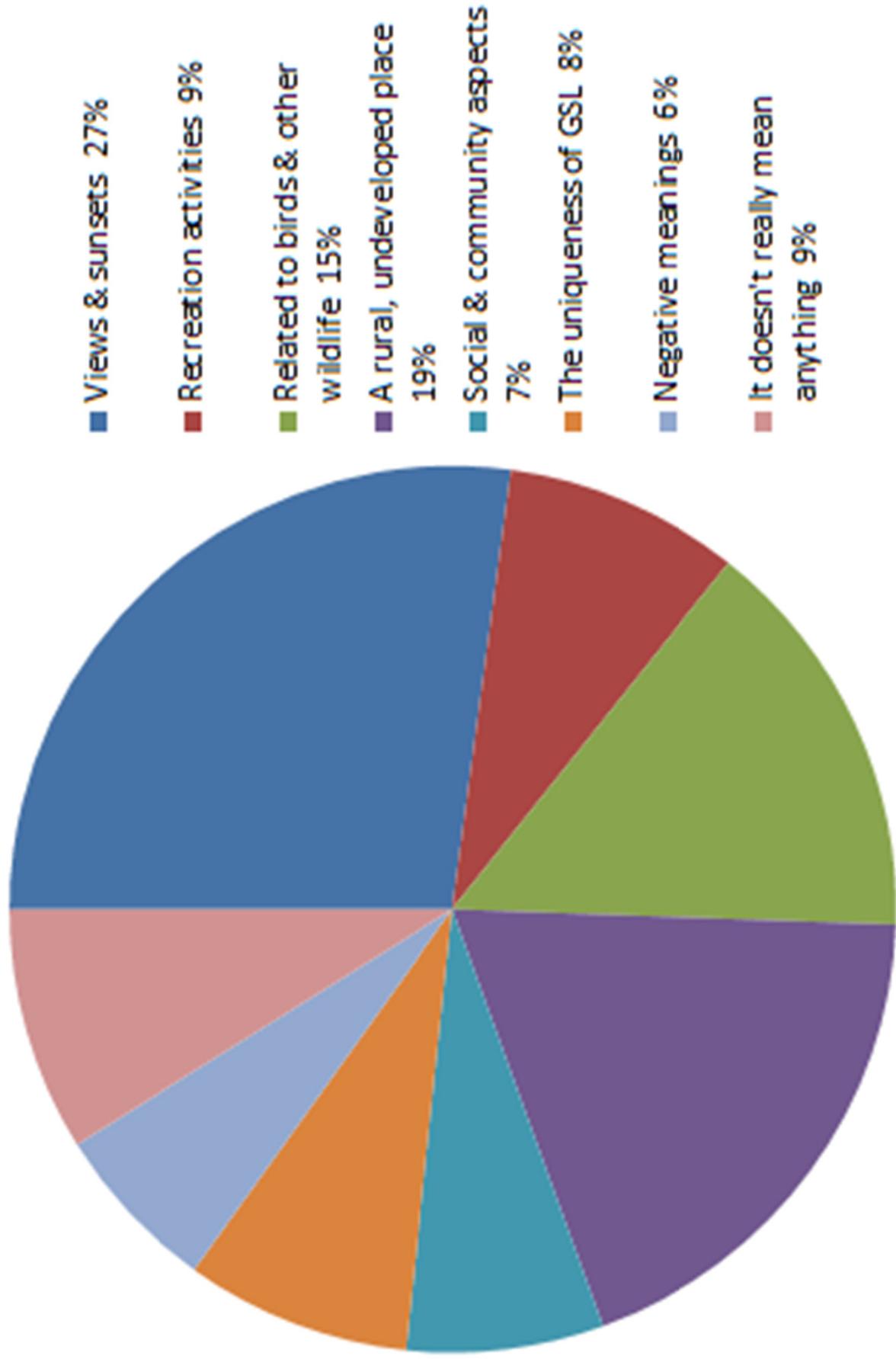
- “It’s a privilege, it’s a tremendous privilege.”
- “...wonder and appreciation, I think.”
- “...that long, sweeping, stinking, slimy, brine shrimp-infested, rotten... it stinks!”
- “The lake’s irrelevant... The lake’s just there... Never thought about the lake much, actually.”



Survey respondents:

- **What does Great Salt Lake mean to you?**
 - It's a unique natural feature, with historical and ecological significance. As an amateur bird watcher, I am especially attracted to the refuges & preserves.
 - Legacy of my ancestors who settled this area as early pioneers
 - Happy childhood memories watching the sunsets over [Antelope] island & the lake
 - An important wildlife/bird refuge/flyway
 - Memories--some good, some sad
 - Beautiful, surreal, comforting
 - Memories, beauty, always been there, it does stink in the late summer but that's okay
 - Waterfowl hunting
 - It's a land mark from any map of where we live
 - Historical and environmental
- **Big, smelly, salty lake that I call home**

Great Salt Lake Meanings for Survey Respondents



Is there a lake out there?

- When asked what they liked most about living near GSL, 7% gave answers indicating no real sense of the lake:
 - The lake has nothing to do about how I feel about living here
 - Most of the time I don't even know it's there.
 - I didn't even realize I was that close--I don't consider myself close
 - Never thought about it. Don't feel we live that close to it, never see it
 - It doesn't matter, I don't see it
 - It isn't close enough to effect me
 - Don't really pay any attention to it
 - **It's not important to me**

Other dynamics with meanings:

- Shared meanings among groups of people
- Multiple meanings held by the same individuals
- Disagreements about meanings between groups and individuals



Factors that made the most difference between people:

- Exposure, experience, and involvement
- Location of residence
- To a lesser degree, sociodemographic factors



- **Respondents who were more likely to have place attachment than not:**

- Lived on multigenerational familial property
- Grew up near GSL
- Had lived near lake 20 years or more
- Visited lake-related sites most frequently
- Participated in GSL-related recreation most frequently



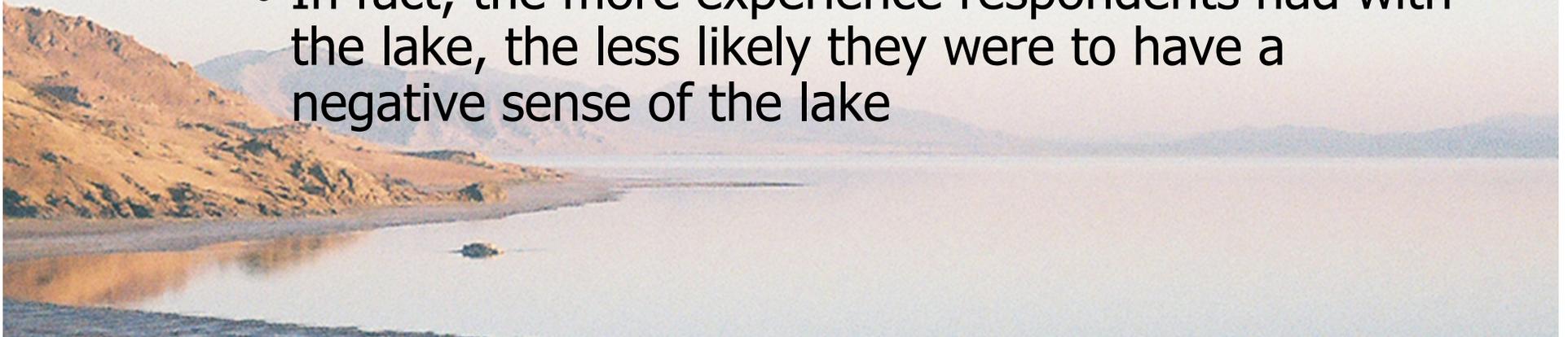
- **Respondents who were more likely to have a sense of the lake than not:**

- Those who lived on multigenerational familial property
- Those who lived nearer to access to the lake (Antelope Island Causeway)

- **Respondents who were more likely to have a negative sense of the lake than not:**

- Participated in GSL recreation infrequently if at all
- Those who never visited the lake

- In fact, the more experience respondents had with the lake, the less likely they were to have a negative sense of the lake



Other Ways Location Mattered:

- Those with close access to wetlands & relatively close access to the open water were more likely to say GSL meant recreation activities
- Those living in the most rural area were more likely to say the lake held rural meanings for them
- And those who were able to see GSL from their property were more likely to say GSL meant views and sunsets

Not your typical lakefront property



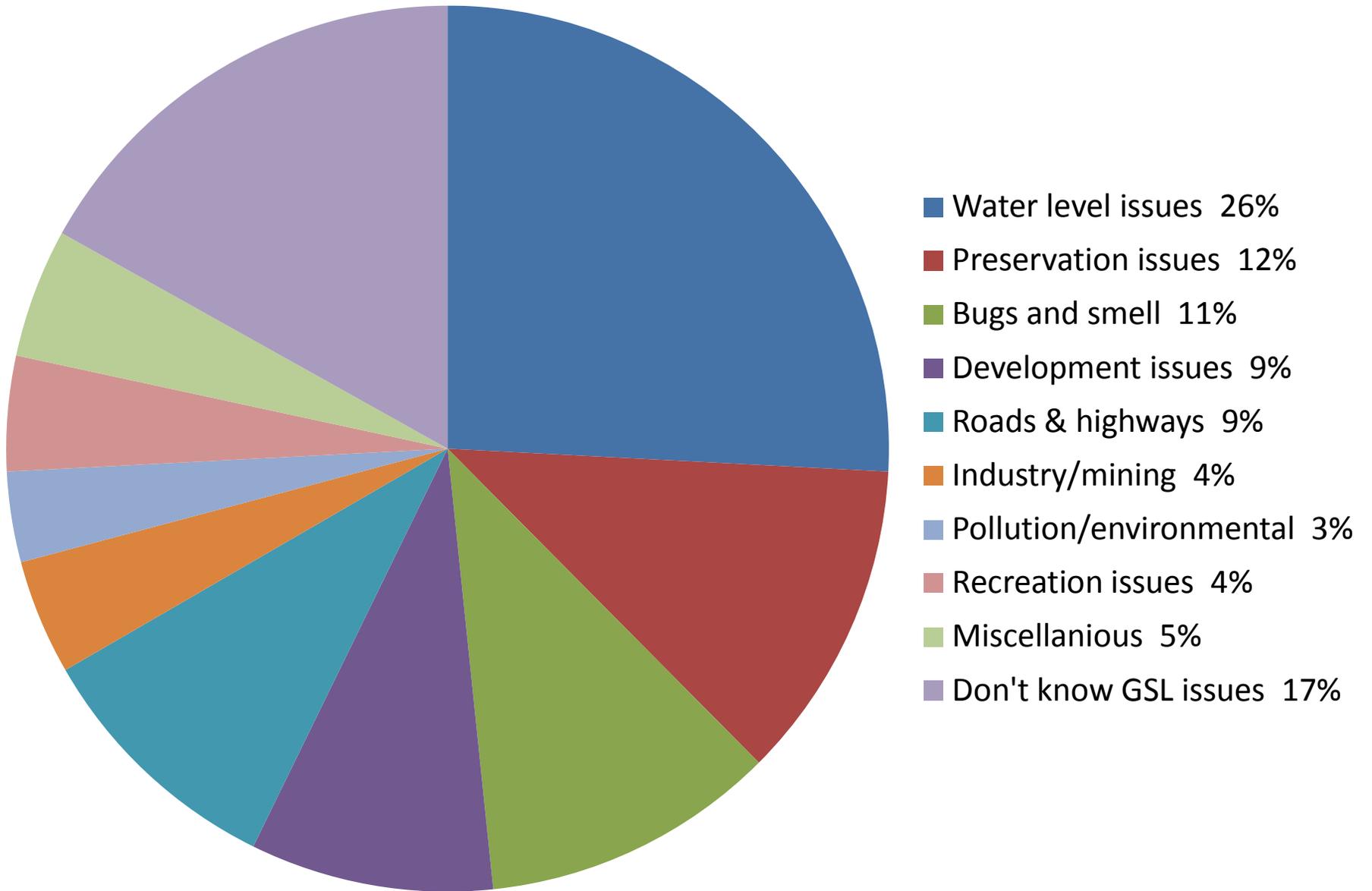
Not your typical lakefront property



Neighbors of Great Salt Lake

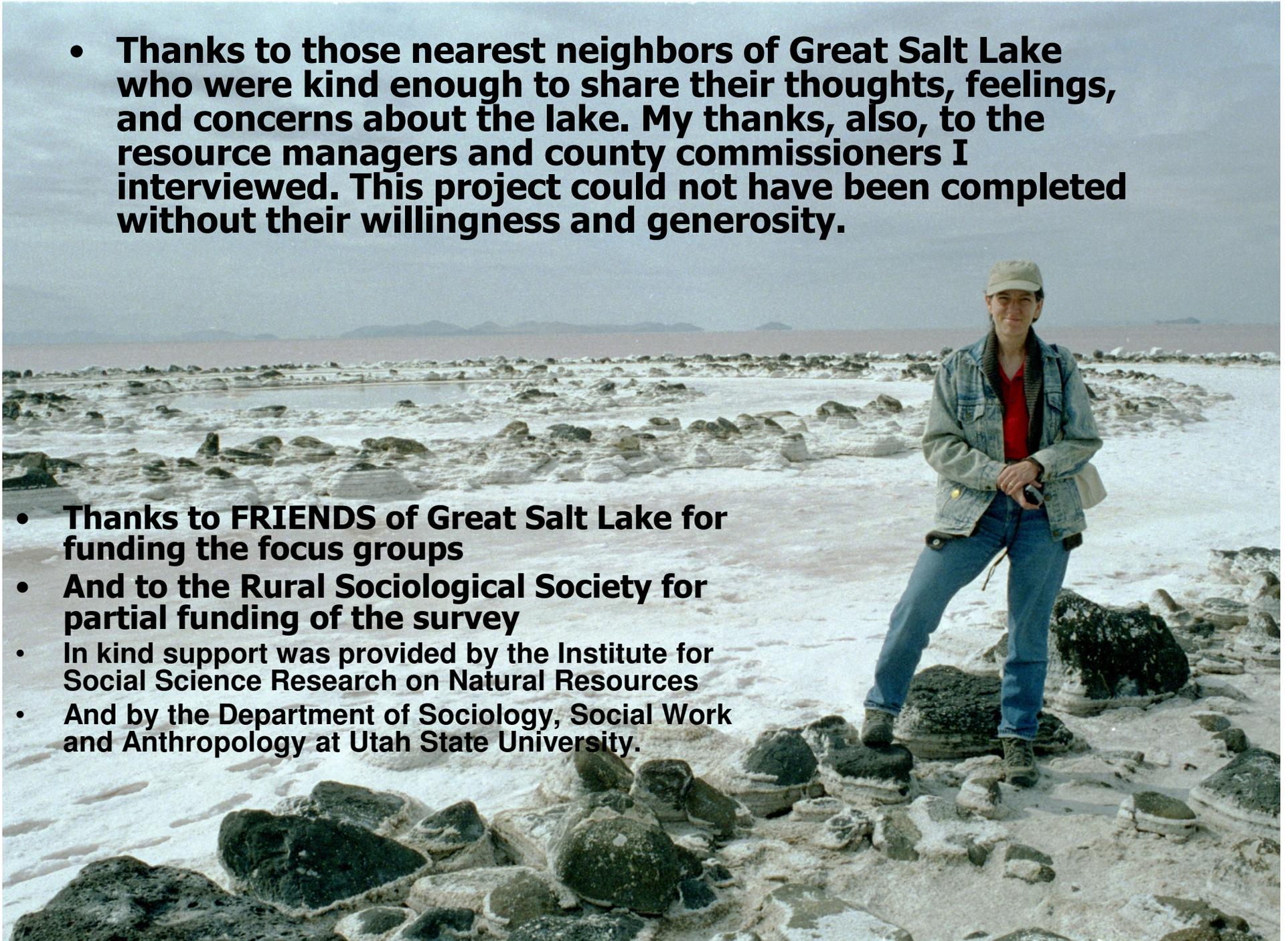
- **GSL neighbors experience some lake-related problems others do not, e.g.:**
 - More potent & pervasive odors
 - Damage from salt and lake dust
 - Social stigma
- **They also experience positive things others do not, e.g.:**
 - Birds and wildlife in their neighborhoods & nearby
 - Dark night skies & reflection of moon on the water
 - Lake-related weather & shelter from that weather

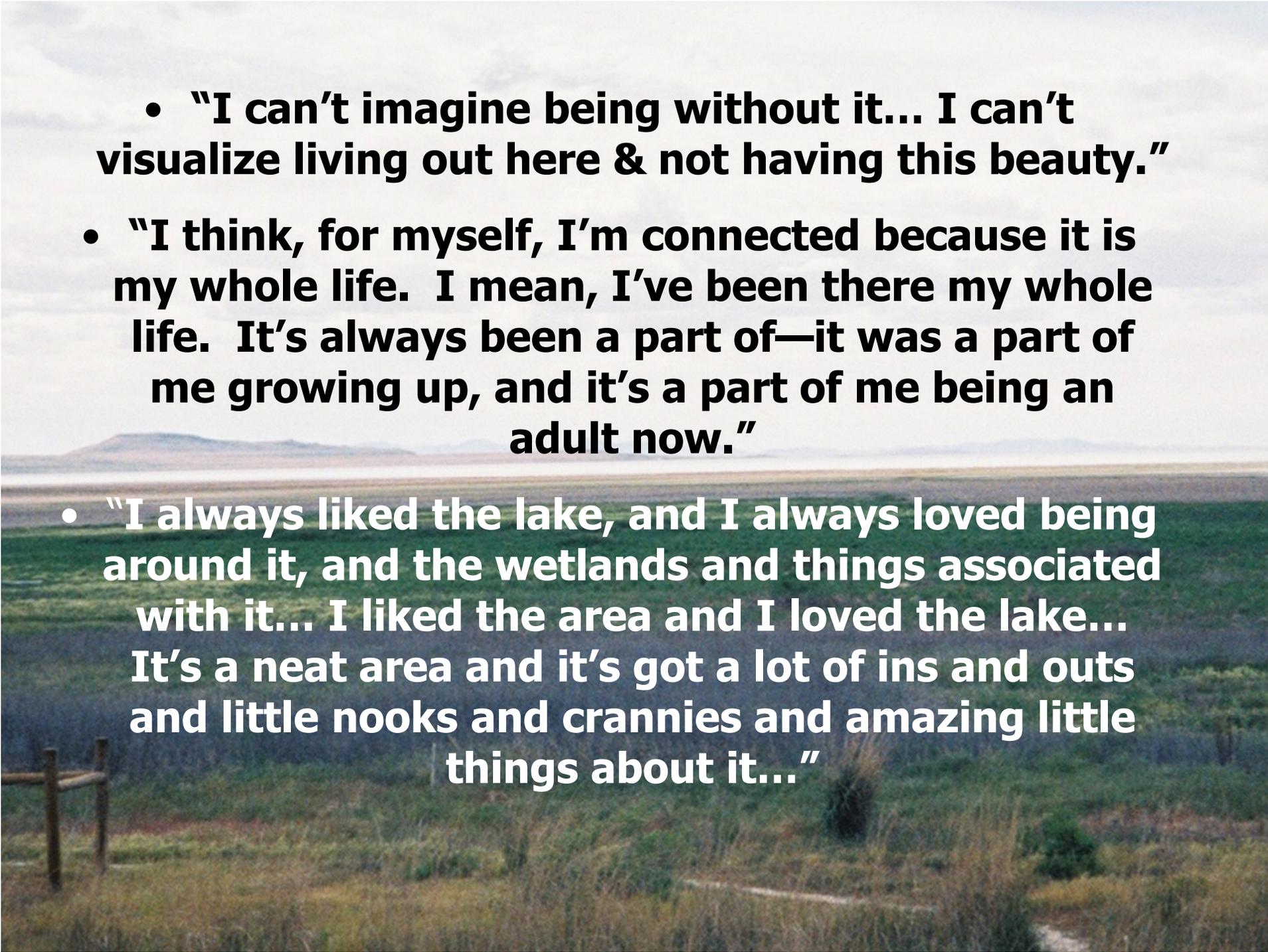
Most Important GSL Issue



- **Thanks to those nearest neighbors of Great Salt Lake who were kind enough to share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns about the lake. My thanks, also, to the resource managers and county commissioners I interviewed. This project could not have been completed without their willingness and generosity.**

- **Thanks to FRIENDS of Great Salt Lake for funding the focus groups**
- **And to the Rural Sociological Society for partial funding of the survey**
- **In kind support was provided by the Institute for Social Science Research on Natural Resources**
- **And by the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology at Utah State University.**



- 
- **“I can’t imagine being without it... I can’t visualize living out here & not having this beauty.”**
 - **“I think, for myself, I’m connected because it is my whole life. I mean, I’ve been there my whole life. It’s always been a part of—it was a part of me growing up, and it’s a part of me being an adult now.”**
 - **“I always liked the lake, and I always loved being around it, and the wetlands and things associated with it... I liked the area and I loved the lake... It’s a neat area and it’s got a lot of ins and outs and little nooks and crannies and amazing little things about it...”**

- **“...I’ve learned to have a real love-hate relationship with the Great Salt Lake. You know, it’s a beautiful place—you can go out there a lot of times and the lake will be so clear you can see six or eight feet deep and see the bottom, just like Bear Lake, it’s beautiful. And the sunsets are just phenomenal out there on Fremont Island ‘cause there’s no civilization if you look west as the sun sets, and they’re just gorgeous.**
- **But I’ve also found out that the lake, the Great Salt Lake is one of the most dangerous bodies of water in the world—that and the Dead Sea—because of the density. And we’ve experienced that in our boats, you know you have to be so careful with the density, the white caps and also the fog out there...”**