

On December 7, Utah Governor Spence Cox released his FY2023 Budget Recommendations, which included an investment of \$500M in water infrastructure, planning, and wise stewardship and management. The budget document reads: “Our water resources are becoming more important as our growing population drives increased demand for water and agricultural production. As population outpaces investment, our state becomes more susceptible to drought and other water-related challenges.” The Governor recommended a “...generational investment in water infrastructure, including optimizing our current water supplies and investing in productive agriculture, vibrant communities, and healthy watersheds to protect this key natural resource into the future.”

In addition to \$100 million in 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds appropriated for water in the Utah Legislature’s First Special Session, Governor Cox recommended investing another \$400 million of ARPA funds in water conservation, restoration, preservation, and infrastructure to “proactively respond to drought challenges, degrading infrastructure, and to meet the needs of future growth.”

The funding would also benefit the Great Salt Lake, one of the State’s most important ecosystems. “We are committed to protecting and preserving this key resource. Annually, the Great Salt Lake contributes more than \$1.3 billion in total economic impact, hosts upwards of 10 million migratory birds, and is a recreation asset serving numerous boaters, hunters, and wildlife watchers. During summer 2021, the lake reached the lowest levels on record-threatening wildlife habitat, air quality, local communities, human health, industries that depend on the lake, and even Utah’s world-famous snow.” To ensure responsible future management and surrounding wetlands, the Governor recommended \$600,000 in restricted funds to update a comprehensive resource management plan.

In addition, Governor Cox recommended directing \$45 million toward Great Salt Lake preservation efforts on top of \$5 million already appropriated to enhance inflows, restore and preserve wetlands and upland habitat, and integrate the Great Salt Lake into water and land use planning. Similarly, \$25 million is recommended to rehabilitate Utah Lake and improve its water quality.

Utah’s Agricultural Water Optimization program has demonstrated conservation strategies that optimize water use without compromising agricultural yields. Once all current projects are completed, an estimated 43,800 acre-feet of water (the equivalent of a small reservoir) will be available every year. The Governor proposed establishing a statewide water cooperative action plan that prioritizes conservation, storage, agriculture preservation, and use optimization. He recommended an additional \$50 million on top of an already appropriated \$20 million to further advance agriculture-related water conservation efforts. Moreover, a \$5 million infusion to the Agriculture Resource Development Loan Fund would increase producers’ ability to implement future water conservation projects.

Investing in infrastructure for high-quality drinking water is another priority. It requires significant planning and investment before any water reaches our taps. “Dedicated professionals continually ensure our water meets the high standards we expect. The state has a role to play in ensuring access to clean drinking water for communities across the state.” The budget calls for collaborative partnerships, and recommends \$75 million on top of \$25 million previously appropriated. The spending will bring clean water for the first time to Westwater from nearby Blanding and improve drinking water systems in other small rural communities across the State.

Additionally, the Department of Environmental Quality will use \$890,000 from water fees to assist local communities in maintaining drinking water standards. The Governor recommended \$100 million for the Local Match Program to help communities fund additional water infrastructure.

“Historic investments in Utah’s reservoirs by past generations prevented even more dire outcomes during 2021 drought conditions. Today, our population growth has outpaced our investment in water development. We must address this problem.” Governor Cox recommended \$500,000 to begin planning and developing future water storage solutions. Further, effective water storage requires healthy watersheds. “We can maximize existing storage by increasing yields through proper watershed and groundwater management.” In addition to continued water storage planning and development, the Governor recommended adding \$4 million to the Watershed Restoration Initiative and \$1.5 million to the Shared Stewardship Initiative as part of a broad strategy to improve watershed conditions, increase water yields, and reduce catastrophic wildfires. The Governor also recommended \$1 million toward pre-fire mitigation under a Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy and \$2.5 million to restore fire-ravaged landscapes to protect drinking water quality and mitigate the impacts of sediment pollution in streams and reservoirs.

Infrastructure/South Dakota

On December 7, Governor Krisi Noem (R-SD) addressed the state legislature with her budget recommendations for FY22 and FY23. She noted that general fund receipts are up 11.4% over last year's historic numbers and that there are \$215.5M in one-time dollars for FY22 and \$157.6M in ongoing general funds. The state also has American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds available. "To the fullest extent that we can, we are going to put those funds to work for our state, to address our state's most pressing needs, to make fiscally responsible, one-time expenditures that will not grow the government, but that will save our people money in the long run."

She emphasized the importance of building and maintaining infrastructure for the future. "As our state continues to grow, so does our need for access to clean, quality water. Thankfully, we now have the resources to make a \$660M, once-in-a-generation investment in water projects across the state. With our combined resources, including state, federal, and local dollars, these projects could yield a landmark \$1.5B investment. This necessary work will ensure rural towns have clean drinking water; it will update existing water treatment facilities; replace outdated water systems in our older communities; and construct drainage projects for new communities.... Routing this money through existing programs at the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, we will ensure a fair, objective, and impartial process that makes the best use of taxpayers' dollars."

She also addressed the need for repairs to dams and flooded areas. "Dams are one of the most essential forms of infrastructure - especially for a state that has the Mighty Missouri running through it. We need dams that are strong and built to last. Unfortunately, the Richmond Dam near Aberdeen is over 80 years old. Due to the risk of loss of life and property, repairing it is a top priority for Commissioner Ryan Brunner of School and Public Lands. I am recommending \$6.5M in funding to repair this critical infrastructure. This will build on the investments we made in our dam infrastructure over the past year. Additionally, I am recommending \$5.6 million to repair public recreation areas damaged by the 2019 floods. In the case of Lake Alvin, that project is estimated to cost about \$3M and is at risk of failure. We have the money available to get these crucial projects done - so let's do it." <https://news.sd.gov/newsitem.aspx?id=28771>