

Land Management Funding Amendments

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Carl R. Albrecht

Senate Sponsor:

LONG TITLE**General Description:**

This bill addresses funding for watershed restoration and forest health.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- defines terms;
- establishes the Utah Forest Restoration Institute (institute) in connection with Utah State University;
- provides funding to the institute;
- requires the institute to:
 - conduct research as provided by state and federal law;
 - study how the state can improve forest and watershed health;
 - recommend mitigation strategies that reduce the risks and impact of wildfire;
 - coordinate with the Watershed Restoration Initiative to fund watershed and forest restoration projects;
- review and respond to, in a timely manner, an emergency request for funding a watershed restoration project in response to a natural disaster; and
- monitor the long-term effectiveness of watershed and forest restoration projects;
- requires the Watershed Restoration Initiative to:
 - coordinate funding decisions with the institute on partnership watershed restoration projects;
 - coordinate the long-term monitoring of a watershed restoration project with the institute;
 - collect data required by the institute;
 - provide research and learning opportunities for higher education students and faculty associated with the institute; and
 - submit an annual report to the institute and two legislative committees; and
- makes technical and conforming changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

This bill appropriates \$3,800,000 in operating and capital budgets for fiscal year 2027, all of which is from the Income Tax Fund.

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

79-2-601, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapter 34

79-2-602, as enacted by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 51

79-2-605, as enacted by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 51

ENACTS:

53H-4-317, Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section **53H-4-317** is enacted to read:

53H-4-317 . Utah Forest Restoration Institute.

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Institute" means the Utah Forest Restoration Institute created in Subsection (2).

(b) "Watershed Restoration Initiative" means the initiative created in Section 79-2-602.

(2) There is created the Utah Forest Restoration Institute in connection with Utah State University.

(3) The institute shall:

(a) conduct research as provided by state and federal laws governing the establishment and maintenance of southwest ecological restoration institutes;

(b) study how the state can improve the health of forests, woodland ecosystems, and watersheds;

(c) recommend mitigation strategies that reduce the risks and impacts of wildfire;

(d) coordinate with the Watershed Restoration Initiative to fund watershed and forest restoration projects in accordance with Subsection (4); and

(e) monitor the long-term effectiveness of watershed and forest restoration projects funded by the state.

(4) To coordinate the funding of watershed and forest restoration projects with the Watershed Restoration Initiative, the institute shall:

(a) review a prioritized list of watershed restoration projects submitted by the Watershed

65 Restoration Initiative;

66 **(b)** approve funding for watershed restoration projects based on:

67 (i) immediate need for watershed and forest health;

68 (ii) the projected short-term and long-term benefit to watershed and forest health;

69 (iii) available funds; and

70 (iv) recommendations from the Watershed Restoration Initiative; and

71 **(c)** before May 1 of each year, notify the Watershed Restoration Initiative of the

72 approved watershed restoration projects from the prioritized list described in

73 Subsection (4)(a).

74 **(5)(a)** The Watershed Restoration Initiative may submit an emergency request for

75 funding to the institute in response to a wildfire, flooding event, or other natural

76 disaster.

77 **(b)** If the institute receives an emergency request for funding from the Watershed

78 Restoration Initiative, the institute shall:

79 (i) within 72 hours of receiving the request, review the emergency request for

80 funding;

81 (ii) within 96 hours of receiving the request, notify the Watershed Restoration

82 Initiative of the institute's decision to provide funding for the request; and

83 (iii) within a reasonable time of receiving the request, if the institute decides to

84 provide funding for the request, distribute funding to the Watershed Restoration

85 Initiative.

86 **(6)(a)** The institute shall prepare and submit an annual report on or before July 1 of each

87 year to the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality

88 Appropriations Subcommittee.

89 **(b)** The report shall include:

90 (i) a list of programs funded by the institute;

91 (ii) any programs or research completed in the previous year and an assessment of the

92 programs or research; and

93 (iii) a complete operating and financial statement for the preceding fiscal year.

94 Section 2. Section **79-2-601** is amended to read:

95 **79-2-601 . Definitions.**

96 As used in this part:

97 **(1)** "Administrative costs" means the costs of administering the initiative, including costs

98 for staffing, rent, data processing, legal, finance, accounting, travel, maintenance, and

office supplies.

(2) "Director" means the director of the initiative who is appointed under Section 79-2-602.

(3) "Division" means the Division of Wildlife Resources created in Section 23A-2-201.

(4) "Initiative" means the Watershed Restoration Initiative created in Section 79-2-602.

(5) "Restoration" means to assist the recovery of ecosystems and ecosystem services that have been mismanaged, degraded, or destroyed.

(6) "Utah Forest Restoration Institute" means the institute created in Section 53H-4-317.

~~[(6)]~~ (7) "Watershed" means the geographical surface area that drains water into a stream, river, or other body of water.

Section 3. Section **79-2-602** is amended to read:

79-2-602 . Watershed Restoration Initiative -- Creation -- Objectives.

(1) There is created within the department the Watershed Restoration Initiative under the general supervision of the executive director.

(2) The policies and objectives of the initiative are to manage, restore, and improve watershed ecosystems throughout the state by focusing on improving:

(a) watershed health and biological diversity;

(b) water quality and yield; and

(c) opportunities for sustainable uses of natural resources.

(3) The initiative shall:

(a) submit a prioritized list of watershed restoration projects to the Utah Forest Restoration Institute in accordance with Section 53H-4-317; and

(b) coordinate the long-term monitoring of a watershed restoration project with the Utah Forest Restoration Institute, including:

(i) collecting data required by the Utah Forest Restoration Institute; and

(ii) providing research and learning opportunities for higher education students and faculty associated with the Utah Forest Restoration Institute.

~~[(3)]~~ (4) Consistent with this part, the initiative may integrate, coordinate, or partner with federal, state, local, private, and non-profit plans and programs to further the initiative's objectives.

~~[(4)]~~ (5) To achieve and implement the policies and objectives under ~~[Subsection (2)]~~ Subsections (2) and (3), the initiative shall:

(a) develop and oversee a watershed restoration project proposal process to develop statewide watershed restoration priorities, including ranking criteria;

(b) maintain a website that includes:

- (i) an events calendar;
- (ii) tracking of watershed restoration projects;
- (iii) a description of the watershed restoration project proposal process, including applicable ranking criteria; and
- (iv) the name and contact information of each person with decision-making responsibilities related to ranking and selecting watershed restoration project proposals;
- (c) organize and oversee a biennial statewide watershed restoration workshop;
- (d) assign funding to watershed restoration projects, and manage and track project budgets;
- (e) submit a request to the Utah Forest Restoration Institute for funding a partnership watershed restoration project;
- ~~[(e)]~~ (f) provide initiative partners with contract support, reporting, and tracking assistance regarding incoming and outgoing watershed restoration project funds;
- ~~[(f)]~~ (g) ensure that watershed restoration projects meet applicable cultural resource requirements;
- ~~[(g)]~~ (h) upon request and as appropriate, provide performance reporting and initiative information to the media, partners, and the executive and legislative branches of state government;
- ~~[(h)]~~ (i) prepare and provide training and technical support for watershed restoration project managers; and
- ~~[(i)]~~ (j) provide the executive director and the Utah Forest Restoration Institute with reports and recommendations regarding the initiative's performance and funding.

Section 4. Section **79-2-605** is amended to read:

79-2-605 . Reporting.

- (1) The initiative shall prepare and submit an annual report on or before November 1 of each year to:
 - (a) the Utah Forest Restoration Institute;
 - (b) the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee; and
 - (c) the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality Appropriations Subcommittee.
- (2) The annual report described in Subsection (1) shall include:
 - (a) by source, the initiative's total annual resources, including partner funds;
 - (b) the initiative's historical annual funding amounts from year to year;

- (c) the amount of funds received from the Utah Forest Restoration Institute for partnership projects;
- (d) the total amount of state funding used to leverage non-state partner resources;
- (e) the total administrative costs related to the initiative, including the costs of each initiative partner that receives funds through the initiative; and
- (f) performance metrics that demonstrate the initiative's impact and effectiveness.

[~~The initiative shall prepare and submit to the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee, on or before November 1 of each year, an annual report that includes:~~]

- ~~[(1) by source, the initiative's total annual resources, including partner funds;]~~
- ~~[(2) the initiative's historical annual funding amounts from year to year;]~~
- ~~[(3) the total amount of state funding used to leverage non-state partner resources;]~~
- ~~[(4) the total administrative costs related to the initiative, including the costs of each initiative partner that receives funds through the initiative; and]~~
- ~~[(5) performance metrics that demonstrate the initiative's impact and effectiveness.]~~

Section 5. **FY 2027 Appropriations.**

The following sums of money are appropriated for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. These are additions to amounts previously appropriated for fiscal year 2027.

Subsection 5(a). **Operating and Capital Budgets**

Under the terms and conditions of Title 63J, Chapter 1, Budgetary Procedures Act, the Legislature appropriates the following sums of money from the funds or accounts indicated for the use and support of the government of the state of Utah.

ITEM 1 To Utah State University - Education and General

From Income Tax Fund (2,200,000)

Schedule of Programs:

Public Service (2,200,000)

The Legislature intends to reallocate the ongoing appropriations under this item to Utah State University's Utah Forest Restoration Institute from Utah State University's Ecology Center and Public Lands Initiative.

ITEM 2 To Utah State University - Special Projects

From Income Tax Fund 6,000,000

Schedule of Programs:

201 Utah Forest Restoration Institute 6,000,000

202 The Legislature intends that the Utah Forest

203 Restoration Institute at Utah State University use, of the

204 ongoing appropriations under this item:

205 (1) no more than \$800,000 for operations and

206 staffing purposes; and

207 (2) at least \$5,200,000 to fund and study

208 watershed restoration projects as required under

209 Subsections 53H-4-317(4) and (5).

210 Section 6. **Effective Date.**

211 This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.