

1 **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;

18 • review and respond to, in a timely manner, an emergency request for funding a watershed restoration project in response to a natural disaster; and

19 • monitor the long-term effectiveness of watershed and forest restoration projects;

20 ▶ requires the Watershed Restoration Initiative to:

- coordinate funding decisions with the institute on partnership watershed restoration projects;

21 • coordinate the long-term monitoring of a watershed restoration project with the institute;

22 • collect data required by the institute;

23 • provide research and learning opportunities for higher education students and faculty associated with the institute; and

24 • submit an annual report to the institute and two legislative committees; and

25 ▶ makes technical and conforming changes.

31 **Money Appropriated in this Bill:**

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

34 **Other Special Clauses:**

35 None

36 **Utah Code Sections Affected:**

37 AMENDS:

38 **79-2-601**, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapter 34

39 **79-2-602**, as enacted by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 51

40 **79-2-605**, as enacted by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 51

41 ENACTS:

42 **53H-4-317**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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

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

46 **53H-4-317 . Utah Forest Restoration Institute.**

47 **(1) As used in this section:**

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

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

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

52 (3) The institute shall:

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

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

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

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

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

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

64 (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

99 office supplies.

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

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

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

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

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

106 [6] (7) "Watershed" means the geographical surface area that drains water into a stream,
107 river, or other body of water.

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

109 **79-2-602 . Watershed Restoration Initiative -- Creation -- Objectives.**

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

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

- 114 (a) watershed health and biological diversity;
- 115 (b) water quality and yield; and
- 116 (c) opportunities for sustainable uses of natural resources.

117 (3) The initiative shall:

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

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

- 122 (i) collecting data required by the Utah Forest Restoration Institute; and
- 123 (ii) providing research and learning opportunities for higher education students and
124 faculty associated with the Utah Forest Restoration Institute.

125 [3] (4) Consistent with this part, the initiative may integrate, coordinate, or partner with
126 federal, state, local, private, and non-profit plans and programs to further the initiative's
127 objectives.

128 [4] (5) To achieve and implement the policies and objectives under [Subsection (2)]
129 Subsections (2) and (3), the initiative shall:

- 130 (a) develop and oversee a watershed restoration project proposal process to develop
131 statewide watershed restoration priorities, including ranking criteria;
- 132 (b) maintain a website that includes:

133 (i) an events calendar;
134 (ii) tracking of watershed restoration projects;
135 (iii) a description of the watershed restoration project proposal process, including
136 applicable ranking criteria; and
137 (iv) the name and contact information of each person with decision-making
138 responsibilities related to ranking and selecting watershed restoration project
139 proposals;

140 (c) organize and oversee a biennial statewide watershed restoration workshop;
141 (d) assign funding to watershed restoration projects, and manage and track project
142 budgets;

143 (e) submit a request to the Utah Forest Restoration Institute for funding a partnership
144 watershed restoration project;

145 [f] (f) provide initiative partners with contract support, reporting, and tracking
146 assistance regarding incoming and outgoing watershed restoration project funds;
147 [f] (g) ensure that watershed restoration projects meet applicable cultural resource
148 requirements;

149 [g] (h) upon request and as appropriate, provide performance reporting and initiative
150 information to the media, partners, and the executive and legislative branches of state
151 government;

152 [h] (i) prepare and provide training and technical support for watershed restoration
153 project managers; and

154 [i] (j) provide the executive director and the Utah Forest Restoration Institute with
155 reports and recommendations regarding the initiative's performance and funding.

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

157 **79-2-605 . Reporting.**

158 (1) The initiative shall prepare and submit an annual report on or before November 1 of
159 each year to:

160 (a) the Utah Forest Restoration Institute;
161 (b) the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee; and
162 (c) the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality Appropriations
163 Subcommittee.

164 (2) The annual report described in Subsection (1) shall include:

165 (a) by source, the initiative's total annual resources, including partner funds;
166 (b) the initiative's historical annual funding amounts from year to year;

167 (c) the amount of funds received from the Utah Forest Restoration Institute for
168 partnership projects;
169 (d) the total amount of state funding used to leverage non-state partner resources;
170 (e) the total administrative costs related to the initiative, including the costs of each
171 initiative partner that receives funds through the initiative; and
172 (f) performance metrics that demonstrate the initiative's impact and effectiveness.
173 [The initiative shall prepare and submit to the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and
- 174 Environment Interim Committee, on or before November 1 of each year, an annual report that
- 175 includes:
176 [(1) by source, the initiative's total annual resources, including partner funds;]
177 [(2) the initiative's historical annual funding amounts from year to year;]
178 [(3) the total amount of state funding used to leverage non-state partner resources;]
179 [(4) the total administrative costs related to the initiative, including the costs of each
180 initiative partner that receives funds through the initiative; and]
181 [(5) performance metrics that demonstrate the initiative's impact and effectiveness.]]

182 **Section 5. FY 2027 Appropriations.**

183 The following sums of money are appropriated for the fiscal year beginning July 1,
184 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. These are additions to amounts previously appropriated for
185 fiscal year 2027.

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

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

190 ITEM 1 To Utah State University - Education and General

191 From Income Tax Fund (2,200,000)

192 Schedule of Programs:

193 Public Service (2,200,000)

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

198 ITEM 2 To Utah State University - Special Projects

199 From Income Tax Fund 6,000,000

200 Schedule of Programs:

201 Utah Forest Restoration Institute 6,000,000

202 The Legislature intends that the Utah Forest

205 (1) no more than \$800,000 for operations and
206 staffing purposes; and

(2) at least \$5,200,000 to fund and study watershed restoration projects as required under Subsections 53H-4-317(4) and (5).

210 Section 6. Effective Date.

211 This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.