

Scott D. Sandall proposes the following substitute bill:

Land Management Funding Amendments

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Carl R. Albrecht

Senate Sponsor: Scott D. Sandall

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

- 29 • submit an annual report to the institute and two legislative committees; and
- 30 ▸ makes technical and conforming changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

32 This bill appropriates \$1,900,000 in operating and capital budgets for fiscal year 2027, all
33 of which is from the Income Tax Fund.

Other Special Clauses:

35 None

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 [~~e~~] (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.

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174 [~~The initiative shall prepare and submit to the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and~~

- 175 ~~Environment Interim Committee, on or before November 1 of each year, an annual report that~~

- 176 ~~includes:]~~

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

183 **Section 5. FY 2027 Appropriations.**

184 The following sums of money are appropriated for the fiscal year beginning July 1,

185 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. These are additions to amounts previously appropriated for

186 fiscal year 2027.

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

188 Under the terms and conditions of Title 63J, Chapter 1, Budgetary Procedures Act, the

189 Legislature appropriates the following sums of money from the funds or accounts indicated for

190 the use and support of the government of the state of Utah.

191	ITEM 1 To Utah State University - Education and General	
192	From Income Tax Fund	(650,000)
193	Schedule of Programs:	
194	Public Service	(650,000)

195 The Legislature intends to reallocate the ongoing

196 appropriations under this item to Utah State University's

197 Utah Forest Restoration Institute from Utah State

198 University Extension.

199 ITEM 2 To Utah State University - Special Projects

200 From Income Tax Fund 2,550,000

201 Schedule of Programs:

202 Utah Forest Restoration Institute 2,550,000

203 The Legislature intends that the Utah Forest

204 Restoration Institute at Utah State University use, of the

205 ongoing appropriations under this item:

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

207 staffing purposes; and

208 (2) at least \$1,750,000 to fund and study

209 watershed restoration projects as required under

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

211 Section 6. **Effective Date.**

212 This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.