

RIDGELINES TO SHORELINES INITIATIVE

A COMPREHENSIVE WATERSHED STRATEGY





The “**Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative**” aims to holistically address critical environmental and ecological challenges in targeted watershed areas at a landscape-scale in Utah.

Historical Context:

Fire suppression policies initiated by the U.S. Forest Service in the early 20th century were very effective. These policies disrupted natural fire regimes and led to the accumulation of forest fuel, contributing to the current wildfire risk. The introduction of invasive species to control erosion has augmented these problems.

Utah’s Coordinated Action Plan for Water:

The State of Utah engaged in a collaborative planning effort in 2022, resulting in the Coordinated Action Plan for Water. The action plan encompasses four sections: Investing in Infrastructure, Vibrant Communities, Productive Agriculture, and Healthy Waters and Watersheds. The Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative aligns with and complements the tasks identified in the action plan.

Purpose of the Initiative:

The primary goal of the Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative is to promote and fund coordinated landscape-scale watershed restoration. This initiative seeks to achieve several key objectives:

- » **Improve Forest Health:** Through active management, enhance the health of Utah’s forests, which have suffered due in part to a century of fire sup-

pression policies, leading to the accumulation of excessive fuel and dense vegetation susceptible to fire and disease.

- » **Reduce Wildfire Risk:** Reduce wildfire risk to communities and infrastructure. Overstocked forests and unhealthy conditions have increased the risk of wildfires, which have detrimental effects on our watersheds.
- » **Improve Air Quality:** Improve air quality by reducing wildfire risk and intensity, thereby reducing smoke pollution.
- » **Increase Water Quality and Yield:** Increase water quality and the availability of water resources by addressing issues such as invasive species and vegetation density.
- » **Improve Wildlife Habitat:** Improve wildlife habitat compromised by tree density, wildfires, and invasive species.

Holistic Approach:

The initiative adopts a comprehensive and holistic approach to address these challenges. This includes on-the-ground restoration work, grant writing to access matching federal funds, education and outreach efforts, research on watershed and water needs, planning, compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other federal laws.

Leveraging Resources:

One of the central strategies of the Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative is to invest state funds strategically while leveraging federal grant funding. Instead of creating entirely new programs, it seeks to enhance and focus the capacities of existing programs related to watershed restoration and natural resource management in Utah.

Coordination and Collaboration:

The initiative recognizes that multiple governmental and non-governmental organizations are already engaged in localized efforts across the state. However, it emphasizes the importance of coordinating these efforts on a landscape-scale to maximize resources and achieve long-term gains.

Vegetation Treatments and Water Availability:

Increased vegetation densities, particularly from encroaching trees and non-native invasive plants, have reduced water availability in rivers, reservoirs, riparian areas, lakes, and aquifers. Various state programs, such as the Watershed Restoration Initiative, Shared Stewardship, the Grazing Improvement Program, and the Invasive Species Mitigation Program, have been working individually to address these issues. Coordinating collaborative project implementation would generate targeted and impactful results greater than what each program could achieve from pursuing individual projects.

Committee of Experts and Stakeholder Engagement:

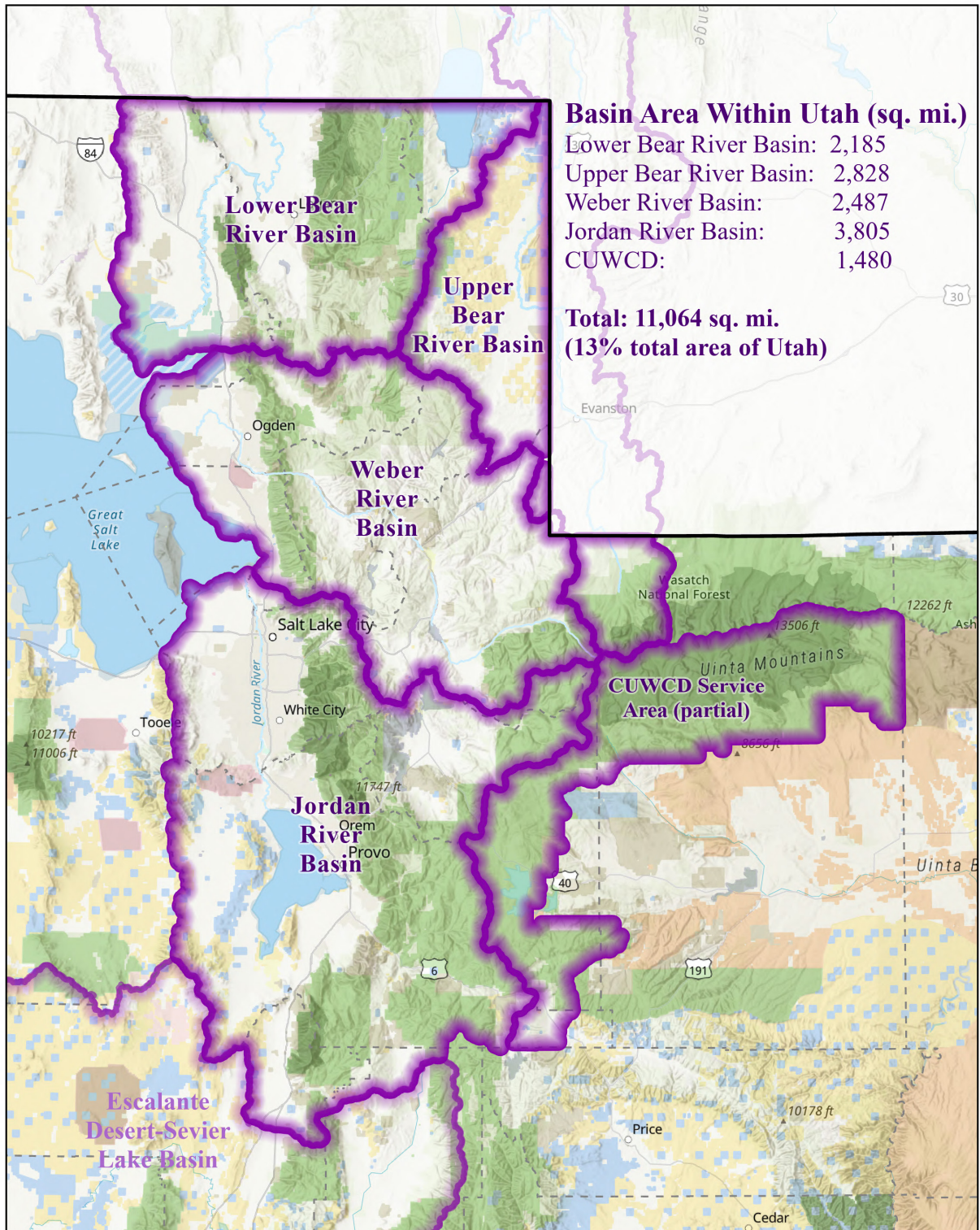
The initiative intends to assemble a collaborative group of subject matter experts from state agencies and higher education to plan, strategize, and prioritize its implementation. This committee will work on comprehensive statewide and regional plans, project prioritization, budget allocation, and defining goals and timelines. To ensure the success of the Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative, a broad committee of stakeholders will be established. This collaborative group will work to secure commitments of resources and political support from various participants, including federal and state land management agencies, regulatory bodies, local and tribal governments, neighboring states, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders.

Urgency of Action:

There is an urgent need to scale up and implement watershed restoration, forest health improvement, and vegetation management projects in Utah. Catastrophic wildfires, unhealthy forests, habitat degradation, and strained water resources have become common challenges, threatening communities and ecosystems.

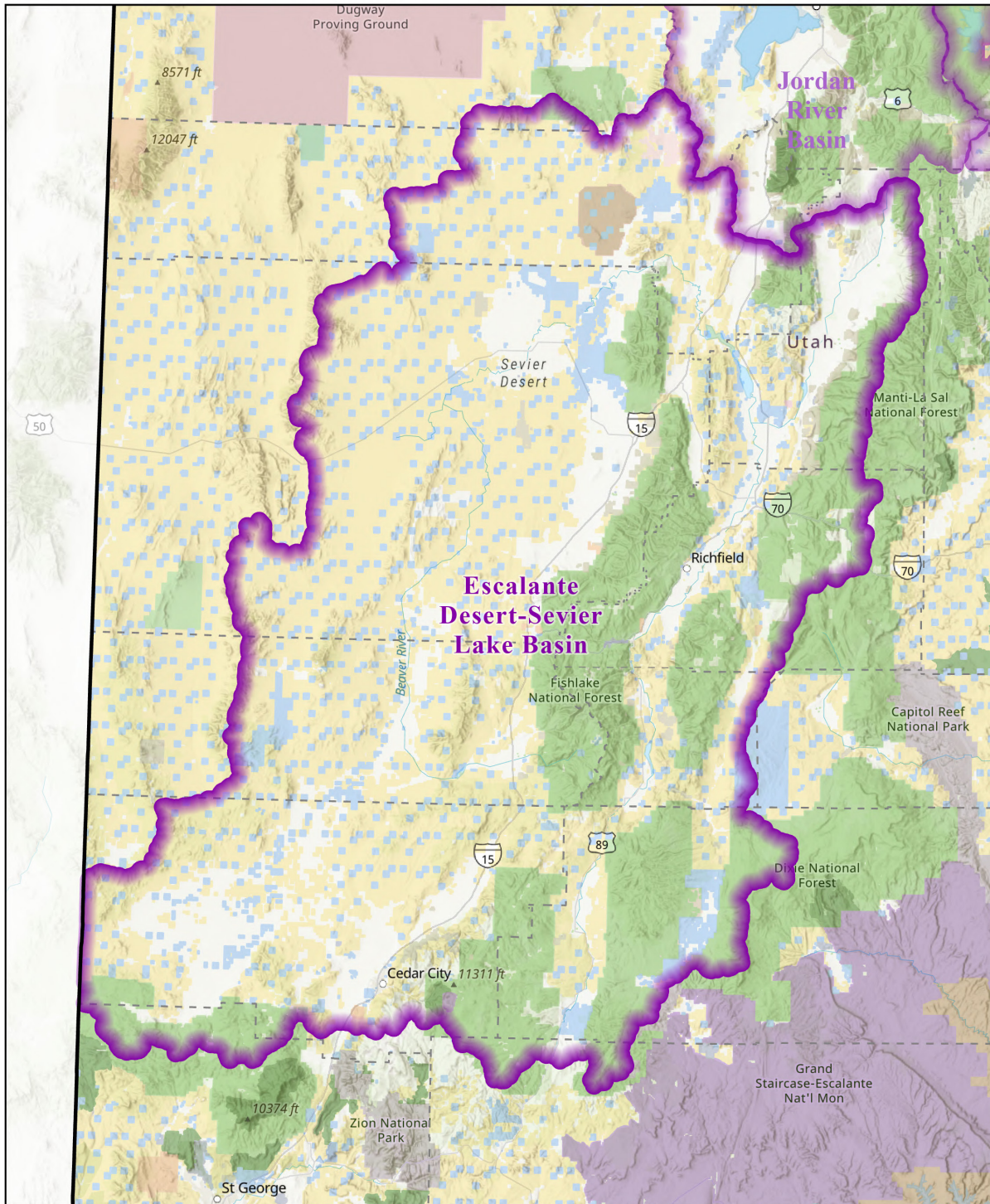
In summary, the Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative aims to address critical environmental and ecological issues by promoting greater coordination between partners and landscape-scale watershed restoration. It takes a holistic approach, leveraging existing programs, engaging stakeholders, and recognizing the urgency of mitigating wildfire risks, preserving water resources, and protecting the state's natural environment.

Focus Area 1: Great Salt Lake Tributary Basins



Focus Area 2: Sevier Lake Basin

Basin Area Within Utah: Sevier Lake Basin: 16,367 sq. mi. (19% total area of Utah)



*Focus areas are preliminary and subject to change upon further coordination and analysis

The Ridgelines to Shorelines Initiative - Anticipated Budget

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