Standing-Water Habitat

Below the still surface of Utah's reservoirs, lakes, ponds and pools are habitats that are as dynamic as any ecosystem on land. Biologists call these bodies of standing water *lentic* habitats, and they range from tiny desert springs to the world-famous Great Salt Lake.

Photo Courtesy of Lynn Chamberlain

Complex communities of bacteria, algae, plants and insects support a variety of snails, bivalves and fish. Many of these waters are well known by anglers for the bass, catfish, perch and trout species they support. These waters also are fished by a variety of bird species, including eagles and osprey.

Standing-water habitats play a critical role in providing Utah's human population with drinking water, recreational opportunities and electricity. Despite their value to humans, however, lentic habitats are increasingly at risk from human activities. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is working aggressively to ensure the future of this important habitat.

Key Facts about Utah's Standing-Water Habitat:

Rare

Standing-water habitats cover just three-and-a-half percent of Utah's land area,with much of this area being the Great Salt Lake.

Under Stress

Biologists think that much of Utah's standing-water habitats are suffering from human impacts. As a result, these habitats may be declining, which is significant because reservoirs, lakes and ponds are home to a large number of sensitive species.

Plant Life

In addition to the plants that provide food and cover for a variety of standing-water wildlife, bacteria and algae play an important role in standing water habitats at the base of the habitat's food web.

Animal Life

Lentic habitats are home to a diversity of animal life, from microscopic plankton to snails and insects to fish. Frogs and toads are often found near standing water, and a variety of birds—including the American white pelican, eagles and osprey—feed on wildlife found in lentic habitats.

Species on the Edge

Photo Courtesy of Ron Stewart

Osprey

Aquatic wildlife species and their standing-water habitats are both threatened by a variety of human and natural impacts. In all, standing-water habitats are home to 16 species of conservation need, including the following:

Tier One—Very High Concern
Least chub, June sucker, Bonneville cutthroat trout, Colordao River cutthroat trout

Tier Two—High Concern
American white pelican, Bonneville cisco, Bear Lake whitefish

Tier Three—Moderate Concern
Osprey, glossy valvata

What's Threatening Utah's Standing-Water Habitats?

Water Loss—Water demands from the state's expanding population are consuming more water from rivers and streams, leaving less for wildlife.

Nutrients and Sediments—Large amounts of nutrients, such as fertilizers, and sediments can damage standing-water habitats by causing the water to become too cloudy for sunlight to penetrate.

Dam Safety—Unsafe dams could collapse or be purposefully breached, quickly destroying the reservoirs they hold.

Pollution—Contaminants such as mercury from industrial and commercial activities threaten both fish and people.

Invasive Species—A variety of plant and animal species have been introduced to our waters, and many native plants and animals can't compete. Carp, for example, have caused native fish numbers in some waters to decline.

Taking Action

Protecting Utah's standing-water habitats will require coordinated action among a variety of partners across the state.

Conservation Actions

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has identified the following key actions needed to protect Utah's standing-water habitats:

1. Better manage agricultural activities.
2. Support pollution control efforts.
3. Control harmful nonnative plant and animal species.
4. Secure "conservation pools" and other methods of ensuring water for aquatic species.
5. Remove invasive plants, plant desirable plants and educate the public about how to help prevent the spread of invasive plants.
6. Maintain dams that provide key standing-water habitats.
7. Monitor and research water quality and wildlife populations depedndent upon standing-water habitats.

Conservation Partners

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is working closely with local governments, the Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Trout Unlimited, the Utah Farm Bureau, the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, the Provo River Water Users, the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District, the Audubon Society, and others to protect standing-water habitats.

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