

2025 Utah People & Environment Poll (UPEP) Executive Report



College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Community & Natural Resources Institute
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Introduction

Utah's people and environment are currently experiencing significant changes as the population continues to grow, droughts and flooding pose threats to agriculture, air quality leads to health concerns, energy needs rise, and public lands see increased use. Action is needed to address these changes, especially given how rapidly they are occurring. Political leaders, environmental organizations, Tribal Nations, and universities play a critical role in ensuring Utah's environment, economy, workforce, and underserved communities have a sustainable path forward. Understanding residents' views, values, and concerns can help better craft the policy, inform infrastructure, and identify the services needed to do so. With this goal of understanding in mind, Utah State University's Community & Natural Resources Institute (CANRI) launched the Utah People and Environment Poll in spring of 2023. The 2023 UPEP illuminated important insights into Utah's values and concerns, and the survey was repeated from November 2024 through January 2025 to continue to build a mechanism for gathering timely, relevant, and longitudinal data on issues at the intersection of people and the environment in Utah to help inform policy to address environmental issues. The following summarizes some of the notable results of the most recent survey. Results and reports of the 2023 survey can be found here: <https://chass.usu.edu/canri/upep-previous>.

Overview

The 2024-2025 Utah People and Environment Poll (UPEP) is a statewide survey of adult Utah residents to assess attitudes towards and perceptions of a variety of environmental issues facing Utah today as well as respondents' values and beliefs. The results form a rich body of data that will be able to inform actions and initiatives across the state. This poll builds upon our understanding from the 2023 edition, and subsequent surveys will be able to assess change over time and potentially offer insights into the impact of various interventions.

The poll was designed to reach a representative population across Utah, with an oversampling of rural and non-white and/or Hispanic residents to ensure adequate representation. Just over 468 residents completed the poll from 26 of Utah's 29 counties. Respondent demographics can generally be described as equally distributed across gender, political identity, profession, and income. The majority of respondents (52%) hold a bachelor's degree or subsequent graduate degrees and 72% of respondents described themselves as moderately or very religious. 62% of respondents are White, while 19% are Black or African American, and just over 35% of respondents identified as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Respondent ages range from 19 to 94. The counties with the most respondents were Salt Lake (37%), Utah (10%), and Cache County (7%).

A Collaborative Effort



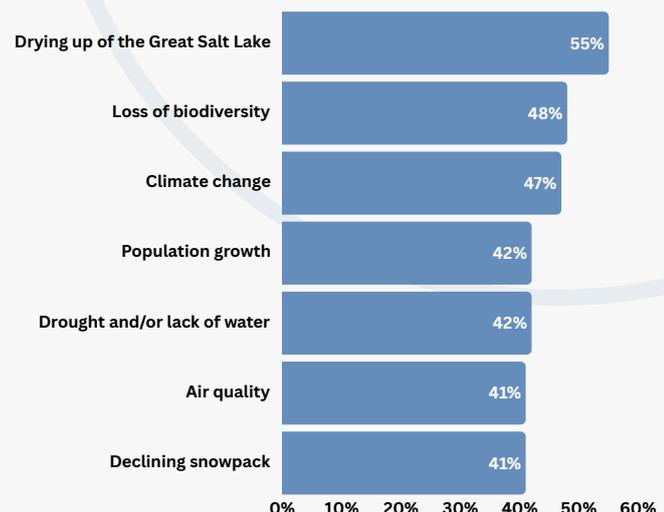
The survey was a collaborative effort led by Dr. Jessica Schad and her SOC 7100 (Advanced Survey Methods) class. Faculty and students from departments across College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHaSS) as well as the departments in other colleges including of Environment and Society, Watershed Sciences, and Civil & Environmental Engineering contributed questions.

Utahns: Connected to Home

Respondents indicated a strong connection to Utah, which is perhaps tied to the amount of time many respondents have lived in the state. The average length of residence in Utah was over 32 years, and 87% of respondents say they intend to still live in Utah five years in the future. Additionally, 72% reported that they either somewhat or strongly agree with the statement that they would regret having to leave Utah.

Issues of Concern

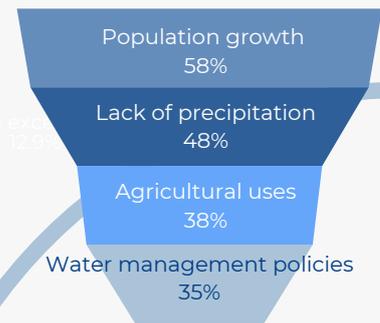
Respondents indicated that key environmental or related issues of concern are the drying up of the Great Salt Lake, loss of diverse plants, animals, habitat, etc., climate change, population growth, drought and/or lack of water, poor air quality, and declining snowpack. Over 40% of respondents indicated that they are “very concerned” about each of these issues, with the most concern being given the drying up of the Great Salt Lake, loss of biodiversity, and climate change.



Water

Water remains a top concern for Utahns in the 2025 UPEP, with 67.5% of respondents rating Utah's water crisis as a 7 or higher on a 10-point severity scale. When asked what factors are contributing to Utah's water crisis, respondents indicated that population growth (58%), lack of precipitation (48%), agricultural uses (38%), and water management policies/water rights (35%) are the biggest issues of concern.

What factors are contributing to Utah's water crisis?



Air

Close to 77% of respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree with the statements that air pollution is a serious issue and air pollution poses a serious problem, while over 71% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they are concerned about air pollution causing more cases of long-term health issues (i.e. asthma, lung & throat cancer). Additionally, over 50% of respondents agree or strongly agree that it is possible they will experience health problems from air pollution in the future, while just over 41% reported they are at risk for health concerns caused by air pollution.

Land

Utah's tourism industry continues to be a major economic driver in the state. In 2023, Utah visitors spend \$12.71 billion, supporting 159,800 jobs and resulting in \$2.35 billion in state & local tax revenue. Much of this tourism is dependent on the availability and accessibility of public lands.

87% of respondents indicated that outdoor recreation options and/or access to wilderness and public lands are moderately, very, or extremely important to them. Over 80% of respondents also indicated that they visit Utah's outdoor recreation sites (e.g. National Parks, national forests, state parks, ski areas, etc...) often. Roughly 75% of respondents indicated that they are satisfied with the environmental conditions of Utah's outdoor recreation sites, while nearly 90% indicated they are satisfied with the variety of Utah's outdoor recreation opportunities. Additionally, 70% of respondents indicated they are willing to change their plans or behavior to help preserve the environmental condition of Utah's outdoor recreation sites.



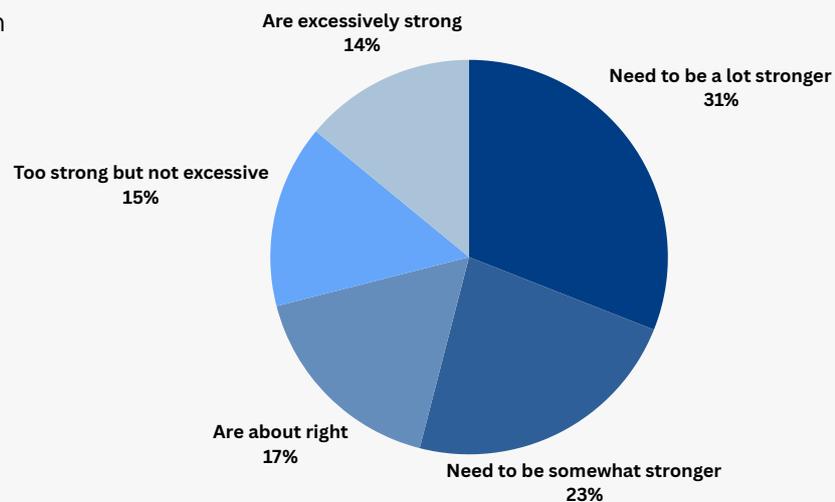
The Great Salt Lake

The Great Salt Lake is at risk of drying up, and this loss coincides with the loss of ecosystems, increases in air pollution, and changing weather patterns. A vast majority of respondents (87%) are somewhat or very aware of the drying up of the Great Salt Lake. Additionally, 76% of respondents are somewhat or very aware of agriculture as one of the main drivers of this problem. Respondents are somewhat or very concerned about a number of issues caused by the drying up of the Great Salt Lake, including harms to migrating birds/other species (89%), harm to human health (87%), loss of the lake's intrinsic value (85%), harm to agriculture from dust (81%), harmful algal blooms (81%), harm to the ski industry (76%), and harm to lake recreation/tourism (74%).

Respondents are generally supportive of a variety of policies and strategies to protect the Great Salt Lake. Among the most popular were policies that reduce outdoor watering, incentives that reduce household, business, and agricultural water use, and changing water rights laws to grant the Great Salt Lake its own rights.

Are politicians doing enough?

The majority of respondents are in favor of environmental regulation in Utah. 55% of respondents indicated that they believe environmental regulations in the U.S. need to be somewhat or a lot stronger, and 79% of respondents are in favor of protecting the environment even if it causes slower economic growth. Respondents also indicated that Utah lawmakers are not doing enough on a key handful of environmental issues, including poor air quality (76%), population growth (70%), drought and/or lack of water (70%), and the drying up of the Great Salt Lake (68%).



Environmental Regulations in the U.S...

Want to know more?

In addition to these topics, the UPEP also collected data about Utahns attitudes toward energy, water heritage, wildfire, values, environment & equality, and climate change & vulnerability. If you are interested in additional information, please visit our website (<https://chass.usu.edu/sociology/canri/upep>) or email Dr. Jessica Schad at jessica.schad@usu.edu.

