

Could the Great Salt Lake fuel alternative energy sources?

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The Great Salt Lake via the satellite Sentinel-2B in 2018

Hailey Brown - As knowledge of the dangers of climate change increases, countries around the world have promised to curb emissions and offset their carbon footprint. Alternative energy sources have become central to this mission. However, the raw materials needed to fuel clean energy sources are not easily accessible, even if they are close to home. So, companies around the world are competing for access to a limited pool of resources, a mission that is further complicated by geopolitics.

Waterleaf, under the parent company Lilac Operations, is seeking to [break into Salt Lake City's lithium market](#). The company claims its technology can extract lithium from the Great Salt Lake's brine without consuming any freshwater. If approved, the impact of the new plant will cross multiple [scales](#). On the local level, the plant would create jobs which would benefit the local economy. As the norm shifts toward clean energy sources, jobs in other energy sectors will dwindle, a trend that can already be seen in Utah. Increasing job opportunities in alternative energy will be important for local economies around the world. On the global scale, countries are competing with each other to lead control of clean energy supply chains. Currently, China controls the greatest share, which is seen as a threat by the U.S. and many of its allies. Hence, Waterleaf's potential production of up to 25,000 tons of lithium a year is a lucrative opportunity for the United States to increase its share in the market. However, it is up to the Governor whether to approve Waterleaf's request.

In geopolitics, [location](#) is understood as the role a place plays in the world. It is often shaped by major industries and sources of employment. The Great Salt Lake is not commonly thought of as an abundant resource for Salt Lake City due to its dropping water levels. However, if Waterleaf joins existing companies in extracting lithium from the lake, it could carve out a new understanding of the city and its importance within global geopolitical competition, shaped by clean energy.

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