A group of 22 Utah economists have conducted an analysis of the Lake Powell Pipeline debt and are warning Governor Herbert about the project's dire financial plight. The comprehensive analysis found the pipeline will saddle every man, woman and child in Washington County with as much as $781 of debt every year, for the next 50 years.

The economists warn that repaying this debt will require increasing water rates at least 500% in Washington County alongside increasing impact fees 123% and raising property taxes to their maximum level and keeping these increases in effect for 50 years.

Without these increases, Utah taxpayers will not be paid back for the billions we will pay for constructing the project, as state law requires. Due to basic market economics, increasing water rates this much will decrease Washington County residents’ demand for water to the point the pipeline water will go unused. In other words, we must choose between not getting repaid for the billions we pay for this pipeline, or forcing gigantic water rate increases to our neighbors in Washington County. All this to build a water project no one needs. 

RainHarvest Takes Utah By Storm in 2015!

The URC partnered with another four cities in our successful RainHarvest program in August. Sandy, Park City, Summit County and Ogden joined existing partners Murray and Salt Lake County in 2015 in making rainbarrels available to their residents at a discounted rate. RainHarvest is Utah’s first-of-its-kind rainwater collection program, which reduces water use by partnering with municipalities to provide subsidized rain barrels to their residents.

In total, the URC’s RainHarvest program has distributed more than 2300, rainbarrels across Utah in 2015, saving 115,000 gallons of water every time it rains enough to fill a 50-gallon barrel. That’s a lot of water that won't become polluted runoff and won’t need to be diverted from our rivers.
Envision Utah Process Flushes Conservation

The water salesmen hiding behind Envision Utah’s new water plan are proposing that both the Lake Powell Pipeline and Bear River development are essential to Utah’s future. Envision Utah has spent nearly two years carrying out Governor Herbert’s request to draft a 50-year water plan for the state.

During this process Envision Utah forbid the chorus of voices from speaking to the array of less expensive alternatives which exist to these disastrous water projects. Instead, the same old vested interests presented the same old useless river diversions again and again, thereby ignoring decades of water conservation successes across the American West.

The Utah Rivers Council asked to present during the Envision Utah process repeatedly, but were refused. Many conscientious volunteers on the water panel also asked that we be allowed to present, but Envision Utah refused to allow criticism of the backroom plan hatched to keep Utah’s water policies in the 19th century.

Envision Utah is proposing 5 water scenarios for Utah, 4 of which call for both Lake Powell Pipeline and Bear River development to be constructed. The only scenario that doesn’t call for these expensive and unnecessary water projects casts the outcome as a dire, vegetation-lacking future.

Envision Utah is now creating the misperception these water projects will somehow magically protect Utah’s rapidly disappearing farmlands. This disingenuous claim is typical of some of Utah’s gluttonous water suppliers, eager to see Utahns spend $4 billion on pet water projects.

According to the USGS, Utah is the Nation’s highest per person water user.
Utah Legislature to Battle for Water Conservation and the Lake Powell Pipeline

The upcoming legislative session is going to be critical for Utah's rivers and wetlands. The 2016 session is the first opportunity for legislators to implement the recommendations put forth in the May audit of the Division of Water Resources, called for by the URC. The audit by the Legislative Auditor General found the Division was using bad data to exaggerate future water needs while ignoring less expensive sources of water and not working hard enough to implement water conservation.

In an effort to reduce Utah's nation-leading water use, there is now a push for legislation requiring conservation pricing among public water systems to set up pricing structures that reward conscientious water users. Another audit recommendation discussed all summer was a proposal to install meters on secondary water systems which use huge quantities of water. Metering all 100,000 secondary water connections in the Weber Basin Water District would cost $100 million, just 5% of the $2 billion cost of proposed Bear River Development.

In the 2015 legislative session, the four largest water districts spent nearly $500,000 lobbying to convince Utah legislators to pass a bill to open a fund for the Lake Powell Pipeline and Bear River Development. These same lobbyists and legislators are looking to spend tens of millions of your tax money to fund these boondoggles in the 2016 legislative session.

Help us at the Utah Legislature! Sign up for email action alerts at utahrivers.org!

Help Us Bring Democracy to Utah!

The URC is looking for volunteers who want to see democracy finally make its way to Utah. Utahns can't vote for any of the board members of the water districts who collect property and sales taxes and use taxpayer funds to lobby for billions in new spending to divert Utah's rivers. We want to change that, but we need your help.

The boards of these government water districts are supposed to provide oversight, yet these agencies hand pick their board members to bypass meaningful oversight. By appointing board members who love collecting property taxes and public spending, these agencies fast-track boondoggles like the Lake Powell Pipeline and Bear River development.

Under state law the water district board members are appointed from community volunteers. We want to see people appointed who want to phase out taxes used to encourage water waste and implement alternatives to wasteful new projects.

For more information on how you can get involved contact us at zach@utahrivers.org

Renew your membership with URC!

The Utah Rivers Council seeks to protect Utah's rivers and clean water sources for today’s citizens, future generations, and wildlife. We implement this mission through grassroots organizing, advocacy, research, education, community leadership, and litigation. With over 400,000 acre feet of proposed river diversions statewide, your financial support is vital in order to continue our work to protect Utah's watersheds. Please renew your membership today.
New Mexico and Colorado Senators Float Mine Cleanup Bill

This November, New Mexico Senators Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall joined Colorado Senator Michael Bennett by introducing legislation to reform the 1872 Mining Law. The proposal would require new and existing mines to pay fees into a fund to clean up abandoned mines, potentially raising over $100 million annually. The new law, called the Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act of 2015, would require active mining companies to make rent payments for their use of public land.

New mines on federal lands would also be required to pay royalties on their profits into the fund. Currently the U.S. is one of the few countries in the developed world not charging royalties for hardrock mining on public land, as is collected for oil and gas development. The royalty would not apply to existing mines and would be a monumental step forward toward more responsible clean up of the West’s toxic legacy.

A new Interior Department report found that crucial steps were skipped by the EPA contractor working to clean up the abandoned Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colorado. Officials knew the contractor’s actions could result in a blowout of the structure holding 3 million gallons of acidic mine waste, but did not act to prevent the spill from occurring.

Because of this decision, a bright orange toxic plume of waste shocked the world as it polluted the Animas and San Juan Rivers before entering Utah and the rest of the Colorado River Basin through Lake Powell Reservoir. The decades-old waste contained highly toxic compounds like lead, cadmium and arsenic.

River runners with permits for multi-day river trips on the San Juan were turned away and irrigators were told to shut off their diversions. The long-term impacts of the spill are still unclear, although increasing the toxicity of the water supply for millions of people downstream is a sad milestone for those who depend on the Colorado River Basin.

The spill occurred after Colorado authorities opposed a superfund designation for decades to clean up the long abandoned Gold King mine, fearing the listing stigma would impact tourism. With nearly 18,000 abandoned mines in Utah, another 20,000 abandoned mines in Colorado, it is clear it is time to start taking these toxic timebombs seriously.

You Can Help Prevent Another Gold King Mine Catastrophe!

Contact your Senator now and tell them to support the Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act of 2015!

Sen. Orrin Hatch, (202)224-5251, hatch.senate.gov
Sen. Mike Lee, (202)224-5444, lee.senate.gov
A long-proposed hydroelectric dam on the Bear River received a major blow when the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission recently recommended denial of the project. The proposal was to build a 109-foot-tall hydroelectric dam on the Bear River in southeast Idaho, called the Bear River Narrows Hydroelectric Project. The proposed dam would have inflicted a host of environmental damages by inundating the amazing Oneida Narrows, a popular recreation area suitable for wild and scenic river designation.

This may be the final nail in the coffin for the struggling project since the Idaho Department of Water Resources rejected a water right in 2012 necessary to construct the dam. The URC commends our friends at Idaho Rivers United and several other organizations that have worked to stop the ill-advised dam from being approved.
River Legend Takes Out of the Great River of Life

The URC extends our gratitude to pioneering river legend Dee Holladay, who inspired tens of thousands of people over the years to respect the rivers of this great planet. For decades, Dee used the pulpit of his inflatable raft at Holiday River Expeditions to engage people in understanding and caring for our rivers as life-support systems for the many species which depend upon them. His voice was quiet and smooth, yet his stories commanded the attention of visitors from all over the world from every walk of life, whether it was on one of his trips or in his relaxing backyard.

Dee was a long time board member of the Utah Rivers Council and a driving visionary for river conservation and water education, and the inspirational guide for leagues of people across many generations. Our condolences to his family and the many, many people he inspired over the years. The rivers of Utah thank you, Dee.

Economists Warn of Lake Powell Pipeline’s Wave of Debt

Continued from cover

This analysis comes at a critical time, as the Division of Water Resources will submit its federal application on December 1. The agency has spent $28 million and 8 years planning the pipeline but still doesn't have a plan to repay Utah taxpayers for this boondoggle water project.

The Division was audited in 2015 by the Legislative Audit General which found that an array of cheaper alternatives exist to expensive water projects like the Lake Powell Pipeline, but these options are being ignored by this agency.

Washington County is among America’s highest water users (per person) because it has some of the lowest water rates in the American West. These cheap rates seem like a good deal until one realizes the Washington County Water District makes more money collecting property taxes than by selling water. That’s why eliminating these property taxes for water would allow the free-market to achieve more sustainable water use.

If Washington County implemented a real water conservation program, such as Las Vegas practices, they could work to eliminate water waste, which is abundant in the area. The Legislative Audit also found that the area’s municipal water supply is growing as urban development replaces lands formerly used by agriculture, which uses much more water per acre.
Yes! I Want to Support the Utah Rivers Council!

To be a strong voice for your rivers we need your help, now more than ever.

Questions? Call 801-486-4776 or email nick@utahrivers.org

Contributions to Utah Rivers Council are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.
Is Your City a Partner in RainHarvest?

Stay Connected to the URC

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Email nick@utahrivers.org for more info on how you can help your city participate in our next RainHarvest program!