

Creating an Oasis: Water Development and Funding in Utah

Research Report #647, February 2002

Lesson Summary

Utah is the second driest state, making water policy one of the most important issues for government. A complicated system has evolved, funded by a mix of taxes and service fees.

Related Websites

- Utah Division of Water Resources:
<http://www.nr.utah.gov/wtrresc/>
- Utah State Auditor's local government financial reports:
<http://www.sao.state.ut.us/reports/lgfs.htm>

Utah Core Curriculum

Classroom Application: Geography for Life

- **Standard** 6200-04
Students will understand how human activities shape the earth's surface
- **Objective** 6200-0401
Explore the importance of water
- **Standard** 6200-06
Students will use geographic knowledge to connect to today's world.
- **Objective** 6200-0601
Apply geographic concepts to interpret the past
- **Objective** 6200-0602
Apply geographic concepts to interpret the present and plan for the future

This lesson plan is provided by Utah Foundation to assist in using the accompanying Research Report in high school or middle school classes. Please feel free to copy the Research Report for your students.

*Find overhead masters for this lesson on our website at:
www.utahfoundation.org/schools.*

Vocabulary

Adjudicate: Act as a judge.

Ameliorate: Improve, make better.

Arid: Dry.

Benign: Having little or no bad effects.

Burgeoning: Beginning to grow.

Caveat: Warning or caution.

Cooperatives: Associations in which members share profits.

Impetus: Force causing activity.

Infrastructure: Fundamental facilities needed for the functioning of a region, such as highways or water systems.

Precedent: An act serving as an example for later following situations.

Pro rata: In proportion according to a certain rate.

Proponent: Person who puts forward a proposal.

Tenet: An opinion or principle held as true.

Quick Questions

1. True or False. Does the monthly water bill reflect the cost of providing water to your home?

Answer: False.

2. What is the annual average precipitation in Utah?

Answer: 13 inches.

3. When does most of this fall?

Answer: Winter.

4. What are the three distinct time periods of water development in Utah?

Answer: 1847-1865, 1870-1900, and 1900-1947.

5. What two ideas, which came from early pioneer experience, established the basis for water utilization in Utah?

Answers:

- a. Individuals had the right to utilize water resources but those rights extended to all members of the community.
- b. Water use must be for the benefit of all, or at very least, do no harm to the community.

6. Scientific measurements were originally inaccurate. As scientific measures became more accurate, there was less water than previously thought. How was this resolved?

Answer: 1880 passing of "An Act Recording Vested Rights to the Use of Water and Regulating their Exercise."

7. What was the Carey Land Act?

Answer: It authorized special grants of federal lands in arid states and placed the responsibility of reclamation on the states.

8. What did the water law passed in 1903 attempt to do?

Answer: Clarify and codify issues not addressed in previous legislation.

9. What are the four primary agencies that assist in the management of water resources within the federal government?

Answer: Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service.

10. What are the six groups that deal with water in any jurisdiction of the state? Describe the major responsibility of each.

Answers:

- a. Public Utility Department
 - i. Cannot sell its water rights.
 - ii. Can exchange water rights with another agency.
 - iii. Must sell water at retail rates to its inhabitants.
 - iv. Can sell surplus water wholesale and retail beyond the limits of the city.

- b. Metropolitan Water District
 - i. An institution distinct from a municipality and as such it has independent taxing privileges.
 - ii. Political boundaries of member cities define the boundaries of the metropolitan water district.
 - iii. Sells water wholesale to member cities and may also sell surplus water to entities outside the water district.
 - iv. Can buy and sell water rights.
 - v. Can issue bonds and incur indebtedness.
 - vi. The legislative bodies of member cities appoint representatives to the board of directors of a metropolitan water district.
- c. Water Conservancy District
 - i. Sells water wholesale.
 - ii. Can buy and sell water rights.
 - iii. Can issue bonds and incur indebtedness.
 - iv. Has independent taxing privileges.
 - v. Can sell water retail.
 - vi. Can contain or be contained in another water conservancy district.
 - vii. May be in more than one county.
 - viii. Boundaries within a county are not constrained by city boundaries but by property within the district.
 - ix. The county legislative body appoints the board of trustees of a water conservancy district entirely contained in a single county.
 - x. If it services more than one county, the governor appoints the board of trustees for that conservancy district.
- d. Improvement District
 - i. Buys and sells water rights.
 - ii. Issue bonds and incur indebtedness.
 - iii. Has independent taxing privileges.
 - iv. Can sell water retail.
 - v. Does not need to follow city boundary lines.
- e. County Service Area
 - i. Established with the intent of expanding services into new unincorporated areas of a county.
 - ii. Has independent taxing authority.
- f. Private Water Companies
 - i. No taxing authority but gains its revenue through retail water sales.

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Traditionally, taxes (both property and sales taxes) have funded a significant portion of water infrastructure and development costs. The monthly water bill from local public utilities reflects only a part of what Utahns are paying for water. Many citizens do not know the true costs associated with providing this basic necessity. Proponents of eliminating the property and sales tax subsidy on water argue that by doing so, Utahns would have a better understanding of the need for conservation. Opponents of this argument state that water is a public resource and in order to provide service to all, the current funding system is necessary.

Divide the class into two groups reflecting the two positions. Assign each group to write a defense for their position using logical arguments.

2. Assume it is 1894 and the state constitutional convention is convening. Prepare the class for a panel discussion. There will be three panel members representing the three points of view discussed on page 5. Divide the class into three groups. One person will need to be prepared to state and defend the point of view given to the group.

During the panel discussion, the class members should prepare questions to ask.

Following the panel discussion, they should prepare a statement reflecting their views that should be included in the state constitution.

Quiz Page

Vocabulary

Adjudicate	Caveat	Precedent
Ameliorate	Cooperatives	<i>Pro rata</i>
Arid	Impetus	Proponent
Benign	Infrastructure	Tenet
Burgeoning		

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