



State of Utah

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Department of
Environmental Quality

Alan Matheson
Executive Director

Brad T Johnson
Deputy Director

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT

Donna Kemp Spangler
Communications Director
Office: 801-536-4484
Cell: 801-554-4944
dspangler@utah.gov

DEQ Invites Public Comment on Draft Water Quality Report
Data Show 47 Percent of Utah Stream Miles Assessed Don't Meet Standards

SALT LAKE CITY – The Utah Department of Environmental Quality just released its biennial report on the state of Utah's waters, and the results are mixed.

The report identifies new impairments in several important state waterbodies. Seventy-one percent of the assessed freshwater lake acreage failed to meet water quality standards for their beneficial uses. This high percentage reflects the fact that the state's two largest lakes, Lake Powell and Utah Lake, make up approximately 90 percent of the lake acreage that was categorized as impaired.

While 21 percent of the stream miles assessed met water quality standards, 47 percent did not. Another 32 percent had insufficient data to make a determination and will require additional monitoring.

The Division of Water Quality (DWQ) compiles water quality data every two years in an Integrated Report (IR) to determine whether the water quality in Utah lakes, rivers, and streams supports a particular water's designated beneficial uses. These uses include drinking water, recreation, agriculture, waterfowl, game fish, and aquatic life.

Data collected in the San Juan River, a Utah waterway impacted by the Gold King Mine spill, led DWQ to list two segments of the river as impaired for metals. Improved assessment methods for harmful algal blooms (HABs), a nutrient-fueled increase in toxic cyanobacteria that can harm people and pets, resulted in the listing of Utah Lake as impaired for recreation uses due to HABs.

“While many of our waters are in pretty good shape, we're seeing others that are facing increasing threats from a variety of pollutants,” explained Walt Baker, division director of DWQ. “We will need to work together to find ways to protect our waters and improve those that are experiencing problems.”

The IR does contain some bright spots, including new sources of data, tailored strategies for restoring and protecting water quality that move beyond a “one size fits all” approach, and a draft methodology for analyzing high frequency dissolved oxygen data, a critical component of aquatic health. DWQ also made plans to work with the Davis County Health Department to manage potential health risks associated with frequent harmful algal blooms in Farmington Bay. The division will collect additional data and develop methodology for a full assessment of the Bay for the 2018 Report.

DWQ encourages the public to review and submit comments on the report during a sixty-day public comment period that runs from June 10, 2016 to August 9, 2016. A public hearing will be held on July 19, 2016, at 2 p.m. in the DEQ Board Room, 195 North 1950 West, Salt Lake City, Utah. The report and instructions for submitting written comments are available at <http://www.deq.utah.gov/ProgramsServices/programs/water/wqmanagement/assessment/currentIR2016.htm>

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About DEQ

Established in 1991, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) mission is to safeguard public health and quality of life by protecting and enhancing the environment. DEQ implements state and federal environmental laws and works with individuals, community groups and businesses to protect the quality of Utah's air, land and water. For more information, visit www.deq.utah.gov, follow DEQ on Facebook (utahdeq) and Twitter (UtahDEQ), or call 1-800-458-0145.