



# PROVO RIVER DELTA

- + RECOVERING the June Sucker
- + RESTORING the Natural Ecosystem
- + IMPROVING Recreational Experiences



Autumn 2020

## THE DELTA BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE

Standing at the edge of one of the newly constructed delta ponds, it's becoming easier to visualize the diverse mix of habitats that will develop once the Provo River Delta Restoration Project is complete. In the five months since excavation started, the western portion of the project area has been transformed from flat pastureland into an assortment of deep ponds, wide channels, and elevated riparian mounds.

*(continued inside)*

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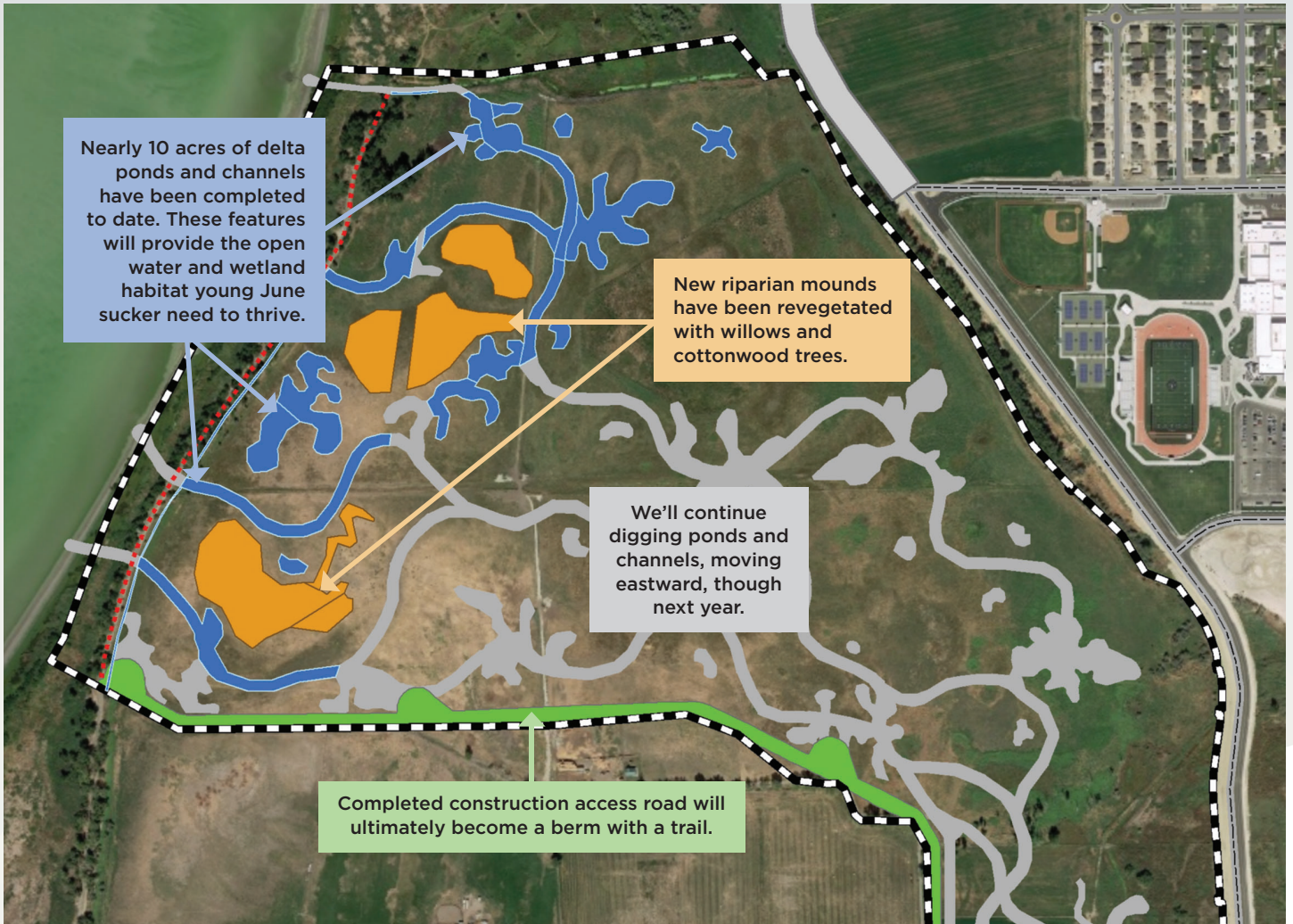


### FOR MORE INFORMATION

This newsletter is to update you on project progress.

For more information, visit:

[provoriverdelta.us](http://provoriverdelta.us)



Nearly 10 acres of delta ponds and channels have been completed to date. These features will provide the open water and wetland habitat young June sucker need to thrive.

New riparian mounds have been revegetated with willows and cottonwood trees.

We'll continue digging ponds and channels, moving eastward, though next year.

Completed construction access road will ultimately become a berm with a trail.

## THE DELTA BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE

*(continued from front page)*

Dry conditions this summer and fall have been ideal for excavation and hauling. To date, more than 60,000 cubic yards of material—the equivalent of 28 football fields—have been excavated from the project area and hauled to the future site

of Provo City's Regional Sports Park. We have also focused on weed control and native plant restoration this year. Despite being shorthanded due to the pandemic, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources has made great strides in knocking back noxious

weeds like phragmites. And in recent weeks we have spread seed on disturbed areas and installed 30,000 native plants. Excavation of delta ponds and channels will continue through the winter as conditions allow.



# LOST NATIVE FISH OF UTAH LAKE

When European settlers arrived in Utah Valley there were 13 species of native fish living in Utah Lake. Today, only two of those 13 can still be found in the Lake—the June sucker and Utah sucker.



**What happened to the other fish?** Well, the Utah Lake sculpin is now considered extinct, with the last specimen being collected in 1928. The Bonneville cutthroat trout is primarily found in higher elevation streams and rivers now, but at times some may be found near the mouth of the Provo River or other Utah Lake tributaries. The least chub, a fish found only in Utah, was once abundant along the Wasatch Front, but now persists only in a few isolated marshes primarily in the west desert. The reidside shiner, mottled sculpin, southern leatherside, Utah chub, speckled dace, longnose dace, mountain whitefish, and mountain sucker are no longer in the Lake, but can still be found in the Provo and Spanish Fork rivers and a few other tributaries.

All the other species of fish we now find in Utah Lake were introduced intentionally as a food source or for angling. These nonnative fish have drastically changed the fish community from where it was in the mid-1800s. In many cases they are detrimental to the survival of native species due to impacts from competition and predation. These impacts combined with impacts from habitat alteration, both in the lake and at the mouth of

tributaries, make it difficult for the original fish species to survive. Habitat restoration projects can help give the original species a chance to survive by providing the habitat they need to thrive and to overcome the threats imposed by introduced species.

The **Provo River Delta Restoration**, is such a project. It involves diverting the last mile and a half of lower Provo River north of its current location into a constructed system of waterways and wetlands that connect with Utah Lake to create habitat essential for survival of June sucker, one of the two remaining native fish in the Lake. The project will help the June sucker population recover so it no longer needs protection under the Endangered Species Act. The project will also improve the ecosystem and recreational experiences in the area. Trails and a viewing tower will be constructed around the delta. The



existing river channel will continue to receive streamflow, with water quality and recreation improvements made. Bird monitoring and mosquito and weed control are ongoing project elements.

The project is needed for native June sucker, but the local human community will be served by enhanced outdoor recreation opportunities and protected open space, and all Utahns will benefit as the restoration helps ensure important water delivery projects tied to June sucker recovery stay on track.



*June Sucker*



*Utah Sucker*



*Utah Lake Sculpin (extinct)*



*Bonneville Cutthroat Trout*



*Least Chub*



*Bonneville Redside Shiner*



*Mottled Sculpin*



*Leatherside Chub*



*Utah Chub*



*Speckled Dace*



*Long Nosed Dace*



*Mountain Whitefish*



*Mountain Sucker*

# DELTA ARCHAEOLOGY

The historic Provo River delta—an area of fertile soils much larger than the current restoration project area—supported one of the heaviest concentrations of prehistoric people living anywhere in the Great Basin. Evidence of these inhabitants and their culture have been unearthed in the project vicinity through various archaeological surveys and research. Consequently, we have been working closely with the Utah State Historic Preservation Office to ensure measures are in place to avoid or address effects project construction may have on cultural sites. A cultural resource monitor has been on-site to monitor construction activities since they began last Spring. On September 18, a potential cultural site was discovered where construction materials and equipment were being staged. A team of archeologists from Logan Simpson conducted an intensive surface inventory, mapping, and limited testing to determine the site's significance. While nothing further was discovered, the site will continue to be closely monitored during construction.



## REACHING OUT—SAFELY

Required supplies now include masks, hand sanitizer, and social distancing signs, but despite these new challenges we managed to continue reaching out to stakeholders and the community this year. Although many of our usual outreach events like the Utah Lake Festival were canceled, we did some “distanced tabling” at a nearby trailhead and small site tours with interested parties, including Utah Lake Commission board members and teachers at nearby Provo High School. We’ve also taken advantage of virtual technology. We had to get innovative to celebrate the official delta groundbreaking last June. We held a virtual event that included a video involving local, state and federal officials and project partners. The video was released through news and social media and is still available on our website at [provoriverdelta.us/videos](http://provoriverdelta.us/videos).

We also organized our first community volunteer event in October. Armed with masks, gloves, shovels (and a 2-meter space cushion), families yanked and pried out hundreds of young Russian Olives in our project area. Removal of these invasive trees will allow native cottonwoods and other plants more growing room, while avoiding herbicide use in a sensitive wetland area. Many thanks go to our volunteers who could have been weeding their own yards but chose to spend the sunny last-chance summer Saturday stewarding our public lands!

COVID permitting, we hope to offer additional site tour and volunteer opportunities in 2021. If you would like to be notified of future opportunities, please get in touch via the Contact Us page on our website at [www.provoriverdelta.us](http://www.provoriverdelta.us).



*Cultural resources testing of a 1 by 1 meter test unit*