



PROVO RIVER DELTA

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



Autumn 2021

A SEASON OF TRANSITION

In northern Utah, autumn is a time of transition from the hot, dry summer season to the cooler, wetter weather of winter. Autumn 2021 is also a time of transition for the Delta Restoration Project. In recent weeks, construction efforts have turned a corner—shifting from excavating a broad expanse of ponds and channels in the north half of the project—to creating a narrower corridor of sloping river channels in the south half of the project.

(continued inside)

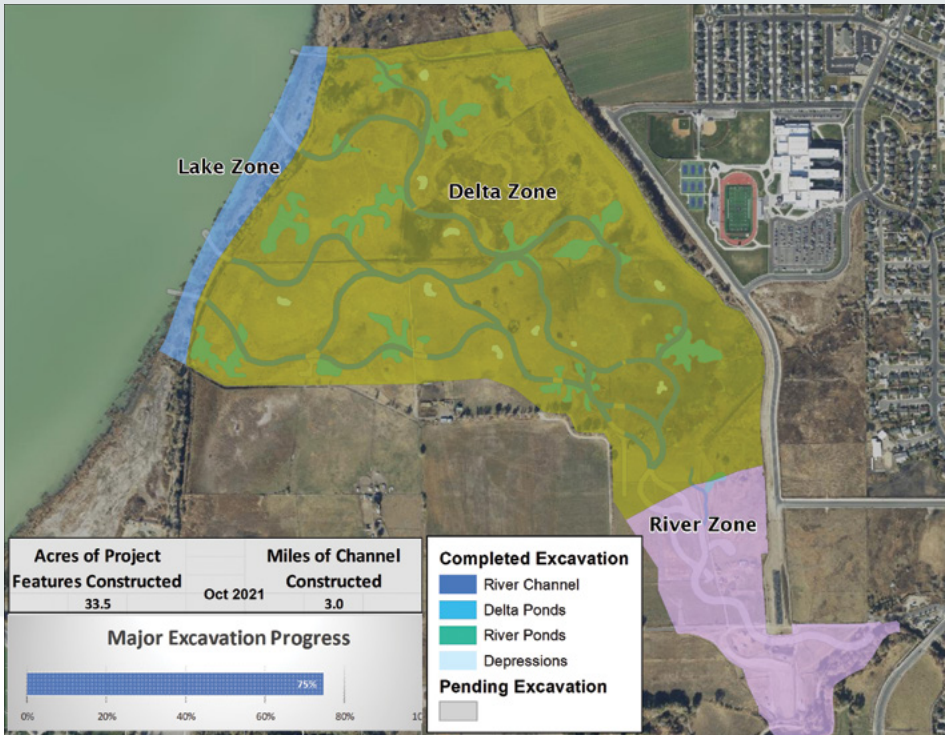
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

This newsletter is to update you on project progress. For more information, visit: provoriverdelta.us



A SEASON OF TRANSITION

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This transition marks a shift from creating flatwater delta zone habitat to creating swifter-flowing river zone habitat. Delta zone ponds and channels will remain full and deep year-round because of the backwater influence of the lowered dike and Utah Lake. Water depth in the more swiftly flowing pools and riffles of the river zone will be more variable. Young June sucker will be able to grow and hide from predators in the densely vegetated wetlands of the delta zone, and adult June sucker will be able to spawn in the rocky substrates of the river zone.

This autumn's transition into the river zone marks a major milestone for the project, and we look forward to future transitions as construction continues. Efforts this winter will focus on constructing the river zone channels. By late next spring we plan to begin lowering the north half of Skipper Bay Dike and preparing to direct the river into the river and delta zones by late fall 2022.

Once the lake and river are connected to the restored delta, the project will provide habitat essential for survival of young June sucker, a threatened

native fish that only lives naturally in Utah Lake. The Provo River Delta Restoration Project will also improve recreational experiences in the area by providing public access to a protected open space and building trails, a viewing tower, interpretive exhibits, and new trailhead parking areas. The existing Provo River channel will remain and will continue to receive streamflow, with water quality and recreation improvements made. Completion of the Provo Delta will also help ensure that important water supply projects tied to June sucker recovery stay on track.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE



NORTHERN PIKE RESEARCH

In addition to habitat development projects like the Provo River Delta, the June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program (JSRIP) has also invested a lot of effort into managing and researching non-native fish in Utah Lake. Carp removal continues to be a major focus, but recently, researching impacts and behavior of Northern pike in Utah Lake has been a JSRIP priority.

Northern pike are large, toothy predatory fish that were illegally introduced into Utah Lake and have the potential to impact June sucker and sport fish populations. Adult pike can eat all but the largest carp and catfish in Utah Lake. If left unchecked, pike populations in the lake could reach a point where they impede June sucker recovery efforts and ruin fishing opportunities. Illegal fish introductions frustrate managers, strain budgets, and ultimately prove costly as control efforts can take millions of dollars.

In 2019, the JSRIP initiated a Northern pike movement study that involves placing telemetry tags in individual pike and tracking their movements. This study allows biologists to identify areas where the fish concentrate in Utah Lake, informing future control efforts. Similar methods have been used to track common carp in Utah Lake to aid carp removal efforts.

Please do your part to prevent illegal fish introductions by never moving fish to different water bodies. Anglers are also asked to help researchers: if you catch a tagged pike, please contact the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' Springville office at 801-491-5678 and release the fish back to the lake so biologists can keep tracking it. Any untagged pike that are caught should be reported and removed. JSRIP research efforts like the Northern pike tracking study have added to the scientific understanding of June sucker and the Utah Lake ecosystem. Like the Provo River Delta Restoration Project, research is one of the stepping stones along the path to full June sucker recovery. Learn more at www.junesuckerrecovery.org.



Photos: Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

FISHING IN THE FUTURE DELTA

The Provo River Delta Restoration Project will create a large, new, publicly-accessible fishing area while also maintaining fishing opportunities on the existing channel. We expect that the 260-acre restored delta area will provide a similar fishing experience as Provo Bay, attracting sportfish like Bluegill, Channel Catfish, Largemouth Bass and White Bass. The complexity of new delta ponds and braided river channels will provide much greater habitat diversity than the channelized and leveed existing river.



Bluegill



Channel Catfish



Largemouth Bass



White Bass

The existing river channel will remain and will be managed as a community fishery. It is expected to support similar sportfish as the Provo Delta and may be seasonally or supplementally stocked.

Project construction will affect fishing access on the existing lower Provo River in late 2022 into 2023 while the diversion and small downstream dam are being built. We expect the Provo Delta to open to the public in 2024 and look forward to welcoming anglers and other recreational users to explore and enjoy this new protected open space.

Photos: NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory licensed under CC BY_SA 2.0

KEEPING PROVO RIVER FLOWING

Did you know that in Utah, diverting a river's entire flow is perfectly legal if the users own priority water rights? The lower Provo River has a long history of being diverted for irrigated agriculture and water supply—diversions that in dry years would often reduce summertime flows to a trickle.

For more than 20 years, members of the June Sucker Recovery Program's Flow Workgroup have worked together to purchase and deliver water to the Provo River to support the springtime June sucker spawning run. Since 2015, the program has also

consistently provided supplemental water late into the summer to ensure the lower Provo River stays wet all summer long. This instream water will protect young June sucker in the Provo River Delta once the project is complete and also protects outdoor recreation opportunities, like fishing opportunities that will expand when the Provo River Delta is complete. For those of you who enjoyed escaping to the shady refuge of the lower Provo River during this past summer's heat and drought—say a little thank you to the June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program for keeping the Provo River flowing!



Left: Utah Conservation Corp crew member hard at work. Center: Bee on Rocky Mountain Beeplant. Right: Tour on Skipper Bay Dike, which will be partially removed and lowered to reconnect delta with lake.

DELTA TOURS AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP

It was not only the bees buzzing with activity at the Provo River Delta this summer. In addition to our construction activities, we hosted over 20 tours and 18 stewardship events with high school and university students, trail users, anglers, scouts, local community members, and other interested groups. Hundreds of visitors learned about the emerging Delta firsthand during our 2021 tours.

The Utah Conservation Corps crew invested around 200 hours of sweat equity to improve the mix of native plants in the project area, reducing the need to chemically

treat invasive weeds in sensitive areas. Their follow-up sweeps to manually pull invasive weeds complemented Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' herbicide treatments. Thanks also goes out to the dozens of gung-ho community volunteers and students digging in to weed out invasive tamarisks and Russian Olives.

If field trips were your favorite subject in school, watch our website for next year's tour schedule and stewardship opportunities beginning next spring. Private group tours or stewardship projects can also be arranged. Contact us through our website: provoriverdelta.us.