



PROVO RIVER DELTA

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



Spring 2021

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

One year ago, we had just finished building a construction access road into the delta project and

Utah was trying to flatten the curve of a growing pandemic. As of today, we've excavated more than two miles of new river channels and more than 30% of Utahns have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Let's just say it's been an eventful 12 months!

(continued inside)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

WHO'S DOING WHAT IN THE AREA?

If you've been to the lower Provo River lately, you've probably noticed all the construction activity going on. With so many trucks and excavators roaming around, it's difficult to distinguish who is doing what. Construction of the Provo River Delta Project is currently limited to areas north of Boat Harbor Drive and west of Provo High School (see map). Crews will be working in this area throughout 2021. Provo City is working on its Lakeview Parkway Project in the area south of Boat Harbor Drive, near the Provo River, and near the Lakeshore Bridge Trailhead, which will provide transportation needs north of Center Street.



(continued from front)

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES



One way we're tracking construction progress is through the use of six pole-mounted cameras, we affectionately refer to as "Sky Eyes". These Sky Eyes capture images multiple times a day from various locations around the project, providing a detailed record of changes to the landscape as the project progresses. The cameras will also be valuable for long-term monitoring once construction is complete. Many thanks to Provo City Power for installing the poles, to Bureau of Reclamation for

maintaining the camera equipment, and to Department of the Interior for funding the effort! Check out the stop-motion video created with Sky Eye images on our website under www.provoriverdelta.us/videos



For the remainder of 2021, we will continue excavating delta channels and ponds, generally moving from north to south and from west to east. The goal for 2021 is to complete nearly all the planned excavation work so efforts in 2022

can focus on lowering a portion of Skipper Bay dike and preparing to divert the river.

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.

JUNE SUCKER MOVING TOWARDS RECOVERY



In February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially reclassified the June sucker as a *threatened* species. June sucker were originally listed as *endangered* in 1986 when the species was facing many threats and the population was on the brink of extinction. Since that time, numerous recovery actions have been implemented resulting in an improved June sucker population and benefiting the Utah Lake ecosystem. The move to the lower *threatened* status recognizes these successful actions and comes thanks to the June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program (JSRIP). While the downlisting is a great accomplishment, complete recovery and delisting of the June sucker is the goal. The Provo River Delta Restoration Project will go a long way to reaching that goal by providing essential habitat conditions currently lacking in the lower Provo River.

A good example of the progress made towards recovery is the number of fish seen in this year's June sucker spawning run. Below average snow pack this winter means lower flows in the Provo River this spring. While we would prefer more water, lower flows result in ideal conditions for watching spawning June sucker. Biologists anticipate spawning to be most visible the third and fourth weeks in May. If you're heading to the river in hopes of still seeing some fish, please remember to give them their space and don't harass them as they are especially vulnerable during spawning. In 2004, a total of 16 June sucker were observed spawning in the Provo River, this year biologists anticipate several thousand will use the river.

SECOND SATURDAY SITE TOURS

In April we kicked off our Second Saturday Site tours of the Provo River Delta Restoration Project. Come check out newly excavated ponds and channels up close, stroll out on a swamp mat, and learn about Utah Lake's mollusks and snails, whose shells are easily found in the excavated mounds of Delta dirt. Bring your curiosity along with the whole family, all ages welcome. Tours will be held the second Saturday of each month until October. Advanced sign-up is required to manage group sizes. For times and to sign up, visit our website: www.provoriverdelta.us/second-saturday-site-tours



Special thanks to Jordan Holcomb and Kate Holcomb from Utah Division of Wildlife Resources for sharing their expertise on shells found in excavated soils. They've identified about 10 snail species, including the *Valvata utahensis*, an extirpated species no longer found in Utah Lake!



Photo by Debi Snyder

OVER A MILLION BIRDS OBSERVED IN PROJECT AREA

If you frequent the area around the Provo River Delta project, chances are good you've seen one of the Provo River Delta bird monitors alongside a local road or trail collecting data on bird abundance and movement. Since April 2017, trained bird monitors, primarily from Brigham Young University, have been diligently collecting data three times per week from 22 different monitoring sites. That's an amazing 6,250 hours of effort documenting well over 1 million observations! The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of bird use and movement in and around the delta project area and how bird use and movement might change as a result of the delta project. The study will continue through and after project construction. The information is being used by an interagency working group to identify measures to mitigate if there's potential increase in risks to aviation safety at nearby Provo Airport.



Photo by Wyatt Carter taken during bird monitoring.

So, what have we learned in 4 years of bird monitoring?

- The study area provides habitat to an amazing 177 different species.
- Observations can fluctuate dramatically from one year to the next in response to changes in available habitat; the first year of delta construction resulted in fewer observations of species that utilize the construction site like Canada geese and white-faced ibis.
- European starlings were by far the most observed species.
- The largest number of birds observed in a single observation? A flock of 3,700 gulls loafing on Utah Lake in the middle of Provo Bay on September 27, 2018.
- Who made the 1,000,000th observation? Sariah Pullan. She documented a pair of yellow warblers vocalizing along the shoreline of Utah Lake near the end of the Skipper Bay Dike trail on July 20, 2020. Way to go Sariah!

Access to this rich dataset can be accessed via two interactive storyboards on our website under the Resources tab: www.provoriverdelta.us/avian-monitoring and www.provoriverdelta.us/monitoring-last60

JUN 5 - 13

UTAH LAKE SCAVENGER HUNT

UtahLakeCommission.org

UTAH LAKE SCAVENGER HUNT!

The Utah Lake Commission and June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program will be hosting the 2nd annual Utah Lake Scavenger Hunt starting Saturday, June 5th at 8 AM and ending Sunday, June 13th at 10 PM.

Photo, Video, Text, and GPS scavenger hunt missions are created and assigned point values by organizers, and players are automatically awarded points after completing each submission. Daily prizes and a grand prize will be awarded. Missions will include answering trivia questions about the lake, watching videos with educational content and capturing photos or videos of various recreation activities and all sorts of missions to specific access points at the lake.

For more info and registration, go to:
mailchi.mp/c2927f0158e1/ejip5iplqq

