



PROVO RIVER DELTA

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



Spring 2023

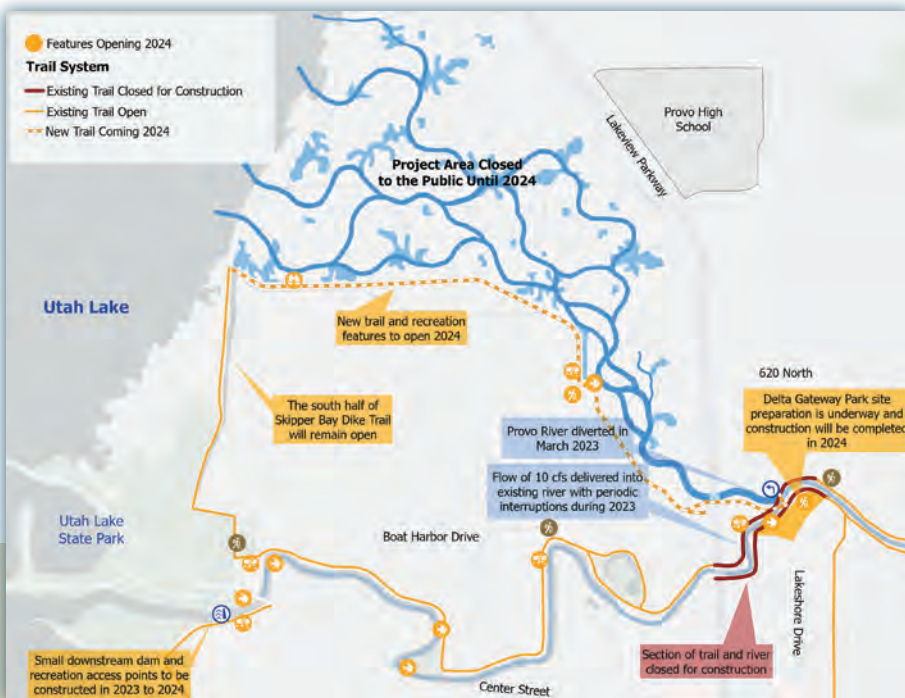
RIVER MEETS DELTA

On March 2, the Provo River Delta project reached a major milestone — the Provo River was diverted into the channels and ponds constructed over the past three years, connecting the river with a restored delta and with Utah Lake. An enthusiastic crowd of over 200 local community members, government officials, project staff, educators and volunteers gathered to celebrate and watch

(continued inside)

IN THIS ISSUE

- River Meets Delta
- Warmer Weather, Birds Flock Together
- Here Comes the Water!
- June Sucker: Expert Navigators
- Dig in at the Delta
- Utah Lake Festival Returns
- Utah Lake Planning



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

provoriverdelta.us



WARMER WEATHER, BIRDS FLOCK TOGETHER

With the warmer days of spring upon us, bird activity is on the rise in the delta project and surrounding area.

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. These sites are in both the delta project area and surrounding locations like Provo Bay and Powell Slough. The purpose of the study is to better understand bird use and movement in and around the delta project area and how these factors might change as a result of the delta project. The information is being used to identify measures to mitigate risks to aviation safety at nearby Provo Airport. Although the study's purpose is to address aviation safety, you can use the information to help guide your next outing near Utah Lake and the delta project.

Collected data shows a consistent spring migration at the delta project and surrounding areas. Each year from early March through late May we see a large influx of spring migrants. The average number of species observed during this period is 86, with peak observations in the month of May. These include species of waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, songbirds, and many others. To up your chances of seeing the spring migration in action, be on the lookout early in the morning or late in the evening. If you're lucky you might also see some nesting activity. Observations have shown nesting activity to occur as early as March and last throughout the spring and summer months.

While the delta project area is closed for construction until 2024, the south half of Skipper Bay Dike trail remains open and is a great location to see migrating birds firsthand; or, you can visit the project area by signing up for one of our site tours.

(continued from front)

RIVER MEETS DELTA

excavators remove the final scoops of dirt needed to connect river with delta.

Now, project construction is shifting to complete recreation and access features in and around the delta and along the original Provo River. With this diversion of flows, a portion of the original river channel is being narrowed to receive a minimum flow of water to maintain the area's recreation values and access. The accompanying section of Provo River Parkway Trail will remain closed while diversion and channel work is underway. There will be short periods when flows to the channel are interrupted; we are coordinating to limit impacts to the fishery and other river uses during this time. A small dam is being built at the downstream end of the channel near Utah Lake State Park. The dam will keep water levels deep enough for flat water recreation, will provide for better sport fishery management and, along with the planned installation of an aeration system, will improve aesthetics of the channel.

Other features to be constructed this year include a new Skipper Bay Parking lot, with non-motorized boat ramp, restrooms, and trail connections; trails that provide connections between Utah Lake State Park, the delta, and existing Provo River Parkway Trail; and, Provo City will be developing the Delta Gateway Park. Project construction is expected to be complete and open to the public in 2024.

HERE COMES THE WATER!



NOVEMBER 1, 2022

Last November, after Utah's hottest summer on record, groundwater levels at Provo Delta were so low that we were concerned conditions would be too dry for our fall revegetation efforts. Now, with Utah's biggest snowpack in history starting to melt, we're facing a very different situation. The Delta's ponds and channels are full of groundwater, Provo River flows are starting to rise, and even Utah Lake – which was down a whopping seven feet last fall – is expected to fill!

With these conditions, flood preparation has become a high priority. Provo Delta construction crews are working to shore up



JUNE SUCKER: EXPERT NAVIGATORS



Hobble Creek Delta, 2010

With the diversion of Provo River flows into the restored delta, the location where the Provo River enters Utah Lake has shifted to north of Utah Lake State Park. This change has led some to wonder whether June sucker will be able to find the new location and swim up the river to spawn. Research and past projects show June sucker have a remarkable ability to find and access tributaries for spawning, despite changes in location and flow. In fact, several June suckers have already been observed in the Delta!

In 2008, the June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program (JSRIP) completed a restoration project where Hobble Creek enters Utah Lake. Like the Provo River Delta Restoration Project, this project involved relocating the mouth of the creek. At that time, JSRIP biologists weren't sure if June sucker would use the creek, as there were no records of June sucker spawning there. However, in May 2009, June sucker were documented in Hobble Creek and by the end of the spawning season over 60 adults had been observed using the new creek. Despite the creek only being in this location for a few months, June sucker were able to find it. June sucker have continued to use Hobble Creek for spawning, with a record annual count of over 1,000 individuals using the creek in 2019.

A similar situation occurs on the American Fork River, where in most years upstream diversions dry up the river in early spring and little to no flow reaches Utah Lake. But in years with an abundant snowpack, the river does flow all the way to the lake. When this happens, June sucker migrate to the river to spawn. This was first documented in 2010 and again in 2011, 2017, and 2019, providing evidence that June sucker will adjust to varying natural conditions to identify suitable spawning locations.

The Hobble Creek and American Fork River examples are two of the reasons biologists are confident June sucker will be able to locate Provo River's new outlet. JSRIP will be monitoring the river again this year to record spawning numbers and track June sucker population trends.



APRIL 10, 2023

temporary protections at the diversion structure and small downstream dam — features that will remain in construction mode for many more months — to be ready for high river flows and rising lake levels. And the schedule for building up the berm along the project's southern boundary has accelerated. But within the delta proper, "flood preparation" is already built into the project's design in the form of a natural, connected floodplain. Rather than trying to contain flows within a single narrow channel, the project's channel braids are meant to overtop during high flow periods. Overbank flooding is an

important ecological process that deposits nutrient-rich sediment, creates habitat, and jump-starts the growth of native riparian plants like cottonwoods. The desire to restore this process is why the Provo River's high flows are designed to be diverted into Provo River Delta.

So, although it would have been nice to have another growing season of vegetation establishment under our belt, we look forward to seeing how the restored floodplain ecosystem of Provo River Delta responds to its first spring runoff season!

DIG IN AT THE DELTA

Though the Delta is closed for construction and restoration work until 2024, you can earn a front row seat to the nature show by signing up for our Delta Dig-Ins. These stewardship opportunities are for all ages. Join us out in the field as we help transform the reborn delta into a biodiverse and resilient ecosystem. We will pull weeds, sow seeds, plant and tend seedlings, or just watch butterflies flutter by. Work varies by the season and project needs.

Along with Provo River Delta site tours, public stewardship events take place every second Saturday of the month from April – October. To volunteer or sign up for a tour complete the form on our website at <https://www.provriverdelta.us/contact-us>

Custom tours and stewardship events are also available for well-organized and motivated groups. BYU student Anna Monson organized a community willow planting in late March. Remarkably, dozens of cold-hardy volunteers showed up to tuck willows into snow covered beds on the banks of the restored Provo River Delta, demonstrating the importance and contribution of the local community to the restoration effort.



UTAH LAKE FESTIVAL RETURNS JUNE 3RD

Come to the Utah Lake Festival on June 3, 10 AM – 2 PM at Utah Lake State Park in Provo! The goals of the Utah Lake Festival are to educate the public about what is being done to improve the lake, promote recreational activities, and allow attendees to enjoy a beautiful Saturday at one of Utah's greatest natural resources. You can learn about conservation and restoration projects at the lake, cast a fishing line, climb a rock wall, make your own June Sucker hat and more! Visit <https://utahlake.org/utah-lake-festival/> to learn more.



UTAH LAKE PLANNING

The Utah Lake Authority has been developing a management plan to guide projects on Utah Lake and its adjacent tributaries over the next several years. We have provided input and are working closely to help prioritize projects that will benefit the Lake and the humans that rely on it for quality of life and economic benefit. Please visit the Utah Lake Authority website to get more information and provide input on the plan.

