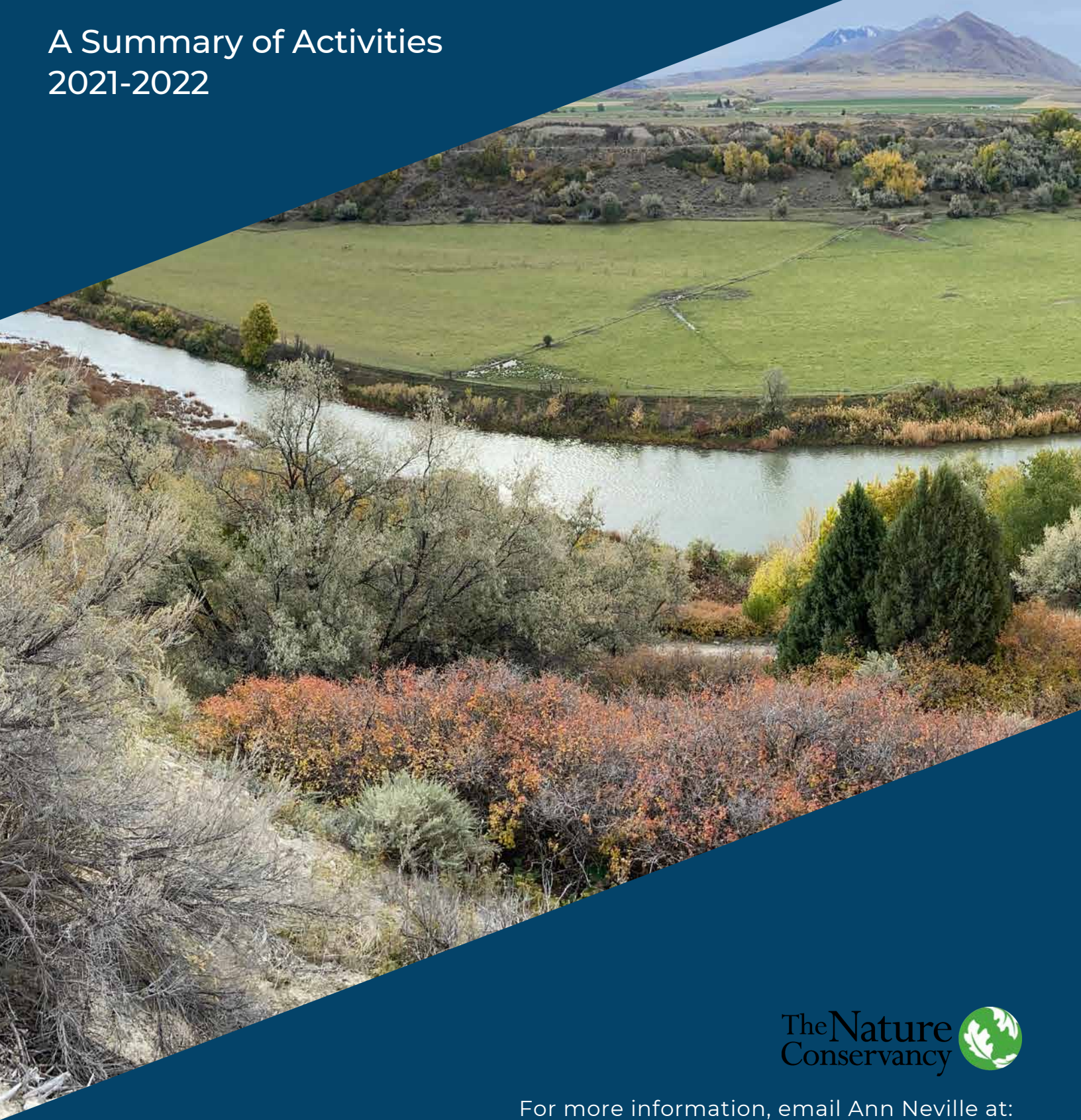


Lower Bear River Watershed Collaboration for the Future

A Summary of Activities
2021-2022

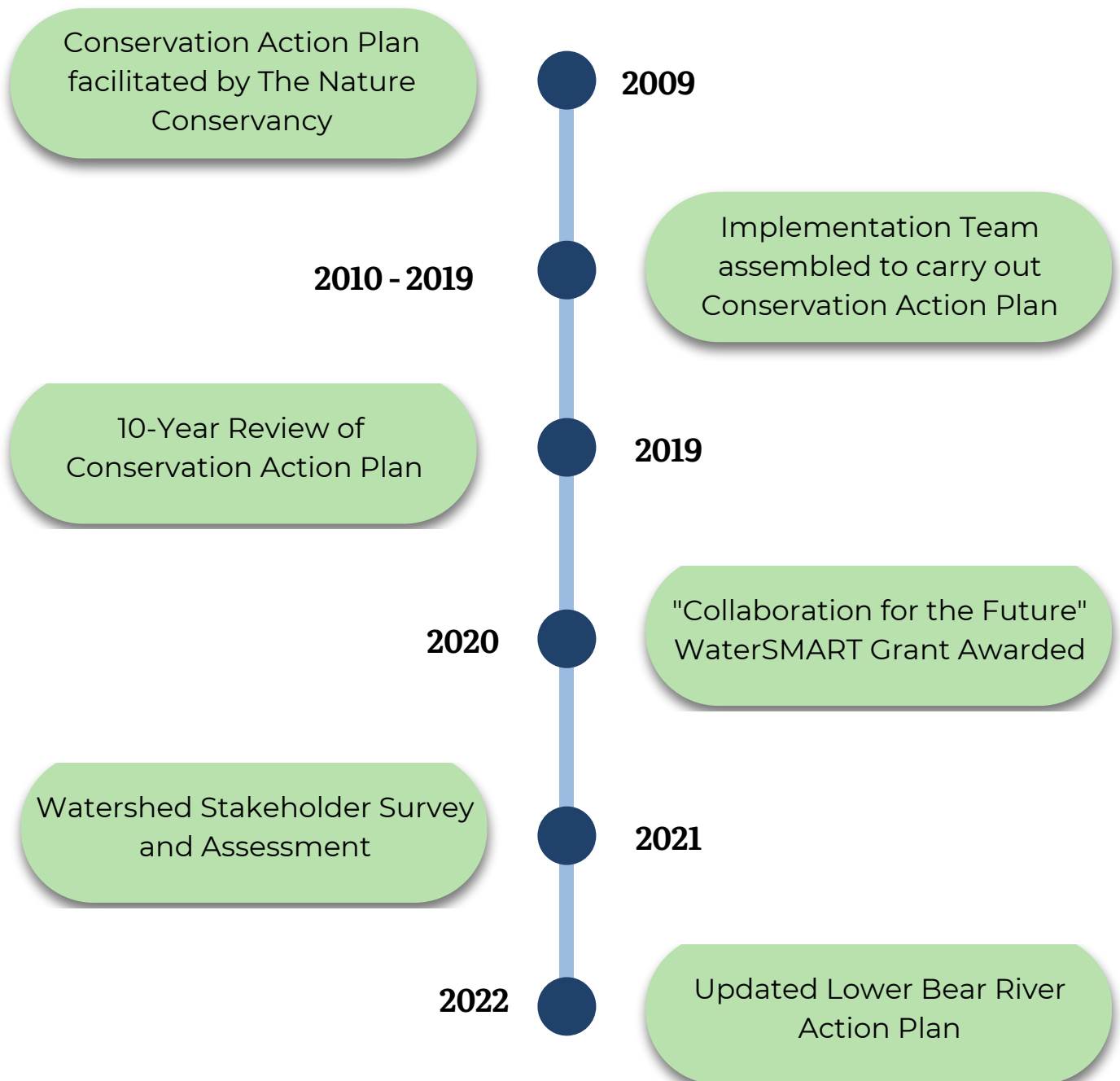


The Nature
Conservancy 

For more information, email Ann Neville at:
ann.neville@tnc.org

History

A team of stakeholders in the Lower Bear River Watershed has been collaborating for nearly 20 years. Bound by a desire to improve ecological conditions of the watershed, they developed the 2009 Lower Bear River Conservation Action Plan. With the 10-year anniversary of this Plan in 2019, the group reflected on the impact of their actions. Collaboration for the Future is based on an assessment of stakeholders and the existing group, and situation analysis workshopping with the team.



Purpose of Watershed Groups

Watershed initiatives and groups further shared watershed goals. They work collaboratively to implement on-the-ground projects (action level), inform watershed programs (organizational level), and / or influence policy and legislation (policy level). In their absence, many watershed-level activities would not be accomplished.

Successful Traits

There are 1,000's of watershed groups in the United States and these are some traits of groups that achieve their goals:

- Are comprised of a diverse membership
- Have an action plan with a clear mission and goals
- Effectively communicate with open data sharing and information exchange
- Have short, medium, and long term goals to engage different members
- Use metrics of success that consider environmental, social, and economic outcomes
- They operate at the institutional level that matches the scale of the issues they want to address (on-the-ground projects vs. policy)
- Use a paid staff person to lead the group
- Are sustained with adequate funding to focus on actions

Challenges

Many watershed groups share the challenge of assigning clear outcomes of their efforts because:

- Measuring environmental change can take decades
- In complex systems it is hard to link the work of the group to the change
- Determining what metric to evaluate is a challenge



Stakeholder Assessment: A Summary

A phone questionnaire was given to 34 watershed users to share open ended responses on their activities and values in the Lower Bear River. Responses were categorized by the respondent's mission type (i.e., agriculture; economic development, community, or planning; natural resources; and utility or industry).

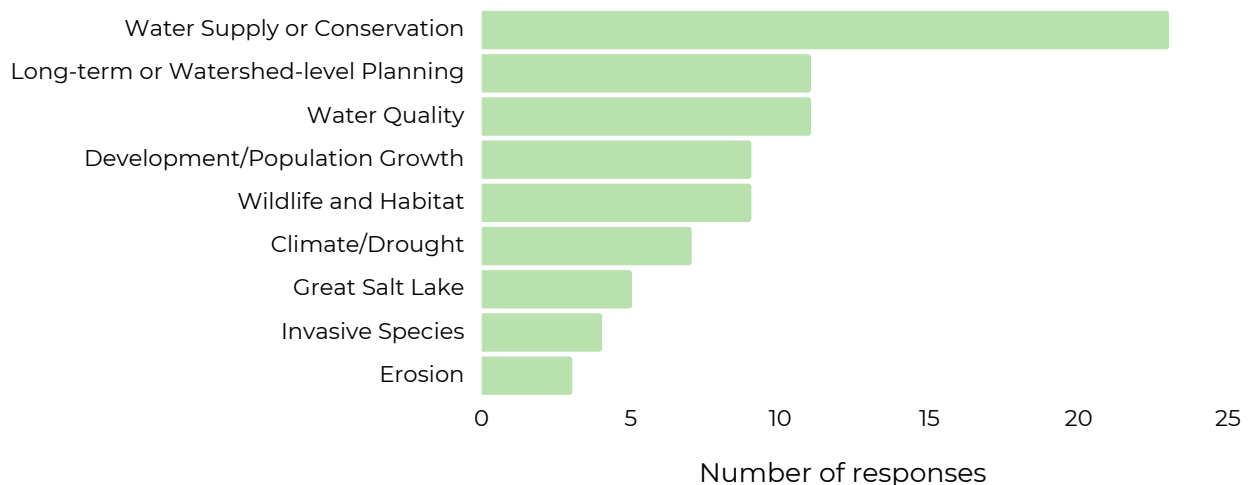
Half (50%) of respondents that agreed to take the survey represented the management or conservation of natural resources. The remaining represented agriculture; economic development, community, or planning; and utility or industry.

Watershed Values

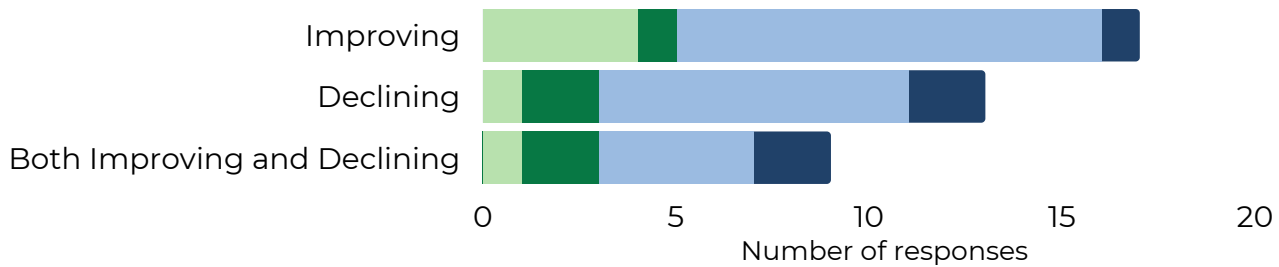
Respondents highly value the Bear River and its watershed and many said “the river is life”. Top responses to “What value does the Bear River and its watershed have to you or your entity”, categorized by respondent type are summarized below:

Agriculture	Economic Development, Community, or Planning	Natural Resources	Utility or Industry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irrigation • Agriculture • River is “life” • Water • Community and heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything • River, River is “life” • Water • Recreation • Many users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water, water quality • Wildlife, habitat • Great Salt Lake • Recreation • Ecosystem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water rights • Water • Agriculture • Great Salt Lake • Hydroelectric power generation

In this survey, respondents shared their **top watershed problems** (See summary bar chart below). When asked what they thought were significant obstacles to solving the problems, respondents replied often with sociological or related to policy (e.g., education, awareness, adapting to change, more collaboration, policy and politics, smart growth, and existing regulations).



How respondents find the **health of the Lower Bear River watershed**: Light green represents agricultural users. Dark green represents economic development, community, or planners. Light blue is natural resource managers and navy blue is utility and industry users.



Work Being Done & Interactions

The respondents of this survey are mostly (82%) all involved with activities they believe improve the health of the Lower Bear River watershed. Extrapolating these results means there are likely hundreds of individual watershed projects actively occurring without formal recognition or documentation.

There is a **spirit of collaboration within the Lower Bear River watershed’s** community. Respondents surveyed largely (79%) already work with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions like Utah State University on watershed projects.

97%

Of respondents are interested in collaborations on watershed projects

Respondents representing natural resources managers receive information most often in a given year with other users receiving information about the watershed much less, if at all. However, many are not getting information about watershed health or activities on a regular basis and no common watershed association or source of information currently exists for the Bear River Watershed.



There is not a common resource respondents use to find information on the Bear River watershed.

Funding Watershed Activities

Respondents use many sources of funding, including their own personal dollars, to pay for projects that improve watershed health. However, there were many state and federal funding opportunities people were not aware of.

For some, funding was seen as an obstacle to solving the watershed's problems. Finding money for individual watershed projects may be a challenge or respondents may see the watershed's problems as so complex (e.g., adapting to climate change, population growth) that solving them with money alone is a challenge.

Measuring Project Outcomes

Many types of watershed users have goals and objectives to measure the outcomes of their watershed activities. Project objectives were often directly tied to their specific grants or projects, and less so to the health of the entire watershed. Most watershed users also used anecdotal observations or collected data – things like fertilizer use, soil testing, and water sampling - to measure project outcomes.

Enhancing Strategic Planning



A High Value Watershed

Users agree the Lower Bear River watershed is highly valued for multiple purposes, and there is an appetite for more watershed information and engagement.



Culture of Collaboration

The culture of collaboration is of value in the Lower Bear River watershed. Users already collaborate and are willing to work with other groups.



Desire for Information

Many users want more watershed information and do not know where to find it. Outreach could be a place for enhancing strategic planning.

Outreach Event

In January 2022, the team hosted an online webinar. The event introduced the Lower Bear River Watershed Conservation Action Plan and shared funding opportunities for watershed programs. Utah State University moderated a discussion on watershed collaborations with a panel of six leaders in the community representing Utah Association of Conservation Districts, agricultural producers, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Utah Department of Natural Resources.



Situation Analysis

Over the course of several meetings, the existing Conservation Action team workshopped through a vision and a situation analysis. Results of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats assessment are included on Page 7. The team considered the Lower Bear River watershed's interests, through the lens of both ecological systems and human needs. With these in mind, direct and indirect drivers threatening these interests were connected, Page 8. These exercises inform the future of the Conservation Action Plan team.

The Lower Bear River Implementation Team Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats

Strengths

- High value watershed
- Expertise & knowledge
- Motivated
- Existing relationships and trust
- Committed facilitator
- Collaborative culture

Weaknesses

- Uncertainty if objectives are being accomplished
- Lack of community recognition
- Challenges addressing policy issues
- Lacking socio-ecological approach
- Missing key watershed users

Opportunities

- Recruit different watershed users to Team: agricultural, policy/planning
- Share information between users
- Key into new management plans in watershed
- Prioritize activities

Threats

- Major, pressing environmental issues in the watershed
- Maintaining relevance as a group
- Ability to measure outcomes
- Funding to sustain Team

Lower Bear River Watershed Situation Analysis

Modeled After: *TNC's Situation Analysis*

