

Back to the Future of Sovereign Lands

Public Meetings on Sovereign Lands Management

“The bed of Bear Lake is sovereign land and is administered by the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. The division has initiated a planning effort for Bear Lake and would like to invite you to participate in the process to develop the Comprehensive Management Plan for Bear Lake. The goal of this plan is to provide direction for the management of the bed of the lake and to establish a procedure for plan implementation, monitoring and amendments.

Crucial to the plan development is the input and participation by the public.

You can participate in the planning process by attending the meeting, and giving us your thoughts on the management of Bear Lake.”

”Public Meetings on Sovereign Lands Management”

No, we’re not stuck in a time-warp, taking us back to the summer of 2006, when we saw the same headline. This is the return to action after a relatively short hiatus in the planning process. I say relatively because the state has had the intention of completing this management plan since back in the 70’s and 80’s when Bear Lake was eyed for oil and gas exploration. I don’t know what delayed the process back then, but after the meetings and surveys to gather public input on the issues of beach use in 2006, the FFSL had to put the project on hold when a serious health condition left them without the services of key personnel. In the interim it was determined that contracting with a professional consulting firm to facilitate the process would be the best way to see the planning process to a

successful and timely conclusion. Bio-West, Inc of Logan was selected to fill this roll.

So, are we starting over? Not at all! The comments that were collected before have been submitted to Bio-West for compilation into an Issues Statement. As step #1, this document is intended to clarify the scope of each concern and to provide a foundation for the development of CMP Goals and Objectives (Step #2).

To help the work go forward, a Planning Work Group (PWG), comprised of approximately 15 individuals who represent management agencies, landowners, conservation organization, tourist and business groups and resource user groups that have a significant interest in the future management and use of Bear Lake was formed. The group is intended to be a committee that represents the various interests around the lake, is small enough to be effective and have members dedicated to participate throughout the life of the process. The strategy is to have this smaller group hold “work” sessions to develop ideas and proposals that can then be presented to the public for scrutiny and comment. It is hoped that this will make the best use of everyone’s time.

This brings us to where we are today. The PWG met to analyze the concerns that would go into the draft Issues Statement. This information will be presented to the public at the meetings on **June 18 & 19 (see insert for details).** These meetings and the entire process will be as effective as we, the community, choose to make them. If we only wish to use the platform to complain and point fingers at others, it will be unproductive. But if we all come with the idea that we can and will work together to find practical solutions, we can be successful in producing a state management plan that will reflect our vision for Bear Lake.

Although the official public meetings will be only at certain stages of the process, it does not mean our participation is limited to those meetings. This is a great opportunity to engage in many discussions and have our own “work” sessions to understand the underlying issues and brainstorm for ideas to present as options. These lands are literally central to the social and economic fabric of the Bear Lake Valley. If the lake is the heart, the sovereign land is the skin that contains it and protects it. It is the part we touch and interact with most. The health of each is intertwined as is the health of our community.

We learned from the Hook Canyon threat that under current state statute and policy these lands could be subjected to uses not compatible to maintaining the aesthetic and recreational value of the lake. In the letter from Governor Huntman’s office to Symbiotics it was stated

“The state, through the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands is currently engaged in a planning process for the comprehensive management of the sovereign lands (lake bed lands) at Bear Lake. These sovereign lands have been withdrawn from any new leasing until the comprehensive plan is complete. The Division is required by statute to manage its land under multiple-use, sustained yield principles, and is leaning primarily toward recreational use in the area. The Division's planning process invites and encourages public participation in the determination of the proper balance of uses at Bear Lake. The state believes that the licensing process envisioned by the FERC application for the pump storage project is not an acceptable substitute for this public process.”

We have been given a reprieve and the time to get our house in order. We all must be willing to give it a lot of time and attention. Come to these meetings, come to the new State of Bear Lake Forums (see Forums) and come prepared to contribute.

David and I, as directors of Bear Lake Watch, have been asked to participate on the PWG and thus have volunteered to help represent your various interests and coordinate the process. Please

Public Meetings

Bear Lake Area

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

New Garden City Offices

Conference Building

305 West Logan Road

Garden City, Utah

Salt Lake Area

Thursday, June 19, 2008

6:00 p.m.— 8:00 p.m.

Quality Inn

Wasatch Room

1659 West North Temple

Salt Lake City, Utah

feel free to contact us with questions, comments and ideas. Visit the website at www.bearlakewatch.com or email at bearlakewatch@aol.com.
Claudia Cottle, Keeping it Clean, Deep and Blue!