



# Legislative Update

February 13, 2024

Happy Valentine's Day week ♡. We hope you know how much we love each of you. The policy team was hard at work last week on appropriations and a number of bills of interest and concern.

On Wednesday, the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environmental Quality Appropriations Subcommittee met to vote on final rankings for requests for appropriations. A number of Farm Bureau priorities were ranked by the committee. We've posted some of these priorities below. If you would like to view the entire voting packet, you can find it [here](#).

- One-time appropriation of \$2 million for the Endangered Species Mitigation Fund ranked #1.
- One-time appropriation of \$500,000 for Utah FFFA ranked #2.
- One-time appropriation of \$1 million for the Agriculture Voluntary Incentive Program (Ag VIP) ranked #5.
- One-time appropriation of \$5 million for the LeRay McCallister Working Farm and Ranch Fund ranked #7.
- One-time appropriation of \$200,000 for the Predator Control Program ranked #14.
- One-time appropriation of \$250,000 for State Management of Wolves (Pass-through) ranked #15.
- Ongoing appropriations of \$400,000 for Agricultural Water Optimization Research ranked #1 on the ongoing funding list.
- Ongoing appropriations of \$521,000 for Public Lands Legal Counsel (legal counsel and representation for Beaver, Garfield, Kane, Piute, and Wayne on public lands matters) ranked #4 on the ongoing funding list.



(Photo Credit: Scott T. Taylor Photography)

On Wednesday afternoon, the policy team testified before the House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee in support of S.B. 18, Water Modifications (Sen. Sandall). This bill is a follow-up to S.B. 277, Water Conservation and Augmentation, which passed in the 2023 Legislative Session. Among other things, S.B. 277 allowed water users who install agricultural water optimization projects to file applications with the Division of Water Rights to put the “saved water” to another beneficial use. S.B. 18 retools those provisions, moving them into the State Engineer’s section of code and adding language clarifying the definition of saved water and the administrative procedures to secure its separate use and protect it from forfeiture. We are excited that the bill moved forward and it should be signed into law soon.

At the same hearing, the policy team expressed concerns regarding H.B. 262, School and Institutional Trust Lands Amendments (Rep. Snider). This bill would allow the director of the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration to sell or lease to the Utah Department of Natural Resources an aggregation of more than 5,000 acres to the Utah Department of Natural Resources if fair market value is paid for the sale or lease. The director is also authorized to sell or lease the lands without complying with the current advertising requirements with certain approvals. Despite expressing concerns about the bill because Utah Farm Bureau policy opposes DWR acquiring or leasing public or private land, range, or grazing permits, the committee favorably recommended the bill to the full House.

On Thursday afternoon, the policy team testified before Senate Judiciary, Law Enforcement, and Criminal Justice Committee on H.B. 31, Agritourism Amendments. Senator Sandall presented a substitute with changes related to liability protections for agritourism operators. The Utah Association for Justice (Utah Trial Lawyers Association) opposed the substitute and ultimately the committee held the bill and moved to the next agenda item. We have continued to work with committee members and the Utah Trial Lawyers Association, and a compromise substitute will be presented before the committee later today. We are optimistic that the bill will move forward and ultimately be signed into law.

As always, we welcome you to send our policy team questions or comments on bills or topics of concern. We also encourage you to read through the [2024 Utah Farm Bureau Policy Book](#), which can also be found under the policy section of our website. Finally, please mark your calendar for Farm Bureau Day on the Hill on **Friday, February 23**. We will have a full day of activities on Capitol Hill.

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