



Legislative Update

August 14, 2025

Interim Update

We hope you've had a safe, enjoyable, and productive summer. Throughout the summer, the Utah Farm Bureau policy team has been hard at work—attending legislative and agency meetings, joining legislative field tours, and meeting with our federal delegation and other officials in Washington, D.C. to represent your interests. We are actively working with the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), Utah Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and other agricultural partner organizations on legislation and funding requests for the 2026 General Session of the Utah State Legislature.

Between legislative sessions, legislative interim committees, made up of both senators and representatives, meet to study significant issues facing the state and prepare bills for the next legislative session. This process differs from the General Session, where the Senate and House each have standing committees comprised only of their own members. During the interim, committee chairs prioritize topics for study based on issues not addressed during the General Session, incorporating input from committee members and the public. Subsequently, interim committees listen to expert and public testimony to decide whether to recommend legislation and prioritize bills for the next General Session. Interim meetings are open to the public and can also be streamed live or accessed following the meeting at le.utah.gov.

The Utah Legislature met for Interim meetings in May and June. The State Legislature takes July off and returns for Interim meetings again in mid-August. During the May Interim, the policy team and members of the board of directors attended the Senate Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Confirmation Committee to speak in support of the nomination of Kelly Pehrson as UDAF Commissioner, filling the vacancy resulting from the retirement of former Commissioner Craig Butters. The Committee favorably recommended Kelly's appointment, and the next day, the full Senate voted unanimously to confirm Kelly as commissioner.



(L to R: Terry Camp, Jared Buhler, Commissioner Kelly Pehrson, Trevor Barnson, Tyson Roberts, & Logan Wilde)

The following day, the policy team attended the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee meeting. At the meeting, the committee approved its list of interim study items. Items of interest to agriculture include the following:

- 1) Study strategies to maximize effectiveness and to mitigate the cost of dust suppression efforts at Great Salt Lake.
- 2) Study predator control issues, including the status of Utah's agreement with Colorado related to wolves and the impact of predators on big game populations.
- 3) Study how to help farmers participate in and benefit from agritourism activities, such as possible changes to the regulation of the use of farm buildings.
- 4) Study how to minimize the loss of Utah's agricultural land.
- 5) Study water-related issues recommended by the Legislative Water Development Commission.

Additionally, at the hearing, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) presented detailed findings on predator management based on more than a decade of research utilizing radio-collared deer. From 2014 to 2025, DWR identified mountain lions as the leading cause of deer mortalities in Utah (580 deaths), with coyotes following (404). Unlike coyotes—which primarily prey on malnourished or weaker deer—mountain lions disproportionately target healthy, prime-age animals that are key to herd growth, significantly suppressing deer populations when lion predation exceeds 7% in a unit. In response, DWR is targeting impacted management units with increased trapping, hunting outreach, and specialized removal efforts. The state also expanded bear permits and coyote bounties (now \$100 in priority habitats) as part of an overall strategy to protect livestock and sustain viable big game herds.

The DWR presentation also addressed the status of wolves in Utah. While western wolves are considered “biologically recovered,” their endangered species status was reinstated by courts in 2022, following a brief nationwide delisting in 2020. Under the state's Wolf Management Act, Utah must prevent the establishment of viable wolf packs until Utah regains full state management authority. Through a memorandum of understanding with Colorado and a federal permit, Utah can now capture and return wolves that enter from Colorado, including both collared and uncollared individuals, as well as handle Mexican wolf dispersers from Arizona and New Mexico. Officials stressed the need for long-term federal delisting, underscoring the importance of the proposed Pet and Livestock Protection Act to secure local management and limit judicial challenges to delisting efforts.

The Committee also received an update on the Utah Soil Health Program as part of a sunset review. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) highlighted the program's progress since its creation by the Legislature in 2021. The Legislature established the program to encourage widespread adoption of voluntary soil health practices, emphasizing benefits such as improved soil function, reduced erosion, better water retention, and increased crop yields.

Key achievements of the Soil Health Program include more than 148 free on-farm soil health assessments since late 2023, technical assistance for producers, a five-year demonstration project on 17 Utah farms, and over 100 educational workshops reaching nearly 7,000 attendees statewide. The program is also investing in on-the-ground support—such as providing no-till drills and other soil health equipment for rent—which have been utilized on over 33,600 acres across the state. Citing strong producer interest, tangible environmental and agronomic benefits, and ongoing collaborative research, the Committee

unanimously recommended a 10-year extension of the program's authorization. You can view the full agenda and rewatch the meeting by clicking [here](#).

During the June Interim meetings, the policy team attended a meeting of the Legislative Water Development Commission. At the meeting, the Commission voted to support the following list of study items:

- 1) **Low Impact Development (LID) & Stormwater** - Study the impact of eliminating LID and upsizing municipal storm drain systems to move rain and snow water directly to the Great Salt Lake.
- 2) **Brine Mining Operations & Water Rights** - Study considerations for water rights related to the mining of brine.
- 3) **Livestock Watering** - Study ways to recognize livestock watering ponds located on homesteads. May require diligence claims.
- 4) **Sprinkler Efficiency Requirements** - Study the sale or offer of sale of sprinklers that do not meet specific water efficiency standards.
- 5) **Water Leak Notifications** - Study the possibility of mandating water delivery companies to notify customers if the company has data suggesting a possible water leak.
- 6) **Stream Access** - Study the management of recreational stream access and how other Western states apply public trust to navigable waterways.
- 7) **Waterwise Landscaping & Turf** - Study waterwise landscaping and the role of different types of turf and the water cycle in water-efficient landscaping practices.
- 8) **Drinking Water Consolidation Assessment Authority** - Study the Department of Environmental Quality proposal to require developers of proposed public water systems to first assess joining an existing public water system rather than creating a new system.
- 9) **Tiered Water Rates** - Study the implementation and effectiveness of tiered water rates.

The following day, the policy team attended the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee meeting. Among other agenda items, lawmakers revisited [H.B. 309 \(2025\)](#), which modifies public access requirements for 30 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in Weber, Davis, Salt Lake, and Utah counties. As of May 7, 2025, those wishing to enter these WMAs must hold a valid hunting, fishing, or combination license. The change reflects growing concerns about high public use—particularly along the Wasatch Front—by individuals who are not financially contributing to WMA maintenance. Legislators noted that requiring a license ensures that those who benefit from the land will also help fund land stewardship.

The DWR oversees 149 WMAs statewide, totaling nearly 600,000 acres. These areas are critical for conserving wildlife habitat, mitigating damage to private property, and supporting recreational activities such as hunting and fishing. Importantly, each \$40 license sold yields significant federal matching funds—about \$80.49 per hunting license and \$16.19 per fishing license—which are reinvested into WMA upkeep. DWR estimates that at least 300 new licenses will be purchased annually as a result of this policy.

Some users who traditionally accessed these lands without a license – such as hikers, birdwatchers, and runners – are questioning this new policy. Specific concerns involve trail easements and areas where it's unclear whether the new requirements apply. For example, select trails within the Timpanogos WMA have already received exemptions. Lawmakers and DWR officials have acknowledged the rollout

challenges and expressed willingness to revisit the statute in the upcoming legislative session to ensure it is workable for all user groups while maintaining adequate funding for WMA management.

The dates for the next Interim Sessions are August 18-20. You can view the upcoming schedule by visiting le.utah.gov. As always, we encourage you to actively send our policy team questions or comments on topics of concern. We also encourage you to read through the [2025 Utah Farm Bureau Policy Book](#), which can also be found under the policy section of our website.

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