



Legislative Update

June 16, 2026

Legislative Interim Update

As summer gets underway, the Utah Farm Bureau policy team remains actively engaged on issues affecting Utah agriculture. Since the close of the 2026 General Session, we have been attending interim committee meetings, monitoring legislative study items, participating in policy discussions, attending candidate fundraisers, and engaging in the electoral process as Utah's June 23 primary election approaches. We have also traversed the state with our regional managers to attend county Spring Issue Surfacing Meetings (SISMs). The quality of discussion at these meetings was excellent, and we appreciate the thoughtful policy ideas, local concerns, and practical input shared by county Farm Bureau members. We hope County Farm Bureaus will continue working on policy proposals and bill ideas throughout the summer in preparation for fall annual business meetings. Meanwhile, as you all know, we use existing Utah Farm Bureau policies to guide our interactions with legislators and agencies.

During the interim, members of the Senate and House of Representatives combine into joint legislative committees to study issues facing the state. This process differs from the General Session, held in the winter, where the Senate and House each have their own standing committees comprised only of their own members. During the interim, committee chairs prioritize topics for study based on issues not resolved during the General Session, then seek input from committee members and the public. Subsequently, interim committees hear expert and public testimony to decide whether to recommend legislation and to prioritize bills for the next General Session. Interim meetings are open to the public and can also be streamed live, or recordings of the meetings can be viewed after the meeting at le.utah.gov.

During the May Interim meetings, the Utah Farm Bureau policy team followed the Senate Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Confirmation Committee as it considered appointments to the Land Conservation Board. The Land Conservation Board is housed within the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) and advises on the LeRay McAllister Working Farm and Ranch Fund, which provides grants to help preserve working agricultural lands, open space, and critical conservation lands through voluntary conservation easements and related land preservation tools.

The Committee favorably recommended the appointments of Jeff Young, Kari Malkovich, and Sam Morgan to the Land Conservation Board. Jeff Young, who serves as the Summit County Farm Bureau president, was appointed as a member representing cattlemen. During his remarks, Jeff highlighted his lifelong background in agriculture, his work managing Ensign Ranches, and his experience serving on the Eastern Summit County Ag Preservation Board, where he helped evaluate conservation easement projects. Committee members discussed the importance of balancing private property rights, agricultural production, open space, and growth pressures.

On May 20, the policy team attended the Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee meeting. At the meeting, the Committee approved its 2026 interim study item list. The final study list includes the following:

1. Agricultural Burns — Examine inconsistencies among statute, rule, and permitting practices to clarify when agricultural burning is allowed and how clearing index thresholds apply.
2. Animal Depredation — Review predator control authorities, strengthening management of invasive pests, such as feral swine, and depredation fees.
3. Aquaculture — Evaluate whether regulatory changes could better support the growth and operation of Utah’s aquaculture industry.
4. Carbon Credits — Study the management, sale, and oversight of carbon credits generated on state and federal lands to assess risks, transparency, and protection of Utah’s interests.
5. Emergency Preparedness — Study strategies and policies to strengthen emergency preparedness across the state.
6. Food Donations — Examine opportunities to better facilitate meat donations and surplus to food banks and schools, including improving access to plants for processing donated livestock and game.
7. Native Plants — Study how the state can encourage access to and use of native plant species.
8. Rare Earth Elements — Study the management and development of rare earth elements, including research activities occurring within the state.
9. Resource Value Assessments — Assess the feasibility and implications of including mineral rights in property value assessments.
10. Waste and Recycling — Study feasible methods for collecting and recycling antifreeze and waste tires.
11. Water — In coordination with the Legislative Water Development Commission, study: 40-year water demand planning and public system water loss on the Colorado River and Colorado River Authority issues; Drinking water data and safety (electronic reporting, lead testing in childcare facilities); Drought response planning and strategy; Groundwater protection, recharge, and river connectivity; Hydropower expansion feasibility; Long-term infrastructure funding and water use transparency; Quantifying water needs and goals (Great Salt Lake and statewide); Retention/detention basin use; Rule against perpetuities (water right subordination agreements); Statewide water conservation and entity coordination (agricultural efficiency, secondary meters, turf buyback, land use, interagency cooperation, funding, and canal piping depletion savings) Water supply augmentation and diversification (infrastructure, storage, recovery, and reuse)
12. Data Centers — Study the potential impacts of data center development on Utah’s natural resources and infrastructure, including water use, water rights, wildlife, air quality, sound, viewsheds, cooling technologies, and related resource concerns.

Water was the major focus of the hearing. The Division of Water Resources reported that Utah’s 2026 snowpack peaked early, melted out early, and set a new record low. Presenters emphasized that while reservoir storage provides important resiliency, conditions vary significantly across the state, with particularly difficult conditions in parts of central and southern Utah and serious concerns for both surface water and groundwater systems. The Committee also discussed Great Salt Lake levels, Lake Powell and Flaming Gorge, drought messaging, and the need for Utahns to treat water conservation as a long-term ethic rather than only a response to dry years.

The Committee also heard from representatives of the local water provider, Prepare60, about drought response and long-term system resiliency. Weber Basin Water Conservancy District discussed reduced reservoir storage, a delayed irrigation season, an earlier planned end to the irrigation season, and 20 percent reductions on certain outdoor and irrigation water contracts. Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District also discussed conservation, regional water system connections, and the importance of planning for both drought years and future growth. Committee members emphasized the need to help the public understand practical ways to reduce use while continuing to protect Utah's long-term water supply.

Long-term funding for water infrastructure was another key topic at the meeting. The Division of Water Resources presented information showing that Utah faces billions in water infrastructure needs for drinking water, secondary water, off-farm agriculture, sewer, and stormwater systems. Presenters explained that local rate adjustments could address a large portion of the gap, but that additional state-level funding will likely be needed to supplement local efforts and fund essential projects. The discussion also highlighted concerns about aging infrastructure, growth pressures, declining federal support, and the need to prioritize projects based on objective statewide criteria rather than isolated funding requests.

The Committee also reviewed the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan submitted by the Water Development Coordinating Council. The plan is intended to create a coordinated process for identifying, ranking, and funding water infrastructure projects that may need state financial assistance. Presenters explained that the process was created to improve transparency, better coordinate among state water funding agencies, and help the Legislature direct limited funds to the highest-priority projects. The Committee also discussed upcoming deadlines for agency plans, funding reports, and future recommendations to the Legislature.

The following day, May 21, the policy team attended a meeting of the Legislative Water Development Commission. The Commission received a broad update on Utah's water outlook, including current drought conditions, water supply challenges, Great Salt Lake efforts, Colorado River negotiations, agricultural water optimization, drinking water infrastructure, water quality, long-term conservation messaging, and funding sufficient for state water agencies to recruit and retain qualified staff members. State Water Agent and DNR Executive Director Joel Ferry informed the Commission that Governor Cox would be issuing a statewide drought disaster emergency declaration due to historically poor snowpack, low runoff, declining streamflows, and impacts already being felt by agricultural producers and small communities. The declaration is intended to help state agencies respond to drought impacts and make low-interest emergency disaster relief loans available to producers facing feed shortages, reduced crop production, and other drought-related impacts.

The Commission also heard from the Division of Water Resources and the State Engineer on current water conditions and anticipated needs. Presenters at the meeting emphasized that Utah's April 1 snowpack was among the lowest on record, with much of the snowpack melting out weeks earlier than normal. Because Utah relies heavily on snowpack for its water supply, many reservoirs had already peaked, streamflows were running well below normal, and several river systems were seeing priority cuts much earlier than usual. The State Engineer discussed how Utah's prior appropriation system is being tested by drought conditions, with distribution cuts happening much earlier than in the past.

Agricultural water was a major focus of the meeting. UDAF highlighted the continued success of the Agricultural Water Optimization Program, reporting 387 completed projects and more than 125,000 acre-feet of annual diversion savings from projects with at least one year of data. UDAF emphasized that these

projects are helping producers stretch limited water supplies further and will likely provide important drought resiliency this year. The Commission also heard updates on emergency disaster relief loans for producers, including the availability of low-interest loans triggered by the drought declaration.

The Great Salt Lake was another central topic. Commissioner Brian Steed reported that the lake remains near historically low levels and is likely to reach the state’s “serious adverse effects” threshold, but also noted that targeted management actions are helping. The state has intentionally managed the causeway berm to help protect salinity levels in the South Arm. The Commission discussed additional strategies to get water to the lake, including infrastructure improvements, municipal conservation, agricultural optimization and leasing, and habitat work such as phragmites removal. The Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands also reported that voluntary agreements with mineral operators will significantly reduce water use on the lake this year, and that the state continues to pursue major phragmites removal, the Newfoundland Basin project, and water acquired through the US Magnesium transaction.

The Commission also received updates from several state water agencies. The Division of Water Quality discussed how drought can affect pollutant concentrations in streams, lakes, and reservoirs, as well as ongoing efforts to streamline permitting and evaluate possible state assumption of the federal Section 404 wetlands permitting program (the Utah Division of Water Rights already manages the Section 404 stream alteration permit program, under federal oversight). The Division of Drinking Water discussed drought impacts on drinking water systems, cybersecurity threats to water infrastructure, federal funding concerns, and the need to expand lead testing in childcare facilities and private schools. Utah Water Ways provided an update on the Slow the Flow campaign, new “Water Runs Utah” messaging, demonstration landscapes, and K-12 water education materials. Finally, the Colorado River Authority of Utah updated the Commission on the difficult interstate negotiations over future Colorado River operations, efforts to protect Utah’s interests, voluntary demand management pilot work, measurement and telemetry improvements, and the need for better forecasting and depletion data across the basin. You can view the full agendas and rewatch the meetings by visiting le.utah.gov.

The next Interim Session starts today, June 16-17, 2026. You can view the agendas for the upcoming meetings by visiting le.utah.gov. As always, we encourage you to send your questions or comments to the policy team on topics of concern. We also encourage you to read through the [2026 Utah Farm Bureau Policy Book](#), which can be found under the policy section of our website.



Terry Camp
(801) 718-2769
terry.camp@fbfs.com

Wade Garrett
(435) 660-9292
wade.garrett@fbfs.com