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Draft 2016 Integrated Report comments and Utah Lake/Farmington Bay algal bloom concerns

1 message

Utah Native Plant Society [REDACTED]@unps.org>

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We remain incredibly disappointed by the ongoing delay in implementing water standards for Utah Lake, and also for Farmington Bay.

Clearly these areas are highly impaired under Clean Water Act standards. There must be no more delays. Action must IMMEDIATELY be taken to solve these problems.

The kinds of algal blooms experienced in 2016 and recent prior years are not normal and NOT the product of "natural conditions."

These are growing population centers and the problem is not going to go away:

(a) these areas will experience nothing but more and more pollutants (they should be called what they are and not referred to simply as "nutrients" which highly misleads the public - an excess of a chemical in this context of eutrophication is called pollution - and it is more than just "nutrients" that is causing the problem);

(b) multiple Utah tree ring studies show that 1950 to 2000 was one of the wettest periods in the last 800 years and that we are returning to drier conditions the problems in connection with which will be greatly exacerbated by anthropogenic effects that are clearly happening at the same time as high population growth and extreme development activities continue to occur near and around these areas.

The abuses to Utah Lake over the past 167 years have reached a final tipping point. Even by the mid-1920's, critical aquatic vegetation was already largely gone as a result of the practice of dumping raw sewage into the lake as well as from agricultural runoffs and other abuses. Newspaper articles from 1971 talk about returning Utah Lake to an enjoyable place to recreate, and there were meetings and there were studies and more talk. Yet here we are some 45 years later and the lake is in even worse shape.

The current inadequate standards are the reason that this most recent massive algal bloom has occurred, the worst ever observed on the lake.

Utah Lake is a sick, highly polluted lake and northern Utah residents deserve better. Utah Lake health obviously impacts the Jordan River and the Great Salt Lake. Utah Lake as it is now being managed represents a significant health hazard to all residents of the Wasatch Front in northern Utah.

Current delays calling for more study are inappropriate: action must be taken, and now.

Actions must include:

(a) Implementing total maximum daily load (TMDL) standards that have been delayed for far too long immediately; and

(b) Taking additional immediate steps to require Utah (and Davis) County sewage treatment plants to remove nitrogen and phosphorous out of sewage water;

(c) Becoming proactive and closely involved in helping to limit any further development and ESPECIALLY ROAD CONSTRUCTION around the Utah Lake (and the Great Salt Lake) including the massive proposed road construction currently in the process of being implemented (TransPlan40 proposals specifically with respect to Utah Lake), the toxic runoffs from which will greatly exacerbate attempts to return the lake to some minimum level of health, and to also protect the few remaining biodiverse wetland areas including areas already identified of conservation concern, and to work with other agencies and organizations to restore at least some of the wetland communities that used to exist around Utah Lake, which will also help to greatly improve water quality and human health and recreation values.

Currently UDOT seems to be oblivious to the importance of contiguous, healthy wetland ecosystems and eutrophication consequences of their projects proximate lake, streams, river, springs, and underground water sources. You must become involved to make sure that roads are not built through our precious and few remaining wetland areas that help to act as filters and provide invaluable services for people and wildlife: part of the strategy to mitigate and avoid algal blooms MUST include consideration of a healthy wetland infrastructure.

Air pollution and acid rain type issues no doubt are also at work which is why more roads and more cars and more polluted air will also work against effective solutions in the long term and we must come up with other solutions to Wasatch Front transportation which has a direct bearing on water quality.

A parallel example (and there are of course many, many others) from example from Lake Champlain in Vermont:

http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/276855/original/final_compiled_small.pdf

A quote from the above:

"In a warming world, phosphorus loads are likely to increase, rather than decrease. With climate change, Vermont is likely to experience more frequent heavy storm events, with runoff and floods which can account for up to 95% of phosphorus loading (Stager and Thill 2010). Climate change will likely increase precipitation across the board; Vermonters will see more winter rains rather than snow." (see bottom of page i)

We can expect similar impacts here and that phosphorous loads will continue to increase.

Road and other construction and loss of wetlands with integrity will add to the existing eutrophication problems that clearly exist at Utah Lake and which is acknowledge by many sources including this 2014 report at Utah Lake

<http://utahlake.gov/caution-dangerous-algae-bloom-at-utah-lake/>

And that was two years ago.

No more delays. Please take action. Implement TMDL now as a first step.

Tony Frates
UNPS conservation co-chair

