

Utah Watershed Review

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Special Issue: George Hopkin Retirement

Editors Note: George Hopkin has worked for the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) for the past 21 years in many of the programs related to nonpoint source pollution control. We have dedicated some of the space in this issue to George, who officially retired December 17, 2009.

George Hopkin has worked for the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) for nearly 22 years. In that time he has processed and managed Agricultural Resource Development Loans, managed UDAF's Section 319 nonpoint source pollution control program, worked closely with the conservation districts in both of those programs, and most recently, has directed the division in which both of those programs reside. As Conservation and Resource Management Division Director, he has become very involved with UDAF's portion of the Colorado River Salinity Control Program, and the UDAF-led Grazing Improvement Program and the Invasive Species Mitigation Fund.

In other words, George has just about done and seen it all in the area of agricultural conservation programs in Utah.

"I cannot say enough good about George. He has been more than an associate and colleague," said Chuck Gay, Associate Vice President for Cooperative Extension, Utah State University.

In a retirement ceremony at the UDAF on December 14th, Hopkin was honored and roasted by several friends and colleagues, including UDAF Deputy Commissioner, Kyle Stephens, who hired Hopkin to work for him in the loans section.

Utah Commissioner of Agriculture and Food, Leonard Blackham echoed the sentiment of many when he said George's leadership and knowledge about



Top photo: left to right--Roy Gunnell, Doug Loftstedt, EPA, and George Hopkin, circa 1995.

Above, Nancy Mesner, USU, with George at the 2009 Utah NPS Conference in Price, Utah.

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Utah's First Urban Farming Conference a Success

Salt Lake County is working on a plan to make several County-owned parcels of ground available to urban farmers on yearly or multi-year leases.

Salt Lake County Mayor, Peter Carroon, made that announcement as he welcomed about 75 farmers and representatives of agricultural agencies and organizations to Utah's first urban farming conference. The conference was sponsored by the County, the Southwest Marketing Network, National Center for Appropriate Technology and the Western Rural Development Center. Utah State University, and Utah Department of Agriculture and Food's Utah's Own Program, were among the agency co-sponsors and contributors to the conference.

Converting unused County land to for-profit agricultural land was the idea of Salt Lake County Councilman Jim Bradley. Bradley, who also spoke at the day-long conference, said that so far they have identified about 35 pieces of vacant land from ¼ acre lots to five or ten acre parcels that might be usable as farm ground. Earlier this autumn, Bradley and experts from Utah State University Extension, toured many of the possible sites to determine if they adequate available water, appropriate soils and access to make them suitable for agricultural uses. The next step, according to Bradley is to develop a request for proposals (RFP) and allow new and existing farmers to apply to lease the parcels. No timetable for the release of the RFP has been set.

Farm to school programs were another major topic of discussion at the conference. Farm to school programs provide opportunities for farms to provide fresh produce and other commodities directly to schools or school districts for use in the school lunch or snack programs. Conference attendees heard about successful

farm to school examples from New Mexico and Colorado. Following the conference about a dozen people stayed to talk about start farm to school efforts locally. Utah is one of only a few states that currently does not have an active farm to school effort. Penny Trinca, First Frost Farm, Cache County, agreed to lead Utah's effort.

Other presentations included local examples of scaling up operations for new markets, starting farmers markets and identifying resources for urban farmers.



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Nonpoint Source Task Force to Review Charter

During the December 2009 Utah Nonpoint Source Task Force meeting, Walter Baker, director, Utah Division of Water Quality, set up a sub committee to address the task force's charter and determine ways the task force can continue to evolve and stay relevant. Baker wants to assess what's working, what's not working and what needs to be changed.

Some task force members have been concerned for some time that participation seems to be dwindling. This has been true of task force meetings as well as programs of the task force, most notably the

annual Utah Nonpoint Source Water Quality Conference.

During the short discussion among the whole task force, some members brought up issues such as not fully understanding how their work is relevant to the mission of the task force, while others mentioned that the task force seems too focused on agricultural water quality, when storm water and other urban water quality concerns are important federal and state water quality mandates.

One suggestion made during the general discussion was to have agencies or programs provide

updates on a rotating basis. Perhaps two or three programs per meeting could provide a program overview or update in a bit more detail. Other programs would still have a couple of minutes each to make major announcements, but the programs in the spotlight would be able to provide a bit of depth into what they are doing.

Baker asked for volunteers to sit on the committee and come up with additional suggestions to bring before the whole task force in the Spring 2010 meeting.

Environmental Group Opposes Jordan River Location for Regional Sports Complex

A new environmental coalition, the Jordan River Restoration Network has started a petition drive and public relations campaign to stop Salt Lake City from building a proposed soccer complex on the city's northwest side, near the Jordan River. The city is planning on breaking ground as soon as next spring. More than 150 acres of open land along the Jordan River and 2200 North could soon be a sprawling sports complex.

During a December news conference Dr. Ty Harrison, professor of Wildlife Biology, Westminster College, said, "This is not the place for a soccer complex."

The city has a different goal: 18 soccer fields, 4 baseball diamonds, a large stadium and a parking lot for 1,300 cars. Voters approved the plan six years ago.

Salt Lake Mayor Ralph Becker

says, "We need to initiate construction this year. We're working through the final planning and design phase."

Becker and the city plan to incorporate a buffer zone of at least 100 feet to protect the Jordan River and even improve it by using \$15 million from the 2003 bond election, Real Salt Lake's gift of \$7.5 million and a possible \$17 million from the county.

"We are looking to really, greatly enhance current quality of the Jordan River along that stretch," Becker says.

But opponents say adding a huge sports facility would inherently destroy the quality of land there. The group believes Salt Lake City is contradicting its environmental stance by building the complex.

Jeff Salt of the Great Salt Lake Keepers says, "Salt Lake City has

abandoned its environmental policies, commitment to open space and a commitment to this recent planning document called 'Blueprint Jordan River.'"

That policy passed earlier this year and was supposed to be a guide for preserving open space along the river.

Mayor Becker says the plan will be sensitive to the surrounding area. "I don't think anyone takes environmental matters more seriously than I do or Salt Lake City," Becker said.

The coalition is preparing for the January 5, 2010 City Council meeting by collecting signatures to its petition, letters against the development from residents, and trying to rally people to attend the meeting and speak out against the proposal.

“Hopkin” continued

natural resource issues will be missed.

Dputy Commissioner, Kathleen Clarke, said she will also miss George’s gregarious personality and infectious laugh.

During the ceremony, Hopkin was presented with several gifts, most of which stayed with a theme of big game, ranching and the natural resources. From this writer’s perspective, that seems very fitting. George has never strayed far from his ranching roots. His heritage has seemed to guide him through some tough, volatile natural resource management issues.

Now as you ride off into the sunset, George, your friends at UDAF and throughout Utah and the nation wish you a smooth journey and happy trails ahead!



Kyle Stephens, left, presents George with a print that has been customized for him. George’s initials, as well as his hire and retirement date appear to be etched onto the trunk of one of the trees.

Several members of the Hopkin family attended the retirement social, including (right to left) his son Seth, daughter-in-law-to-be McKenzie, son Fran, and daughter Amelia.

George’s wife, Margaret, attended but is not pictured in the photo. George’s two other daughters one son-in-law and two grand children were unable to attend.



George Hopkin holds up a wood burned plaque, created by UDAF employee Thayne Mickelson.

