

# Draft Environmental Impact Statement

## Summary of Key Findings

The Lake Powell Pipeline draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is the result of many years of evaluation, dozens of scientific studies, and the input of hundreds of participants with widely diverse views and areas of expertise.

**Here are some of the key findings of the draft EIS:**

### Washington County needs more water

“Based on population growth in Washington County through the year 2060, water demands will exceed Virgin River Basin surface and groundwater supplies, resulting in shortages.”<sup>1</sup> “Under median climate change scenarios, approximately 86,000 acre-feet of water will be needed annually by 2060 to satisfy increased water demands of a growing population in Washington County.”<sup>2</sup>

### Washington County needs a second source of water

“A second, reliable water supply is needed to meet existing and future water demand.”<sup>3</sup> “Relying on a single source of water increases vulnerabilities of the water supply due to unexpected demands associated with increases in population or economic expansion, natural or human-induced infrastructure disruptions, and projected climate change scenarios.”<sup>4</sup>

### The project is the only alternative that meets Washington County’s water needs

The Lake Powell Pipeline is the only<sup>5</sup> alternative that will meet “future water demands in Washington County by 2060” and would “establish a more diverse and secure water supply that would mitigate uncertainties related to relying on a single source of water.”<sup>6</sup>

### Conservation alone will not meet Washington County’s future water demand

“Washington County was the first county in Utah to meet the statewide water conservation goal of reducing per capita water use 25 percent by 2025.”<sup>7</sup> Despite implementing multiple conservation objectives, “population growth will increase total annual water demand beyond the existing water supplies in Washington County.”<sup>8</sup> Relying on conservation alternatives to meet Washington County’s water need will not provide a second reliable water source<sup>9</sup> and would be environmentally harmful,<sup>10</sup> prohibitively expensive<sup>11</sup> and technically infeasible.<sup>12</sup>

### The project uses only a portion of Utah’s existing Colorado River water right

The water for the Lake Powell Pipeline “is already allocated to Utah ... as part of its apportionment from the Colorado River [Compacts].”<sup>13</sup> The project “intends to use up to 86,249 acre-feet per year to address future water demands in southwest Utah.”<sup>14</sup>

### The project is affordable

The project is “economically feasible based on the ability to repay.”<sup>15</sup> After examining a variety of affordability factors, the draft EIS concludes Washington County’s population has the ability to pay for the project so long as the area continues to grow as projected.<sup>16</sup> Further, “[t]he overall fiscal condition of the economic region appears to be conducive to continued economic growth...”<sup>17</sup>

### Project construction will generate over 11,000 jobs for Utahns

Short-term construction related expenditures will produce positive economic benefits to the State of Utah, including 11,059 jobs and over \$600,000,000 in labor income during the construction period. The total value of output (which is the market value of goods and services produced by the project) in Utah will be over \$1.7 billion.<sup>18</sup>

### The long-term benefit of a reliable water supply is worth over two billion dollars

Households and businesses benefit economically “from avoiding a shortage or increasing water supply reliability.”<sup>19</sup> The Lake Powell Pipeline “will reduce potential gaps in supply and demand in the future as well as decrease the potential for shortage events at any particular time.”<sup>20</sup> Several studies estimate the value of a reliable water supply ranges from \$89 to \$360 per year for households and from \$360 to \$1,800 per year for businesses. Assuming Washington County’s population grows as forecasted, the best estimate of the present value of water reliability benefits over 100 years is \$2,097,870,000.<sup>21</sup>

### The project will benefit endangered fish and birds

Because the project allows water to flow from the Green River to Lake Powell, it “would have beneficial effects to Colorado River fish and designated critical habitat.”<sup>22</sup> The project would also “have beneficial effects to proposed critical habitat for western yellow-billed cuckoo in the Upper Colorado and Green Rivers, particularly at Canyonlands National Park at the confluence of the Green and Colorado Rivers.”<sup>23</sup>

### The project will have minimal impacts to the landscape

Land “disturbance in most areas would be short-term and effects would be controlled through implementation of EPMs [environmental protection measures]”<sup>24</sup> that would “avoid or minimize environmental effects.”<sup>25</sup> For example, lands will be “stabilized and restored after construction activities” and facilities will “be blended into the surrounding area and hidden from view as feasible using local topography, or paint and other materials to blend with surrounding natural colors.”<sup>26</sup> Using the EPMs will meet the visual resource management objectives of the BLM and National Park Service.<sup>27</sup>

### The project will minimize effects to animals and plants

The project’s proposed environmental protection measures “would be highly effective at minimizing effects to [endangered species] and habitats.”<sup>28</sup> While construction “may affect individual sensitive species or their habitat” temporarily, it is “not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or to reduce viability for any population of species.”<sup>29</sup>

Representatives from the Utah Division of Water Resources and Washington County Water Conservancy District are grateful for the efforts of countless individuals who contributed to the draft EIS as well as those who will participate in the public comment process.

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### Footnotes

1. “Dear Reader letter,” p.i.
2. Section ES-3, p. 3; Section 1.2.1, p. 9.
3. “Dear Reader letter,” p.i.
4. Section 1.2, p. 9.
5. Section 2.1.3.1 pp 13-16 explains why the No Lake Powell Water Alternative and the Local Waters Alternative were eliminated for failing to meet the purpose and need for a reliable future source of water. The No Lake Powell Water Alternative “would not diversify the water supply,” may not be feasible due to cost, lack of legal authority, and adverse environmental effects. Section 2.1.3.1 p. 14. The Local Water Alternative “[failed] to fully meet the need or accomplish the purpose” of the project and “would likely introduce additional risk to the WCWCD’s overall water supply and only provide a single source of water rather than a more diverse and secure water supply through a second source.” Section 2.1.3.1 pp. 15-16.
6. Section 2.3.2, p. 21.
7. Section 2.1.3.1, p. 15.
8. Section 1.2, p. 8.
9. Section 2.1.3.1, p. 16 (Local Waters Alternative “would likely introduce additional risk to the WCWCD’s overall water supply and only provide a single source of water rather than a more diverse and secure water supply through a second source.”); Section 2.1.3.1, p. 14 (No Lake Powell Water Alternative “would not diversify the water supply because Washington County would not have a second secure, reliable water source outside of the Virgin River Basin...”).
10. Section 2.1.3.1, p. 14 (Reverse osmosis which is required by both alternatives “is a costly method for increasing water supply with potential adverse environmental effects related to diminished flows in the Virgin River affecting endangered fish species and also the disposal of spent brine materials.”).
11. Section 2.1.3.1, p. 14 (“The estimated cost of [the No Lake Powell Water] alternative was \$3.3 billion.”); Section 2.1.3.1, p. 15 (“The Local Waters Alternative does not provide estimates for the infrastructure needed to implement the alternative...”).
12. Section 2.1.3.1, p. 14 (“Repurposing outdoor potable water to indoor is not feasible because the WCWCD does not have the ability or authority to require Washington County residents to xeriscape their properties to more water efficient environments...” and “it may not be feasible to acquire or convert all private agricultural water rights to M&I use. Some landowners may not be willing to sell or give away their water rights or land for development.”).
13. Section 1.1, p. 6
14. ES-1, p. 1.
15. Section 2.3.2, p. 21.
16. Section 3.20.1.6, p. 243.
17. Section 2.20.1.3, p. 240.
18. Section 3.20.1.7, p. 244.
19. Section 3.20.1.4, p. 240.
20. Section 3.20.1.4, p. 240.
21. Section 3.20.1.4, p. 241.
22. Section 3.15.2.2, p. 190.
23. Section 3.15.2.2, p. 188
24. Section 3.2.2.2, p. 54
25. Section 2.3.2.9, p. 27.
26. Section 2.3.2.9, p. 27.
27. Section 3.16.2.2, p. 201.
28. Section 3.15.2.2, p. 184.
29. Section 3.14.2.5, p. 177.