

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wasatch Front Region, UT
August 29, 2024

Contacts:

Soren Simonsen, Executive Director
Jordan River Commission
801-706-1055
sorensimonsen@utah.gov

Rachel Turk, Communications & Outreach
Manager, Jordan River Commission
801-831-1937
rturk@utah.gov

MEDIA ALERT

Major Jordan River Restoration & Event Announcements

Media Event Date & Time: Friday, August 30, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.

The Jordan River Commission is pleased to announce the kickoff of its annual Get to the River Festival at the Jordan River Parkway throughout the month of September, and the launch of a major riparian and watershed restoration initiative funded primarily through a recent [America the Beautiful Challenge Grant](#), awarded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The nearly \$5 million federal grant, matched by state and local government contributions, private donations, and in-kind support from the Jordan River Commission, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands, and thousands of anticipated volunteers, will invest over \$7 million in riparian wildlife habitat restoration, outdoor recreation improvements, watershed enhancement, and capacity-building of our local conservation and stewardship workforce over the next two and a half years. This will be the largest single, coordinated riparian restoration effort ever around Utah's Jordan River, and will support a continued focus on the ecological health of the Utah Lake, Jordan River and Great Salt Lake watershed.

The Jordan River project was selected through a highly competitive process from among over 450 applicants, and was one of 74 awards totaling over \$141 million for [conservation projects](#) across the United States.

The grant award will fund four primary projects and programs:

- Restoration at Big Bend nature park and preserve (City of West Jordan, lead project manager) – This is the largest project funded and includes the next phase in an ongoing 70-acre restoration at Big Bend, between approximately 8400 and 8800 South at the Jordan River, and will fund a major river and floodplain restoration, native riparian forest planting, and trails, river access and open space improvements for public use and wildlife habitat enhancements (see this recent [project video](#) that highlights work

completed to date).

- Invasive species management and native species restoration across the Jordan River (Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands, and Jordan River Commission, lead project managers) — This project targets the mitigation of harmful invasive species like *phragmites* and *tamarisk* in more than a dozen locations with major infestations, with support from Utah Conservation Corps crews and recruiting of local community volunteer support. Approximately 20,000 native trees and shrubs will be planted as part of this restoration effort.
- Wetland and upland restoration on the [Gillmor Sanctuary](#) (Audubon Rockies, lead project manager) — This project will greatly expand invasive species management and shorebird habitat restoration in the Jordan River delta area in the south shoreland area of Great Salt Lake.
- Public outreach and community science (Jordan River Commission, lead project manager) — This program will engage nonprofit partners and community members in monitoring aquatic, riparian and upland habitat in the Big Bend and other locations, and develop a broader outreach campaign to improve Jordan River watershed health.

These projects are all vital components leading toward healthier river riparian areas and watershed, integrating critical habitat restoration, ecosystem services, and community engagement through stewardship, education and recreation.

"This is a significant step towards a revitalized future for the Jordan River," says Kim Shelley, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, which is the lead grant recipient and manager. "I'm grateful for the partnership of the Jordan River Commission, West Jordan City, Utah Forestry Fire and State Lands, and the National Audubon Society in championing investments in the health of this waterway. Together, we're embarking on a journey to restore and rejuvenate this habitat, while fostering sustainable ecosystems for generations to come."

The grant application included a joint letter of support from the entire Utah congressional delegation, including its two Senators and all four Members of Congress, whose districts all encompass different areas of the Jordan River Watershed.

"Utah continues to deal with a long-term drought problem. The Jordan River Commission's programs are leading state conservation efforts to change the way water is used in the Salt Lake Valley—using public/private partnerships and community-oriented engagement to achieve measurable outcomes," said Senator Mitt Romney, whose leadership to create and pass the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided major funding for this federal grant program. "I was proud to support the Commission's efforts to secure a nearly \$5 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which will help accelerate critical projects related to the Jordan River's watershed restoration and enhancement."

A media event will be held on Friday, August 30, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. at the Big Bend nature park and preserve in West Jordan (see additional information about location, access and parking below), and will feature federal, state and local leaders representing many of the partners carrying out the America the Beautiful Challenge Grant projects and programs.

Speakers include:

- Councilmember Silvia Catten, Millcreek City, Jordan River Commission Governing Board Chair & Event Advisory Committee Member
- Mayor Dirk Burton, West Jordan, Jordan River Commission Governing Board Past Chair
- Congressman Burgess Owens, Utah's 4th Congressional District
- Kim Shelley, Executive Director, Utah Department of Environmental Quality
- Eric McCulley, Watershed Scientist, Utah Reclamation Mitigation & Conservation Commission, Jordan River Watershed Council Chair
- Alison Holloran, Executive Director, Audubon Rockies, and Vice President, National Audubon Society
- Jamie Barnes, Director, Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands

Additional staff from these organizations, with detailed knowledge of the projects and programs, will be available for questions and interviews immediately following the media event. The event will include a tour of the Big Bend nature park and preserve, with abundant video and photography opportunities, for those interested.

The Jordan River Commission will also provide a preview of the Get to the River Festival at the Jordan River Parkway throughout the month of September. This month-long series of over 50 events and activities, happening across three counties and 16 cities, highlight the ongoing efforts of Commission partners to preserve, restore and improve the Jordan River and its surrounding environment and watershed, and expand access to outdoor recreation, particularly nature-based activities.

The Festival features a variety of arts and culture, education, recreation, social, stewardship and other types of events and activities that will engage, inspire, and connect individuals and communities to each other and to this important natural resource. Activities for individuals and families accommodate a diversity of interests, for people of all ages, skill levels and abilities. Details of the Festival can be found [GetToTheRiver.org](https://www.gettotheriver.org).

The first Get to the River Festival was organized in the spring of 2014, as a two-day event including a conservation day of service and a day of fun, river oriented education and recreation activities. Now in its 11th year, the Festival has evolved to over a month of events and activities, planned and hosted by more than 25 Festival partners, that celebrate, conserve and activate the Jordan River Parkway, and allow participants to explore the diverse recreation, education, conservation, and cultural experiences and opportunities offered in and around the Jordan River Parkway.

The theme for this year's Festival is "Connections," representing the many physical, ecological,

social, cultural, historical and metaphorical connections represented by Utah's Jordan River.

Website: GetToTheRiver.org

Key Dates:

- **Media Event:** Friday, August 30, 2024 at 10:00 AM
- **Festival Events:** August 26 through October 3, 2024
- **Celebration & Recognition Event:** October 3, 2024 at the Loveland Living Planet Aquarium

*** The media event will be held at the trailhead to the Jordan River Parkway Trail and the Big Bend Nature Park & Preserve in West Jordan, located at [approximately 900 West on 8600 South](#).

Street parking is available near the trailhead.

Passenger carts will be available to assist those with heavy equipment and other mobility needs.

*** **END** ***