Rural Utah Resiliency

Situation Assessment

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This assessment was commissioned by the Nature Conservancy Utah Chapter and Utah Clean Energy to inform their and other organizations’ efforts to engage with rural communities around issues related to resilience and climate change.

About the Environmental Dispute Resolution Program

The Environmental Dispute Resolution (EDR) Program is based in the Wallace Stegner Center at the University of Utah’s S.J. Quinney College of Law. The mission of the program is to foster a culture of collaboration around environmental, natural resource, and public policy issues. The program does so through providing teaching and training, coaching, public education, and collaboration assistance and advising.

EDR Program staff members are impartial third parties with expertise in facilitation and stakeholder engagement. The program has worked on a wide range of community planning, natural resource, and public policy issues across the Mountain West and nationally. Dr. Rumore has particular expertise in assessing readiness for, designing, and facilitating collaborative efforts around topics related to rural planning, regional planning, and the intersection of natural resource management and community planning. Additional information about the EDR Program is available at https://sjquinney.utah.edu/stegner-center/edr/.
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**Background**

During the fall of 2021, Environmental Dispute Resolution (EDR) Program staff conducted in-depth, confidential interviews with 24 individuals familiar with rural Utah communities and the challenges and opportunities that these communities currently face. Interviewees included state, county, and local government representatives; economic development professionals; scientists; and NGO staff. The intent of these interviews was to understand the spectrum of issues that affect, or are likely to affect, the resiliency of rural Utah communities; identify potential strategies for enhancing the resiliency of rural Utah communities; and determine promising pathways forward for helping rural Utah communities prepare for and respond to current and emerging challenges and opportunities. A list of stakeholder groups represented by interviewees is provided in Appendix A. The list of questions that we asked interviewees is provided in Appendix B.

For the purposes of this assessment, we defined “rural Utah” as all Utah communities that are not on the Wasatch Front; we explained this categorization to all interviewees prior to interviews. We intentionally did not define the concept of “resiliency” and instead left it open for interviewees to define themselves.

This report shares the findings from this assessment. We first provide a summary of our findings. We then provide a more in-depth discussion of these findings, which is organized by: perspectives on the state of rural Utah, perspectives on climate change and rural resiliency, perspectives on engaging rural Utah communities in resiliency efforts, and facilitation team recommendations and potential next steps. Throughout our discussion of findings, we have highlighted representative quotes from interviewees.

**Summary of Findings**

When asked how rural Utah is doing, interviewees shared the following perspectives:

- Rural Utah is not homogenous
- The state of rural Utah communities generally reflects the state of their regional economic base
- Rural communities have been resilient to change in the past, but current and emerging challenges will likely require a new approach
- Rural communities need a vision and forward-looking planning
- Cultural clashes threaten the ability of rural communities to build a shared vision for the future, plan together, and work together to respond to change
- Regionalization is a promising approach for addressing rural concerns
- Rural Utah is a major asset to the State of Utah, and it merits more attention and support from the state

The following themes emerged from interviewees’ responses to questions about whether rural Utah communities are and/or should be concerned about a changing climate:

- Climate change will affect rural communities and we need to start thinking about and preparing for it now
• Economic development is considered a higher priority for rural communities than climate change risks – but these issues are interconnected and need to be addressed in an integrated way
• Mitigation-related policies and funding may provide opportunities for rural communities to pursue their economic goals and visions
• A perceived lack of concern about climate change risks to rural Utah may be inhibiting statewide action

The following general advice for future efforts to engage rural Utah around topics related to resiliency emerged from interviews:

• Frame efforts around protecting rural values and ways of life
• Focus on impacts and adaptation
• Learn from past engagement efforts
• Focus on listening to, truly partnering with, and empowering rural communities
• Regional organizations, such as the Associations of Governments, are leading in rural community engagement, and are worth exploring as potential partners in resiliency efforts

Based on the above observations from our interviews, the facilitation team recommends the following:

• Do not use climate change adaptation or mitigation as the entry point for conversations with rural communities; instead, integrate these issues into conversations about economic development and maintaining rural identity and quality of life
• Use an asset-based community development approach to rural engagement
• Partner with and work through regional entities, such as the Associations of Governments, and other trusted entities, and invest in building local and regional capacity for planning, economic development, and community engagement
• Start engagement efforts by listening to and really trying to understand rural needs, and ensure rural engagement efforts are responsive to those needs
• Partner with existing rural development efforts to help ensure those efforts are promoting longer-term resiliency and not just short-term strategies. Explore ways of building climate change adaptation and mitigation into those efforts in ways that address community concerns and needs
• Get communities thinking about the climatic changes they are already seeing and experiencing, such as changes in drought, wildfire, and heat. Help them explore how these changes could affect their community, economy, and quality of life
• Work with the state and others to provide technical, financial, and other resources that build the capacity of local and regional entities to plan for future change and capitalize on emerging opportunities, such as federal funding that may soon be available for infrastructure and climate-change related projects

The facilitation team has identified the following potential next steps. These steps are both distinct and complementary, meaning they can be done in concert with or independently of each other.

• Share, discuss, and ground truth the findings of this assessment with rural community leaders
• Share the findings of this assessment with entities working with rural Utah to help inform their efforts
• Convene representatives from key entities that work with rural Utah to explore opportunities for putting the findings of this assessment into action via joint efforts focused on increasing holistic resiliency and wellbeing in rural communities
• Pilot asset-based community development in a rural community, with a focus on holistic resilience and wellbeing
• Anonymously poll rural Utah communities to build on the findings from this assessment
Perspectives on the Current State of Rural Utah

Interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on how rural Utah is currently doing, followed by questions about what they see as key concerns, future challenges, and opportunities for rural Utah communities. The following themes emerged from interviewee responses.

Rural Utah is not homogenous

Not surprisingly, interviewees generally recognized there is not a singular “rural Utah.” They generally suggested, instead, that rural communities in Utah can be categorized as follows based on a combination of geography and the local industries and economic activities that define a given region:

1. Northern Utah: light manufacturing, agriculture, growing suburban communities
2. Northeastern Utah: oil and gas extraction
3. Central Eastern Utah: coal mining and energy production
4. Southeastern Utah: tourism and natural amenities, some agriculture
5. Central Utah: tourism and amenities, agriculture

Notably, these descriptions loosely correlated with the groups of counties the different Associations of Governments (AOGs) represent.

The state of rural Utah communities generally reflects the state of their regional economic base

Interviewees commonly said that rural areas of Utah are experiencing varying levels of success, which they suggested seems to reflect each region’s economic base.

They typically described rural areas with light manufacturing, a strong agriculture base, and growing suburbs—such as in Northern (Cache, Weber, and Davis Counties) and Southwestern Utah (near St. George)—as “booming” and “doing really well.”

“The energy-producing regions, including coal-producing counties like Carbon, Emery, and Millard, were described as surviving but losing high-wage jobs and experiencing a decline in their tax base to the point where it may no longer be sufficient to meet budgetary needs. According to interviewees, this has led to a lot of interest around helping these communities figure out what their future looks like, but little concrete action to really help these areas craft a sustainable forward path and very few realistic ideas for how to replace high-paying jobs, since these areas are located away from the existing manufacturing centers in the state that otherwise could match the lost salaries. A lack of infrastructure in the region was also cited as a challenge for attracting business investments. This has led to fear and anxiety of impending changes and what it means for these communities. One interviewee familiar with gas-producing counties such as Duchesne and Uintah said these areas are not highly concerned about the loss of jobs because the highly regulated oil and gas industry complies with federal standards, which helps to ensure its longevity, but that boom-and-bust cycle inherent to the oil and gas industry makes "Rural Utah is doing ok, but it is not equal everywhere."
growth and outside investment challenging, thus affecting the overall sustainability and economic health of the region.

Those familiar with tourism-based and gateway communities expressed concerns with the rate of growth these areas are experiencing, which they said is putting significant pressure on infrastructure and services that are often supported by volunteers (such as emergency management services). According to interviewees, the onset of COVID-19 has driven more people to experience outdoor amenities and allowed working professionals to relocate away from cities, leading to an influx of newcomers to potentially unprepared rural towns. While this brings opportunities, it also brings challenges. As one interviewee described, “Tourism is at an all-time high, but many communities would like to turn off the faucet because it doesn’t really bring well-paying jobs or economic development. And we can’t provide the services needed [to accommodate more people].”

Many interviewees recognized that the greatest challenges lie with “frontier communities,” or those regions described as “very rural” and off major transportation corridors like I-15 or I-70. These communities, interviewees said, are largely reliant on farming and ranching, and as these industries become more stressed due to changes in the market and water availability, there are few economic alternatives. There is some opportunity to increase tourism, but due to their remote location it would take significant outside investment to ready these regions for more visitors. As a result of the lack of opportunity and growth, there is an outmigration of children and an aging population that will soon retire and require additional social and health care services that counties may not be able to afford.

These perspectives suggest that while there are many shared challenges and opportunities across the rural parts of the state as explored below, there is also a need to target rural engagement and development efforts to reflect and address the context of these different regions.

*Rural communities have been resilient to change in the past, but current and emerging challenges will likely require a new approach*

While interviewees generally acknowledged that there is diversity in how rural Utah communities are currently doing, they also noted that there are a lot of common challenges that seem to be affecting most if not all of Utah’s rural communities. These included, in no particular order, challenges associated with housing; upgrading and maintaining infrastructure; provision of basic community services; a declining tax base and reduction in Community Impact Board funding; and loss of key industries and related jobs. Additionally, as further discussed below, when prompted to, interviewees generally recognized that changes in water availability and other climate-related risks are a concern for all rural communities; however, climate-related risks were not top of mind for most interviewees.

In discussing the state of rural Utah and current and emerging challenges, several interviewees noted that rural communities have been adapting to change for decades. They cited examples such as changes in coal mining and agriculture that occurred over the last century in response to market changes and other forces. According to these interviewees, rural residents have a deep love and pride for their communities and way of life, which gives them hope that, although these

“There is significant economic opportunity for rural skill sets to contribute to a new energy picture and future. But they need to adapt.”
communities will need to adapt to current and emerging challenges, they will ultimately figure out what they need to do to survive.

The belief in rural adaptability was paired with a general sense that the complexity of issues facing rural communities today is different than it has been in the past. Interviewees indicated that the combination of a lack of resources, declining tax base, housing concerns, limited access to education and health care, loss of industries that have characterized certain regions, and unmet infrastructure needs may prove too difficult for some rural communities to tackle on their own. Interviewees also commonly noted that local government officials tend to play many roles within their jobs and communities, and that this can make it especially difficult for these rural regions to respond to current and emerging challenges and opportunities.

*Rural communities need a vision and forward-looking planning*

When talking about the state of rural Utah, many interviewees expressed a concern that many rural Utah towns and cities do not have a clear, shared community vision and/or that these communities are not engaging in forward-looking, long-range planning. These interviewees felt strongly that these two related concerns make it harder for rural communities to adapt to current and emerging changes and steer their future. As one interviewee put it, these communities need to “build the new way, not the old way” and this is going to require a vision for the future along with more holistic, integrated, comprehensive planning.

Along similar lines, many interviewees suggested that visioning and forward-looking planning are an important and powerful tool for helping rural communities protect the elements they hold dear and avoid undesirable outcomes, such as loss of community character and identity.

Interviewees cited numerous potential reasons for the lack of clear community vision and long-range planning in many rural Utah communities. These included, in no particular order: lack of a statewide focus on planning; limited local government capacity to engage in planning, especially long-range and comprehensive planning; a singular focus on maintaining historic industries rather than diversifying economies; overreliance on Community Impact Board funding to supplement budgets; a focus on short-term economic gains rather than long-term economic strategy; a lack of civic engagement by residents, who may not fully understand what it takes to successfully run a county or city; and, as discussed below, emerging culture clashes.

*Cultural clashes threaten the ability of rural communities to build a shared vision for the future, plan together, and work together to respond to change*

Interviewees commonly noted that culture clashes appear to be playing out in rural Utah communities, such as between more conservative, multigenerational residents and more liberal newcomers. These clashes, they suggested, are feeding local divisiveness and a real or perceived lack of common ground
that people can agree on, which makes it hard for these communities to rally behind a shared vision, plan together, and work together.

Several interviewees indicated this culture clash appears to be particularly notable in areas with increasing tourism and growth, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19, which they said has put pressure on the social as well as physical infrastructure of many communities. Interviewees also noted that many long-time rural residents are part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that an influx of people with different religious orientations might be contributing to divisiveness and making it more challenging to build a broader sense of community.

In addition to speaking about the culture clash that appears to be happening within rural Utah, interviewees also suggested there is a culture clash between rural and urban Utah. Some interviewees also talked about the real or perceived value divide between outside environmentalists and rural communities, saying rural communities often feel environmentalists “support policies that are antithetical to rural values and ways of life” and “care more about renewables than powerplants and what is happening to local communities.”

Some interviewees felt the national political discourse is contributing to these real or perceived cultural divides and related tensions, with many interviewees expressing frustration that the divisive national rhetoric encourages polarization and prevents people from trying to understand and connect with those they feel are different from them. These broader dynamics, some interviewees felt, are hindering rural communities’ ability to work together and leverage outside resources to respond to change and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Regionalization is a promising approach for addressing rural concerns

In line with the idea that rural Utah can generally be categorized into geographic regions, several interviewees said there is great promise in taking a regional approach to addressing rural concerns. Interviewees saw the following potential benefits to such a regional approach: it can help provide expertise, technical capacity, and resources that are typically not available locally but are tailored to local needs; it can help to create a unified voice for bringing rural concerns and needs to state decisionmakers; and it can make it easier to pool and leverage resources that are brought in from the state or private sector.

When discussing the promise of a regional approach to addressing rural concerns, interviewees commonly noted that, historically, counties in the state have largely functioned independently from each other. This, they said, has effectively created an atmosphere of competition for money and the attention of state leaders, which in turn has resulted in uncoordinated asks of decisionmakers and the inability to leverage opportunities that could benefit more than one community.
Numerous interviewees suggested the AOGs might be well positioned to spearhead regional rural development efforts. They commonly noted that the AOGs have existed since the 1950s as social service providers and grant administrators, but there has recently been a renewed focus on the economic development role that these organizations can play. Many interviewees saw great potential for working with and through the AOGs to provide a range of regionalized support for rural communities.

“\textit{We don’t know what the future of rural Utah looks like...We need to focus on creating more responsive leadership and organizational structures rather than committing to a single path and having a ‘come what may’ attitude. The commitment is there, but it needs a more regional and flexible approach to be able to adapt. It needs a coherent structure that brings communities together rather than addressing challenges individually. It also needs funding, economic specialties and consistent marketing. It is not enough to just ‘be ready.’ And it needs a unified vision, but that is hard to create.”}

\textit{Rural Utah is a major asset to the State of Utah, and it merits more attention and support from the state}

In some ways tied to the above points about regionalization and the potential to work through the AOGs, many interviewees also felt there is a need and opportunity for the state to provide additional support for rural Utah.

Several interviewees said they feel rural communities provide significant benefit for urban Utah but often do not get sufficiently resourced or compensated to reflect the services and benefits they provide. When talking about this, interviewees commonly provided the example of how the state has done a lot of marketing to bring tourists to gateway communities but has not matched that tourism marketing with sufficient resources and support to accommodate the influx of people. This, interviewees suggested, leaves the burden on rural communities to provide services and amenities, which often takes the form of volunteer search and rescue, fire, and other emergency management services. Many interviewees felt the state can and should provide additional support in tourism-dependent areas to ensure the continuity of these services. Interviewees also mentioned that rural Utah provides various other amenities that have been integral to the state’s overall development and growth, particularly cheap energy and raw materials. Accordingly, some interviewees felt, as one person put it, “we owe rural Utah a debt” and the state needs to help these communities figure out a way forward without losing their sense of identity or values.

“\textit{Rural Utah is the biggest asset of the state - it fuels the Wasatch Front with respite, energy, food, and recreation. But rural communities are not receiving what [they] are giving to Wasatch Front or the broader country.”}

In talking about the need for the state to provide additional support for rural Utah, some interviewees said that rural Utah has historically felt left behind by the Governor and State Legislature, leading to a lack of trust and skepticism when those from the state or other outside entities
bring ideas to communities. As one stated, “[One] frustration amongst rural communities is that people talk about growth, but there is no action. Where’s the investment? Where are the [Utah Department of Transportation] projects to build out road access?” That said, interviewees felt that current outreach efforts by the Cox Administration (which are primarily geared toward economic and community development) are being well-received, which makes them hopeful. Of note, no interviewees directly mentioned the One Utah Roadmap, which specifies steps the Cox Administration is taking regarding “Rural Matters” in his first 500 days in office, though many alluded to the Cox Administration’s rural engagement efforts broadly.

Also worth noting, some people feel that many state agencies and others that are working on issues related to rural Utah communicate well at the high-level, but that this coordination often doesn’t trickle down to the program and staff level, which can lead to disconnects between state efforts. This suggests there might be an opportunity for improving coordination among all levels of state government when it comes to working with rural communities.

Perspectives on Climate Change and Rural Resiliency

All interviewees were asked specific questions about whether they are concerned about how climate change might affect rural communities and, if so, what they think rural communities need to do to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Of note, very few interviewees talked specifically about climate-related risks to rural communities prior to being prompted to do so, other than some concerns being expressed about water availability. That said, when asked whether they are concerned about climate change and if it is something rural communities need to be thinking about and preparing for, most interviewees expressed concern and spoke to how climate change fits into rural communities’ overall resilience. The following themes emerged from their responses.

Climate change will affect rural communities and we need to start thinking about and preparing for it now

When asked whether climate change is a concern for rural communities, most interviewees agreed that climate change is something rural communities should be thinking about and preparing for. A few people felt strongly about this, highlighting changes in water availability that are already manifesting and are projected to get worse, and how those are likely to affect both growth and industry in these regions.

Some interviewees said that data suggests Utah is warming at a rate higher than the rest of the country, with this being particularly notable in Eastern Utah. The predictable impacts of this heating trend, they said, include reduced water availability for groundwater and reservoir storage, reduced snowpack, increased aridification (i.e., less water in the soil and air), greater risk and intensity of wildfires and related air quality issues, and increased risks of heat impacts on both people and wildlife. Climate
change is also projected to result in higher intensity precipitation events in much of Utah, according to these interviewees, which can lead to flash flooding, water quality issues, and loss of life, among other concerns.

When talking about the impact climate change could have on rural communities, interviewees expressed concern that climate change could negatively impact the economy, development, and quality of life for rural Utah and the rest of the state. Below are the most commonly identified areas of impact:

- **Risks to agriculture and grazing:** Many interviewees expressed concern about the future of agriculture and grazing in rural Utah due to current and projected changes in water availability. Some suggested that, while there is a perception that people in rural communities don’t believe climate change is happening, grazers and agricultural producers are acutely aware of drought trends since they have decades of experiential information and are already experiencing changes to their water season. These interviewees suggested that talking about the changes people are seeing on the ground is a good entry point from which to start talking about resilience to climate change. Importantly, interviewees also indicated that changes in water availability aren’t the only pressure on rural agriculture and grazing, with several people indicating that many children of family farming operations are leaving rural areas for better job opportunities elsewhere.

- **Risks to growth and development:** Several interviewees expressed concern about how changes in water availability and other climate change impacts will affect the ability of towns and cities to grow and develop as they want. Given the intense drought conditions experienced in 2021, interviewees mentioned the possibility that communities might need to reduce building permits and/or put moratoria on development. They also mentioned that some small towns are starting to implement local water restrictions. Some people recognized that these actions were likely to continue in future years with or without more targeted planning efforts.

- **Risks to infrastructure:** Interviewees noted that climate change has major implications for infrastructure and that infrastructure has a significant role to play in mitigating the negative impacts of climate change. One example provided by interviewees is that flash flooding means more runoff, which can affect water quality and overwhelm antiquated water treatment infrastructure, as well as place additional pressure on levees, irrigation systems, and other water control infrastructure that may already need repair. As these kinds of infrastructure systems are maintained, upgraded, or replaced, they can be adjusted to better handle projected climate changes, such as the possibility of more

“Agriculture has been a big source of jobs, but it is maxed out due to water limitations, and has been for a long time.”

“Climate is [one] of the issues [that] counties [must address], but there's so much crumbling infrastructure it impedes the ability to adapt. For example, [counties] need the ability to treat water, and with fewer water resources, water quality is a big issue. How can you have safe drinking water if you can’t afford to fix the system, regardless of whether the water is there?”
extreme runoff. Therefore, a few interviewees suggested, climate change projections should be factored into infrastructure decisions and investments. They also noted this is made more difficult by the fact that many rural Utah communities are struggling to maintain existing infrastructure and provide basic services. Their comments suggest that significant outside investment may be necessary to assist rural communities in dealing with their existing infrastructure and adapting it to reflect projected climate changes—and that leveraging outside funds to make infrastructure more climate change resilient could have the mutual benefit of helping rural communities address basic infrastructure and service needs.

- **Heat stress:** When talking about climate change risks to rural communities, some interviewees also mentioned heat stress, saying they are particularly concerned about people in remote rural areas, including many parts of Indian reservations, where people may not have good access to air conditioning or other technology to help keep people cool. This, as one person put it, makes it hard to “prepare for a hotter, drier world.”

Reflecting on these points, some interviewees highlighted the importance of planning and preparing for climate change now. They mentioned that certain climatic changes, such as drought, are already playing out on the ground. Additionally, these interviewees noted that planning, infrastructure, and other decisions being made now will either increase or decrease the risks and impacts of future climate change. Interviewees illustrated this by providing the infrastructure examples discussed. One interviewee also gave the example of channelization of waterways, saying that as communities grow, development often requires the channelization of waterways and river corridors to gain control of flow; this affects surface water availability and groundwater recharge, which may compound with climate change to further reduce water availability in outlying areas. Additionally, according to this interviewee, channelization of waterways can also increase risk of flood damage, since flash floods can breach the channel and spill over into neighboring developments, and this could become more problematic if climate change results in more frequent and/or more severe storms. These kinds of examples suggest that incorporating climate projections into ongoing planning and zoning decisions can help avoid or reduce future concerns and liabilities.

**Economic development is considered a higher priority for rural communities than climate change risks, but these issues are interconnected and need to be addressed in an integrated way**

As mentioned above, when talking about how rural Utah is doing in general, interviewees generally focused on economic issues and did not specifically talk about climate-related risks until prompted to do so. In line with this, interviewees said that rural communities’ focus is generally on economic challenges and that climate-related risks, such as drought, are secondary or far less important.

That said, interviewee comments widely spoke to the interconnectedness of climate change and economic issues. Some interviewees noted that there is concern that climate change policies and related economic shifts could lead to loss of economic opportunity for energy and agriculture-based rural regions. In contrast, other interviewees suggested there might be opportunities presented for these rural regions by these larger policy and economic shifts. Additionally, as discussed above, some interviewees felt strongly that climate change, if not planned for, presents a major risk to the economic wellbeing and future growth and development of rural Utah communities. These considerations led many interviewees, some cautiously, to acknowledge that rural communities need to consider the impacts of climate change in future rural visioning, planning, and economic development efforts.
A few interviewees identified an opportunity for the state to get out front and lead on issues related to climate change, including through potentially engaging rural communities in conversations about resiliency to climate change and developing climate-related datasets and tools specific to rural Utah to help with local and regional decision making. Many interviewees said that the state is currently not doing much in terms of integrating climate change into planning efforts.

It is worth noting that the few interviewees who expressed some caution around whether rural communities need to plan for climate change said there is a tangible (or at least more familiar) path for addressing economic development issues, but there is not a clear path for planning for and addressing climate change. This may suggest that lack of clear strategies for how to plan and prepare for climate change may be as much or more a barrier to action than uncertainty about whether it is something rural communities should be considering.

Mitigation-related policies and funding may provide opportunities for rural communities to pursue their economic goals and visions

A few interviewees said there might be opportunities for rural communities to simultaneously contribute to and benefit from efforts to reduce greenhouse gas, such as through leveraging federal funding related to climate change mitigation to help with their infrastructure needs and pivot their economies. These kinds of opportunities for rural communities to leverage investments in climate change mitigation to achieve certain community goals and/or to address certain community issues might merit further exploration.

A perceived lack of concern about climate change risks to rural Utah may be inhibiting statewide action

When asked if they are concerned about how climate change will affect rural Utah communities, most interviewees indicated they are concerned and they think climate change is something rural communities need to be thinking about and preparing for. Additionally, several interviewees indicated that many of the people they know who are involved in water resources management or agriculture at the local, county, or state level do seem to be aware of and concerned about how climate will impact rural Utah. However, when asked whether other people are concerned about climate change risks to rural Utah communities, interviewees commonly said they don’t think others around them, especially members of the general public, are concerned. Interviewees also noted that climate change and the risks it presents have not become part of the everyday conversation and there have been few dedicated efforts to incorporate climate change explicitly into any economic development or planning processes – especially at the state level.

When talking about these dynamics, interviewees provided several reasons for the real or perceived lack of concern about climate change risks to rural communities. Some interviewees suggested that attitudes in rural communities often reflect the national political dialogue, which has been contributing to tribalism and a sense that climate change is a political issue. This can make climate change a “non-

“Resiliency to climate change is not being discussed in Utah like it is in other states. We are not seeing efforts on the ground to engage in this discussion either...It’s not happening at [the] state level.”
discussable issue” for many rural communities. A few interviewees mentioned concern that people in rural areas appear to be listening to “talking heads” on social media and the news, rather than trusting information coming from scientists. This, they noted, speaks to the importance of finding the right trusted messengers to communicate climate science to rural communities.

In talking about reasons for lack of concern and/or action to prepare for climate change in rural communities, some interviewees noted that rural communities do not have the resources to be able to tackle the urgent issues they are facing, not to mention those associated with climate change. Additionally, as mentioned above, there is not a clear path for planning for climate change risks and related issues. This lack of resources, capacity, and clarity can make tackling climate change (or even talking about it) overwhelming, which in turn can encourage people to put their attention elsewhere.

Taken together, these findings might suggest that 1) there may be more people who are concerned about climate change risks to rural communities than many people believe, 2) people living and working in rural areas may be disinclined to talk about climate change for fear that they are in the minority in their concern and/or the perception that climate change isn’t of concern to their communities (both local and political), whether or not that is actually the case, 3) when engaging with rural communities around issues related to climate change, it is important to work with and through trusted messengers, and 4) providing resources, capacity, and pathways for helping rural communities respond to climate change might help make climate change more discussable and addressable.

Perspectives on Engaging Rural Utah Communities in Resiliency Efforts

Interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on how to engage rural Utah communities in discussions about resiliency. They were also asked to share their thoughts on key barriers and opportunities for engagement. Below are key themes that emerged from these conversations. It is important to note that since different people had different perspectives and suggestions, not all of these themes are directly compatible with each other.

Frame efforts around protecting rural values and ways of life

In line with many of the above-discussed findings, interviewees commonly shared the perspective that climate change and resiliency discussions and efforts tend to only focus on what rural communities will be losing. They suggested that, instead, we need to frame resilience-building and engagement efforts around how to protect and enhance rural values and ways of life amid change.

Interestingly, this negative “loss mindset” and deficit framing was embodied by interviewees, who generally framed climate change as a problem. Only a few interviewees spoke to the opportunities that efforts to address climate change could present for rural communities.
Along similar lines, some interviewees felt that there is a sense among rural communities and the general public that little can be done to change the trajectory of climate impacts. They indicated that climate change discussions and efforts tend to emphasize risks without providing any pathways forward or realistic solutions that will benefit rural communities and protect their sense of identity. This can make climate change seem too big and overwhelming, thereby discouraging rather than encouraging planning and adaptation efforts. Interviewees felt this is especially true when those doing the planning are unfamiliar with the technical aspects of climate and climate impacts or are unsure of how to even start thinking about the ways in which their community will be affected and what to do about it.

Taken together, these sentiments suggest that efforts to engage rural communities around questions of resilience and responding to climate change need to be thoughtfully framed around opportunities for protecting and enhancing rural identities and ways of life while also providing concrete steps for capitalizing on these opportunities. As one interviewee said, many rural residents are “defenders of nostalgia rather than champions of change.” It might be helpful to keep this in mind in rural engagement efforts of all sorts and to frame efforts around protecting and preserving key assets and values rather than imposing change.

**Focus on impacts and adaptation**

Due to the politicized nature of discussions around climate change, interviewees generally suggested that any rural engagement efforts that specifically address climate change focus on adaptation, rather than mitigation, at least to start. Their advice on this front varied somewhat, with interviewees sharing the following ideas (listed in no particular order):

- Focus on water and drought planning
- Rather than leading with data and projections, ask people what environmental and resource changes and patterns they have been seeing and experiencing
- Find trusted messengers to communicate the science of climate change to communities
- Improve local education on climate change and what it could mean for communities

“It is hard to know how to adapt [to] or mitigate climate change. The way we look at it is that it’s a bad thing and [we] don’t want to talk about it. But if we acknowledge climate change, then the powerplants go away and we see things happening that we don’t want to see. Climate change adaptation comes down to jobs - if there are other jobs available, it is not so devastating to think about losing the coal plant or mine. [Right now] climate change means less jobs, less money, less production. We need to change that. [There is] fear because no one has brought solutions or an answer.”

“Focus on adaptation to less water and snowpack, and economic changes in energy. Discuss how communities can pivot, rather than ‘getting rid of coal.’ How can we shift what operations look like? How can we promote resiliency by converting landscapes?”
Of note, some interviewees cautioned against using the term “climate change” at all in rural engagement efforts. As one interviewee said, “Words are very powerful, and I believe a rural audience will tune out quickly when they see words such as climate change even when manifestations such as water scarcity is a top issue. You may want to consider reframing these topics...There is so much common ground even among diametrically opposed opinions. If you want the attention of everyone, finding that common ground and describing it in language that appeals to all is critical to success.”

Learn from past engagement efforts

During interviews, interviewees spoke about several current and past efforts to engage rural communities around economic development. In so doing, they often said that both those trying to assist rural communities and those in rural communities are frustrated that prior rural engagement efforts have not gained more traction. Interviewees provided the following reasons for the limited success of past projects:

- **Past efforts have not effectively listened and responded to what rural communities want:** Many interviewees said one key reason past efforts have fallen short is because rural communities did not feel their concerns have been effectively heard and responded to, particularly by outside voices from the Wasatch Front.
- **Outside efforts have often approached rural communities with a savior mentality rather than offering to truly partner with them:** Several interviewees noted that rural communities do not appreciate the perception of being given a “handout,” especially by outsiders who come into the community thinking they have “the answers” to their problems. Instead, interviewees suggested communities would rather be approached as a partner, with outsiders playing a partnership role in helping them along, rather than telling them what to do.
- **The right local players were not on board:** In a similar vein to the above points, some interviewees said that the right local leaders have not been adequately engaged in past efforts to leverage outside economic development opportunities. Some mentioned that meetings associated with those efforts were often comprised mostly of outsiders from the Wasatch Front with only a few representatives from the community. This, interviewees suggested, has led to distrust of outside efforts, especially since few of these efforts have played out as intended.
- **Local communities may need additional capacity to effectively leverage outside opportunities:** In talking about reasons past engagement efforts have fallen short, interviewees also often said they feel many rural communities have not done a great job of leveraging the external resources and opportunities that have been brought to their communities. Some interviewees attributed this to those projects not being true partnership efforts and/or the fact that local public officials in rural areas tend to wear many hats and are often overextended, which makes it difficult for them to develop the skill sets or spend the time needed to capitalize on these opportunities and resources.

Interviewees generally indicated that the failure to effectively listen to what communities want, approach projects as true partners, engage the right local players, and ensure local public officials have the capacity to really utilize outside opportunities have often led to rural engagement efforts not playing out as planned and not achieving their desired goals. This in turn, it appears, has resulted in a vicious cycle where rural communities distrust the state and other outside entities, which makes it hard to partner with rural communities and get the local buy-in necessary to achieve long-term success. Some
interviewees also noted that certain local elected officials are antagonistic to outside investment and opportunity and want to control outside resources that are brought to the community (sometimes with disregard for how those funds and other resources are meant to be used); it seems likely that the vicious cycle described above could be contributing to this dynamic.

These comments suggest that, as further discussed below, future rural engagement efforts, whether around resiliency-related topics or otherwise, would benefit from being rooted in truly listening to what rural communities want and need, approaching these efforts as true partnerships with rural communities, and ensuring that local leaders and other key local players are effectively engaged in, on board with, and well-resourced to participate in the effort.

**Focus on listening to, truly partnering with, and empowering rural communities**

When asked about how to best engage rural communities in resilience efforts, the most common answer was that these efforts should be locally driven. Especially for those who work closely with local communities, there was a strong belief that any effort to build rural resiliency needs to include true engagement with local leaders and community members, active listening that builds trust, frequent communication and updates about progress, investment in local skills and capacity, following through on promises, and a product that reflects the needs and identity of the community. These suggestions align well with the above-discussed findings about where past rural engagement efforts may have fallen short.

Given the history of outside engagement with rural Utah, many advised that rebuilding trust should be an important goal of any effort to work with rural communities. Along with this, several people mentioned the importance of getting those who disagree with each other together to better understand their point of view, identify common values and goals, and determine ways to move forward with tackling the complex issues rural communities are facing.

On a related note, several interviewees felt that rural areas can and need to do a better job of advocating for themselves, recognizing their own capacity constraints, and being open to new opportunities and outside resources.

“Show up and follow through! Ask [communities] what they want to be when they grow up and figure out how to help them get there. Mayors and commissioners haven’t had tools to follow through. [Help them] develop a plan. If you could show up without an agenda and listen, that would be great. Identify the people that want to work with you and figure out best next steps.”
Taken together, these perspectives suggest that future rural engagement efforts need to be a two-way street: outside entities need to do a better job of approaching rural engagement efforts in a true partnership way and empowering local communities to drive efforts, and local communities need to be willing to step up to partner and advocate for themselves and receive outside help. Effective engagement efforts that truly empower and build capacity in local communities could help with both sides of that equation.

It is noteworthy that many interviewees mentioned there is a lack of good examples for rural communities to look to in terms of managing growth and planning efforts. It seems that there is a promising opportunity for the state and others to partner with certain pilot communities, to put these lessons learned into action and, in so doing, to create a positive example for other communities to look to.

**Regional organizations are leading in rural community engagement, and are worth exploring as potential partners in resiliency efforts**

Many interviewees said they think that regional organizations, specifically the AOGs, the Utah League of Cities and Towns (ULCT), and the Utah Association of Counties (UAC) are currently doing the best job of engaging rural communities and understanding their needs. Accordingly, they thought these regional organizations have the greatest promise for leading the kind of partnership and local empowerment efforts described above. People mentioned several ways these organizations could play a key role in efforts to enhance rural community resilience, including compiling and sharing data, making introductions and serving as a broker, bringing people to the table, and helping to build trust. It is noteworthy that these organizations generally seem to be a trusted resource for towns and counties across rural Utah.

Interviewees suggested that the AOGs, in particular, are in close contact with the municipalities they serve and have a good beat on the needs and wants of those communities. Interviewees said that, while their role has shifted over the years, AOGs are currently playing a more prominent role in providing a collective voice for rural towns and counties and that this role may need to continue to expand in coming years. For outside organizations wanting to effectively partner with rural communities on resiliency efforts, the AOGs could provide an opportunity to do so.

Interviewees noted that the AOGs, ULCT, and UAC are accountable to elected officials; thus, their ability to play a convening role in rural engagement efforts may be limited. However, several interviewees felt it would be worth exploring what these options could look like. Interviewees recommended building capacity within the AOGs to assist rural communities with planning, economic development, and other such needs, saying this is a promising way to help assist and empower rural communities across the state.
Facilitation Team Recommendations and Potential Next Steps

The facilitation team has developed the following recommendations and next steps based on the results of this assessment, which are intended to be used by any entity that wants to help improve the resilience of rural communities and/or engage rural communities in conversations about climate change.

**Recommendations**

In light of the findings of this assessment, we have developed the following list of actions we would recommend organizations do and do not do when engaging rural communities around resiliency and related topics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DO NOT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on economic development and maintaining rural identity and quality of life as the starting point for conversations around resilience; integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation into conversations about economic development and maintaining rural identity and quality of life</td>
<td>Focus on climate change adaptation or mitigation as the entry point for conversations with rural communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an asset-based community development approach to rural engagement (see Appendix C)</td>
<td>Use a deficit-based approach to rural engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame rural engagement efforts around opportunities for protecting rural identity and quality of life amid change</td>
<td>Frame efforts around problems, loss, and how rural identity and quality of life must change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner with and work through regional entities, such as the AOGs, and other trusted entities</td>
<td>Use a top-down approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in building local and regional capacity for planning, economic development, and community engagement</td>
<td>Use a “hand out” or “savior” approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start by listening and really trying to understand rural needs, then ensure rural engagement efforts are responsive to those needs</td>
<td>Impose your agenda on rural communities or do token or agenda-driven listening efforts that do not really hear and address community needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner with and/or explore ways of building climate change adaptation and mitigation into existing rural economic development efforts (see Appendix D) to help ensure existing efforts are promoting longer-term resiliency</td>
<td>Start something new specifically focused on climate change adaptation and mitigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get communities thinking about the climatic changes they are already seeing and experiencing, such as related to changes in drought, wildfire, and heat. Help them explore how these changes could affect their community, economy, and quality of life</td>
<td>Lead with climate change projections and data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with state entities and others to provide technical, financial, and other resources that build the capacity of local and regional entities to plan for future change and be able to capitalize on emerging opportunities, such as federal funding that may soon be available for infrastructure and climate-change related projects</td>
<td>Ignore local capacity needs and limitations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Potential next steps**

We have identified several potential next steps for building on the findings of this assessment, which are listed in no particular order. These steps are both distinct and complementary, meaning they can be done in concert with each other or independently of each other.

- **Share, discuss, and ground truth the findings of this assessment with rural community leaders:** For this assessment, we interviewed those who have worked with and/or provided services to rural communities to get a “balcony” perspective on how rural Utah is doing and to produce recommendations for how to effectively engage with rural Utah communities. While we have reason to believe the perspectives and recommendations in this report provide valuable insight for future efforts to engage rural Utah around topics related to resiliency, we also believe there is value in sharing and discussing the takeaways from this report with key local, county, and regional officials in rural areas to get their perspectives on and ground truth these findings. These conversations could be done one-on-one or as focus groups. If nothing else, the findings of this assessment can provide a valuable conversation starter for dialogue around rural needs, opportunities for enhancing rural resilience and quality of life, and next steps.

- **Share the findings of this assessment with entities working with rural Utah to help inform their efforts:** We believe the findings from this assessment are relevant and potentially helpful for a range of state agencies, economic development organizations, and other service providers that work with rural Utah communities. Much of what we uncovered in our interviews speaks to the lessons learned from past engagement efforts and could help inform and direct current and future efforts. We hope entities throughout the State of Utah who are working with rural communities will consider and utilize the results of this assessment in their work.

- **Convene representatives from key entities that work with and represent rural Utah to explore opportunities for joint efforts around increasing holistic resiliency and wellbeing in rural communities:** It may be advantageous to convene leaders from key organizations that work with and provide services to rural communities to discuss the results of this assessment, rural needs, and opportunities for joint efforts aimed at increasing the holistic resilience and wellbeing of rural Utah. This effort could particularly explore opportunities for connecting existing and planned efforts and avoiding redundancy; sharing and leveraging different resources to improve outcomes in rural communities; and exploring ways of integrating the findings of this assessment into all rural engagement efforts in the state. It might also make sense to discuss the possibility of working together and pooling resources to host rural listening sessions around the state to inform holistic rural development and resiliency efforts. These entities could also consider partnering and pooling resources to pilot an asset-based community development approach in a partner rural community (see recommendation below). The Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, the Community Development Office, and/or the Governor’s Senior Advisor for Rural Affairs might be appropriate conveners for this type of gathering, if they are interested in hosting such an effort.

- **Pilot asset-based community development in a rural community:** We see great promise in piloting an asset-based community development approach to help a local town or region develop a vision for the future and strategies for enhancing and protecting local values and quality of life amid economic, climatic, and other current and emerging changes. Asset-based community development is a framework for community-driven development that focuses on
identifying, mobilizing, and building on community and individual talents, skills, and assets, rather than focusing on the problems or what is lacking within a community (see Appendix C for more information). Such a pilot effort could put the recommendations from this assessment into practice, demonstrate how asset-based community development works and how it is different from a deficit-based approach, and provide a much-needed example of other rural areas (in Utah and perhaps elsewhere) to look to and learn from. This effort would require the buy-in of a community willing to partner in this endeavor; based on our conversations, it seems that Emery County might be a good candidate for this kind of engagement, although this possibility would require further exploration. This kind of effort would also likely necessitate the involvement of many entities and accompanying resources. As such, it might be a good opportunity for entities involved in planning and development efforts in rural Utah to practice effectively partnering with each other and local and regional entities toward shared goals. While providing specific recommendations on what this effort would look like are beyond the scope of this assessment, we suggest it should start with deep listening to the partner community to identify key assets, opportunities, and concerns; use a true partnership approach that includes carefully laying out expectations for everyone involved; identify and address key local capacity gaps; and use a holistic approach to thinking about community development and resilience that accounts for future sources of uncertainty, such as economic shifts and projected changes to climate and water availability. We would also recommend working with one of the AOGs or another trusted regional entity on this project, perhaps having them lead it. It seems plausible that federal funding could greatly assist with and contribute to this effort. The facilitation team is available to further explore this idea, if any entities are interested in moving it forward.

- **Anonymously poll rural Utah communities to build on the findings from this assessment:**
  While this is not one of our key recommended next steps, it might be worthwhile now or down the line to administer a carefully crafted poll for local and regional public officials and community members in rural areas to build on some of the findings of this assessment. For example, an anonymous poll could explore how people feel about the state of their community and region, what they see as key assets in their communities that could be enhanced, what they see as key opportunities for their community going forward, and what key risks or challenges they think their community needs to be thinking about and preparing for (including climate related risks). While we believe an anonymous poll like this could be valuable if administered at the state or regional scale, we caution that such polls can be very problematic if not carefully framed and administered. If anyone is interested in pursuing a poll, the facilitation team is available to discuss possible approaches that can help ensure this effort is done in a way that is likely to be productive and not counterproductive.
Appendix A: List of Interviewee Organizations

Individuals from the following organizations were interviewed for this project. Many of these interviewees currently live in or have lived in rural communities across the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bear River Association of Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five County Association of Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six County Association of Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uintah Basin Association of Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Community Development Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Association of Counties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moab City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eureka City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richfield City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit County*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Lands Solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;R Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ensign Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature Conservancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Clean Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Rural Development Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Water Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two former economic development professionals, currently retired</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*We attempted to interview representatives from multiple rural counties around the state, including those who were recommended to us by interviewees. It is noteworthy that only one county official responded to our request for interviews, which may reflect some of the local concern about “outside efforts” discussed in this report.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Tell us a bit about you and your connection with and work in rural Utah?
2. How is rural Utah doing?
3. What do you think are key concerns for rural Utah, in general and specific areas?
   a. Current issues and challenges
   b. What do you see coming down the pike? Future concerns?
4. What do you think are key needs and things we should pay attention to regarding rural Utah?
5. How concerned are you about the impacts a changing climate might have on rural Utah?
6. How concerned do you think other people are about a changing climate and rural Utah?
7. What, if anything, do you think should be done to address the concerns you’ve identified, and/or to help rural Utah become more resilient to a changing climate?
8. What ideas do you have for strategies that could help rural Utah mitigate and/or adapt to climate change?
9. If we were to engage rural Utah stakeholders in exploring solutions for creating a more resilient rural Utah, what might that look like?
   a. Who should be involved? How?
   b. Concerns, barriers, challenges?
10. Who else would you recommend we talk to?
Appendix C: Asset-Based Community Development

Asset-based community development is a framework for community-driven development. It focuses on identifying, mobilizing, and building on community and individual talents, skills, and assets, rather than focusing on the problems or what is lacking within a community. Assets are considered both physical and social in nature, and can be at the individual, community, or organizational level. The process provides a way for communities to take control of their future, invest in the strengths identified through asset-mapping, and create and embrace a vision that encompasses the local culture and values. This asset-based approach is in comparison to a deficit-based approach, which focuses on the problems and needs of a community and ways to fill those needs (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The deficit approach</th>
<th>An asset-based way of thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starts with deficiencies and needs in the community</td>
<td>Starts with assets/resources in a community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to problems</td>
<td>Identifies opportunities and strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides services to users</td>
<td>Invests in people as active participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes the role of services</td>
<td>Emphasizes the role of civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on individuals</td>
<td>Focuses on communities/neighborhood and the common good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees people as clients and consumers receiving services</td>
<td>Sees people as participants and co-producers with something to contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats people as passive and “done to”</td>
<td>Helps people take control of their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixes people</td>
<td>Supports people to develop their potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implements programs as the answer</td>
<td>Sees people as the answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Woodward et al. 2021

Appendix D: Current Planning and Economic Development Opportunities

Current planning and economic development opportunities that were mentioned by interviewees are listed below. Some of these are further detailed in the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget FY23 Interactive Budget Narrative in the Rural Matters section, accessible at https://gopb.utah.gov/fy23-interactive-narrative/.

**Governor’s Office of Energy Development (OED)** is developing a strategic plan for Utah’s energy future
- Goal is to integrate energy, environment, economy, public lands, and infrastructure issues, with a focus on helping communities that will be affected by decarbonization trends transition.
- Will likely be completed in March 2022

**OED and the Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity (GOEO)** have been selected as a Phase 1 recipient of Build Back Better Challenge Grant funding administered through the Economic Development Agency
- 60 (of 100) Phase 1 recipients received $500,000 to prepare an application for Phase 2, which can offer $25 million to $100 million in funding to carry out project
- The OED and GOEO application focuses on helping coal communities to transition their economies away from fossil fuel development

**Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB)** is partnering with Envision Utah and the AOGs to develop a budget request to hold a statewide conversation about growth (see language below).
- With the sentiment that many regions feel growth is happening too fast and without much strategy, this effort is to help direct a conversation with the public on how to grow while preserving the character of communities.
- Goal is to develop statewide policy and plan for strategic investments across the state to help with growth planning.

**GOPB** has received a $1 million statewide planning grant from the Economic Development Agency
- AOGs are required to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) every five years. Historically, this has been done independently by each AOG.
- This grant is to help coordinate the CEDS development efforts across AOGs.

The **Statewide Unified Economic Opportunity Commission** is a body comprised of the Governor, Speaker of the House, Senate President, legislators, elected officials and members of state agencies
- In a related but separate effort from OPB’s, the commission is developing statewide economic development strategies.
- There is currently an effort to try and marry these statewide strategies with the local efforts of the AOGs

**The Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO)** is in the process of developing statewide resource management plans
- A focus will be on energy development within local communities, forestry and logging, watershed restoration, and mining for critical minerals.
**GOPB** is in the process of coordinating Utah state water agencies to develop a Coordinated Action Plan for Water
- Goal is to bring water agencies together and collectively determine how to move forward together on water issues across the state
- The first of four chapters was released January 13, 2022 and can be viewed at [www.gopb.utah.gov/waterplan](http://www.gopb.utah.gov/waterplan).

**Utah Association of Counties** is currently developing a capital improvement infrastructure inventory for the AOGs.

**Utah Community Development Office** is working on better understanding how universities can be a resource for state planning efforts in rural communities.