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Utah groups receive \$20M grant to manage water

SALT LAKE CITY — The National Science Foundation has awarded a \$20 million grant to help protect and manage Utah's most valuable resource — water.

The award created a group called iUtah to explore how population growth, changing climate and land use affect the state's water sustainability, according to the Utah Governor's Office.

The group includes researchers from Utah State University, the University of Utah, Brigham Young University and two dozen other higher-education institutions as well as government agencies and industry officials.

"Utah is faring better than most states due in part to unprecedented partnerships in all aspects of our economy," Gov. Gary Herbert said. "This public-private collaboration among so many educational, industry and government partners in tackling a key factor in long-term economic growth and quality of life is another example of our state's can-do approach."

The grant provides \$4 million per year for five years to fund the program.

The project will invest in projects that improve state water usage and inform residents of water-saving practices.

Todd Crowl, a professor in Utah State's Ecology Center and Department of Watershed Sciences, is the project's principal investigator.

"Utah State is excited to be leading this initiative to strengthen the research infrastructure across the state," said Utah State President Stan Albrecht. "The results from iUtah will have a dramatic impact on how we understand and respond to changing water resource availability in Utah."

Most of Utah's precipitation falls as snow. As a result, the project will focus on how changing mountain snowpack affects water supplies for the state's growing communities, officials said.

It will look specifically at watersheds, infrastructure and technology.

Plans call for a research facility featuring controlled experimental gardens to test engineering innovations for water runoff and quality. Utah's natural watersheds will serve as living labs with on-site observatories along the Wasatch Front.

The central goal is to build a statewide community of water scholars, and foster education and outreach programs on quality and usage.

Utah's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) office coordinated the

multi-partner approach with support from the Utah Science Technology and Research initiative.

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