

## Riverton Residents and Utah's Water Future

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South Valley - Just under half of Riverton residents think there is enough water to meet the city's current needs, whereas only 24 percent are confident of Riverton's future water supply. This is one of many findings that Dr. Melissa Haeffner, a postdoctoral research fellow for iUTAH, and Dr. Douglas Jackson-Smith, a professor of sociology at Utah State University, presented to Riverton City Council on Jan. 12. Haeffner and Jackson-Smith led an extensive academic assessment on water use and perceptions throughout Utah in July and August 2014. They are now presenting results to city councils and public utility staff across the state to make local and state water decision-makers aware of the experiences and priorities of residents.

“Very few respondents in Riverton believe there is not enough water to meet current needs, but more say there may not be enough water in the future. While our project did not directly assess the adequacy of Riverton’s water supply, the lack of concern about potential water shortages appears to be related to local residents’ water-use behaviors. Well under a third of households say they have decreased their water use over the last five years, and a majority of respondents did not believe they could do more to reduce water use in the future, which was lower than in most of our other study communities,” Jackson-Smith said.

Riverton was chosen as one of 23 neighborhoods in Cache Valley, Salt Lake Valley and Heber Valley to participate in the study. The study found that residents are concerned about a number of water issues, though these issues rank behind growth-related concerns such as air pollution and traffic congestion. Riverton residents also know how much they spend on water but not how much they use. Residents generally water their own lawns, rather than relying on an association, and know and follow basic recommendations.

“We are excited by the high level of response to the survey in Riverton. The survey was conducted in only one neighborhood within Riverton, but the respondents represent similar characteristics as the general adult population in the city when compared to U.S. census data, and we believe the results are a good snapshot of how local residents perceive and feel about water issues,” Haeffner said.

Jackson-Smith and Haeffner also highlighted the unusually high level of concern about poor water quality. Riverton has since moved from well water to the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District as its primary source of culinary water.

“One of the most striking results in Riverton was an unusually high level of concern about poor water quality in local water. Interestingly, the survey was conducted shortly before the city decided to change to a new water supplier. Since we have baseline data from 2014, it could be interesting to go back and ask people if their perceptions of water quality have changed,” Jackson-Smith said.

Mayor Bill Applegarth and council members seemed receptive to the study. Applegarth’s signature was also requested for a memorandum of understanding, which ensures the confidentiality of water users and survey respondent information and facilitates research collaborations between the survey research team and public water suppliers. Haeffner and Jackson-Smith ended their presentation by commenting on local policy-preference findings.

“Riverton residents are supportive of efforts to build new water storage projects and to restrict future development unless water supplies are guaranteed, but there is considerable opposition to mandates – like ordinances requiring a certain kind of landscaping or forms of development that use less water per person,” Jackson-Smith said.

The “Utah’s Water Future” household survey that was presented is part of the innovative Urban Transitions and Aridregion Hydro-sustainability (iUTAH) project, a National Science Foundation -- supported program integrating research, training and education, aimed at strengthening science for Utah’s water future. iUTAH’s efforts include helping place monitoring instruments in three rivers or streams to track the way changes in climate and different patterns of urban development affect water supply and water quality in the state’s urbanizing watersheds.

For more information about the survey visit [www.iutahepscor.org/hhsurvey](http://www.iutahepscor.org/hhsurvey)