



For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Deena Pyle
801.201.4300
pyle@utahhumanities.org

***Think Water Utah*, a Utah Humanities Statewide Project, Receives 2022 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Utah Division of State History**



Thursday, November 10, 2022 – *Think Water Utah* is a statewide collaboration and conversation on the critical topic of water presented by Utah Humanities and its partners. From 2020 through 2022, *Think Water Utah* engaged 312,418 visitors in 25 exhibitions and over a hundred free community events in 34 locations throughout the Utah and southern Idaho.

2022 Outstanding Achievement Award Recipient

As a prestigious capstone to this tremendous endeavor, the *Think Water Utah* project partners received the 2022 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Utah Division of State History for statewide collaboration. The award recognized significant contributions, extraordinary service, and outstanding projects in the fields of history, archaeology, preservation, and/or historical archives. Members of the team were honored to receive this award at the 70th annual Utah State History conference in Provo. [Event and award photos are available here.](#)

A Statewide Collaboration that Strengthened Utah Communities and Explored the Critical Topic of Water

Think Water Utah featured two exhibitions from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service – *Water/Ways* and *H2O Today*. These exhibitions traveled to nine communities in Utah from August 2020 to October 2022 reaching underserved audiences including those living in rural areas, youth, and members of historically marginalized communities. In addition, each host organization developed local water-related exhibits and public programming that explored Utah's water stories and challenges. The Utah Museum of Fine Arts and Natural History Museum of Utah also created water-focused exhibitions and public programming, some of which also traveled.

All of Utah Humanities' partners engaged their communities in conversations about water by seeking out underrepresented voices and stories and collaborating with other organizations to reach new audiences. They also experimented with online and socially-distanced program models and worked to strengthen themselves as vibrant community spaces.

Think Water Utah project scholar and Director of the American West Center at the University of Utah, Gregory E. Smoak, detailed the history of water in Utah in [Utah Water Ways](#), a 40-page essay with historic photographs. Four thousand copies of the essay were provided free of charge to exhibition visitors and distributed freely to schools, libraries, teachers, and scholars.

Utah Humanities' [Beehive Archive](#) radio program featured 90 new episodes focusing on water in Utah. These 2 minute stories are available on KCPW Radio, Utah Public Radio, and on many podcast platforms.

***Think Water Utah* Exhibitions around the State from 2020-2022**

- **Bear River Heritage Area with the Hyrum City Museum** | *H2O Today*, *Boa Ogoi: the River is Life*, *H2Oh How Miraculous!*, *The Dam that Saved a Town: Newton Reservoir 1871-2021*, *Hometown Habitat*, *Obstacle or Opportunity: Winter Shapes Life in Cache Valley*, *What If We Did Our Best? Water in Utah from Snow to Salt Lake*, *Blue at the Zoo*, *Steam Snow Sweat: Water & the Transcontinental Railroad*, *Water Works*, *Like Water*, *Decisions Downstream*, and *Blessed by Water Worked by Hand*
- **Canyon Country Discovery Center, Monticello** | *H2O Today*, *H2Oh How Miraculous!*, and *Our Water Our Home*
- **Fremont Indian State Park Museum, Sevier with the Snow College Library - Richfield** | *Water/Ways*, *Carved Rock: How Water Shaped Land & Life in Clear Creek Canyon*, and *Drained: Using Water from the Sevier River*
- **Frontier Homestead State Park Museum, Cedar City** | *H2O Today* and *H2Oh How Miraculous!*
- **John Wesley Powell River History Museum, Green River** | *Water/Ways* and *Our River is Our Community*
- **Kanab Museum** | *Water/Ways* and *Water Right*
- **Natural History Museum of Utah, Salt Lake City** | *Decisions Downstream*
- **Swaner Preserve & EcoCenter, Park City** | *Water/Ways*, *Decisions Downstream*, and *Why Wetlands?*

- **Uintah County Heritage Museum, Vernal** | *H2O Today* and *Through Their Eyes: Photographs from the Second Powell Expedition*
- **Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City** | *Confluence* and *Think Water Through Art*
- **West Valley Arts at the Utah Cultural Celebration Center, West Valley City** | *H2O Today*, *Utah's Waterways*, and *Utah's Rivers at a Crossroads*

To learn more about the four-year statewide collaboration, visit the [Think Water Utah](#) portion of the [Utah Humanities website](#).

Carol Harsh, Associate Director of Museum on Main Street and Community Engagement, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service says, “*Think Water Utah* became a water programming tour de force as a multi-pronged approach with layers of statewide partners and scholars, and host communities across the state, resulting in real public impact. Water is a life-giving resource. Looking at water through the lens of history and culture – both locally and statewide – enabled program participants to grapple with the complexity of water issues and to recognize the many nuances of what water means to us as humans. In so doing, they experienced firsthand the relevance of history in addressing contemporary issues and the power of public history institutions in helping to localize conversations. Utah Humanities is respected and uniquely positioned to pull together such an impressive array of statewide and local partner organizations and scholars, who in turn engaged their communities in meaningful conversations, story initiatives, educational activities, and virtual programs.”

Gregory E. Smoak, Director, American West Center, University of Utah writes that, “*Think Water Utah* illustrates the value of public environmental history to inform public discourse and advocate for a more inclusive and sustainable future... In producing statewide programming, the project team knew we would have to tell some unsettling stories and ask hard questions for the project to truly matter. There is a well-known adage in the American West, often spuriously attributed to Mark Twain, that whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over. Throw in the intertwined and divisive issues of urban population growth and climate change and things could get really tense. We knew that we must directly engage these topics, but that to do so ethically and fairly we must remain rigorous in our historical practice. If we were to advocate for good history and good science, we would have to get things right... I am proud that *Think Water Utah* has addressed environmental justice issues and responded to the climate emergency by advancing this critical conversation in communities across the state.”

Matthew Basso, Public Historian and Professor of History at the University of Utah remarks on the statewide project by saying “In my nearly 20 years of experience as a public historian in Utah, I can say without reservation that *Think Water Utah* is one of the most impressive, far-reaching, expansive, and important public history projects to take place in the state over that period. As the news reminds us virtually every day, there is, arguably, no more important topic in Utah right now than water. I am utterly certain that *Think Water Utah* did our state a profound service by adding context and complexity to conversations on this subject. In addition to facilitating a far more educated populace, they left yet another lasting legacy: a corps of far better-trained local public historians who will continue to serve Utah communities across the state.”

Megan van Frank, Director of the Center for Community Heritage at Utah Humanities, who coordinated the *Think Water Utah* statewide project, says “This teamwork between national, state, and local organizations benefits everyone. Strengthening museums through this type of collaboration helps preserve and share Utah history, and demonstrates how an understanding of the past is absolutely crucial to the important conversations we are having today in our communities. Plus, all this, in the middle of a pandemic! I could not be more grateful to all of our project partners for our work together. Thanks to the Board of Utah Division of State History for this recognition of our efforts and impact.”

Water|Ways and *H2O Today* are organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. Both exhibitions were adapted from an exhibition organized by the American Museum of Natural History (New York) and the Science Museum of Minnesota (St. Paul), in collaboration with Great Lakes Science Center (Cleveland), Field Museum (Chicago), Instituto Sangari (Sao Paulo), National Museum of Australia (Canberra), Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto), San Diego Natural History Museum, and Science Centre Singapore.

Generous support was given by the National Endowment for the Humanities, State of Utah, Utah Division of Arts & Museums, Utah Division of State History, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah American West Center, the ESRR Impact Endowment, the ESRR Humanities & Arts Endowment, the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation, Lawrence T. and Janet T. Dee Foundation, Dominion Energy, Rocky Mountain Power, Union Pacific, KCPW Radio, and Utah Public Radio.

About Utah Humanities: Utah Humanities strengthens Utah communities by cultivating connections, deepening understanding, and exploring our complex human experience. UH is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Salt Lake County Zoo, Arts, and Parks Fund, the State of Utah, and through gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations. Each year, Utah Humanities supports hundreds of educational and cultural programs throughout Utah. For more information, visit www.utahhumanities.org.

###