

Evidence-Based Faith Report

Great Salt Lake Lab: Winter 2025

1. Introduction

We are the Great Salt Lake Lab at the BYU Ballard Center. Our lab has been moving forward with faithful direction toward solutions to preserve Great Salt Lake for two years. In these two years, we have researched the science behind the lake's ecology, dove deep into legislation and government efforts to protect the lake, and communicated with most stakeholders that have some say in how the lake can be saved. We have come to understand the severity of the issue—that toxic dust will negatively impact the lives of everyone in Salt Lake Valley and beyond, the state's economy will face detrimental effects, and a precious ecosystem will fall apart. With this in mind, we have thoughtfully determined that the most effective way to make change is by communicating and coming together for a common cause. This is why we have decided to interact and form relationships with everyone—from the Great Salt Lake commissioner to the humble homeowner to seasoned researchers and nonprofit leaders. After gathering information and a myriad of opinions surrounding the lake, our project led us to create an unbiased and informative website, a caucus presentation and survey, and a conflict resolution plan for all stakeholders to unite for the protection of Great Salt Lake.

2. Divine Intervention

During the lifespan of this lab, our team has seen many ways in which the Lord's hand has influenced our work. Details of these accounts are found below.

2.1 Direction

Kelli: October 2023

Upon coming home from my mission, I was absolutely sure I wanted to work at the Ballard Center. I had an idea in mind of what I wanted to do but also wanted to make sure I was on track for the minor. I booked an advisement appointment, and started talking to the advisor, Teal Christianson, about my passions and life goals. It was an incredibly inspiring conversation, and once she understood where my hopes lie, she excitedly told me about labs. She explained that there was a Great Salt Lake lab that was hiring and that it would be perfect for me. I had the interview with Eliza and Whitney a week later and was hired as a new lab lead. What was even more divine was that I already knew Whitney and she was able to help me understand the problem and become the leader that the team would need

in the next year. I truly believe that God placed people in my path to direct me to this lab because He knew it would help me grow. Even more so, I was able to recognize His trust and confidence in our team as He placed us together to work on this issue.

Paige: December 2023

When I first saw the posting for working at the Ballard Center on their Great Salt Lake Lab, I had an easy but good job elsewhere on campus that I had no intention of leaving. Then, out of seemingly nowhere, I was told that my job would be laying people off and my position no longer seemed secure. Out of concern for paying my rent and other living costs, I applied for the GSL Lab. In the end, I don't know if I actually would have been fired from my other job, but that event pushed me to work in this lab where I have gained so many skills, direction, and wonderful friends. While this was scary at the moment, I know the Lord was directing me to where I needed to be.

Shelby: March 2024

After completing a full-time accounting internship during the Winter Semester of 2024, I found myself left with one year left of college before graduation. I knew that I wanted to spend this year honing new and different skills instead of just focusing all my school and work on accounting, but I didn't know where to start. I had previously worked as an accountant at University Impact, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the Ballard Center, but my old position there was no longer available. By chance, I soon met a student in another ward who works as an advisor at the Ballard Center. He reminded me of how much I enjoyed working in the social impact sector and invited me to an advisement session. During the session, he talked about the Labs and mentioned that the Great Salt Lake Lab was looking for a new member. Something about the opportunity just felt right, and I applied for the position. I didn't have any hard skills in environmental science or know anything about Great Salt Lake, but I prayed that my enthusiasm to learn about both would be enough to qualify me for the work. As I had prepared for my interview with the Lab's team leads, I had begun to feel a love for the problem that I believe was inspired by the Spirit. Thankfully, I was offered the position, and that love has only continued to grow ever since!

I believe that meeting the Ballard Center advisor and being given a love for Great Salt Lake that I had never felt before were two events that were both guided by the Spirit to bring me to this lab and to give me the confidence I needed to dive deep into a world so far outside my normal wheelhouse.

2.2 Providence

Paige: May 2024

As Kelli and I were preparing to leave the country for a month for a study abroad, we were concerned about how the lab would continue and progress in our absence. Gratefully, in the months leading up to our trip, we were able to hire Shelby and Megan onto the team. They not only brought amazing insights and perspectives into our research and ideation, they worked hard and held the lab together while we were gone, allowing us to smoothly transition back into work when we got back. I firmly believe God's hand was at work in providing us the people we needed at just the right time.

Shelby: May 2024

As Kelli and Paige were leaving on their study abroad, I was worried about how Megan and I would be able to help the lab move forward during the summer. We were working on our Problem Understanding paper, but we felt like there was a huge piece of the puzzle to understand the problem that we were missing. While we were doing a good job of gaining a deep understanding of the problem, we struggled to find any sort of direction or end goal towards which we could aim our efforts. During a team meeting soon after Kelli and Paige had left, Megan had the idea to begin interviewing stakeholders about their current efforts instead of just combing through research articles that were quickly becoming outdated. We began meeting with stakeholders from all different sides of the issue and immediately began to observe a huge impact on our understanding of the issue. We began to understand not only the scientific causes and consequences of the problem, but also the social causes and consequences. We began to understand all the cultural barriers, conflicting incentives, deep feelings of distrust, financial restrictions, and miscommunications that make this problem so complex. In total, our team conducted about 40 different interviews with stakeholders. These interviews informed us about the most current efforts being made to solve the problem, helped us establish relationships with the people who work in this world every day, and ultimately led to the creation of all three of our pilot projects. I believe that the inspiration Megan received to begin meeting with these stakeholders was given by the Spirit, and it provided our team with the guidance and direction we needed to move forward.

2.2 Peace

Paige: December 2024

Last week our team had a meeting that was less than ideal. We felt set back by the participant who didn't seem to listen or care about our ideas. Today, we had another important meeting and were all feeling anxious about how it would go. We decided to say a

prayer before the meeting, asking the Lord for help. Immediately, I felt peace and much better about it. The meeting ended up going great and was extremely productive. It helped us regain our confidence and push forward with our plans.

2.3 Redirection

Paige: December 2024

I had been thinking about one of our projects and didn't feel good about it. I prayed for guidance and called Kelli to discuss. After we talked, we decided to make a slight adjustment, and I felt surer and more confident in what we were trying to do. The rest of the team seemed to like it, and later that week we had a meeting that validated our plans. I am certain this was the Spirit helping guide me and our team.

2.4 Strength

Shelby: January 2025

I have recognized the Lord help me articulate my thoughts many times during my time at the Ballard Center (and especially during interviews with stakeholders involving delicate questions and responses). I am a naturally anxious person, and I generally stumble through my words fairly often. But I feel like my mind is cleared and I'm able to speak well pretty much only when I'm at work. I think this gift is a huge blessing that has helped our team a lot.

2.5 Guidance

Kelli: January 2025

Today, I said a prayer before our team meeting and very sincerely asked for us to receive guidance from the Spirit as we met together. The meeting led us to some really cool connections and ideas that I don't think we would have had otherwise.

2.6 Encouragement

Paige: February 2025

I had been feeling a little bit down because I was disappointed in how our pilot projects were turning out. I was sad because the ideas I was so excited about didn't seem to be picking up, and I was worried that our lab would end with nothing to show for it. After having a good chat with Franz and a lot of prayer and reflection, I felt reminded of what our lab has accomplished and everything we have learned. I have been able to see the way the Lord has shaped and helped our team grow in ways that are not tangible. While it would be

amazing to see our work directly aid the GSL, I can feel God softly reminding me that he is proud of what we have done, and that he is working through us in His way and His timing.

2.7 Growth

Paige: April 2025

As I reflect on our time working at the Ballard Center and in this Lab, the one thing that stands out to me more than anything else is the growth we have achieved together. Our abilities in communication, writing, problem-solving, leadership, and other professional skills have clearly grown as we have conducted interviews, written papers, and delivered presentations. However, I also have seen emotional and spiritual growth in our lab. I have seen us become more resilient, hopeful, and confident. I have seen us rely more on the Lord and better be able to see His hand in our work and in social impact generally. Over the past year, there have been many setbacks, stresses, and confusions. Yet I can see so clearly now how God has used these experiences to help refine us into the people we are today, equipped with the skills and mindset to go and do good.

3. Conclusion

Over the past two years, the Great Salt Lake Lab has seen God's hand push the important work forward. There were times of confusion or stress, but faith and teamwork always paved the way for solutions and understanding. This issue is a serious one—with a plethora of different solutions. However, as we looked to the Lord for guidance and prayerfully sought after His miracles, we saw the way ahead. We knew what was specifically in our power to improve the health of the lake. We were led piece by piece, not always knowing how the work would turn out. Because of the continuous hope we had in the Lord's plan for the lab, we could know with certainty that all things would work together for good. Our research, meetings, interviews, and plans all made our ideas fall into place, and through these experiences we can truly see that journey. We know now that the Lord is aware of the Great Salt Lake. He is aware of the citizens of Utah, and He is very aware of our desire to do good. And we know that He will always do good better.