

UTAH AUDUBON COUNCIL  
STATEMENT ON THE INLAND PORT

This morning we heard again about all the benefits and economic development opportunities the Inland Port presents for Utah and its capital city – more exports, jobs and tax revenues, new wealth and prosperity, pride and prestige. What we did not hear, what the public is not being told, is that this Port development presents grave risks to our communities, our health and our environment.

What is not said is there is not one port in the United States, inland or seaside, that is not polluting and polluted, that does not create more traffic, more noise, and diminished air and water quality. What we have not heard yet is how Inland Port enthusiasts intend to develop this concept without turning the Northwest Quadrant of Salt Lake City into an industrialized environmental sacrifice zone.

What we are hearing is that the Port creates opportunities for environmentally dirty and potentially dangerous developments like massive shipments of oil by rail, oil tank farms for crude oil storage, large increases of coal shipments through the urban Wasatch Front, new pipelines for transporting crude from tar sands and oil shale development, huge grain silos that present disorienting obstacles to migrating birds, heavily polluting diesel freight switchers running all night, and more.

The potential storage, even temporarily, of bulk materials such as petroleum products and chemicals is of great concern. Spills or releases of these materials could have serious consequences for the ecology of the area. A major release entering the wetlands or Great Salt Lake could be devastating for birds, brine shrimp, brine flies, macro-invertebrates, phyto-plankton, and other food sources that are important not only to birds but to economic interests like the brine shrimp industry.

Hydrologic impacts to water sources for the wetlands and Great Salt Lake, and geologic risks such as earthquake liquefaction are serious concerns that need to be carefully considered. Moreover, the Inland Port, by its nature, raises the risk of introduction of invasive species (such as plants, insects, rodents, and aquatics) which could have very serious negative impacts for the ecological balance of the area near the Lake and its wetlands and potentially aspects of the city's infrastructure.

SB 234, the Legislation passed in March creating the Port Authority, states that it shall strive to "respect and maintain sensitivity to the...natural environment" and to "improve air quality". Port proponents should respond openly to questions and concerns about if and how this can be done, and if and how negative impacts could be minimized, managed and mitigated, especially as the Port accommodates these industrial uses.

We recognize that it's early in the process, that there is a great deal of work ahead to plan out this Port concept, and that the Port will take years to develop. But

Utahns should be given assurances from the start - now and throughout this process – that the Port will be designed to be net-zero emissions, that storm water runoff will not pollute Great Salt Lake wetlands, that dark sky lighting and bird safe building principles will be adhered to.

The process to date has not been encouraging and does not give us much confidence going forward. It has been far from open and inclusive, too much an insiders' game conducted behind closed doors. In nearly all instances, representatives of the community and conservation organizations were not even in the room, much less at the table when decisions were made. Recommendations we made to legislators to substitute less aggressive Port legislation and to create a community-based Advisory Board to the Port Authority Board have been ignored.

This is in sharp contrast with Audubon's experience with Salt Lake City. In updating the Master Plan and changing the zoning in the NWQ, City planning staff worked with us and other landowners in the NWQ protect the Natural Areas and to create a buffer zone of less intense development within the developable zone.

Why? The Port would be built right next to fragile wetlands, mudflats and playas of Great Salt Lake's south shore. Millions of migrating birds rely on this habitat for nesting, resting or staging before they make long-distance journeys to their final destinations. This specialized habitat is one of the reasons Great Salt Lake is an important international conservation priority.

The Council and the Mayor's Office listened and supported these collaborative efforts. Many of the conservation measures we recommended were adopted into the zoning ordinance and NWQ Master Plan.

To their credit, legislative leaders did extend this protection in SB 234, incorporating in statute the City's "development line" and enshrining the ordinance and master plan (Section 11-58-204). It is critical that this provision in the law remains in effect permanently.

As we go forward, we will urge legislation that, similarly, will put into policy and statute additional protections for air and water quality, restrictions on building heights, and measures to reduce noise and light pollution.

We believe that the best way to prevent this Inland Port development from creating an environmental nightmare is to assure that it is done collaboratively, with openness and transparency, sound science and planning, consultation with knowledgeable stakeholders, and public participation. Utah citizens deserve no less.