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## **As Part of Utah Humanities' Statewide *Think Water Utah* project, *H2O Today in the Bear River Heritage Area* Receives Prestigious National AASLH Award of Excellence**

Wednesday, June 29, 2022 – As part of *Think Water Utah*, a statewide conversation on the critical topic of water presented by Utah Humanities and its partners, [Utah Humanities](http://UtahHumanities.org) congratulates the Hyrum City Museum and Bear River Heritage Area for receiving an Award of Excellence for *H2O Today in the Bear River Heritage Area* from The American Association for State and Local History.

The Award of Excellence is part of the AASLH Leadership in History Awards, the most prestigious national recognition for achievement in the preservation of state and local history.

This year, the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) is proud to confer 53 national awards honoring people, projects, exhibits, and publications. The winners represent the best in the field and provide leadership for the future of state and local history. The AASLH awards program was initiated in 1945 to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United States. The AASLH Leadership in History Awards not only honor significant achievement in the field of state and local history, but also bring public recognition of the opportunities for small and large organizations, institutions, and programs to make contributions in this arena. For more information about the Leadership in History Awards, contact AASLH at 615-320-3203, or go to [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org).

### ***H2O Today in the Bear River Heritage Area* Overview**

Presented as part of Utah Humanities' *Think Water Utah* project and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, the Bear River Heritage Area and Hyrum City Museum portion of the *H2O Today* tour featured additional local exhibitions and regional events that encompassed seven rural counties in northern Utah and southeastern Idaho.

*H2O Today in the Bear River Heritage Area* brought together thirty-three partners to host thirteen exhibits in twenty-three locations, twenty public programs and partner trainings, and a comprehensive educational passport program to localize the anchor exhibit, the Smithsonian's *H2O Today* at the Hyrum City Museum, which ran from April 7, 2021 to February 5, 2022.

Local exhibitions accompanied *H2O Today* as part of the larger project. *Blessed by Water, Worked by Hand* featured painted wire that transformed B&W photography into colored images exploring how water in the Bear River Heritage Area was important to people in the last century. *H2Oh! How Miraculous!* offered infographics that explain the wonders of water, its unique properties, and easy ways to conserve it.

With such a breadth of partners, activities, and resources, over a large geographic area, this project was a tremendous and bold undertaking and created a long-term impact on many communities throughout the region. Over 11,000 people engaged with this six-month-long project. The Bear River Heritage Area and Hyrum City Museum's *H2O Today* events are detailed in this [event publication](#).

The project leadership team consisted of four Bear River Heritage Area board members and local museum professionals, Jami J. Van Huss (Hyrum City Museum Director), Courtney Cochley (Hyrum City Museum Curator), Sharon Johnson (Cache DUP Museum Director), and Gail Griswold (Exhibition Design).

**Jami Van Huss, Director of the Hyrum City Museum**, "This project was a tremendous undertaking for us (Hyrum Museum) and our partner organizations, but we are thrilled with the long-term impact this will have on our community! Our area is teeming with wonderful cultural, educational, and heritage organizations that all face similar challenges of limited resources. Through collaboration, we were able to identify the missions and capacity of partners, find ways to be mutually supportive, offer additional resources of training and funding if needed, and then create maximized outcomes for many audiences. To be recognized nationally with such a prestigious honor is icing on the cake!"

**Megan van Frank, Director of the Center for Community Heritage at Utah Humanities**, coordinates the entire *Think Water Utah* project in Utah. In explaining the critical role Utah Humanities plays in bringing the Smithsonian to Utah, she says, "We work closely with exhibition host organizations to bring this experience to their communities, and the collaboration among national, state, and local organizations benefits everyone. The entire experience directly strengthens Utah museums and helps to preserve and share Utah history." She adds, "What the leadership team for the Bear River Heritage Area did with *H2O Today*, however, is extraordinary. They used their involvement in *Think Water Utah* not only to elevate the conversation about this critical resource in their region, but to invest in their network of local community organizations. Leveraging broad collaboration like this is very challenging but will continue to pay dividends. I could not be prouder of these partners for receiving such well-deserved national recognition!"

To learn more about the statewide tour, contact Utah Humanities at 801.359.9670 or visit the [Think Water Utah](#) portion of the [Utah Humanities website](#).

*H2O Today* has been made possible in Utah by Utah Humanities. *H2O Today* is organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. It was 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.

Many thanks for generous support from 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, 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 empowers Utahns to improve their communities through active engagement in the humanities. 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](http://www.utahhumanities.org).

#### **About Hyrum City Museum**

The Hyrum City Museum creates and maintains interpretive exhibits, provides educational activities, and actively collects and cares for artifacts and historical materials to provide a resource for visitors to make connections with local heritage and our community. We're focused on providing an inviting space for all visitors to feel a sense of belonging by learning, interacting with one another, and engaging with local heritage, which is sustainable and employs museum best practices. *The museum is open Tuesday through Thursday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and by appointment.* Activities, exhibits, and other resources are posted at [hyrumcitymuseum.org](http://hyrumcitymuseum.org), on Facebook, and Instagram.

#### **About AASLH**

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), a national nonprofit association, provides leadership and resources to help the history community thrive and make the past more meaningful for all people. AASLH serves the tens of thousands of history organizations, professionals, and volunteers around the country who help people of all ages develop critical thinking skills and understand how learning history helps society make progress toward justice. Through research, advocacy, and our field-leading professional development program, AASLH advances public history practice and connects history practitioners to critical issues in the field and to one another. For more information about AASLH visit [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org).

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