

“We Live in an Agricultural Death Zone”:

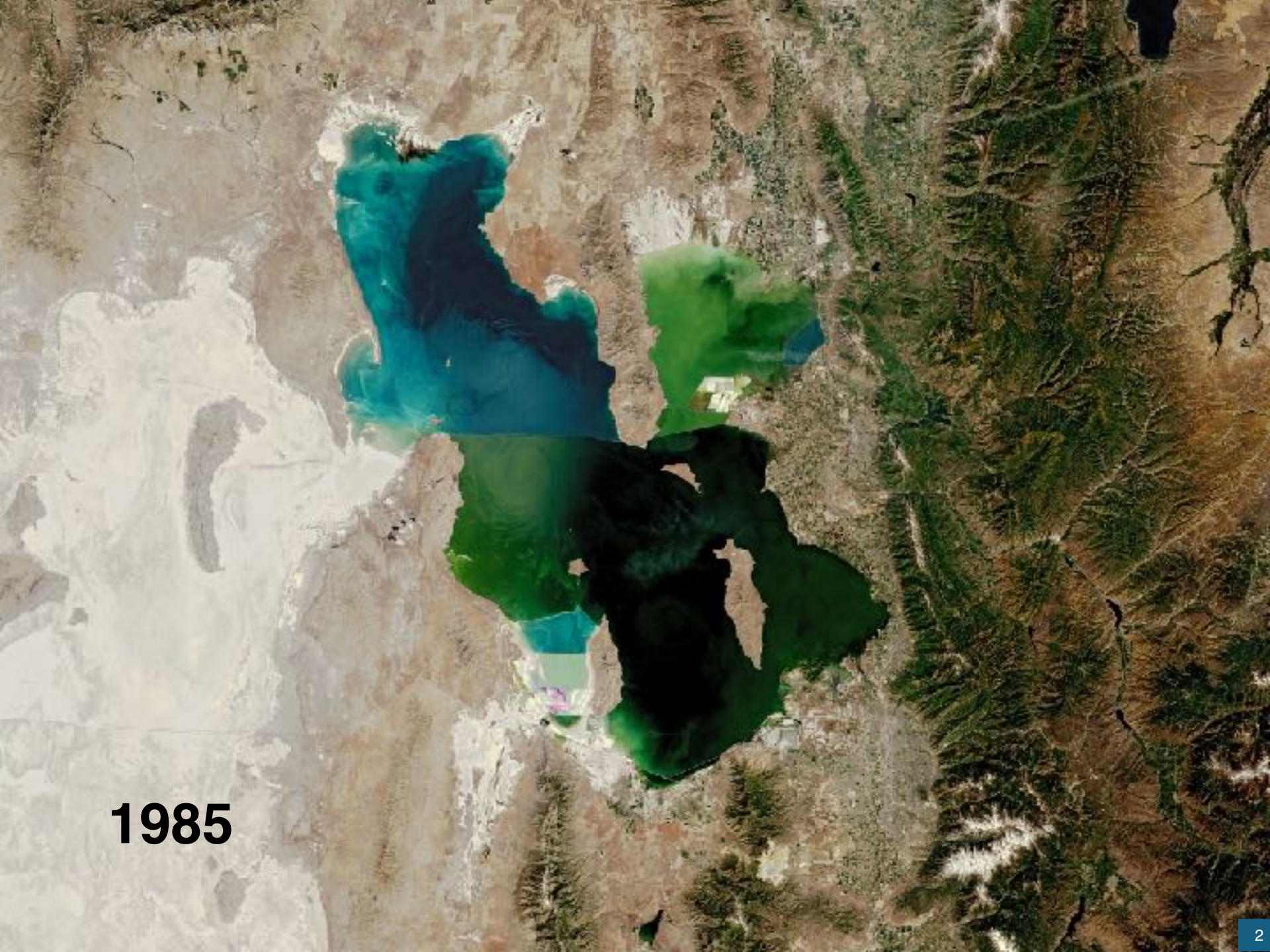
Perspectives on Preserving Farmer and Lake Livelihoods in the Great Salt Lake Basin



BRYN WATKINS - MAY 7, 2025

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY AND THE JANET QUINNEY LAWSON INSTITUTE FOR LAND, WATER, & AIR

1985





2022

...so what?



Respiratory health

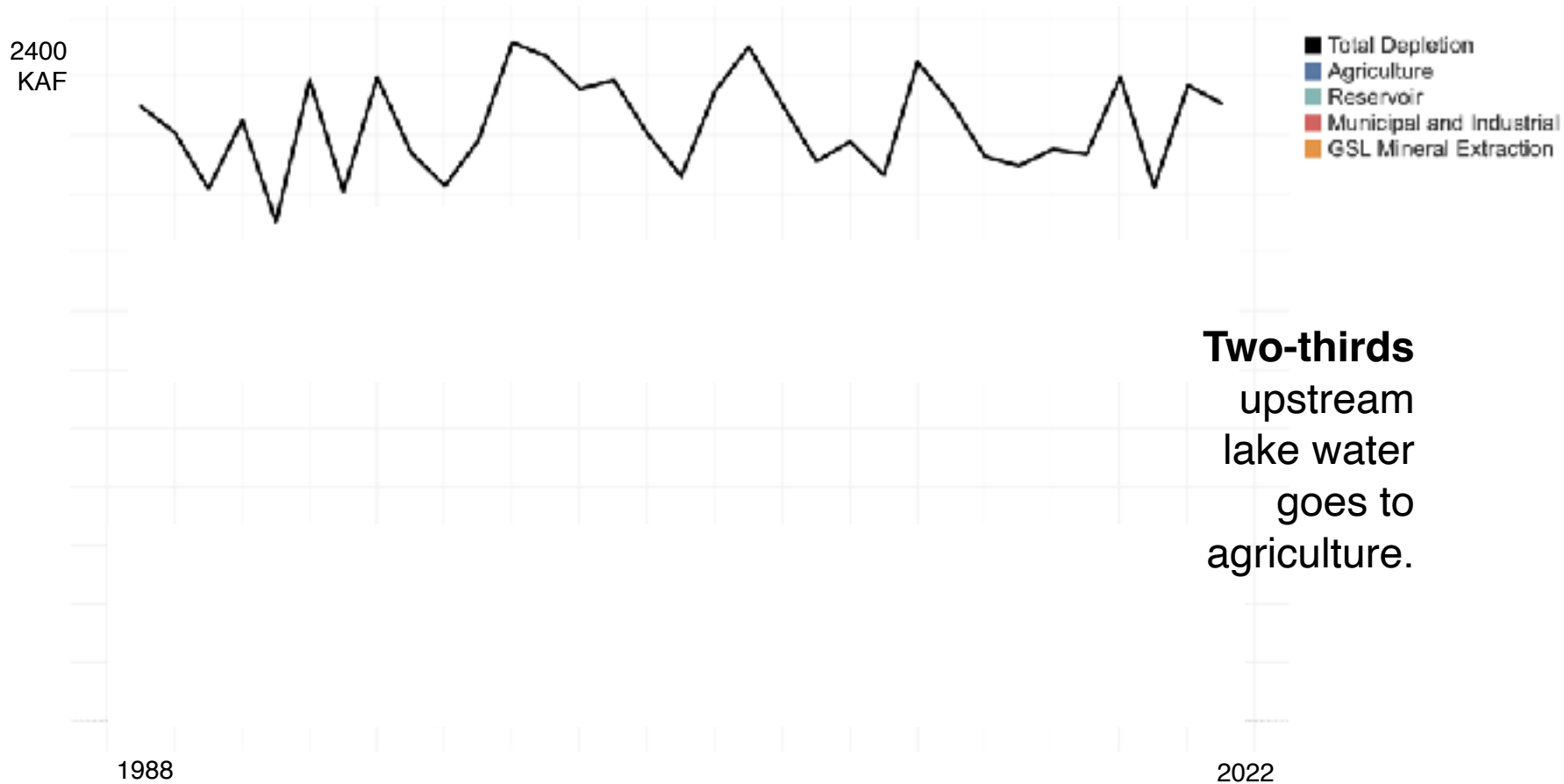


Avian biodiversity



Economic stability

Human Water Use By Type



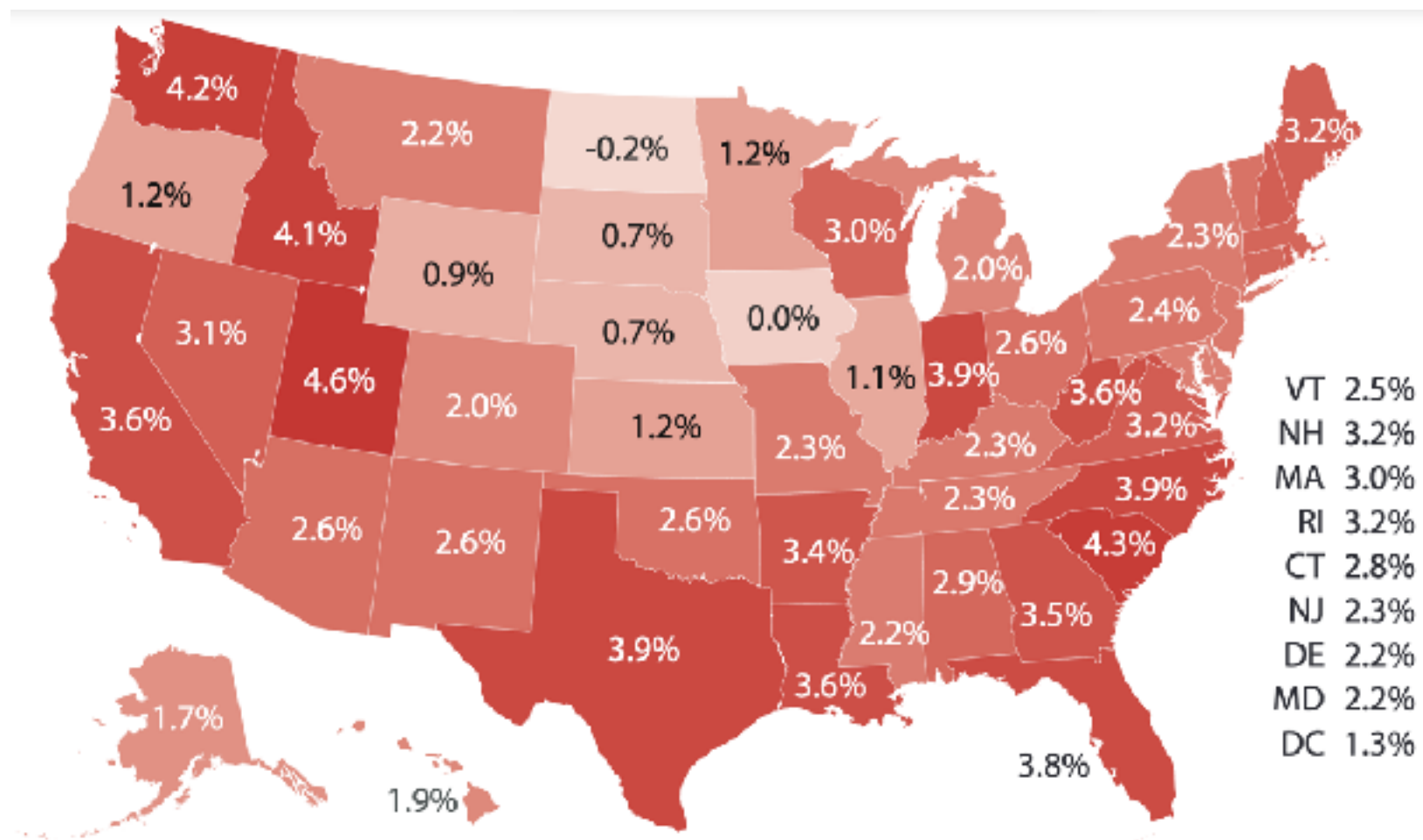
1985



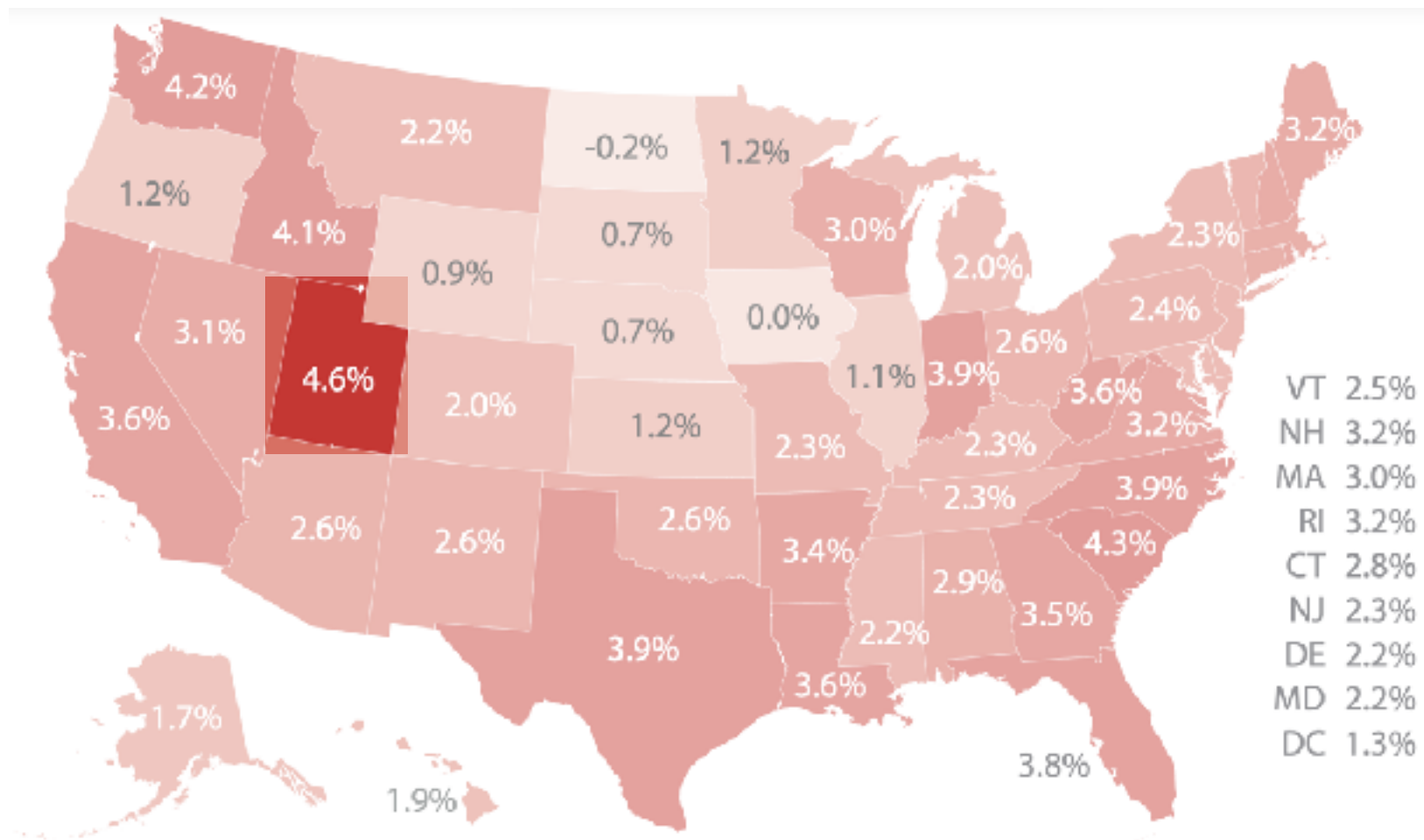


2022

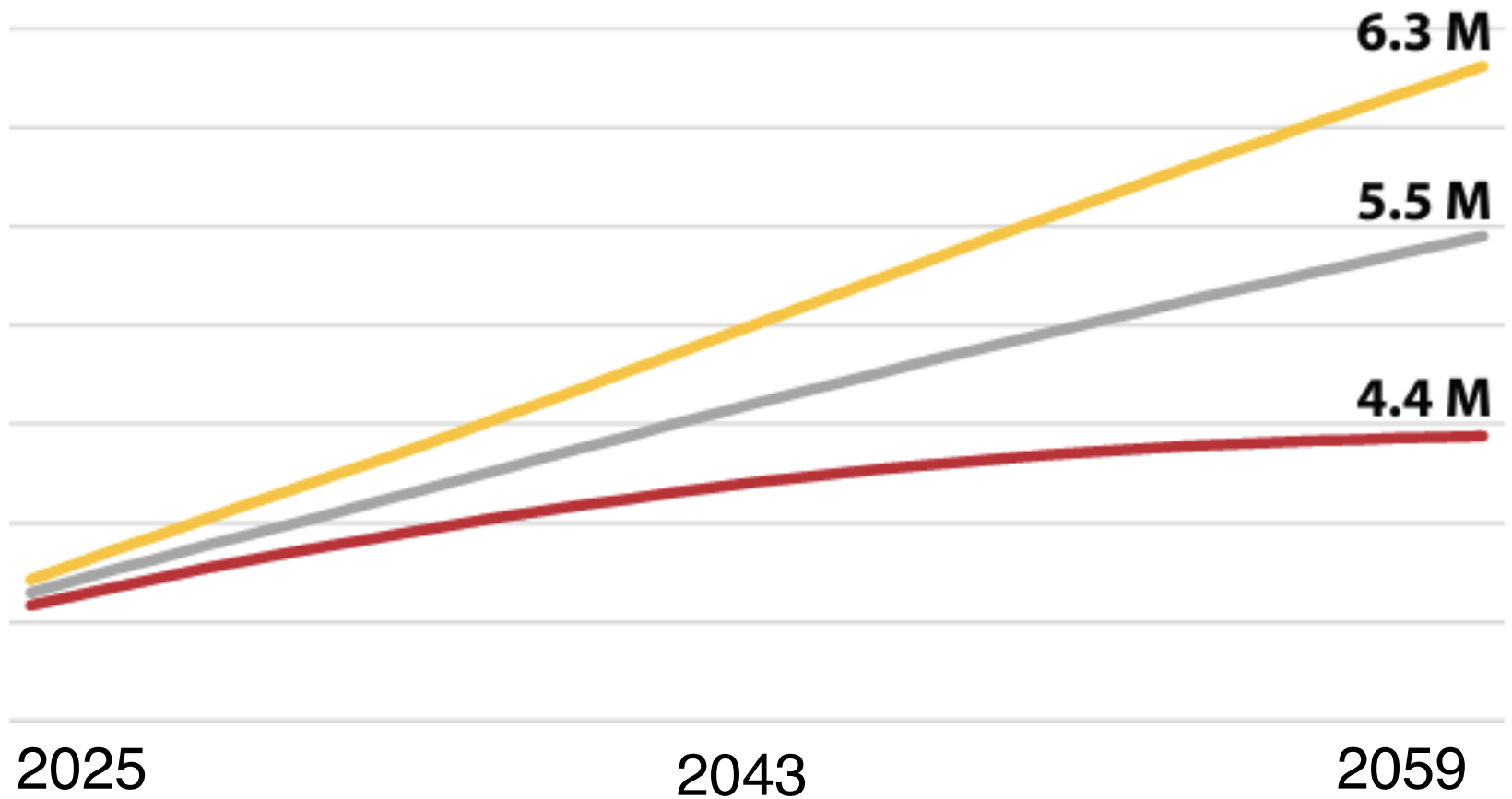
Real GDP Growth, 2024



Real GDP Growth, 2024



Total Utah Population Forecast



...where will this growth happen?

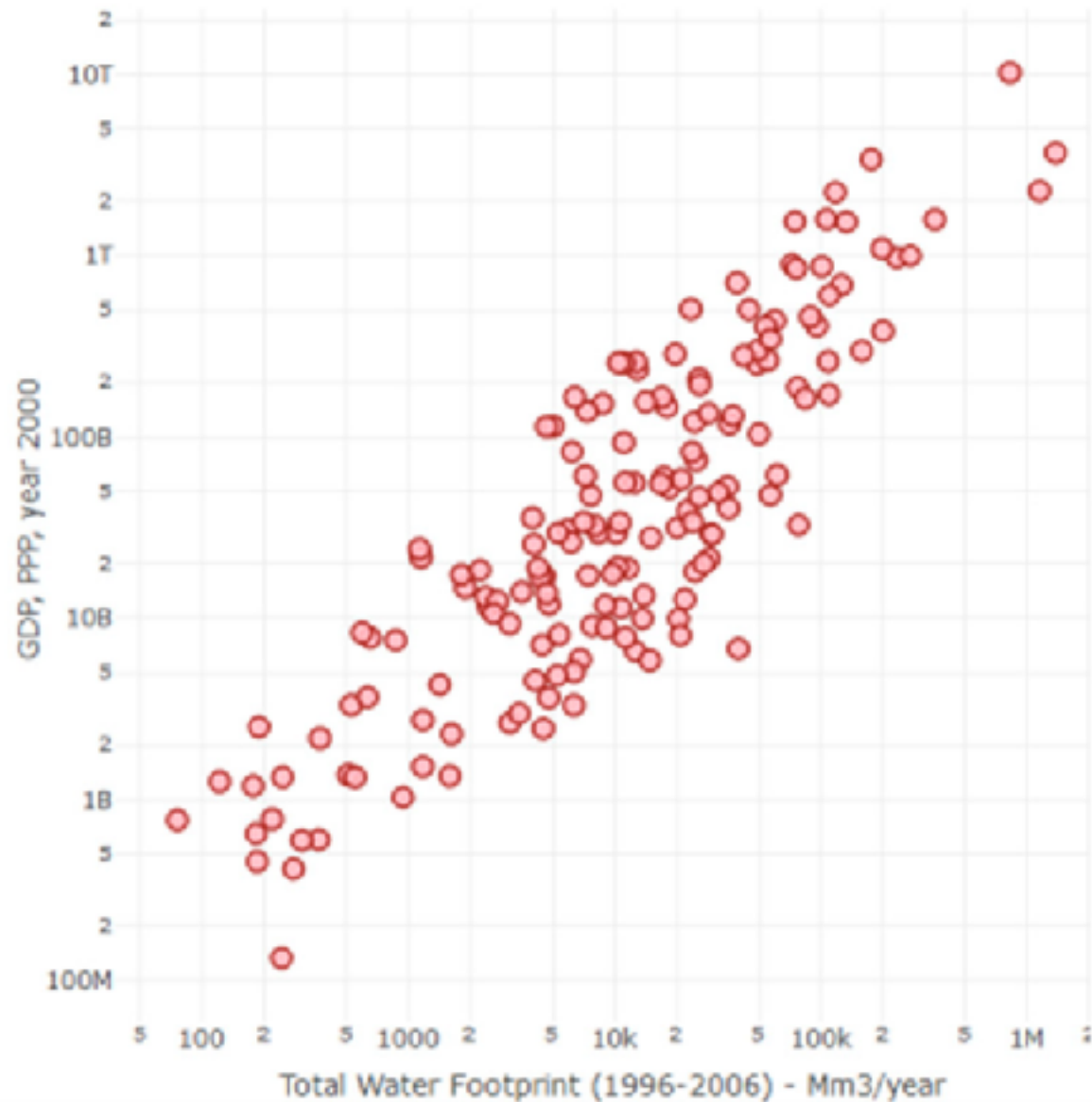
27,900 houses
per year

for 30 years



2022

Absolute GDP vs. Total Water Footprint





Farmers are at the center of both the ecological crisis and economic boom.

Research Questions



Great Salt Lake



Land Transitions



Intervention

Participants

15 interviews,
20 participants

Bear, Weber, or Jordan

Primarily alfalfa

54.7 years old

Pseudonyms

Great Salt Lake



Emotional connection locally



Scapegoated by prevailing
narratives



Responsible for feeding Utah



Scapegoating Food Systems



Joseph Abbott,
alfalfa and onions,
Weber River Basin



Land Transitions

Insolvency



Ecological Consequences



Institutional Skepticism and
Distrust



Loss of Purpose





Insolvency



Various,
alfalfa, cows, and corn,
GSL Basin





Loss of Purpose



Bill Jensen,
alfalfa,
Bear River Basin





Intervention

Economic Growth



Developmental Growth



Coerced Economic
Orientation



Growth



Bob Carter,
alfalfa,
Jordan River Basin





Coercion



Brian Glover,
alfalfa,
Weber River Basin



Results



“We want to
take care of
things.”



“As you have
more **growth**
around you, it gets
harder.”



“We **can’t**
compete.”

Beyond Growth

Agnosticism

Priorities

Reconciliation

Conclusion



An aerial photograph of a coastal area. On the left, a dark blue body of water (the ocean) meets a lighter, sandy or silty area. A river or estuary flows from the top right towards the bottom center, curving along the coastline. The land is a mix of brownish-green fields and darker, forested areas. The text 'Recommendations' is overlaid in white, with a thick purple horizontal line underneath it.

Recommendations

Protect farmers

Prioritize high-density
housing

Strengthen local
exchange

Slow growth

Thank you!

Questions?

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