

# Directors Message

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Moonshine Arch - Uintah County

While scientists, communities, and individuals around the globe grapple with how we work and live in a world with the SARS-CoV 2 virus, big questions about agriculture and natural resources have not gone away. Answering questions about the ecosystems and economies that sustain us requires accurate and timely data, so the work of Utah Agricultural Experiment Station researchers does not stop.

In Utah, many of the big questions about natural resource and land management involve public lands because they comprise about 75% of the state. That places Utah third behind Alaska (95.8%) and Nevada (87.7%) in a ranking by the percentage of land within the states' boundaries that is owned and managed by the federal government.

It is an oversimplification to think that the challenges and opportunities of living with and managing public land are strictly Western U.S. issues, but the 12 states with the highest percentages of public land are all in the West. Faculty members and students at each state's land-grant university and agricultural experiment station apply scientific rigor to examining challenges and opportunities in each state and region.

Researchers at Utah State University are at work on dozens of projects focused on different facets of managing public lands, some of which are highlighted in this issue of *Utah Science*. I invite you to learn more about the work they are doing to fulfill a portion of our responsibility to serve the people of Utah.

The federal government owns and manages land in every state, but the 12 states with the most public land within their borders are all in the West. A region so vast and with such broad variations in geography, geology, climate, ecosystems, economies, and communities provides iconic landscapes and formidable challenges for local residents and management agencies.

Good policy and management need a foundation in good science and in 2018, the Utah Legislature funded the Utah State University Public Lands Initiative to focus research on issues related to managing these important landscapes. The funds are managed by the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station and support an array of projects across several disciplines as faculty and student researchers seek to discover and understand ways to manage these important resources well with narrowly prescribed policies and practices.

Some of those projects—part of USU's Public Lands Initiative funded in part by the Utah Legislature—are profiled in this issue and are uniquely suited to doing cross-disciplinary research on issues in their state.