

Utah Receives Federal Investment to Enclose the Historic Strawberry High Line Canal

A \$100 million federal investment in Utah will help replace the century-old open canal with a modern enclosed pipeline, improving public safety and conserving water for Utah and Juab County

OREM, Utah — The Central Utah Water Conservancy District (CUWCD) today expressed its deep appreciation to the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for providing \$100 million in federal funding to support the enclosure of the Strawberry High Line Canal as part of the Nebo Regional Water Project.

“The Strawberry High Line Canal has served our communities faithfully for a hundred years. This federal investment will ensure that legacy continues for generations to come — in a safer, more efficient, and more sustainable way,” said Gene Shawcroft, general manager of the Central Utah Water Conservancy District. “We are deeply grateful to President Donald Trump, Doug Burgum, Andrea Travnicek, and Scott Cameron for recognizing the importance of this project to the people of Utah.”

This landmark investment, made possible through Section 50501 of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act signed into law by President Trump on July 4, 2025, will help transform one of Utah’s oldest and most vital water delivery systems into a modern, enclosed pipeline that will improve public safety, conserve water, and position southern Utah County and eastern Juab County for sustainable growth.

The District also gratefully acknowledges the strong support of Utah’s House congressional delegation and Senators Mike Lee and John Curtis, whose advocacy for Western water infrastructure made this historic investment possible.

About the Federal Investment

Section 50501 of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which was supported by the entire Utah delegation, appropriates \$1 billion for construction and associated activities that restore or increase the capacity or use of existing conveyance facilities constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation. The funds, which remain available through September 30, 2034, are specifically directed to modernize the Bureau’s aging water infrastructure across the Western states.

The Strawberry High Line Canal enclosure, which is part of the Nebo Regional Water Project, is an ideal candidate for funding under Section 50501 because it is a federally owned conveyance facility originally constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation (then the U.S. Reclamation Service) and completed in 1917 as part of the Strawberry Valley Project. The enclosure of the canal will directly restore and increase the capacity and use of this existing federal facility.

The statute provides that funds appropriated under Section 50501 are non-reimbursable and not subject to matching or cost-sharing requirements. This means the federal investment comes with no repayment obligation to the District, the Strawberry High Line Canal Company, or local water users — a significant benefit that will help keep costs manageable for the communities served by the project.

A Century of Service — and a Pressing Need for Modernization

The Strawberry High Line Canal is a cornerstone of the Strawberry Valley Project, one of the earliest Bureau of Reclamation projects in the West. Built by the U.S. Reclamation Service and completed in 1917, the federally owned canal begins at the base of Spanish Fork Canyon and winds southwest approximately 17 miles along the base of the mountain, delivering water from Salem through Payson, Spring Lake, and Santaquin to Goshen and Genola. The full canal system, including laterals, extends approximately 77 miles, with about 62 miles concrete-lined. The water delivered through the canal originates primarily from Strawberry Reservoir, transported through a 3.8-mile tunnel through the Wasatch Divide from the Colorado River Basin to the Bonneville Basin — a feat of engineering conceived by pioneer settlers in the late 19th century and brought to fruition by the federal Reclamation Service in the early 20th century. Each year, the Strawberry High Line Canal Company delivers an average of 56,300 acre-feet of water to agricultural and municipal users across the region.

After more than a century of continuous service, the canal's aging concrete and reinforcing infrastructure has significantly deteriorated. Exposed reinforcing rods, cracking concrete, and persistent seepage losses threaten both the canal's structural integrity and the safety of nearby neighborhoods, which have grown increasingly close to the canal as urbanization has expanded across southern Utah County. The canal's allocated capacity of 35,000 acre-feet from the Strawberry Valley Project, supplemented by water from the Central Utah Project and local sources, serves a region that is among the fastest-growing in the nation.

The Nebo Regional Water Project

The Nebo Regional Water Project is a comprehensive, multi-component initiative developed by CUWCD in close partnership with the Strawberry High Line Canal Company, the Strawberry Water Users Association, the East Juab Water Conservancy District, Utah County, and cities throughout the region. The project's central component is the enclosure of the Strawberry High Line Canal in a 72-inch-diameter, approximately 18-mile-long enclosed steel pipeline.

The project is being developed jointly with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Department of the Interior's Central Utah Project Completion Act Office, and the Utah Reclamation Mitigation and Conservation Commission, all of which are serving as Joint Lead Agencies for the environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act. This collaboration has demonstrated strong community support.

The enclosure of the canal will deliver multiple critical benefits:

Public Safety: Replacing the deteriorating open canal with an enclosed pipeline will eliminate flood risks and other safety hazards posed by the aging infrastructure to nearby neighborhoods and communities.

Water Conservation: Enclosing the canal will prevent water losses from seepage and evaporation, making the most of a limited and precious water supply in one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation.

Water Quality: Pressurizing and enclosing the canal will produce cleaner water by eliminating exposure to sediment, debris, and contaminants that enter an open channel.

Future Adaptability: The enclosed pipeline will provide a more efficient and adaptable water delivery system that supports current agricultural use while positioning the region to meet future residential, agricultural, and community water needs. A proposed South Utah Valley Regional Water Treatment Plant in Salem will ultimately draw from the new pipeline to deliver potable water supplies to growing communities from Salem to Juab County.

The Nebo Regional Water Project, with an estimated total cost exceeding \$1 billion, will be funded through a combination of federal investment and local financing. The non-reimbursable federal funding provided under Section 50501 significantly reduces the financial burden on local water users and taxpayers. The project is anticipated to be completed by 2032.

Acknowledgments

The District recognizes the indispensable partnership of the Strawberry High Line Canal Company, whose shareholders and leadership have worked collaboratively with CUWCD for years to advance this project. The vision and perseverance of the pioneer settlers who conceived and built the original Strawberry Valley Project more than a century ago remain the foundation upon which this next chapter of water stewardship is built.

About Central Utah Water Conservancy District: Founded in 1964, Central Utah Water's mission is to responsibly plan for the future by developing, delivering, and efficiently using our limited water resources. The District does this through the operation and management of the vast Central Utah Project and a network of facilities including water treatment plants, major storage reservoirs, and extensive conveyance systems. For more information, visit cuwcd.gov.