



# UTAH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

# SHERIFF

MICHAEL L. SMITH

TO: US Forest Service

August 30, 2024

RE: Mount Timpanogos Emerald Lake Shelter

The purpose of this letter is to urge the US Forest Service to allow the shelter located at Emerald Lake on Mount Timpanogos to be repaired. The shelter was damaged in heavy snow fall during the winter of 2023. For decades this shelter has stood as a place of refuge to hikers who experience the harsh and at times unpredictable weather patterns encountered at high elevation on Mount Timpanogos.

This shelter holds significant meaning to the Utah County Sheriff's Office (UCSO). As per state law, the UCSO is responsible for managing all search and rescue operations in the county. Many of the search and rescue calls we respond to occur on Mount Timpanogos. As you know, Mount Timpanogos is designated as a wilderness area, but it is also in close proximity to an urban area. Due to this, we have seen and continue to see a rise in the use of this area.

To mitigate the number of search and rescue calls on Mount Timpanogos, the UCSO formed a volunteer group who provide aid to hikers. This group is known as the Timpanogos Emergency Response Team (TERT). This team spends time at several locations on Timpanogos including the Emerald Lake Shelter which we also refer to as High Camp. TERT will average 10 weekends at High Camp during the warm weather season and render aid to numerous hikers. The aid they render mitigates the need for a more robust response from search and rescue, typically logging thousands of volunteer hours on Mount Timpanogos each season.

We see this effort as a protection of the wilderness area as calls for large numbers of rescuers, equipment, and medical helicopter landings are mitigated. The Shelter is a known gathering point and place of refuge. It holds historical value to those who utilize this area of wilderness. It is utilized by TERT and many other hikers who find themselves in peril.

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Pleasant Grove Forest Service Ranger District held a meeting to discuss the condition and future of the Emerald Lake Shelter. In that meeting it was determined that the shelter was: 1) a place of traditional public use and expectation, 2) historically significant, eligible for national registration and 3) a structure that contributes to the experience of the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness Area. They also proposed a plan to make significant improvements to the shelter.

On a personal note, the Shelter has historical significance to me. I grew up in Pleasant Grove Utah, which is located in the foothills on the west side of Mt. Timpanogos. I have hiked Mt. Timpanogos many times. The first time I was approximately 8 years old and made the hike with my parents. On each of these excursions, the Shelter has played a role. It has been a gathering spot and place of refuge. I recall stories from my youth of generations prior to mine referring to the Shelter. It has held and still holds significant historical value to the many generations who have made the trek to the shelter.

For the reasons outlined by the Pleasant Grove Ranger District as well as the reasons I have outlined in this letter, I urge you to repair and restore the Emerald Lake Shelter. This shelter does have historical significance to our community as well as providing a base for our efforts to mitigate large scale rescue operations in the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness Area.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Mike Smith