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First name: Helen

Last name: Knipe

Organization:

Title:

Comments: September 1, 2024

To: US Forest Service

Re: Emerald Lake Shelter Reconstruction Project #66370

I strongly support the proposed reconstruction of the Emerald Lake Shelter on Mount Timpanogos. This structure holds immense historical and cultural significance for the local community and the many hikers who cherish the unique experience of ascending this iconic peak. The Emerald Lake Shelter is a vital cultural resource that embodies the spirit and history of the Mount Timpanogos hike. As such, it aligns with the Wilderness Act's fifth component of wilderness character, "Other Features of Value," which emphasizes preserving historical and cultural resources within wilderness areas. Reconstructing the shelter would honor its historical significance while ensuring it continues serving future generations of hikers.

The Emerald Lake Shelter is more than just a practical refuge for hikers; it is a vital part of Utah's history and heritage. Dedicated in 1960, this shelter stands as a testament to the collective efforts of multiple community stakeholders, including Utah County, the U.S. Forest Service, Provo City, the Provo Chamber of Commerce, and Brigham Young University, to help protect the many visitors to Mt. Timpanogos and help preserve its alpine environment by addressing sanitation issues. The materials and construction methods used, such as hauling materials by packhorses and constructing the shelter in the harsh alpine climate, reflect the determination and spirit of the time. The shelter symbolizes the era's dedication to making the outdoors accessible while preserving the landscape's natural beauty.

The Mount Timpanogos hike is unlike any other. For generations, it has been a beloved tradition for Utahns and visitors alike, serving as a rite of passage for outdoor enthusiasts. The shelter has played a crucial role in this tradition, providing protection from the elements and serving as a milestone for hikers who aspire to reach the summit. The Emerald Lake Shelter was essential to the Mt. Timpanogos community hike for its last, most popular nine years. A brief search of historical newspapers shows that it quickly became an important refuge and resource for logistics and injury mitigation for the Mt. Timpanogos community hike. Now, 64 years after it was dedicated, it has become a historical touchstone that connects the past with the present. Its construction predates the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the later designation of the Timpanogos Wilderness in 1984, anchoring it firmly in a pre-wilderness era where community and accessibility were paramount.

Importantly, the Emerald Lake Shelter should be recognized as a critical cultural resource, as defined under the Wilderness Act's fifth component of wilderness character: "Other Features of Value." This aspect encompasses resources of scientific, educational, scenic, and historical value, which are essential in maintaining the integrity and uniqueness of wilderness areas. With its rich history and longstanding association with the Mount Timpanogos community hike, the shelter meets this criterion. Its preservation would maintain the wilderness character and enhance the cultural narrative integral to the Timpanogos hiking experience for decades.

Abandoning the Emerald Lake Shelter to decay would have significant negative consequences for both the historical legacy of the Mount Timpanogos hike and the safety of those who undertake it. As the shelter deteriorates, we risk losing a vital connection to the past, erasing a landmark that has served as a testament to the community's dedication to outdoor heritage and cultural preservation. Moreover, with the shelter, hikers could have a critical refuge in a location known for unpredictable and sometimes dangerous weather conditions. The loss of this structure would diminish the overall wilderness experience, stripping away an essential part of the

mountain's history, the community's cultural identity, and a resource that helps minimize the environmental impact of helicopter rescues, which are far more intrusive to the wilderness area.

Rebuilding the Emerald Lake Shelter would preserve a vital piece of our local heritage and continue to provide a safe haven for hikers in the years to come. I understand that this reconstruction poses challenges due to the wilderness designation of the area. However, the historical value of the shelter, its irreplaceable role in the Timpanogos hiking experience, and its importance to public safety far outweigh these challenges. Including cultural resources as an invaluable component of wilderness character allows for the thoughtful preservation of such structures, ensuring that they continue to serve both practical and historical purposes.

The unique nature of the Mount Timpanogos hike-its blend of natural beauty, rigorous physical challenge, and deep connection to the community-makes it an essential part of Utah's outdoor culture. The Emerald Lake Shelter has been and can continue to be, an integral part of this experience. By supporting its reconstruction, the US Forest Service would honor the legacy of the Mt. Timpanogos hike history and ensure that this piece of history remains accessible to all who undertake the journey to Mount Timpanogos.

Recognizing the Emerald Lake Shelter as a significant cultural resource aligns with the Wilderness Act's fifth component, "Other Features of Value," which acknowledges the importance of preserving historical and cultural resources within wilderness areas. By prioritizing this reconstruction, the Forest Service would protect wilderness character and safeguard a vital piece of our shared cultural heritage.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Helen Knipe

Sources

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Utah Office of Historic Preservation Historic Site Form Emerald Lake Shelter

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