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Comments: Mount Timpanogos, Utah by Gary Macfarlane

Help reclaim the wild in the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness

The U.S. Forest Service is taking public comment on the Emerald Lake Shelter Reconstruction Project—a proposal it claims would improve the wilderness character of the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness along the Wasatch Front in Utah. In reality, the agency's proposal would seriously degrade this rugged, high elevation Wilderness.

The Forest Service proposes to use helicopters and other motorized equipment to reconstruct the Emerald Lake Shelter, a sheet metal Quonset hut in the Wilderness that was damaged by snow during 2021/2022.

Your comments are needed by September 13 to convince the Forest Service to adopt an alternative that lets the Wilderness be wild by allowing the hut to fade with time, or that uses wilderness-compatible means to remove the hut's remnants.

This metal Quonset hut with a cemented rock retaining wall was finished in 1960, and the Mount Timpanogos Scenic Area was established in 1961. In 1984, Congress designated the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness. Once this designation occurred, the Forest Service became responsible for ensuring that the area remain wild and primarily shaped by nature.

The Wilderness Act prohibits structures, with a very narrow exception for those that are the minimum necessary to preserve Wilderness—a high bar to achieve. This out-of-place hut not only detracts from the Wilderness, but also fails to meet this Wilderness Act requirement.

Rather than adhere to the Wilderness Act, the Forest Service turns the Act on its head by stating this blight is part of the area's wilderness character and needs to be rebuilt/updated to protect the Wilderness. This is absurd!

The proposal includes helicopter flights, motorized equipment, cement mixers, and other motorized tools. Incidentally, the original hut was supposedly built without helicopters or motorized access, and most supplies were packed in.

The natural deterioration of structures is part of Wilderness—it is evidence of untrammelled and timeless natural processes reclaiming the Wilderness from temporary human occupation. Structures should be removed if that can be done in a manner consistent with wilderness principles and if the impact from removing the structure is less than the impact from leaving the structure. This hut is not listed on the national register of historic places, though it has been proposed for listing. Even if listed, it could be documented and allowed to fade into the Wilderness.

Speak up by September 13 for the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness. Submit your comments at the following link: <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=66370>

Please write in your own words, but consider making the following points:

The Forest Service's first responsibility is to protect the wild character of the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness, rather than any structures such as the Quonset hut, which degrades the area and is not necessary to administer the Wilderness.

The Forest Service's own wilderness policy recognizes that a structure is not needed for visitor use, stating that visitors must be prepared on their own to face "inherent risks of adverse weather conditions, isolation, physical hazards, and lack of rapid communications, and that search and rescue may not be as rapid as expected in an urban setting."

The Forest Service's proposal to use helicopters and build a new improved structure is antithetical to Wilderness. It is a perversion of the Wilderness Act to declare such a structure is part of the wilderness character of the area when the Act clearly precludes structures.

The Forest Service must adopt an alternative that lets the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness be wild by allowing the metal remnants of the Quonset hut to fade with time, or by using wilderness-compatible means, such as non-motorized/non-mechanized tools, to remove it.