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Comments: The U.S. Forest Service's Emerald Lake Shelter Reconstruction Project which claims it would improve the wilderness character of the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness along the Wasatch Front in Utah would, in reality, seriously degrade this rugged, high elevation Wilderness.

I am writing in hopes to help 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 sheet-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 using helicopters, motorized equipment, cement mixers, and other motorized tools to reconstruct the sheet metal Quonset hut in the Wilderness that was damaged by snow during 2021/2022. 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 untrammeled 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.

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.