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Comments: Please accept my comments regarding the Emerald Lake Shelter Reconstruction Project proposed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) within the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness along the Wasatch Front in Utah.

The Emerald Lake Shelter, a sheet metal Quonset hut, was damaged by snow during the winter of 2021/2022. While it was added before Congress designated the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness in 1984, the Wilderness Act strictly prohibits structures within wildernesses. In addition, this structure doesn't even meet the very narrow exception for structures that are the minimum necessary to preserve wilderness and instead detracts from the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness.

It is therefore perplexing how the USFS can argue that this man-made structure fits within the definition of wilderness, let alone how it is part of the area's wilderness character and needs to be rebuilt/updated to "protect" the Wilderness. The Forest Service's first responsibility is to protect the wild character of the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness, not structures such as the Quonset hut, which is not necessary to administer the Wilderness.

The proposal, as it is written, is to use helicopters and other motorized equipment to reconstruct the shelter. Setting aside the fact that using machinery in the Wilderness directly goes against the tenets of the Wilderness Act, it is ironic what the USFS is proposing since the original hut was built without helicopters or motorized access, and most supplies were packed in. That notwithstanding, 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 natural deterioration of man-made structures within wildernesses is an essential part of Wilderness. It is evidence of untrammeled and timeless natural processes reclaiming the Wilderness from our occupation and footprint. 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.

I would ask that the USFS not move forward with the proposed repair/reconstruction of the shelter and instead consider one of two options:

A) Allow the wilderness to consume the structure and reclaim the area that the shelter occupies by letting it slowly fade with time.

or

B) Remove the shelter in a manner consistent with wilderness principles and only if the impact from removing the structure is less than the impact from leaving the structure.

There are better uses for the Forest Service's stretched budget than repairing a structure that should either fade away or be removed.

Thank you for allowing me to comment on this important issue and for taking the time to consider my remarks when making your decision.