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Comments: I am writing to strongly oppose the Forest Service's proposal to reconstruct a dilapidated sheet metal Quonset hut within the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness along the Wasatch Front in northern Utah. The Forest Service is currently accepting public comments on this plan, which would involve the use of helicopters, jackhammers, cement mixers, and other motorized equipment-an extraordinary level of intrusion into one of Utah's most iconic Wilderness areas.

The 20 x 18-foot metal Quonset hut, with a cemented rock retaining wall, was originally built in 1960. It was used to provide shelter and restrooms for an annual public group hike that began in 1912. However, after 8,000 people attempted the hike in 1969 and caused extensive impacts, the Forest Service wisely asked organizers to end the event. Roughly 15 years later, in 1984, Congress designated the area as Wilderness. Over the ensuing decades, the hut deteriorated, and during the winter of 2021-2022, it finally collapsed under snow.

The Forest Service now claims that rebuilding this useless and damaged structure-using motorized equipment-would enhance the area's wilderness character. That assertion is both contradictory and deeply troubling.

The Wilderness Act prohibits structures in Wilderness areas, with a narrow exception only for those that are the minimum necessary to preserve Wilderness. This hut not only fails to meet that high bar, it actively detracts from the wild, untrammeled character that the Wilderness Act seeks to protect. Rebuilding the hut using modern industrial equipment directly violates the core values of Wilderness and sets a dangerous precedent.

Only the "no action" alternative truly honors the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness. The Forest Service's Environmental Assessment (EA) improperly rejected alternatives involving traditional skills-the same methods used to originally build the structure-without a thorough analysis. The EA also lacks critical information, such as how many helicopter flights would be required and the full scope and duration of the project. It dismisses pack stock use based on vague statements from unnamed sources, ignoring the fact that the Forest Service itself maintains wilderness-trained stock and personnel.

The natural deterioration of human structures is not a problem in Wilderness-it is part of the story. It is evidence of nature reclaiming its space from human intervention. Where appropriate, deteriorated structures can be removed using non-motorized methods, but only if that removal has less impact than leaving them in place. In this case, the metal remnants of the hut could be allowed to fade naturally, or removed by hand without violating wilderness character. The remaining rock and cement materials could also be dismantled using traditional tools and techniques.

This hut is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, although it has been proposed for listing. Even if eventually listed, the structure could still be documented and respectfully allowed to return to the landscape-consistent with Wilderness principles.

For such a significant intrusion, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is warranted. The proposal to deploy helicopters and heavy equipment in a designated Wilderness demands comprehensive environmental review-not a rushed and inadequate EA.

The Forest Service must prioritize its duty to protect the wilderness character of Mount Timpanogos. I urge you to reject the reconstruction proposal and instead adopt a wilderness-compatible approach grounded in the values and legal requirements of the Wilderness Act.

Sincerely,