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Comments: Wilderness Watch

Mount Timpanogos by Gary Macfarlane

Help stop a construction project in the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness

The Forest Service is accepting public comments on its proposal to reconstruct a useless, dilapidated, sheet metal Quonset hut in the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness along the Wasatch Front in northern Utah that was damaged by snow during the winter of 2021-2022. As part of the construction plan, the agency would invade the Wilderness with helicopters, jackhammers, cement mixers, and other motorized equipment. Absurdly the Forest Service claims that rebuilding the structure would improve the area's wilderness character.

Your letters are needed by July 25 to protect the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness from the Forest Service's foolhardy project. We must convince the agency to let the Wilderness be wild by allowing the hut to fade with time, or by using wilderness-compatible means to remove the collapsed hut's remnants.

The 20 x 18-foot metal Quonset hut with a cemented rock retaining wall was originally completed in 1960. Prior to the area's 1984 wilderness designation, the hut provided shelter and restrooms for an annual public group hike that was first organized in 1912. The hut was used during this annual hike until the event's excessive impacts caused the Forest Service to ask hike organizers to end it after 8,000 people attempted to reach Mount Timpanogos' summit during the 1969 group hike. So, the group hike ended, and about 15 years later the area became part of the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness. The hut's condition deteriorated over the decades and collapsed during the winter of 2021-2022.

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.

Only the "no action" alternative would honor the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness because alternatives that used traditional skills, like those used to build the structure, were rejected for consideration in the draft Environmental Assessment.

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