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Comments: As a concerned citizen and advocate for the integrity of our nation's wilderness areas, I am writing to express serious concerns about the Forest Service's proposed Emerald Lake Shelter Reconstruction Project in the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness.

First and foremost, the Forest Service's primary responsibility is to protect the wild character of designated wilderness areas, as mandated by the Wilderness Act and reinforced by the agency's own wilderness policies. These policies clearly state that structures are not necessary for visitor use and that visitors should come prepared to face the "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." This foundational principle of wilderness stewardship must guide any decision regarding the shelter.

Rather than reconstructing or repairing the non-conforming Quonset hut, the Forest Service must seriously analyze and adopt a more appropriate alternative: allow the remaining metal debris to naturally fade with time, or remove it using wilderness-compatible methods. The rock and cement portions of the structure could also be carefully dismantled and left to fade back into the landscape. The agency's claim that the structure cannot be dismantled or repaired without motorized equipment is unsubstantiated and inconsistent with historical precedent - the Forest Service originally built the shelter without motorized tools or helicopter support.

Furthermore, the Environmental Assessment (EA) lacks critical detail. It fails to specify the number of helicopter flights or the overall duration of the project. It relies solely on anecdotal and undocumented statements that stock use is "impractical," without identifying the individuals allegedly consulted. This is unacceptable, particularly given that the Forest Service itself owns and operates wilderness stock. There is no indication in the EA that the agency consulted its own personnel or made a good-faith effort to explore non-mechanized alternatives.

Given the scale and scope of the proposed work - which includes helicopter flights, jackhammers, cement mixers, and other motorized equipment - an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is legally and ethically warranted. The proposed activities are highly intrusive and fundamentally incompatible with wilderness character, and the impacts must be thoroughly evaluated in a full EIS.

I urge the Forest Service to fulfill its legal and moral obligation to preserve the Mount Timpanogos Wilderness as wild - not as a place for permanent, mechanized infrastructure. Do not undermine the Wilderness Act's core values for the sake of convenience or comfort. The public deserves a transparent, wilderness-appropriate alternative that honors the law and the land.