

# SAVE OUR CANYONS

Jan. 10, 2022

Utah Department of Transportation and US Forest Service decision makers,

The Central Wasatch Canyons, inclusive of Little Cottonwood Canyon, account for some of the highest recorded recreation visits in the entire state and for many unique geographies in the western US. For Little Cottonwood Canyon, the dispersed recreation visits are even greater than developed recreation sites. That said over 99% of the visits to Little Cottonwood Canyon are for the purpose of recreation. Identifying only two recreation sites as 4f sites in the canyon, is giving short shrift to the recreation area that is Little Cottonwood Canyon.

Countless published guide books and recreation oriented websites discuss the opportunities that exist throughout Little Cottonwood Canyon, which was designated a Scenic Byway in June 1989, most of which begin right from the edge of pavement. These are some of the finest recreational pursuits in the nation, if not the world. The types of recreational pursuits are diverse including primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, but even motorized along forest routes and the highway corridor that runs up and down the canyon. In many instances, high quality recreation occurs right along the Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS boundary, and many of these opportunities and their attributes are directly and negatively impacted by the two current preferred alternatives.

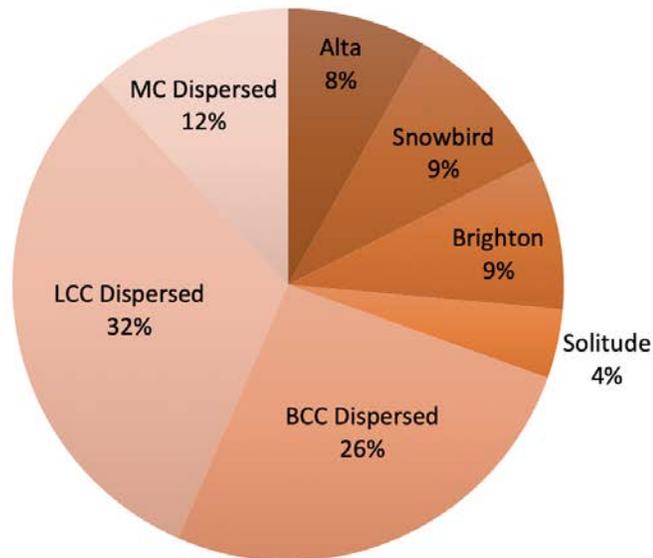
UDOT and the USFS are attempting to disregard numerous protections that have been put in place over decades with the intent purpose to protect and support recreational access and more, manage the impacts of recreation on shared resources like vistas, watershed, flora and fauna, habitat, historic sites, etc. These protections include but are not limited to: the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, Scenic Byways designation, and a host of recreational sites all along the canyon - trails, trailheads, forest roads, boulders, climbing and mountaineering routes (rock & snow), recreational ski areas, road corridor recreation (driving, riding, cycling, scenic view, painting, picnicking), foraging, birdwatching and wildlife viewing, botany, just to name a few.

Even the state's "Cottonwood Canyons Scenic Byway Management Plan" notes, "Recreation abounds in the Cottonwood Canyons, with four ski resorts as well as numerous opportunities for other recreational activities. The Byways are used year-round by myriad recreationists and are home to four ski resorts. The roads themselves (SR-210 and SR-190) are recreational amenities for sightseers, recreational drivers, road cyclists, and other users.... There are twenty-one visitor sites and numerous shoulder pull outs adjacent to Little Cottonwood Canyon Scenic Byway." These sites all enjoy robust recreational opportunities, and their very existence is to aid recreation.

## **Recreation Visits**

According to the study, "An Estimation of Visitor Use in Little Cottonwood, Big Cottonwood, and Millcreek Canyons", Little Cottonwood alone is responsible for 2.2 million, or 49% of the tri-canyon area's visits. Since 2016 when this study was conducted this number has likely trended sharply upward. In the same study, it was found that for every resort visitor, two visitors engaged in dispersed recreation.

**Figure 1: Summary of Tri-Canyon Usage**



To put this in perspective, the Tri-Canyon Area was estimated to receive 4.5 million visits in 2015. Also in 2015 Zion National Park also received 3.6 million and Arches had 1.5 million. The importance and prevalence of recreation, largely dispersed recreation, in Little Cottonwood Canyon is staggering. It enjoys protection and is deserving of respect and stewardship, not damages from transportation initiatives.

**Summary of 4f, guidance from USFS letter and USDOT 4f site**

According to the Federal Highway Administration’s “Section 4(f) Tutorial”, a section 4(f) property “includes significant publicly owned public parks, recreation areas, and wildlife or waterfowl refuges, or any publicly or privately owned historic site listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The guidance goes on to say that a property must also meet all of this criteria:

- It must be publicly owned
- It must be open to the public (except in certain cases for refuges as highlighted in the sections below)
- Its major purpose must be for park, recreation, or refuge activities
- It must be significant as a park, recreation area or refuge

We have compiled a list of sites mainly pertaining to the USFS, all of which we believe to be significant recreational properties. We believe this to be a conservative list and also believe other sites mentioned in published guidebooks, recreation sites, and applications also are worthy of protection under section 4f (see Appendix A). We strongly believe all of the sites meet the criteria above.

In addition to the recreational amenities that are in existence section 4(f) guidance also states that, “Section 4(f) applies to planned facilities when a public entity owns the property and has formally designated and determined it to be significant for park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge purposes. Evidence of formal designation is the inclusion of the publicly owned land, and its function as a Section 4(f) property, into a City or County Master Plan. A mere expression of interest or desire is not sufficient and the property must be currently publicly owned. When privately owned lands of these types are formally designated into a Master Plan for future development, Section 4(f) is not applicable.” Therefore, recreation facilities listed in publicly adopted and current plans, are 4(f) properties. Such plans and facilities are listed in Appendix B, and are incorporated as part of these comments.

### **Use and de minimis impact**

Again using the FHWA Section 4(f) tutorial discusses use of a 4(f) property, which “denotes an adverse impact to, or occupancy of, a Section 4(f) property. There are three conditions under which use occurs:

- Permanent Incorporation – when a Section 4(f) property is acquired outright for a transportation project.
- Temporary Occupancy – when there is temporary use of property that is adverse in terms of Section 4(f)'s preservationist purpose.
- Constructive Use – when the proximity impacts of a transportation project on a Section 4(f) property, even without acquisition of the property, are so great that the activities, features and attributes of the property are substantially impaired.”

Further, “substantial impairment occurs only when the protected activities, features or attributes of the resource are substantially diminished.” As captured in both appendices A & B, there are numerous 4(f) properties that flank or coincide with SR 210, it is arguable that the very existence of SR 210 is for recreational purposes and the “protected activities, features and attributes are being substantially diminished by numerous alternatives in the Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS. This is reinforced by the state’s own scenic byways plan. One of the most repetitive terms as it pertains to attributes of the resource is the scenery and scenic integrity. It is not only found in the Forest Service land management plan, it is reiterated through every single resource management and planning document in the region. The recreational opportunities (bicycling, botany, bouldering, camping, climbing, fishing, foraging, mountaineering, nature viewing, outdoor learning, picnicking, scenic driving, winter sports (resort and dispersed), etc.) and protection of their high quality attributes are a focal point of existing plans and policies. Even the roadless areas that shroud SR 210, were established to protect recreation resources. Simply put, there are more plans and policies calling for the protection of these resources than not. They are all about protecting recreation sites, opportunities, features, activities and attributes and managing the impacts of these priority activities from other shared canyon values.

“For parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, a *de minimis* impact is one that will not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities qualifying the property for protection under Section 4(f).” The impacts to 4f sites by LCC EIS Alternatives are both direct and indirect, thus creating several instances of permanent incorporation/permanent easement but also constructive use impacts introducing noise, access restrictions, vibration, ecological intrusions, and visual impacts, to name a few, to priority recreational resources. Again, looking at the roadless rule that encompasses the LCC EIS project area and alternatives -

“Inventoried roadless areas provide opportunities for dispersed outdoor recreation, opportunities that diminish as open space and natural settings are developed elsewhere. They also serve as bulwarks

against the spread of non-native invasive plant species and provide reference areas for study and research...

*...Primitive, Semi-Primitive Non- Motorized, and Semi-Primitive Motorized classes of dispersed recreation.* Roadless areas often provide outstanding dispersed recreation opportunities such as hiking, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, and canoeing. While they may have many Wilderness-like attributes, unlike Wilderness the use of mountain bikes, and other mechanized means of travel is often allowed. These areas can also take pressure off heavily used wilderness areas by providing solitude and quiet, and dispersed recreation opportunities...

*...Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality.* High quality scenery, especially scenery with natural-appearing landscapes, is a primary reason that people choose to recreate.”

In the screening for de minimis impacts, these as well as the recreational attributes expressed in dozens of laws, federal and local management plans must be evaluated. To date, they have not been. What are all the visitors to these canyons doing, if not recreating? How many comments has UDOT received throughout this EIS process mentioning the protection of recreation, the quality of life and experiences being harmed by these alternatives for the enhancement of commercial recreational opportunity at resort recreation areas? Easily tens of thousands.

## **Conclusion**

Recreation is the primary use of this environment, the canyon is littered with recreational sites and opportunities abound. It appears because of the importance of water resources, the USFS and UDOT are suggesting that the primary use is not recreation, when in fact it is. Watershed Management and protection is a tool to manage and mitigate the recreational impacts. Even Salt Lake City has recognized this in its watershed management plan -

“Canyon Uses: Uses in Little Cottonwood Canyon are characterized by heavy developed and dispersed recreational use, destination lodging and transportation. All uses in the canyon have increased during the past decade. Downhill skiing is the most intensely developed recreation use in the canyon at Alta and Snowbird ski resorts. The most accurate measure of growth in the canyon is average daily traffic. In 1987, the average daily traffic was 12,865. In 1996, the average daily traffic had increased to 16,540, an increase of 29 percent. With the exception of Parleys Canyon, this is the highest average daily traffic in the plan area.” (SLC Watershed Management Plan, pg. ix) <http://www.slcdocs.com/utilities/PDF%20Files/slcwatershedmgtplan.pdf>

The determinations made in this EIS simply ignore the realities of the Little Cottonwood Canyon. Your analysis as it relates to section 4f is incomplete and ignores decades of actions to protect recreation.

In conclusion, as an organization of over 10,000 supporters all of whom are visitors, recreationists, and benefactors of the exceptional beauty of this canyon we appreciate your attention on this matter and look forward to your response to the concerns we've raised repeatedly throughout this process. The convulsion of 4f is a bit lost on the public, however the importance, existence and attributes of the recreational opportunities all across Little Cottonwood are not. While on one hand we appreciate the correction that there were no 4f properties in Little Cottonwood, we disagree with the conclusion that there are only two sites (being treated as one). The inadequacy of your determinations have been a disservice to the community, this canyon, and the nation.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Fisher'.

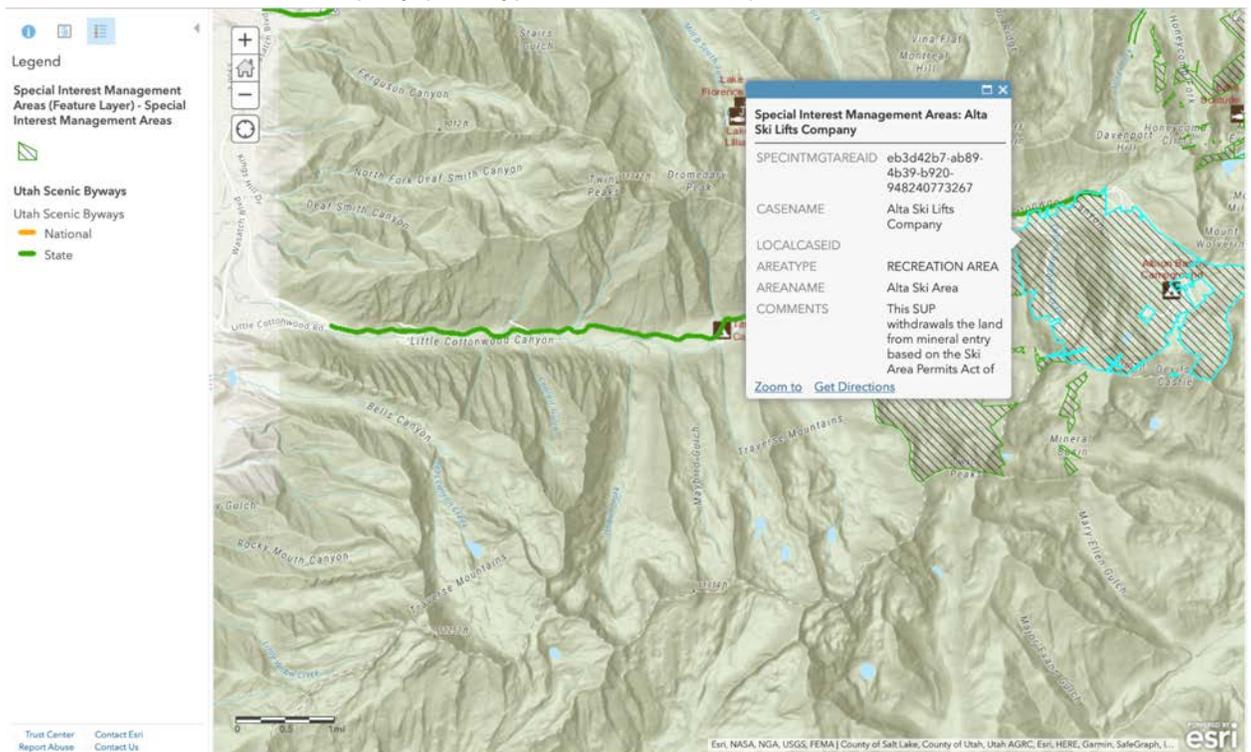
Carl Fisher  
Executive Director  
Save Our Canyons

## Appendix A - Existing Recreational Resources

USFS recreation sites map (many of which are impacted differently winter v non-winter)

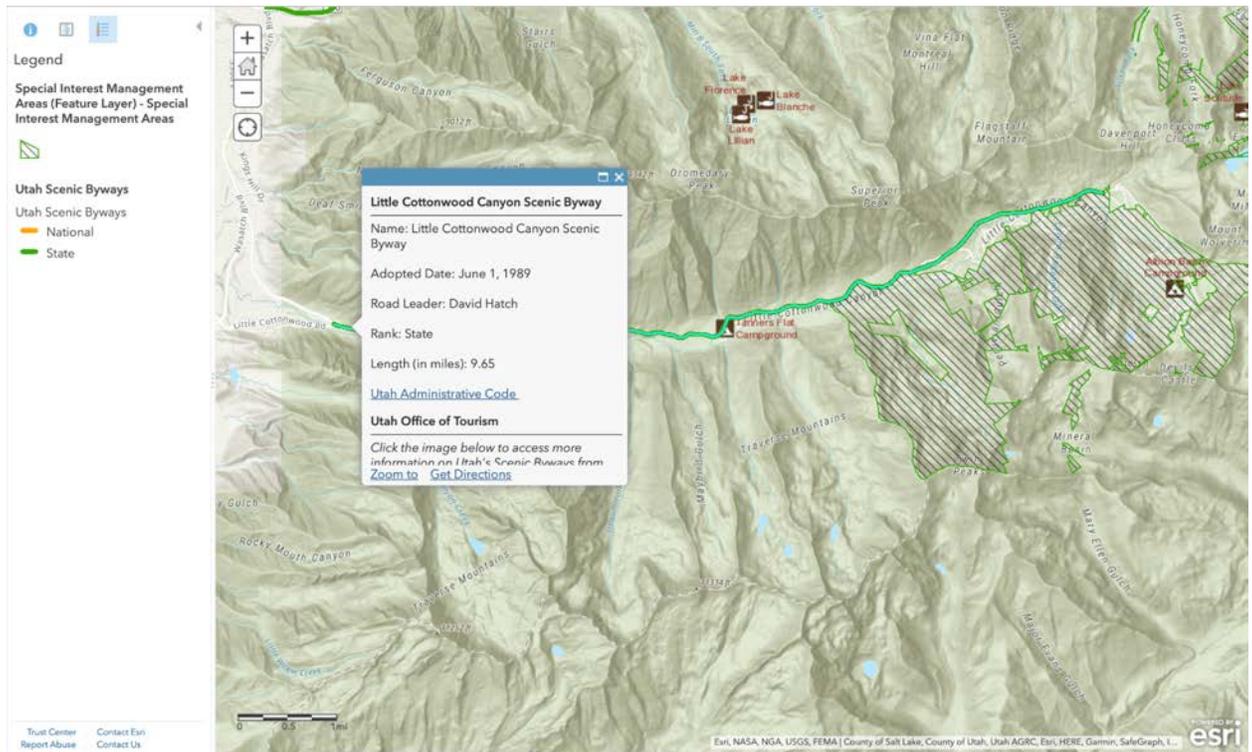
All of the below listed sites are used primarily for recreation and many, if not all are being directly impacted as are their recreational attributes.

- Albion Meadows trail (Trail No. 1006)
- Albion Parking Lot (US Forest System Road 80195)
- Alpenbock Loop (Trail No. 1020)
- Alta-Brighton trail (Trail No. 1007)
- Alta loop 4x4 (US Forest System Road 80239-Admin)
- Alta Ski Area/Alta Ski Lift Company (Area type: Recreation Area)



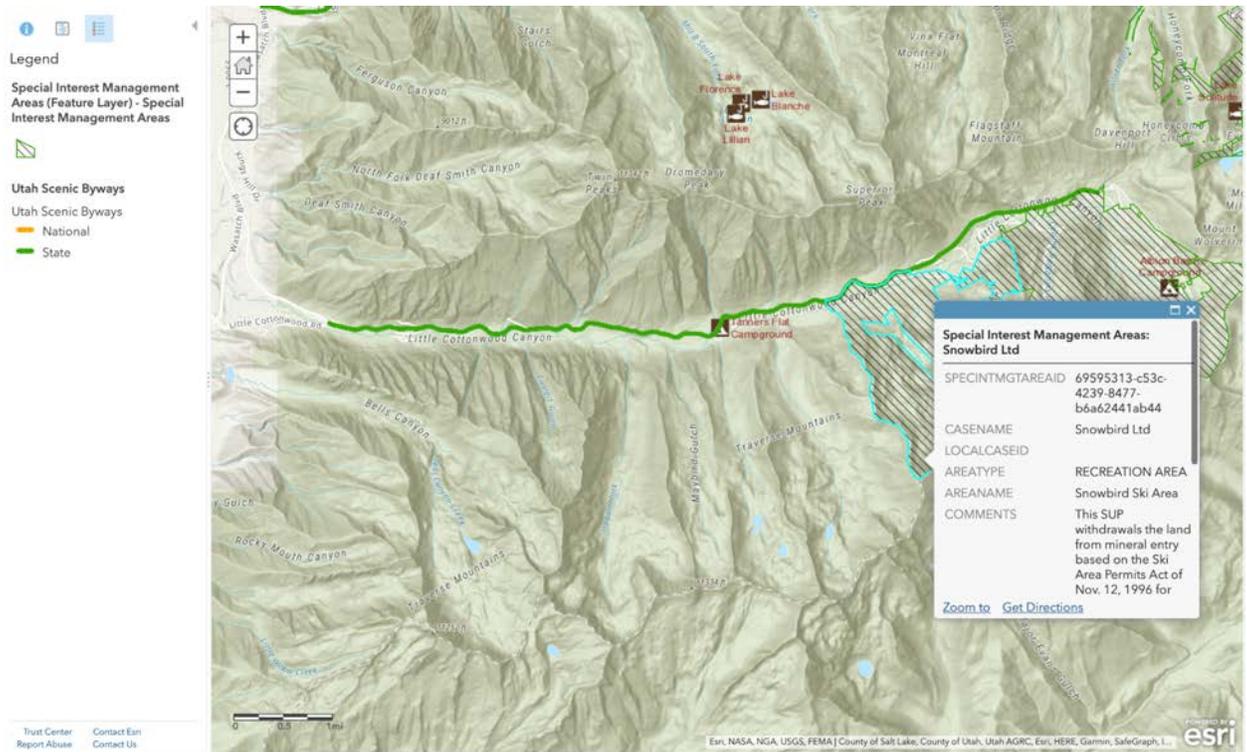
- Baby Thunder road/trail (US Forest System Road 80289-Admin)
- Grit Mill Connector (Trail No. 1020B)
- Lisa Falls (Trail No. 1012)
- Lisa Falls T.H (USFS Road 80271)

- Little Cottonwood Canyon Scenic Byway



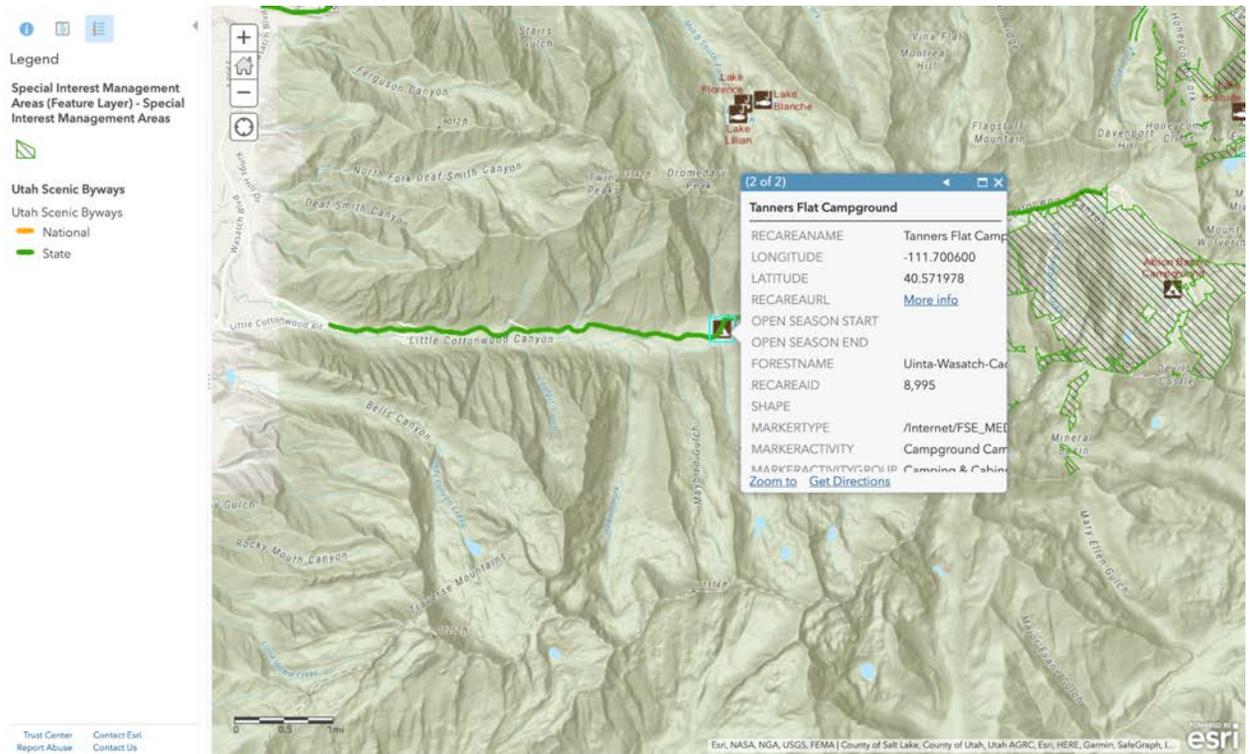
- Little Cottonwood Creek (Trail No. 1001)
- Lone Peak Contiguous Roadless Area (Roadless Area Conservation Rule)
- Main Alta Entry (US Forest System Road 80439)
- Peruvian Gulch-2 (US Forest System Road 80197-Admin)
- Rail Road Grade (US Forest System Road 80238-Admin)
- Snakepit trail (Trail No. 1015)

- Snowbird Ltd. /Snowbird Ski Resort (Area Type: Recreation Area)



- Snowbird Entry #1 (USFS System road 80287)
- Snowbird Entry #2 (USFS System Road 80235)
- Snowbird Access 2 (USFS System Road 80283)
- Base Road (US Forest System Road 80287-A)
- Snowbird Nature trail (Trail No. 1016)

- Tanners Flat Campground (Note “RECAREANAME”)



- Transverse lift road (US Forest System Road 80045-Admin)
- Twin Peaks Roadless Area (Roadless Area Conservation Rule)
- USFS System Roads: 80220, 80220A, 80220B, 80220C, 80220D
- Temple Quarry Interpretive trail (Trail No. 1000)
- Upper Alta Guardstation (US Forest System Road 80040-Admin)
- White Pine Roadless Area (Roadless Area Conservation Rule)
- White Pine Snowbird Link trail (Trail No. 1014)
- White Pine trail (Trail No. 1002)
- White Pine T.H (USF System Road 80219)

## Appendix B - Planned Resources necessitating 4f protections

These plans all contain hundreds of pages of important information about planned recreational amenities that exist in federal, state, county and local plans. We are providing links to many of them, but will also provide quotes from many of them for your reference. It should be noted that our quotes cannot be exhaustive, but the planning documents are - you should read them as part of your due diligence on this project and make the 4f determinations that actually encompass the importance of these recreational sites and their attributes.

### 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule

- “They provide large, relatively undisturbed landscapes that are important to biological diversity and the long-term survival of many at risk species. Inventoried roadless areas provide opportunities for dispersed outdoor recreation, opportunities that diminish as open space and natural settings are developed elsewhere. They also serve as bulwarks against the spread of non-native invasive plant species and provide reference areas for study and research (FEIS Vol. 1, 1–1 to 1–4).” Roadless Rule.
- “*Primitive, Semi-Primitive Non- Motorized, and Semi-Primitive Motorized classes of dispersed recreation.* Roadless areas often provide outstanding dispersed recreation opportunities such as hiking, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, and canoeing. While they may have many Wilderness-like attributes, unlike Wilderness the use of mountain bikes, and other mechanized means of travel is often allowed. These areas can also take pressure off heavily used wilderness areas by providing solitude and quiet, and dispersed recreation opportunities. (Roadless Rule)
- *Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality.* High quality scenery, especially scenery with natural-appearing landscapes, is a primary reason that people choose to recreate. In addition, quality scenery contributes directly to real estate values in nearby communities and residential areas. (Roadless Rule)

### Wasatch Cache National Forest Revised Plan (2003)

(\*Roadless Areas threatened by preferred alternatives - Lone Peak Contiguous, Twin Peaks, & White Pine. Roadless designation protects recreation resources.

- It is now recognized that roadless areas have significant ecological, as well as social values. The values of roadless are of both local and national significance. Roadless areas are often aquatic strongholds for fish; provide critical habitat and migration routes for many wildlife species, especially those requiring large home ranges and key watershed areas for communities and wildlife. The recognition of the values of roadless areas is increasing, as the population continues to grow and as the demand for outdoor recreation and other uses of the forests increases. These unroaded and undeveloped areas provide the Forest with opportunities for potential wilderness areas, non-motorized and limited motorized recreation, and other commodity and amenity uses. (UWCNF Revised Plan 2003, p. 2-18)
- Roadless areas are managed according to the management prescriptions applied. Most are protected and maintained to conserve and preserve important values and benefits of them by prohibiting activities that have a likelihood of degrading desirable characteristics of inventoried roadless areas.  
Roadless areas mapped with prescriptions 1.5, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1A, 3.1W, 3.2U, 4.1 and 4.2 are

maintained for values including soil, water, diversity of plant and animal communities, habitat for TES and species dependant on large undisturbed land, primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized and motorized (open in current travel plan) recreation, reference landscapes for research, study and interpretation, landscape character and scenic integrity, traditional cultural properties and sacred sites and other identified unique conditions.

With no or limited additional road construction and timber sales in these areas, the altering of natural landscapes, habitat fragmentation and changes in native plant and animal communities is minimized. Roadless areas function as biological strongholds and refuges for many species. Sedimentation and disruption of water flows is minimized and the roadless areas provide sources of clean public drinking water. Competition by nonnative invasive species is minimized in roadless areas. Roadless areas support healthy and diverse ecosystems. There is no long-term loss of roadless characteristics and values. (UWCNF Revised Plan 2003, p. 4-14)

### Cottonwood Canyons Scenic Byways Plan

- **“Recreation** - Recreation abounds in the Cottonwood Canyons, with four ski resorts as well as numerous opportunities for other recreational activities. The Byways are used year-round by myriad recreationists and are home to four ski resorts. The roads themselves (SR-210 and SR-190) are recreational amenities for sightseers, recreational drivers, road cyclists, and other users.” (*Cottonwood Canyons Corridor Management Plan. pg. 23 - [https://travel.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/CMP\\_121608\\_portable.pdf](https://travel.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/CMP_121608_portable.pdf)*)
- **“Scenic** - Among all of the intrinsic qualities along the Byways in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, scenic vistas are the most accessible and most striking to every visitor. Immediately upon entering each of the Canyons, the traveler is greeted with a sense of massive wonder as sheer cliffs and thick vegetation envelope both roadways. The scenic quality in each Canyon is continuous and unified, and both roadways have particular highlights that are popular among visitors.  
Along Little Cottonwood Canyon Road, the uphill traveler has an opportunity to see mountain goats wending their way on sheer cliffs. A tribute to the multitude of recreation activities, travelers catch a glimpse of ice climbers on a frozen waterfall. Towards the end of the journey, stands of aspens tell the visitor that their destination is approaching. At the end of this canyon, Mount Superior towers over the roadway, and summer wildflowers blanket Albion Basin. The journey down Little Cottonwood Canyon presents stunning and often breathtaking views of the Salt Lake Valley from the Seven Sisters, with the Oquirrh Mountains in the distance.” *Cottonwood Canyons Corridor Management Plan. pg. 20 - [https://travel.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/CMP\\_121608\\_portable.pdf](https://travel.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/CMP_121608_portable.pdf)*
- *Specific plans for Little Cottonwood - pgs 55-64*

### Salt Lake County Wasatch Canyons General Plan (June 2020)

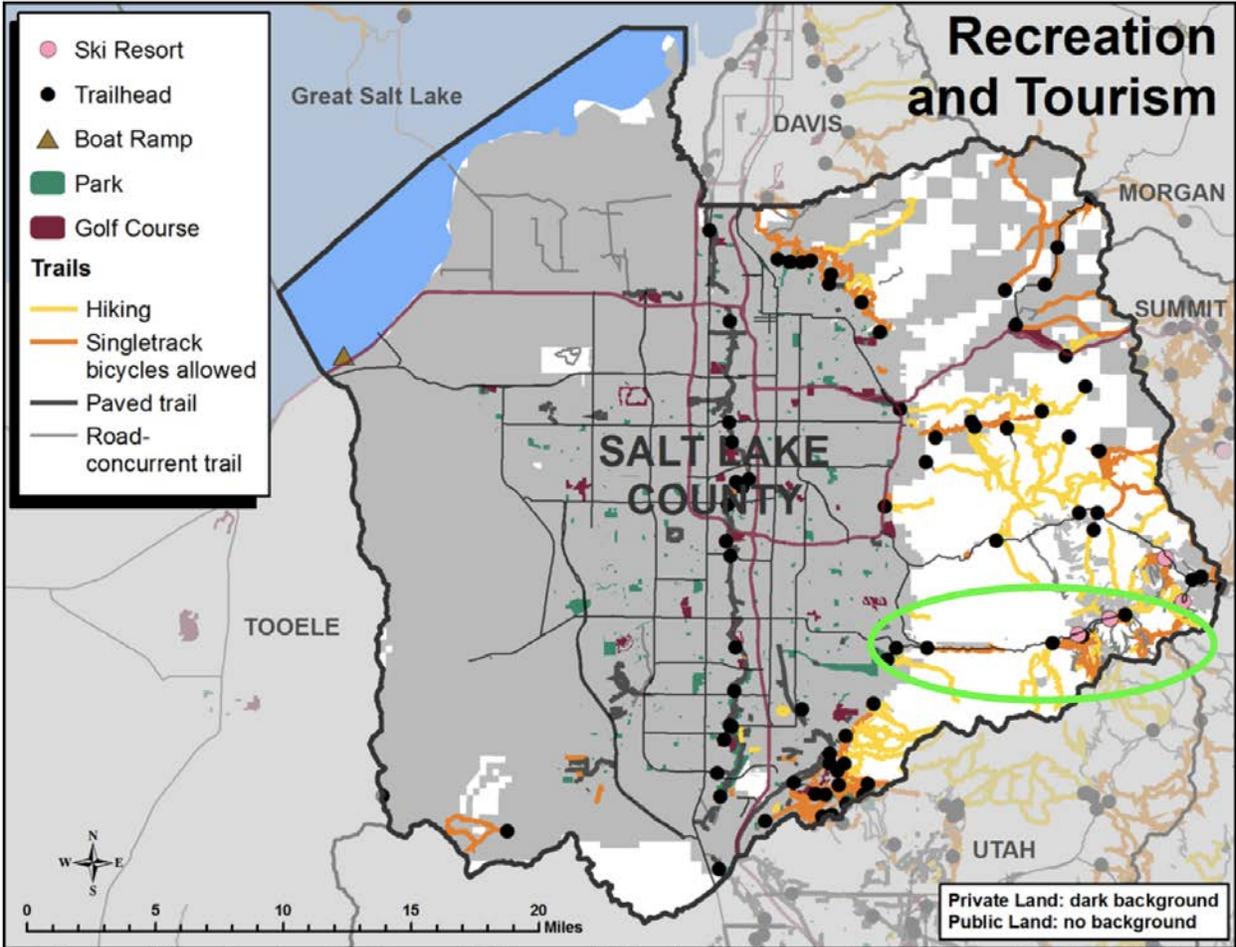
- “Perhaps the primary stressor on the Wasatch Canyons is the increasing visitation and use of the area for recreational purposes. Little Cottonwood Canyon offers destination recreation at its two ski areas, and dispersed recreation at developed picnic and camp sites and in the Canyon backcountry. The Forest Service, as the primary land manager in the Canyon, addresses recreation management in the 2003 Revised Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest Plan. Little

Cottonwood Canyon is a recreational destination for local residents and visitors from around the globe... Dispersed recreation is creating increased impacts in the backcountry, and project participants suggest the impacts should be addressed. Little Cottonwood Canyon has 8 designated trailheads that provide hiking and climbing access and back-country ski access in the winter. Parking at trailheads is limited, and frequently spills out into the highway right-of-way. Both mountain biking and road cycling activities are increasing in popularity and are creating increasing pressure in terms of traffic management and trail use. Impacts to trails are increasing and user conflicts on multi-use trails have been reported. Increased trail usage also results in increased environmental impact.

Little Cottonwood Canyon is a popular area for climbers in the Wasatch with over 1,200 recorded climbing routes (MountainProject.com) and should be recognized as such in order to garner continued support and resources into the future.” (SLCO Wasatch Canyons General Plan, p. 131) [https://slco.org/globalassets/1-site-files/planning--transportation/wasatch-canyons/wasatch-canyons-general-plan\\_optimized\\_js.pdf](https://slco.org/globalassets/1-site-files/planning--transportation/wasatch-canyons/wasatch-canyons-general-plan_optimized_js.pdf)

## Salt Lake County Resource Management Plan

- “A Resource Management Plan (RMP) is a planning document used to define policy, goals, and objectives for managing natural resources on public lands (Utah Code 63L-6-103)... The cornerstone of this management is the coordination and cooperation between the State and Federal land management agencies. The State recognizes that federal agencies are mandated to manage public lands according to federal laws, policies, and regulations established within the framework of the U. S. Constitution, including the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As part of this framework, the Federal agencies must provide consideration to local plans and identify any inconsistencies between local and Federal plans. The State and County RMPs provide federal land managers local plans which they shall consider in their planning processes of public lands.” <https://rmp.utah.gov/about-resource-management-planning/>
  - “Salt Lake County’s public lands provide a variety of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors. Activities including skiing, hiking, mountain biking, camping, fishing, climbing, picnicking, Off Highway Vehicle use, horseback-riding, snowmobiling, hunting, and photography. The public lands in Salt Lake County receive heavy, year-round use due to the close proximity to populated urban centers of the Wasatch Front. Excessive utilization can threaten natural resources such as water quality, and it can cause conflict with local residents...Salt Lake County desires to provide high-quality recreational experiences for visitors and residents. To accomplish this, the county desires a recreation system that is balanced, sustainable, and provides a range of settings that accommodates for year-round outdoor recreation opportunities. The recreation system must account for heavy and increasing demands with sufficient facilities, maintenance, and transportation to support high levels of use at locations with convenient access. The system should also be capable of providing opportunities for environmental education, backcountry experiences, and cultural resource protection.” Salt Lake County Resource Management Plan pp. 77-78).



Data Sources: Ski Area Locations, Boat Ramps, Golf Courses, Trailheads, and Parks Local, Date unknown, Compiled by Utah Automated Geographic Reference Center. Trails, Date unknown, Utah Office of Tourism and GOED. Access via Utah Automated Geographic Reference Center.

Map from p. 76 Salt Lake County Resource Management Plan as required by state law.