

## **Area Assessment Proposal 2-14-24      Kirk Nichols**

Building off and complimenting the USU's Central Wasatch Trail Use Report, and filling in a gap in baseline data, I propose developing a system of mapping and impact assessment starting with highly concentrated visitor destinations. USU has developed trail impact information (including a ranking similar to the area assessment described below, with a 1-5 trail impact conditions) and started a high alpine lakes zone or area assessments that could use a systematic inventory of conditions of those lakes and other popular destinations such as high passes, overlooks, summits, water features including Doughnut Falls and Willow Heights, and popular historic sites such as old mining buildings, shafts and adits. This CWC Stakeholders Environmental group could pool our collective experience and create a map and list of known impacted area to start assessing with funding from the CWC.

Developed out of these impact assessments and trail use data, a concentration index map indicating high, medium, and low use concentration zones could be created.

Initially, a "Quick Class", 1-5 area assessment tool (that can be learned in probably under an hour) could provide, on the ground, photo-documentation and mapped by-tape-measurements or GPS measurements, areas or rings of disturbance around, say a lake, pass, or summit. These dimensional measurements could be taken across time to evaluate growth or shrinkage of disturbance areas. Only by starting these baseline measurements can there be any assessment of effectiveness of management projects such as education, relocation of trails near high concentration zones features, and any area hardening projects.

The 1-5 quick class evaluation is simple:

1. Ground vegetation flattened out but not permanently injured. Minimal physical change except for possibly a simple rock fireplace.
2. Ground vegetation worn away around a fireplace or center of activity.
3. Ground vegetation lost on most of the site, but humus and litter still present. (Litter means leaf litter, not human trash.)
4. Bare mineral soil obvious. Tree roots exposed to surface.
5. Soil erosion is obvious. Trees reduced in vigor and dead.

The quick class system is an amazingly useful start that can always be followed up with more in-depth surveys of detailed vegetation loss, soil loss, vegetation species composition changes, social trail and multiple-trail development, and other disturbance expansion.