

Stakeholders Council Transportation System Committee
Proposed Letter from the Stakeholders Council to the CWC Board
November 20, 2024

Section 3.15.5 of the Mountain Accord stipulates the following:

"It is recommended that either the NEPA process or a separate study analyze the capacity of the environmental resources (biological, flora, fauna, watershed) in the Cottonwood Canyons to remain healthy under increasing recreational use. The study should include an estimation of the social capacity of recreation amenities such as trails and rock climbing routes to handle increasing use while maintaining a range of recreational experiences."

We have had one report, the Visitor Use Study, which primarily addresses the hiking trails, but the Transportation System Committee: 1) does not believe it included all activity in the canyon, 2) does not believe it successfully fulfills the carrying capacity requirements for either hiking trails or many other activities for which there was insufficient sampling, and 3) believes it includes illogical numbers. For example, it lacks credibility in the numbers of visitors it recorded. Utah State University conducted a Visitation Study over 2012-13 and reported 2.2M visitors in that study. This subsequent study (2021-22) by the same organization came up with 1.3M visitors, a 40% reduction. While over the same time period Zion and Arches saw visitor increases of 58% and 74% respectively. How could there have been this significant visitation drop in LCC when visitation moved in the opposite direction at our National Parks and traffic loads in LCC/BCC skyrocketed?

Because each of several uses will have different abilities to support forms of recreation and human incursion, we would next like to create a list of uses that we would like to include in a "baseline" study as an informative and/or decision-making tool for comparing conditions in the future to the current baseline conditions. This is needed, in part, as uses are likely to change and/or evolve and/or new unforeseeable modes will be invented (e.g., heavy backcountry skiing where there was almost none 30 years ago; e-bikes are becoming common) and having robust baseline data for future comparisons is essential for understanding impacts and capacity as recreational pursuits evolve.

After accurate visitation estimates are obtained, the following steps recommended are 1) measuring impacts of these levels of visitation on the assets, and then 2) drawing comparisons between these baseline visitation estimates with the impacts of these current levels of visitation on the assets.