

The Stakeholders Council voted at their November 20, 2024 meeting
to deliver this letter to the CWC Board of Commissioners.

In favor:

Adam Lenkowski
Barbara Cameron
Caitlin Curry
Dan Zalles
Danny Richardson
Del Draper
Ed Marshall
Ella Abelli-Amen
Hilary Arens
Hilary Lambert
John Adams
John Knoblock
Jonny Vasic
Kelly Boardman
Kurt Hegmann
Linda Johnson
Mark Baer
Maura Hahnenberger
Meaghan McKasy
Michael Marker
Olivia Juarez
Pat Shea
Patrick Morrison
Roger Borgenicht
Sally Kaiser
Sarah Bennett

Against:

None

Absent:

Brenden Catt
Briana Sullivan
Dennis Goreham
Megan Nelson
Mike Doyle
Morgan Mingle
Tom Diegel

November 25, 2024

Dear Central Wasatch Commissioners,

The Stakeholders Council requests the Board's consent and support to undertake a "Baseline Conditions Study" to document the current number of users in the Tri-Canyons area of the Central Wasatch.

Section 3.15.5 of the Mountain Accord stipulates:

"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 to handle increasing use while maintaining a range of recreational experiences."

The Visitor Use Study completed by Utah State University primarily addressed hiking trail use, but the Stakeholders Council: 1) does not believe it addressed all recreational activity in the canyon, 2) does not believe it addressed the environmental and social capacity of the environment and amenities to remain healthy with increasing use, and 3) believes it included illogical numbers.¹

Having robust baseline data for future comparisons is essential for understanding visitation impacts as recreational pursuits evolve. Thus, the Stakeholders Council would like to undertake the following:

1. Create a list of canyon users that should be measured in a "baseline conditions study" to study the impacts of levels of visitation on the landscape. This may include resort skiers, backcountry skiers, rock climbers, mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners, road bikers, sightseers, residents, et. al. in each season. It may also document the number of personal vehicles, buses, vans, formal parking spots, roadside parking, etc.
2. Estimate the current number of Tri-Canyons users as a "baseline conditions study" to be an informative and decision-making tool for comparing future conditions to current "baseline" conditions. This is also important as uses are likely to change and evolve as new unforeseeable recreation and travel modes occur². The Council intends to gather data in the most cost-effective manner and report to the Board if funding for outside consultants is needed.

-CWC Stakeholders Council

¹ 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?

² For example, heavy backcountry skiing was almost nonexistent 30 years ago. E-bikes are also becoming common.