To: Bekee Hotze, District Ranger, USFS SLRD

Martin Jensen, Director of Parks & Recreation, SLCO

Wayne Johnson, Associate Division Director of Parks, SLCO

Bart Barker, Executive Director, MSD

Kevyn Smeltzer, Director of Public Works, MSD

Leon Berrett, Associate Director of Operation, MSD

From: The Millcreek Canyon Committee of the Central Wasatch Commission

Re: Improving Public Safety and Reducing Conflicts in Millcreek Canyon

Date: November \_\_\_, 2020

Dear Bekee, Martin, Wayne, Bart, Kevyn & Leon:

As you may know, the Millcreek Canyon Committee, which is part of the Stakeholders Council of the Central Wasatch Commission, has been working on finding ways to increase public safety and reduce the conflicts between various user groups in Millcreek Canyon. Cyclists, pedestrians, motorists, skiers and dogs sharing the same road and trails present a safety threat to each other and occasionally lead to confrontations that degrade the user experience. Speed differences add to these issues, and conflicts will likely increase further with greater canyon use if nothing is done.

Despite our differing interests and priorities, the members of our committee have collaborated with each other and with FIDOS to come up with a list of potential solutions. We have done so because we do not want Millcreek Canyon to be off limits for any of the user groups based on even/odd days. We are submitting our proposals to you now and hope you will agree that they are reasonable, enforceable, and adoptable as rules, education programs, and road/trail signs.

Our view is that distinct conflict situations occur in Millcreek Canyon according to where and when various activities occur. We are primarily concerned with the following three situations.

1. Millcreek Road where it is open to all users, including when it is open above the winter gate;
2. The closed road above the winter gate when it is mostly covered by snow; and
3. The trails and the closed road above the gate in fall and spring when it is partially or completely free of snow.

A number of our suggestions for increasing safety and reducing conflicts in each of these situations call for increasing awareness, education, and enforcement. This is important because some users are now either unaware or unclear on the existing rules or choose to ignore them. We believe that increased enforcement should be feasible because the Forest Service has said that it plans to use about half of its increased fee revenue to hire two education/enforcement officers. The Forest Service should also have funds to improve the signs that are necessary for education, compliance and enforcement.

Situation 1: Where Millcreek Road is open to all users, the most important issues in our view are: (1) people on foot and vehicles/bikes conflicting with each other, and (2) vehicles and bikes conflicting above the area where the dedicated right-shoulder lane ends. We recognize that the extension trail from Elbow Fork to the Big Water trailhead will help to alleviate these issues above the winter gate. Our additional proposed solutions for the whole road are:

* Instruct/educate joggers and walkers to use the dedicated lane on the right shoulder of the road until it ends above the Boy Scout camps for both uphill and downhill travel. This will eliminate the danger of people being out in the downhill lane, below the sharp curves in the lower canyon where drivers and cyclists cannot see them in advance. School cross-country teams and many other joggers/pedestrians already follow this practice, and the cyclists are not too inconvenienced by it.
* Instruct/educate cyclists to obey the speed limit, yield to pedestrians in crosswalks, and slow down around downhill curves to make sure that they have sufficient stopping distance when their line of sight is limited.
* Post “Share the Road” signs in the upper canyon, like the ones recently placed just below Church Fork. We recognize that the FS has been trying to keep the upper canyon sign-free, but placing a few signs at areas already developed would not degrade the forest or reduce the user experience. We are proposing the signs be located uphill at or just above the winter gate and downhill along the road at the lower Big Water overflow lot. Signs are quick, inexpensive and effective; and they are a small concession for increasing cyclist safety and reducing conflicts.
* Install a downhill electronic speed monitoring sign above Log Haven or a warning sign that flashes only when someone enters its crosswalk. The vast majority of motorists have slowed down significantly in response to the current signs and paint; but a few motorists and a noticeable number of cyclists, particularly road cyclists, continue to ride around the downhill curve too fast.
* In addition to the public safety improvements made recently by the MSD at the uphill curve of Church Fork, consider installing one or more crosswalks above the curve as well as an electronic speed monitoring sign.
* Because the road narrows and the shoulder disappears above the winter gate, reduce the speed limit for the upper canyon to 25 mph. Where the road narrows even more near the lower Big Water overflow lot, reduce the speed limit for the uppermost half mile to 15 mph.

Situations 2 & 3: When Millcreek Road is closed to vehicles above the winter gate and it is mostly covered by snow, the most important conflicts are between pedestrians and dogs on one hand vs. downhill skiers and a small number of fat-tire cyclists on the other hand. When the road is closed above the winter gate and there is little or no snow on the ground, the conflict with skiers goes away; but the number of cyclists, pedestrians, joggers and dog walkers increases substantially.

While more than 90% of the people in all the user groups are aware and considerate, a small number create potential or actual conflicts when the winter gate is closed by allowing their dogs off-leash on even days, cycling/skiing downhill too fast, or taking up too much of the road. (We are not concerned about the FS vehicles or the very few vehicles going to The Firs when the road is closed because they are usually driving very slowly and carefully.) So our proposed solutions for the closed road above the winter gate, both with and without snow, are:

* Strongly support the Forest Service’s decision to hire two new education/enforcement officers with the greater revenue from the fee increase this year, as set forth on pages 9-10 of the Communication Plan prepared by the District Ranger. Since our understanding is that the road is treated as a trail when it is closed, we recommend that the FS have control over enforcing the rules for *both* cyclists and dogs. The current divided responsibility is not working very well or very fairly.
* Have the new FS officers educate and enforce the rules *equally* with respect to all user groups. This includes the rule that dogs must be on leashes no longer than six feet in length on even-numbered days and the rule that cyclists must obey the posted speed limit. Wandering dogs and extension leashes, coupled with cyclists and skiers who are going too fast to stop, pose a threat to each other.
* Improve the education and encouragement of all user groups by improving the messages on the signs and increasing the number of them. The Forest Service, SLCO and UPD cannot effectively enforce their rules and regulations if it does not have clear and effective signs posted to educate the public about its responsibilities. Our committee members, who are frequent users of Millcreek Canyon, are prepared to work with the FS and SLCO to design and place signs that are brief, easy to read, attention-grabbing, and compelling. Some of our members have taken photos of signs located in other National Forests or parks that are effective and could help guide the design of signs for use in Millcreek Canyon.
* Improve the education and encouragement of all user groups by increasing public outreach, which members of our committee and FIDOS are prepared to do. Increase awareness that we all need to compromise and be considerate of other users in a shared- use environment and encourage user kindness and consideration. Details of this public outreach to be determined.
* Educate pedestrians not to take up the entire road or walk over the ski tracks. Better educate dog-walkers that there is no poop fairy, and they need to use the free poop bags and carry them out. Better educate everyone that there is no trash fairy, and they need to carry their trash out.
* Educate cyclists that the posted speed limit applies to them too, that dogs are allowed off-leash on odd days and may appear in their path at any time, and that they need to slow down to a stoppable speed when approaching pedestrians, children, dogs or other animals. Increase FS and UPD enforcement against cyclists who speed or ride recklessly.
* Encourage/educate cyclists to use warning bells or give verbal warnings in order to alert pedestrians that they are coming, especially since downhill pedestrians above the winter gate often do not hear the bikes until they are passing or flashing by. Most owners would try to control their dogs and make room for the bikes if they were aware of them coming, and the cyclists on our committee feel that warning bells would not be objectionable to most cyclists and would even help to clear their paths. A representative of the Salt Lake County Bicycle Advisory Committee agrees and has suggested ways for the warning bells to be distributed.
* Separate the user groups on the closed road according to lane, from the winter gate to Elbow Fork, similar to what is now done in City Creek Canyon. Recognizing that pedestrians and dog walkers currently make up about 90% of all users and need room for uphill and downhill traffic to pass, yet also recognizing that downhill cyclists and skiers need a designated safe lane to avoid conflicts, we recommend that a portion of the downhill lane - approximately 7 feet wide and located adjacent to the right shoulder – be designated for downhill cyclists and skiers. The remainder of the road would be for all other user groups, including uphill cyclists and skiers.

We realize that separating the road in this fashion will be challenging, and our committee members are prepared to work with the Forest Service and SLCO in your determination of how to achieve this, but one idea we have now is that the separation could be created by signs on stands with heavy bases located just above the winter gate and then repeated every half mile or so. Some of the cyclists are wondering whether a dashed line could be painted on the road similar to those that designate bike areas on city streets.

We also realize that the separation of lanes will be more difficult as long as Covid-19 persists because people on foot now allow a significant social distance when overtaking each other or passing in opposite directions, especially if masks are not worn. Yet we still believe that using stand-up signs, even during Covid-19, should make it possible for the right-most seven feet of the downhill road to be primarily reserved for downhill skiers and cyclists.

* We propose that these suggested strategies, when feasible, be implemented on a trial basis so that a baseline understanding of current issues is established (conflicts, accidents, experience). We advocate then implementing periodic monitoring as to the effectiveness of the new strategies in resolving the visitor issues. For example, if the separation of the lanes above the winter gate can be implemented on January 1st, 2021, a review on June 30th would allow about 8-10 weeks of little or no snow and 15-17 weeks of snow to evaluate new strategies for addressing the issues identified during each period. The feedback from the FS

education/enforcement officers would be instrumental in evaluating how the separation worked and whether it should be revised.

* Our consensus is that the current on-off leash rule for dogs on odd days should remain in place since there are so few places left around the Salt Lake area for dogs to walk freely. Therefore, we request that the unenforced USFS order (# 04-19-84), that calls for closing the winter road to dogs on odd days, be rescinded and removed from the USFS website. We recognize that cyclists and skiers would still have to be alert at all times for children, dogs and pedestrians crossing into the downhill lane, especially on odd-numbered days.
* If the FS enforcement officers conclude that they are having difficulty enforcing the rules with respect to cyclists or other user groups, then we recommend that additional measures be considered at the June 30th evaluation. These measures could include requiring registration stickers or personal identifications (which could be on cell phones) so that cyclists and other users can be identified. They could also include making warning bells mandatory. We oppose enforcement against any one user group if enforcement cannot be applied equally to all groups.

Trails: On the Pipeline Trail and other trails, our concerns are about dogs off-leash on even days and cyclists coming too fast around sharp curves. Knowing that the trails are too narrow to segregate the users, our solutions for the trails are once again to enforce the leash laws, encourage warning bells, and educate cyclists to maintain a safe speed at all times, especially around sharp curves, for their own safety and the safety of others.

In summary, we realize that we are proposing a significant number of recommendations. The cyclists on our committee are most interested in separating the user groups above the winter gate, similar to City Creek Canyon. They are particularly interested in keeping large pedestrian groups from taking up the whole width of the road. However, we believe that all of the proposals are important because they focus on practical and specific ways of improving public safety and reducing conflicts through education, enforcement, and signage.

Thank you for considering and hopefully endorsing our suggestions. We are sincerely interested in improving public safety and reducing user conflicts in Millcreek Canyon, which would be a win-win for everybody. We ask you to give us your feedback at our next meeting, which will be on Monday, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, at 1:00 p.m. We’ll look forward to hearing your reactions and having the opportunity to discuss our proposals with you then.

The Millcreek Canyon Committee of the Central Wasatch Commission

Cc: Lance Kovel, Special Projects Coordinator, USFS

Marshall Alford, District Recreation Staff Officer, SLRD

Colton G. Rogers, Developed Recreation Program Manager, SLRD