

MEMO

July 6, 2021 (updated) Second Draft

To: Chair of the CWC Board: Christopher F. Robinson

Members of the Central Wasatch Commission Board

From: Chair of the CWC Budget/Finance/Audit Committee: Mayor Jeff Silvestrini

Members of the CWC Budget Finance Committee and the Visitor Use Study Work Group

Reference:

Recommendation from Budget/Finance/Audit Committee and Visitor Use Study Work Group regarding Visitor Use Study: Phase II Funding Strategies

On June 7, 2021, the CWC Board “***decided”*** to proceed with the Visitor Use Study Phase II as a “hybrid model” of two previous proposals from Utah State University. (June 7, 2021, Minutes: Page 5 Items 41 - 44: “Chair Robinson liked the idea of a hybrid approach with seasonal deliverables. There was no opposition from CWC Board Members”).

1. An expedited study to be completed by November 2021 in the amount of $254,603.82
2. An elongated study to be completed by August 2022 in the amount of $288,212.64
3. The hybrid study proposed would be an elongated study ending September 1, 2022, increases canyon numbers for study (LCC/BCC/Millcreek), includes seasonal reports to the Central Wasatch Commission board as the CWC Board continues its conversations regarding transportation mode options. Total cost remains $288,212.64.

The CWC Budget Finance Committee and the Visitor Use working group collaborative met on June 14th and June 23rd (including Dr. Jordan Smith of USU) to discuss both the scope, methodology and the funding of Phase II of the Visitor Use study hybrid. (Copies of the Minutes of both June 14 and June 23, 2021, are included in the Board packet for additional clarification of the discussions).

Considerable discussion occurred regarding the measurement of visitor capacity through both ecological capacity and social capacity; highlighted by questions specifically targeted to the social aspects of the Phase II proposal and the cost.

Mayor Sondak “had issues with the construct validity and the reliability of the social aspects of the study: he commented that people were not good at forecasting their contingent future behavior. Additionally, acceptable levels of visitor use would depend entirely on past experiences and personalities. An extrovert may want to see 10 people on the trail while an introvert may not want to see anyone on the trail; he noted that acceptable levels of visitor use would also shift and change over time: Mayor Sondak posed a number of questions – What a we going to do with the data? How biased are the estimates? How do these estimates change over time?” (June 23, 2021, Draft Minutes page 1 Item 39 – 41) – page 2 (items 1 – 7).

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Dr. Smith “agreed that perceptions of acceptable visitor use would change over time; as people got used to busier settings, those busier setting may become desirable or more normalized in certain locations; what the team tries to do is measure indicators across a variety of different sites ... there would be different metrics based on individual sites”. (June 23, 2021, Draft Minutes page 2 Item 9 to 14).

Dr. Smith “noted that it was important to study social capacity”. (June 23 Draft Minutes page 2 line 24).

“In different locations, the acceptable social indicators could vary widely…… as a result it was important to have multiple capacity indicator measures. If the study only looked at ecological capacity, there would not be information about the variability of the sites. The value of studying social capacity as well as ecological capacity was that it would provide additional information”. (June 23 Draft Minutes page 2 Items 24 – 30).

The collaborative also discussed the desire to understand “how many people could be in the canyons before it impacts water quality, wildlife, or habitat - what level of visitation triggered degradation of the environment. the maximum number may be higher than a recreationist would want to experience in the environment. there needed to be an interaction between the environment and social engagement with the landscape”. (June 14 Draft Minutes page 3 Items 1 – 3 and Item 9 – 13).

In continued discussion, the collaborative reflected on the visitor use study being a priority - that “the environmental impact was critical, and the number one priority - however it was also felt that the visitor experience was equally important to consider”. (June 14 Draft Minutes Item 15 – 21 and Item 37 – 44).

Following continued discussion with Dr. Jordan Smith of USU, the collaborative requested his USU team break apart the ecological study and the social aspects study of the Phase II Visitor Use Study hybrid proposal.

Subsequently, the Budget/Finance/Audit Committee and Visitor Use Work Group recommends:

1. The CWC Board move forward with the Visitor Use Study Hybrid Proposal in a phased approach: ecological study and social study. Total cost remains the same: $288,212.64.
2. Funding be split over two fiscal years (2021-2022 and 2022-2023): a spreadsheet of potential funding needs per fiscal year is included in the board packet and referenced in items c and d below.
3. The CWC Board engage its own resources for the ecological study aspects of the Phase II proposal using state appropriations funding (less administrative fee) and $50,000 returned from reserves. Makes available $106,318.58 from CWC for 2021-2022 fiscal year. Anticipates an additional $66,609.01 needed for fiscal year 2021-2022. (See spreadsheet).
4. The CWC Board develop funding resources before moving forward with the social aspects of the Phase II proposal. Save our Canyon, Friends of Alta, Wasatch Mountain Club, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, and other jurisdictions to name a few. $115,285.06 anticipated need for fiscal year 2022-2023.

7.6.2021 Update: Ecological Study and Social Aspects Study break out attached to this memo.