

Briefing Paper: USFS Wilderness and Other Federal Designations

Purpose and Audience

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide information on the potential designations for additional USFS land protection. The intent is to frame the issue at a high level for System Group and Executive Board members.

Briefing papers are recommended in the Mountain Accord Program Charter (<http://mountainaccord.com/about/participating-organization>) and System Group Rules and Procedures (<http://mountainaccord.com/meetings-and-documents/system-group-document>). System Group and Executive Board members are encouraged to put their specific perspectives in writing, if not captured by the briefing paper, and submit to Program Manager.

Summary

Both the Environment and Recreation System Groups propose additional protection on USFS lands in their Draft Idealized Systems (see maps below); however neither recommended specific designations. The intent is to preserve these lands generally for their current use and management, and to ensure that development (such as ski lifts, buildings, pavement) would not be allowed in the future.

The current Wasatch-Cache National Forest Plan (2003) does not allow for ski resort expansion, buildings, or pavement outside the base of the ski areas (the Plan only applies to USFS lands). However, the Forest Plan can be revised administratively (through the local USFS office) after a NEPA process. The ability to change the Forest Plan allows the USFS to adapt to a changing environment while managing and zoning areas for certain uses.

Wilderness and Special Management Areas are Congressionally designated and therefore offer a high level of protection against future changes (it requires an act of US Congress). A Wilderness designation would be contiguous with the existing Wilderness designation in the Central Wasatch. However, Wilderness prohibits motorized and mechanized uses such as heli-skiing, mountain biking, and certain avalanche control and water infrastructure maintenance activities which are ongoing on the lands in question. The 2003 Forest Plan did not recommend additional Wilderness designation.

Congressman Matheson proposed the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act in 2010 and most recently in 2013 which included special provisions for these activities. The Matheson Bill as currently written has unresolved issues with regards to helicopter skiing and avalanche control activities for the town of Alta.

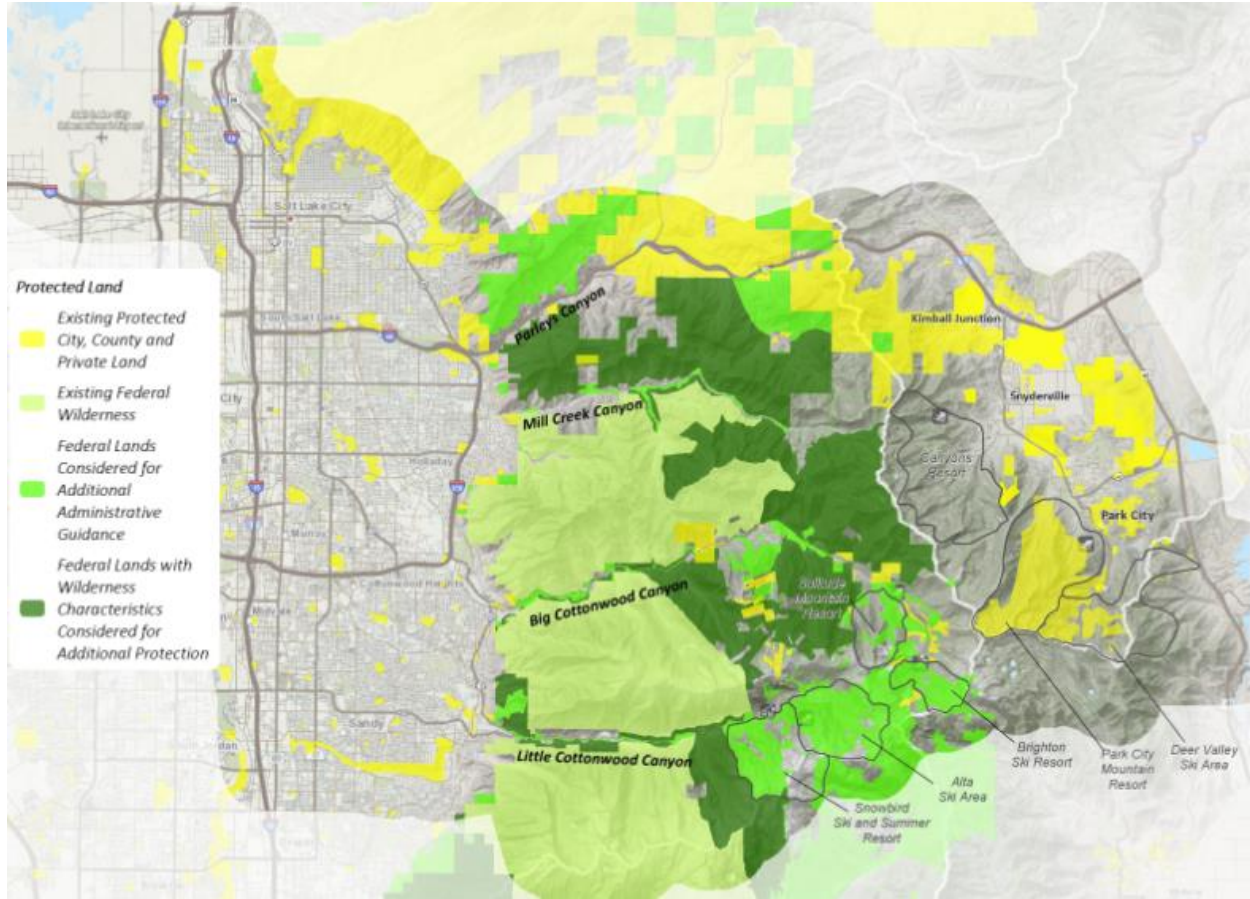
Idealized Environment System

The Idealized Environment System proposes additional protection on about 25,000 acres of USFS land with Wilderness characteristics in the Mountain Accord study area (shown in dark green below). The proposed area is based on the inventoried roadless areas and is larger than the acreage of Wilderness and Special Management Areas proposed in the Matheson Bill.

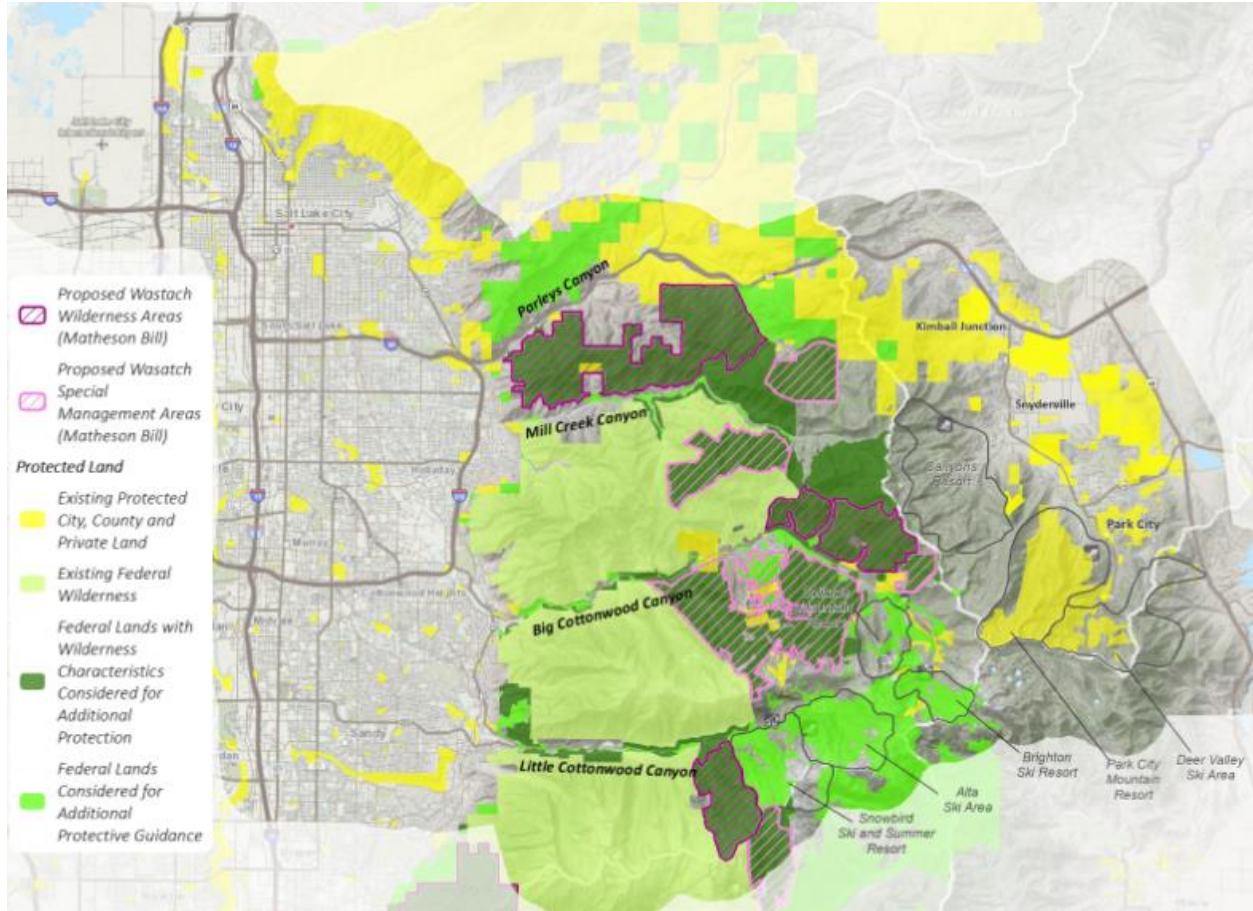
Mountain Accord Study Area Acreages

Total Mountain Accord Study Area	206,325 acres
Existing Federal Wilderness in Mountain Accord Study Area (light green)	34,353 acres
Federal Lands with Wilderness Characteristics Considered for Additional Protection in Mountain Accord Study Area (dark green)	25,798 acres
Remaining USFS Land in Mountain Accord Study Area (considered for additional administrative guidance in bright green)	11,849 acres
Existing Protected City, County and Private Land (yellow)	22,189 acres

Mountain Accord Idealized Environment System



Mountain Accord Idealized Environment System



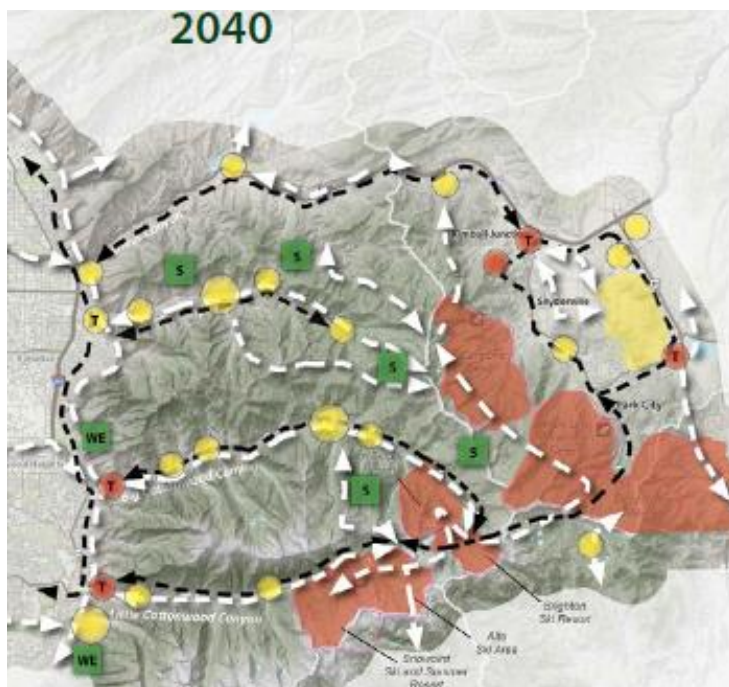
Idealized Recreation System

The Idealized Recreation System proposes:

- area for special management to protect against future development and preserve natural landscapes while allowing flexibility for future recreation management (shown with a green “S”)
- a robust non-motorized mountain bike trail network
- an adjustment to the Wilderness boundary to allow for the completion of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail shown with a green WE for Wilderness exchange (mountain biking is not allowed in Wilderness)

The Recreation System Group has indicated that allowing flexibility in future management decisions regarding recreation is important. Recreation trends are dynamic and rapidly changing and our decisions should allow for new recreation opportunities in the future.

The Idealized Recreation System does not propose any changes to current helicopter uses.



Desired Outcome

- WE** 1. Secure wilderness exchanges to complete the Bonneville Shoreline Trail.
- S** 2. Place areas into special management to protect against future development and preserve natural landscapes.
- 3. Preserve lands that provide unique recreation experiences, are currently used for recreation, and are adjacent to existing open space.
- 4. Design and manage branded areas to attract high levels of use by supporting many activities and user groups.
- 5. Design and manage key recreation areas for increased use while maintaining existing character and recreation opportunities.
- ↔** 6. Complete key nonmotorized urban and mountain trail connections to provide a more robust trail network.
- ↑** 7. Provide year-round, public transit service to connect users with recreation destinations.
- T** 8. Establish transit-focused node to reduce vehicle use in the canyons.

Draft Policy Actions

Establish and fund an organization to provide long-term recreational planning, management, and public education.

Potential Conflicts with Additional Federal Land Designations

Potential conflicts are:

- The physical location of rail or aerial trams in Little Cottonwood Canyon and/or between Cottonwood Canyons and Wasatch Back could conflict with areas proposed for additional protection in Idealized Environment and Recreation Systems. Also, additional protection may be desired to ensure transit investments do not induce development in sensitive areas.
- Depending on its specific location, the non-motorized mountain trail network in the Idealized Recreation System could overlap the “USFS lands with Wilderness characteristics considered for additional protection”. A Wilderness designation would prohibit mountain biking.
- The Wilderness exchange proposed for completion of Bonneville Shoreline Trail (shown as WE on Idealized Recreation Map) conflicts with the Idealized Environment System.

Matheson Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act

Congressman Matheson first introduced the Wasatch Wilderness and Watershed Protection Act, H.R. 2808, in 2010. It was re-introduced with revisions in each subsequent Congress through the present (<http://matheson.house.gov/public-lands/>). The legislation proposes Wilderness and Special Management Areas to strengthen watershed protection. The bill:

- establishes Special Management Areas to allow to allow helicopter skiing on current permitted areas (helicopter ski areas are shared with backcountry skiers)
- provides access to maintain private water supplies
- allows for avalanche control to ensure public safety
- allows mountain biking on Mill D (Crest Trail descent)
- would cease ATV/ motorized use on Mineral Fork

The bill also proposes a land trade that would:

- convert 116 acres of private land in White Pine to Wilderness
- convert 266 acres of private land on Mount Superior into Special Management Area
- convert 298 acres private land on Flagstaff into a conservation easement (no roads, no subdivisions, and no permanent structures except avalanche control for town of Alta and highway)

Summary of Potential Designations

Congressional designations such as special Management Areas, National Recreation Areas, and National Monuments provide protection of federal lands but can include special provisions for certain activities (such as fire-fighting, avalanche control, mountain rescue activities, infestation control, mountain biking, heli-skiing, etc). Many of these designations require the development of a management plan (similar to the USFS Plan).

A comparison of potential designations is given below (this is not a comprehensive list):

Designation	Description
Wilderness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established by Congress • highest level of protection/restriction through 1964 Wilderness Act • considerations for designation are: wilderness character (untrammled, undeveloped, natural), roadless areas over 5,000 acres, need (such as public demand, or continuity to other Wilderness areas) • prohibitions include motorized equipment, mechanical transport, commercial enterprise, structures, installations, landing of aircraft, mountain biking, heli-skiing, and certain water infrastructure maintenance and avalanche control activities • trails are allowed as long as they are cut and maintained with non-motorized tools (no chain saws)
Special Management Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established by Congress • can also be established administratively • allows special management provisions
National Monument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proclaimed by the President or established by Congress • allows for a broader mix of recreation uses, while still providing protection for an area’s cultural, historic and natural resource values • must include at least one nationally significant feature
National Recreation area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established by Congress • primary resource is recreation • broad recreation spectrum • higher carrying capacity than Wilderness • can include prescriptions to manage land for environmental preservation
Conservation Management Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established by Congress • proposed for Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front • intended to keep things the way they are and protect against and uncertain future • allows special management provisions
National Conservation Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established by Congress • Mainly used for BLM lands, uncertain if can be applied on USFS lands • allows special management provisions

Perspectives

As stated in the introduction, System Group and Executive Board members are encouraged to put their perspectives on specific interests in writing if not captured by the briefing paper and submit to Program Manager.

Municipal Watersheds

The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest is one of the most heavily visited national forests in the nation. In the Central Wasatch, the National Forest also provides the majority of clean, safe drinking water to more than 500,000 people in the Salt Lake Valley. The pressure to increase the occurrence on National Forest lands of additional roads, additional commercial recreation facilities, structures, and other development and use are significant, and growing. Further development of this type threatens the water supply for the Salt Lake Valley's growing population. If we take steps to protect the Wasatch Mountains, as many of our predecessors have, through strict limitations on development, current and future generations will benefit with continued access to water.

Wilderness designations within the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, and specifically within portions of Salt Lake City's and Sandy City's municipal watershed areas, first occurred with the passage of wilderness legislation in 1978 and in 1984, establishing the Lone Peak, Mount Olympus, and Twin Peak Wilderness Areas. Congress also previously passed federal legislation providing specific protections to Salt Lake City's municipal watersheds in 1914 and in 1934. This legislation directed control in Salt Lake City's watershed areas over activities like mining and timber harvesting, and directed the USFS and Salt Lake City to work cooperatively to manage Salt Lake City's watersheds.

Inclusion of the additional proposed areas within legislatively protected specially designated areas such as the Wilderness Preservation System and Special Management Areas, or other designations listed in this briefing paper, will significantly limit both the pressures and the resulting impacts of human use and development within our watershed areas for the long term. This will create a significant public benefit in terms of protecting our region's water resources.

Research and studies throughout the nation and world have shown the linkages between the range of development, extraction, and recreational use activities occurring in watersheds and resulting degradation of water quality and supply. These activities can lead to bacteriological contamination, pollution, sediment loading, and further degrades water quality. Pollutants can be washed from parking lots and roads. Development footprints increase impermeable and semi-impermeable areas, which affects soil absorption, increases runoff rates, and elevates the

risk of flooding. Increased development and human activities can disrupt and segment habitat areas, affects wilderness qualities, compromise ecosystem and forest health, and ultimately damage the watershed. When the watershed is degraded, it is also less likely to be resilient to environmental pressures such as climate change and forest fires.

For decades we have successfully taken the conservative approach to watershed protection: control the amount and types of human activities, keeping human exposure to water courses to a minimum, and carefully mitigate any development in the Wasatch Mountains. In some parts of the country, watersheds have been off-limits to human use - see federal legislation, for instance, protecting Portland's Bull Run watershed at <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/29784>. We've allowed some use, in fact a lot of use, but we've carefully controlled and monitored that use to protect our drinking water. The concern, however, is that the amount and type of pressures on the municipal watersheds will, over time, become unmanageable, and mitigation options will become extremely limited resulting in irreversible impacts to the water supply for more than 500,000 people.

Carl Fisher, Save Our Canyons

Wilderness is a uniquely American and treasured designation that can be placed upon qualifying public lands. Since its establishment, which passed Congress with only one dissenting vote, the Wilderness Act of 1964 has been both cherished and idolized because it gave not only federal agencies, but perhaps most importantly citizens, the ability to petition Congress and permanently protect highly valued lands meeting a certain "Wilderness characteristics" as defined by the act.

The idea of Wilderness has, in my opinion, been unfairly politicized. Much as some lands hold vast energy reserves, some lands have wild and natural characteristics that are sought after. Of course, some hold both hence the polarization. For decades, Save Our Canyons has been an advocate for protecting these places - our islands of wild in a sea of urbanization. It has been our philosophy that what makes this region unlike any other place in the world is that very juxtaposition. Our communities and visitors to this world-class alpine environment value that very balance, and that balance cannot be built or created, it can only be degraded. Wilderness quality lands are perhaps the most unique characteristic this region has to offer, and if history is the best predictor of future events, we should without haste invoke the protections of the Wilderness Act to ensure this irreplaceable alpine landscape and watershed remain as they have for future generations. For myself and many others I've met with over the years, access to wild places, interacting with nature and keeping it pristine is why we live, work and raise our

families here, and why we feel to have that remain unchanged, Wilderness is the best designation for the lands in the Central Wasatch.

Because of the politicization of Wilderness, we'll continue to look at other designations to help protect the natural resources, wild characteristics, recreational opportunities and beauty of this place - but Wilderness will always remain the goal as the land and the experiences sought after on it are more than worthy of that highest level of protection.

Learn more about National Monuments: <http://saveourcanyons.org/campaigns/public-lands-stewardship-forest-management/wasatchnationalmonument/>

Preparation

This memo was prepared by Laynee Jones, Mountain Accord Program Manager, with input from:

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