

## Group Looks to Balanced Growth (8 May 09)

By **Arthur Raymond**

Seven canyon gateways to wilderness, recreation and solitude that also contain the lion's share of the Salt Lake Valley's pristine, but fragile, water resources will be pushed to new limits in coming years as the state's population continues to boom.

How to balance this influx of new Utahns — widely expected to double from the current 2.2 million Wasatch Front residents to more than 4 million in the next 30 years — and maintain unspoiled natural resources to enjoy, clean water to drink and economic growth to help keep those new residents working will be the focus of the Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow project.

The plan will examine issues connected to growth in City Creek, Emigration, Red Butte, Parleys, Millcreek, Big Cottonwood and Little Cottonwood canyons.

The year-long effort kicked off Thursday with a ceremony at Salt Lake's Memory Grove Park with support from Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr., Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon and Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker. Huntsman said the connection between Wasatch Front residents and the corridors into those mountains are indelible. "We're defined by these canyons around us," Huntsman said. "They define who we are, they define our quality of life, and we, to a certain extent, help define the canyons by how we use them."

That use has grown by leaps and bounds since the last, wide-view canyons study was conducted 20 years ago. That study was led by a planner who now occupies the office of executive in chief of Salt Lake City — Ralph Becker. Becker said an update of the plan was due, and the group tasked to conduct it — local growth management think-tank Envision Utah — is well-qualified to lead the effort.

"This is a great time for us to be initiating a new Wasatch Canyons planning process," Becker said. "I feel confident that the work of Envision Utah, which has really been a guiding light in Utah ... will do a superb job." Alan Matheson, Envision Utah's executive director, said Thursday that the process of finding the right growth formula that accounts for land-use, recreation, transportation and environmental concerns will rely heavily on public input.

"Through a series of exercises over the next several months, people will have an opportunity to weigh-in," Matheson said. "The better participation we have, the better the results are going to be."

Becker said the last iteration of a growth plan for the canyons — the 1989 Wasatch Canyons Master Plan — also leaned heavily on public sentiment, and that input had a profound impact on the canyon-based resources of today. "When we went through this in the 1980s with Salt Lake County and the Forest Service ... if the public had not spoken up in large numbers that they wanted to see these canyons protected we would be seeing far more development ... today, than we have," Becker said. "My sense is that the public still places that protection ... of a high priority."