

## Help Preserve the Wasatch Canyons (11 May 09)

By Mayor Peter Corroon and Mayor Ralph Becker

As Utah residents, we are blessed with many natural wonders. The canyons along the Wasatch Range are among them. The Wasatch canyons are signature elements of our region and serve a broad range of purposes. Their watersheds provide more than 50 percent of the drinking water for more than 500,000 residents. Many of us enjoy the Wasatch canyons for recreation purposes or to escape for a bit of solace. They provide habitat and wildlife corridors for a wide range of abundant animals, plants, and birds at the edge of a vast desert. The Wasatch canyons stand as the backdrop and viewshed for our urban Wasatch Front and, because of careful management by local and federal managers, have prevailed as a respite for urban users for generations. The canyons are one of the top five most visited national forests in the country and draw important tourism to the state.

With the continued growth of the population surrounding the Wasatch canyons, we believe it is time to revisit how we use them. By making wise decisions today and planning for tomorrow, we — and our children and grandchildren — will continue to enjoy the remarkable Wasatch Canyons well into the future. Involving the public in a meaningful way will ensure that decisions about the canyons encompass broad considerations and meet public needs. Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow is the vehicle to do this.

The Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow process, which begins May 12, is the public's opportunity to provide input to the next Salt Lake County Wasatch Canyons Master Plan. In the late 1980s, the U.S. Forest Service, Salt Lake City and Salt Lake County created plans to protect the Wasatch canyons. These plans guided land-use policy, watershed protection, recreation use, and decisions and ordinances for City Creek, Emigration, Red Butte, Parleys, Millcreek, Big Cottonwood and Little Cottonwood canyons for nearly 20 years. With increasing visitation and changing public uses and pressures, the time has come to update that plan.

Each of these canyons is unique in its physical and environmental characteristics, management and uses. Each of the canyons is environmentally sensitive and has limits on the level of use it can sustain. In addition, not all uses are compatible with one another, resulting in user conflicts.

The Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow process seeks to gather public input about issues and options for future resource management within the context of existing federal, state and local legislative direction. Important issues to be explored include private property, land use and development, watershed health and water quality, recreation, natural resource management, preservation, transportation and public safety.

The state of Utah, Salt Lake County and Salt Lake City are sponsoring this public process. The U.S. Forest Service is a supportive partner, supplying technical expertise, and Envision Utah is serving as project facilitator. This process will update existing plans in the study area, such as the Wasatch-Cache Forest Plan and Salt Lake City's Watershed Management Plan. With the county's population projected to double in the next 30 years, Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow will strive to ensure the long-term health of these treasured canyons and maintain them as one of the great amenities of our region. We hope you'll participate by either attending a workshop or completing an important online survey. More information on the Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow workshops and survey can be found at [www.wasatchcanyons.slco.org](http://www.wasatchcanyons.slco.org).