

Paid parking up the canyon? Protecting watershed point of symposium

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WEST VALLEY CITY — Requiring paid parking passes for visitors to Big and Little Cottonwood canyons was one proposal Wednesday during a county symposium on water quality, pollution control and nature protection.

Sporting a yellow T-shirt that read "Wasatch Wildflower Festival," Creighton Hart of Salt Lake City said, "We have a great asset in our canyons."

As a concerned canyons supporter, Creighton likes the idea of encouraging people to ride a bus up the canyons, but said he isn't sure about charging for parking.

"There is a possibility if we offer park-and-rides, transit centers at the mouth of the canyon and year-round transportation, we will all benefit," he said. "UDOT won't have to pave the road as much, and we won't get so much CO2 in the canyons."

The Fourth Annual Salt Lake Countywide Watershed Symposium continues from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday at the Utah Cultural Celebration Center, 1355 W. 3100 South, West Valley City. The event is free to the public.

Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon kicked off the day with a rallying cry for better stewardship of the land and water.

"We all drink the same water, and we all breathe the same air, so all of us have a great investment in making sure that our water quality and our air quality is good — not only for ourselves, but for our future generations," Corroon said.

In front of a crowd of about 250 people Wednesday morning, Corroon ceremoniously signed an interlocal agreement establishing the Jordan River Commission. Cities and counties wanting to preserve and properly utilize the Jordan River are joining together to form the commission. It will focus on promoting the protection of the river and facilitating orderly planning and development while protecting the individual jurisdictions' ability to govern their own areas.

West Valley City signed the agreement last month. Representatives from Sandy and North Salt Lake, along with Davis and Utah counties, signed the agreement Wednesday afternoon.

In one of the symposium workshops called "Are We Loving Our Canyons to Death?" Gabe Epperson, planning director of Envision Utah, presented results of a canyon study.

"The answer is yes, we are loving our canyons to death," Epperson said. "But with investments and bold policies, we can protect our canyons experience."

Envision Utah facilitated the study, called "Wasatch Canyons Tomorrow," for Salt Lake County, Salt Lake City, the state of Utah and the U.S. Forest Service. The final report will be released publicly in about a month.

The study included gathering public input via surveys and open houses. The report includes recommendations on land use, recreation and transportation.

The suggested parking fee idea could be instituted through a pay box with envelopes or an annual pass on the windshield. The funds could be used for myriad maintenance items, including upkeep of trailheads and restrooms, as well as public transportation.

Envision Utah is a nonprofit organization that "engages people to create and sustain communities that are beautiful, prosperous, healthy and neighborly for current and future residents," according to the group's mission statement.

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