

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Salt Lake County Council

**FROM:** Rick Graham, County Emergency Manager

**THRU:** Catherine Kanter, Deputy Mayor Regional Operations

**RE:** County Council Re-authorization of the Wasatch Canyons Recreation Area

For the past 16 years, since 2003, the County has elected to fund fire and police public safety services in unincorporated portions of Millcreek Canyon and Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, subject to the provisions of Chapter 17-34 of the Utah State Code. Though there is institutional memory that a former County Council created a “recreation area” for these canyon areas in 2003, a search of the County record cannot produce the official document of such action. The purpose of this agenda item and accompanying findings report is for the Council to consider creating (or re-authorizing) the combined geographical area of these canyon areas as a single recreation area.

Chapter 17-34-1 (as amended in 2019) allows that a county may provide certain services in recreation areas that are created by its legislative body. Chapter 17-34-(5)(a) allows that a county legislative body may provide fire, paramedic, and police protection services in any area of the county outside the limits of cities and towns that is designated as a recreation area, subject to certain provisions. The provisions are as follows:

1. If – the area has fewer than 1,500 residents and is primarily used for recreational purposes, including canyons, ski resorts, wilderness areas, lakes, reservoirs, campgrounds or picnic areas; and
2. If – the county legislative body makes a finding that the recreation area is used by residents of the county who live both inside and outside the limits of cities and towns;
3. Then – fire, paramedic and police protection services needed to primarily serve those involved in the recreation activities in designated recreation areas *may* be funded by the county general fund.
4. And – the legislative body may determine that fire, paramedic and police protection services within a municipality that is located in a designated recreation area may be funded with county general funds if the legislative body makes a finding that a

disproportionate share of public safety service needs with the municipality are generated by residents of the county who live both inside and outside the limits of the city and town.

It should be noted that the soon-to-be incorporated town of Brighton will be in the geographic boundary of the recreation area proposed in this report. As a result, if a Resolution consistent with this report is passed, the County Council *may* elect to use general funds to pay for public safety services in Brighton.

## **FINDINGS**

- A. In prior years, the County has used general fund money to provide public safety services in the unincorporated portions of Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons and Millcreek Canyon. These services have included: fire station operations, fire response, paramedic, ambulance, police patrol, traffic control, search and rescue, burglaries and other statutory requirements such as civil processing, drug court, metro gang, etc.
- B. An analysis prepared by the County Surveyor found that the primary population of all unincorporated areas of the three canyons is 668 people based on 312 primary residential parcels and 2.14 persons per household. This population total does not include homeowners of secondary homes or land parcels. The majority residential population is in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Data to support this finding came from the County Surveyor Office, County Assessor Office, County Clerk Office (elections) and the Kem Gardner Institute. See Attachment.
- C. Ski resorts (four private), campgrounds, picnic areas, lakes, reservoirs and other recreation opportunities (such as hiking and biking trails, climbing, back country skiing) and sightseeing are all found in the three canyons and are available to the general public. Information and data from the Uintah-Wasatch-Cache National Forest Service and from Solitude and Brighton Ski Resorts put an estimate to the number of visitors who use the canyons based on vehicle count. These finding show that the canyons are visited and used by many people from outside the canyon areas. See Map Attachment. For example:
  - a. Little Cottonwood Canyon's annual total estimated visitor use based on vehicle count is 2,200,000\* based on a 2016 report provided by the US Forest Service. 1,420,000 are non-resort visitors and 780,000 are ski resort visitors. 33 primary residents live in unincorporated portions of this canyon. The visitor totals do not include residential or seasonal worker vehicle use.
  - b. Big Cottonwood Canyon's annual total estimated visitor use based on vehicle count is 1,774,000\* based on the same report provided by the US Forest

Service. 1,201,000 are non-resort visitors and 573,000 are ski resort visitors. 279 primary residents live in this canyon. This visitor total does not include residential or seasonal worker vehicle use.

- c. Millcreek Canyon's annual total estimated visitor use based on vehicle count is 532,000\* based on the same report provided by the US Forest Service.

There are no primary residential property owners in the canyon.

- d. Visitor use information voluntarily shared by Solitude and Brighton Ski Resorts:

- i. Solitude stated that during the winter ski season 60% of its visitors are local (Salt Lake valley and throughout Utah) and 40% are out-of-state visitors. During the summer season visitors are 80% local and 20% out-of-state. Brighton stated that during the winter season 70% of its visitors are locals and 30% are out-of-state visitors.

- D. Both UPD and UFA track the number of cases (service calls) requiring a response. As mentioned in (A) of this report, public safety is a broad category of services delivered.

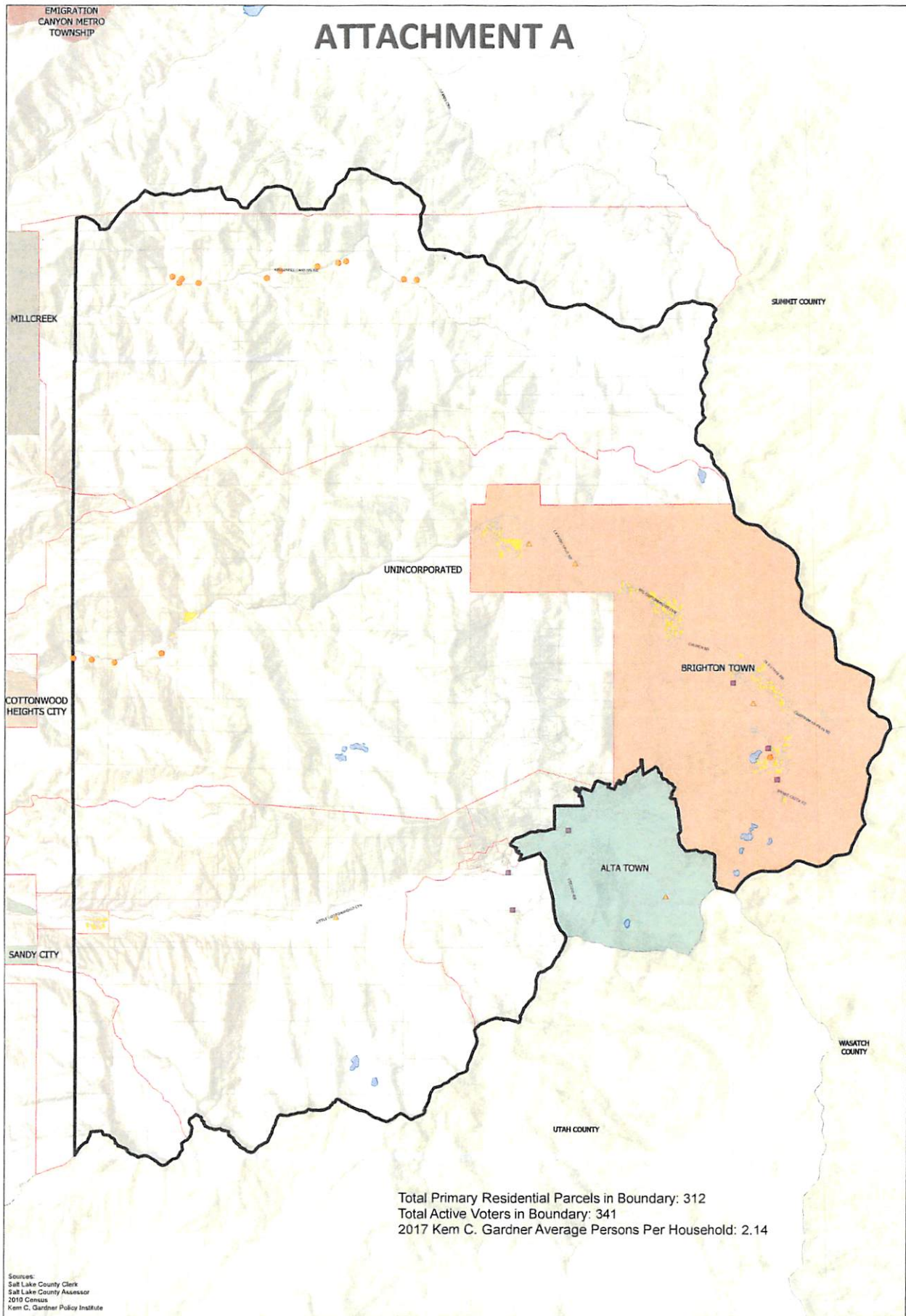
- a. UPD reports that for the period of 2017 – current 2019 it has either initiated or responded to over 4,500 cases for service in the canyons. This number of cases represents an average of 4.72 cases per day. Note, the primary residential population of the unincorporated portions of the canyons is 668 people.
  - b. UFA reports that for the period of 2016 – 2018 it has responded to 1,761 non-medical (fire, hazmat, rescue and traffic) and medical (paramedic and ambulance) calls for service. This represents an average of 587 cases per year for primary residential population of 668.

Based on these findings it appears that the County meets the statutory provisions to designate these three canyon areas (other than Alta) a recreation area, and that the County may provide public safety services in this recreation area, including Brighton, using general fund money should it choose to do so.

Subject to the DA's office confirmation, I recommend that the County Council maintain the current canyon designation structure of one (1) recreation area comprised of: Big Cottonwood Canyon including Brighton, Little Cottonwood Canyon (excluding Alta) and Millcreek Canyon. Doing so will permit continuing the current structure of public safety service delivery to these canyon areas.

\*Report provided to SLCO by the US Forest Service: An Estimation of Visitor Use in Little Cottonwood, Big Cottonwood and Millcreek Canyons - Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, Utah State University, February 2016.

# ATTACHMENT A



## LEGEND

- Cemetery
- Public Areas
- All Resorts
- Recreation Area Boundary
- Primary Residential Parcels
- Lake
- Reservoir
- Brighton Town
- Alta Town
- Parcels in Boundary

## Recreation Area Boundary and Population Estimates For Millcreek Canyon, Little Cottonwood Canyon\*, and Big Cottonwood Canyon

The information depicted on this map is not field verified and is for general reference only. The information is not intended to be used to determine property ownership, final building and site design, jurisdictional boundaries, or to replace a certified topographical or boundary survey, or any other legal document.

Prepared By: The Office of  
 REID J. DEMMAN P.L.S.  
 Salt Lake County Surveyor

Date: 10/10/2017 10:44:47 AM  
 File: 10/10/2017 10:44:47 AM  
 User: Reid.Demman





## SALT LAKE COUNTY SURVEYOR'S OFFICE

Reid J. Demman, P.L.S., *Salt Lake County Surveyor*

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August 13, 2019

Mr. Rick Graham  
Department of Regional Operations  
Emergency Management  
Salt Lake County  
2001 S State Street, Suite N3-600  
Salt Lake City, UT 84190

Dear Mr. Graham,

I am writing in response to your request for the Surveyor's Office to assist in determining population figures for the proposed Recreation Study Area that includes Millcreek, Big Cottonwood, and Little Cottonwood Canyons. We conducted an analysis and used various data sources to come to our conclusion. Please refer to the map (attached) for more detail.

We utilized data from the Salt Lake County Assessor, Salt Lake County Clerk, the University of Utah's Kem C. Gardner Institute, and the 2010 Census. Our estimated numbers are as follows; there are 312 primary residential parcels in the boundary and approximately 2.14 persons per household in this area. If we multiply these two values together, the outcome is approximately 668 people.

In the process of our analysis and validation of the data, we found the information to be consistent and are confident that the population values for the proposed Recreation Study Area are below the threshold of 1,500 people.

Please let us know if you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Reid J. Demman", written over a horizontal line.

Reid J. Demman  
County Surveyor