



Citizens' Committee
to Save Our Canyons
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Dedicated to Protecting the Beauty and Wildness of the Wasatch Canyons, Mountains and Foothills

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National Parks Service
Bear West
145 S 400 E
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

RE: Utah Museum of Natural History Proposal Scoping

March 15, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

Introduction

Save Our Canyons appreciates the opportunity to suggest concerns that should be addressed in the process of deciding whether or not to grant a decision to move forward with building on the selected site. We hope that the issues we raise will be adequately addressed. While we have tried to phrase our suggestions clearly and explicitly, we ask that they not be interpreted narrowly. If it is not clear how some of our statements should be interpreted or addressed, please let us know so that we may clarify them.

One of the greatest assets of the Salt Lake Valley community is the natural beauty of the Wasatch Mountains and foothills.

This resource defines the Wasatch, and it is the reason people visit our valley and choose to move here. Businesses use the skyline of the Wasatch Mountains behind our city as a selling point in recruiting new employees. All who live here, view and enjoy the majestic presence of these mountains so close our backyards. However, it is vital to preserve a buffer zone between that which is natural and the urban environment. The foothill buffer areas are subject to numerous pressures, especially from development and the pressures of an ever expanding population. The impacts of which vary widely; some permanently destroy the natural environment; others routinely degrade it for the convenience of a few; some have very little impact. It is the statutory duty of the National Parks Service to preserve the natural quality of the Wasatch now and for future generations by moderating these impacts.

The Red Butte area has been set aside as a natural area for study and observation.

The proposed action would not merely result in another building in an industrial park; this proposal is uniquely intrusive in an area full of unique vegetation,

abundant wildlife and much needed quiet recreation. This building proposal penetrates deeply into an area that would otherwise be shielded from the ugliness, noise and pollution of the surrounding urbanization

A more stark antithesis to the natural history experience could hardly be imagined. This building proposal would destroy natural history in order to erect a monument to it. This leads to many serious impacts and issues that must be analyzed in quantitative detail before an informed decision can be made.

Trail Access

The Bonneville Shoreline Trail is part of the local heritage of the Salt Lake Valley, and an integral part of our bench trails system.

The Bonneville Shoreline Trail runs along what used to be the water line of the historic Lake Bonneville. It is part of our history, giving us a sense of place and time. A building built on this site would, in actuality, degrade the natural history of this place.

The degree and effect of recreational displacement caused by building on the proposed site must be analyzed.

Familiarity with the foothill and mountain environments is an opportunity easily provided to residents who visit the Red Butte area. Locally accessible by many along the Wasatch Front, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail is one of the most heavily used trails in the valley. Used by joggers, bikers, families, snowshoers, photographers and bird watchers, as well as other recreationalists, diversion of this trail would impact hundreds of users. This range of activities is strongly nature-oriented and is an explicit attempt to escape machines and human-impacted environment. As such, it has very clear resource requirements: silence, natural snow, vegetation and terrain conditions, and areas free from the sight and sound of machines and their impacts.

A structure built too close to the existing trail, or a decision to re-route the existing trail could result in recreationalists creating new and damaging “social trails” by seeking out areas to recreate where the impact of the new building is limited. Recreationalists leaving the trail could represent safety risks as well as much greater impacts on the local ecosystem. The risk caused by recreational displacement should be analyzed

Wildlife, Vegetation, and Watershed Issues

Impacts to local vegetation

We request that Bear West or the National Parks Service contract with an independent, scientifically credible person or organization to perform an adequate inventory of the existing plants on the site as well as a study of the effect of the proposed project on vegetation and sensitive plants.

All precautions should be taken as to not disturb or destroy the Gambel Oak communities that exist on the proposed site.

Impacts on other rare, sensitive, or endemic species

Habitat destruction and urbanization of the area could have an effect on sensitive wildlife species in the area. These species include, among others, the Peregrine Falcon, Northern Goshawk, Lynx, Wolverine, and Marten. A biological study should be carried out to determine the effect of the proposal on these species.

Impacts on native wildlife

A building on this site would have a serious effect on the deer populations that use the area for calving. The effects on deer as well as other wildlife should be adequately studied.

Impacts on water quality

A paved parking lot could result in water quality degradation due to runoff and snow removal. Salting of the parking lot during the winter could result in large amounts of saline in the water and soil. Both could be serious impacts on wildlife who use the area for foraging.

Anti-freeze and oil leaks from automobiles may also be a factor leading to water quality and soil degradation and should be studied.

Socio and quality of life effects of the proposed action.

The proposed development will be visible by thousands of people in multiple cities. The skyline scarred permanently by the structure would have a negative effect on many residents of the community.

This building may set precedence for more foothill development in the area.

The proposed site is not adjacent to public transportation. Creating a new bus system to serve that area is not an acceptable mitigation when current adequate public transportation exists to the University of Utah campus.

The site is too far away from campus to be used by professors with classes for projects and research.

Procedural

NEPA Process

By including only one proposed building site, the scoping focus is too narrow and therefore a NEPA violation.

A wide range of alternatives must be included in the scoping and environmental assessment. By including only alternatives that would eventually lead to the same result is inadequate. Alternatives must include under the NEPA process- a No Action alternative, the Proposed Action Alternative as well as fair and balanced alternatives with varying results.

With regards to this issue, such a degree of public controversy exists; the outcome will almost certainly be “significant.” Therefore, a controversial action would require a full Environmental Impact Statement.

Closing and summary

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed new building site for Utah Museum of Natural History.

Sincerely,

Lisa Smith

Executive Director

Save Our Canyons

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