

APPENDIX 26A

USDA Forest Service Letter Regarding Section 4(f)
Determination for Climbing Boulders



File Code: 1950; 2330
Date: February 17, 2022

Mr. Josh Van Jura
Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS Project Manager
Utah Department of Transportation
PO Box 141245
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-1245

Dear Mr. Van Jura,

This responds to the January 25, 2022, request for clarification from the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) regarding individual boulders located on National Forest System (NFS) lands. To be clear, individual boulders on NFS lands that may be used by the public for climbing or bouldering are not considered by the Forest Service to be significant recreation resources or significant properties relative to Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966.

The 2003 Wasatch-Cache Revised Forest Plan identifies applicable standards and guidelines for specific areas of NFS lands. It does not provide prescriptions, standards, or guidelines that direct the management of boulders for recreational climbing/bouldering purposes. Furthermore, there is no special management plan that governs the management or use of individual, or groups of boulders located on NFS lands. Therefore, these boulders are managed by the Forest Service as general forest resources and are not considered significant recreation resources or significant properties relative to the definitions contained in Section 4(f) of the Transportation Act.

Similarly, individual boulders that are contributing elements to an area identified as protected under Section 4(f) are not significant in and of themselves. Section 4(f) is a land-based regulation, applying to properties that consist of parks and recreation areas, publicly owned wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historical sites of national, state, or local significance (49 U.S. Code § 303). Individual features within a property considered significant in relationship to Section 4(f) are not considered significant in and of themselves by the mere fact that they exist within the boundary of the Section 4(f) area.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact our UDOT Liaison, Mr. Lance Kovel, at 801-999-2131 or lance.kovel@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

DAVID

WHITTEKIEND

DAVID WHITTEKIEND

Forest Supervisor

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File Code: 1950; 2330
Date: November 19, 2021

Mr. Josh Van Jura
Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS Project Manager
Utah Department of Transportation
PO Box 141245
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-1245

Dear Mr. Van Jura,

After consideration of additional facts and circumstances following UDOT's release of the Little Cottonwood Canyon Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the USDA Forest Service has determined that the area accessed by the Alpenbock Loop Trail (Trail No. 1020), Alpenbock Spur Trail (Trail No. 1020A), and Grit Mill Connector (Trail No. 1020B), as shown on the enclosed figure, is a significant recreational resource as defined under 23 CFR §774.11(d) due to the quality, relative proximity, and ease of access to climbing, bouldering, and other recreational opportunities in this finite area. The Forest Service maintains that individual cliffs, boulders, groups of boulders, bouldering problems, and/or vertical climbing routes are contributing elements to the overall significance of the recreational climbing opportunities in the Alpenbock Trail area, but do not have a corresponding level of significance and are not essential features when assessed individually.

Since the Alpenbock Trail area is managed as general Forest System lands under the 2003 Revised Wasatch-Cache National Forest Plan, and is not included in an area-specific management or master plan, the Forest Service evaluated the significance of the area based on its current functionality and use in addition to the standards and guidelines in the 2003 Revised Forest Plan, including the following key considerations:

- The Alpenbock trail system was developed and approved under the 2014 Grit Mill and Climbing Master Plan Environmental Assessment (EA) and associated Forest Service Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), with a purpose to, *“Establish a managed and sustainable system of trails, with appropriate access and parking that maintains high quality climbing and other recreation opportunities for users, while improving resource conditions to the biological, physical, and social environments, including the protected watershed.”*
- Although multiple recreational uses exist in the Alpenbock Trail area, climbing and bouldering are predominant uses in this area.
- The Forest Service decision to provide improved access, and the associated Forest Plan amendment to allow parking to support the climbing use in the Grit Mill area, demonstrate actions taken by the Forest Service to specifically manage sustainable access



to the high-quality climbing resources in this area. The Forest Service focus on access management predominantly for climbing use in this area make this area unique and differentiate it from general forest area access to climbing and bouldering opportunities elsewhere on the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest.

Based on these key considerations, the Forest Service has determined that the Alpenbock Trail area is a significant resource due to the area's current functionality, and the previous Forest Service decision and Forest Plan amendment to provide access and parking in support of the climbing use of this area.

As indicated in my September 15, 2020 letter, the Forest Service determined that the boulders or groups of boulders identified as Parking Lot-West, Bathroom Boulder, Secret Garden, Cabbage Patch, Syringe, 5-Mile, and All Thumbs in LCC were not significant resources as defined under 23 CFR §774.11(d). That determination remains unchanged. The Forest Service does not consider individual-boulders or individual-groups of boulders as significant resources or essential features.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our UDOT Liaison, Mr. Lance Kovel, at 801-999-2131 or lance.kovel@usda.gov.

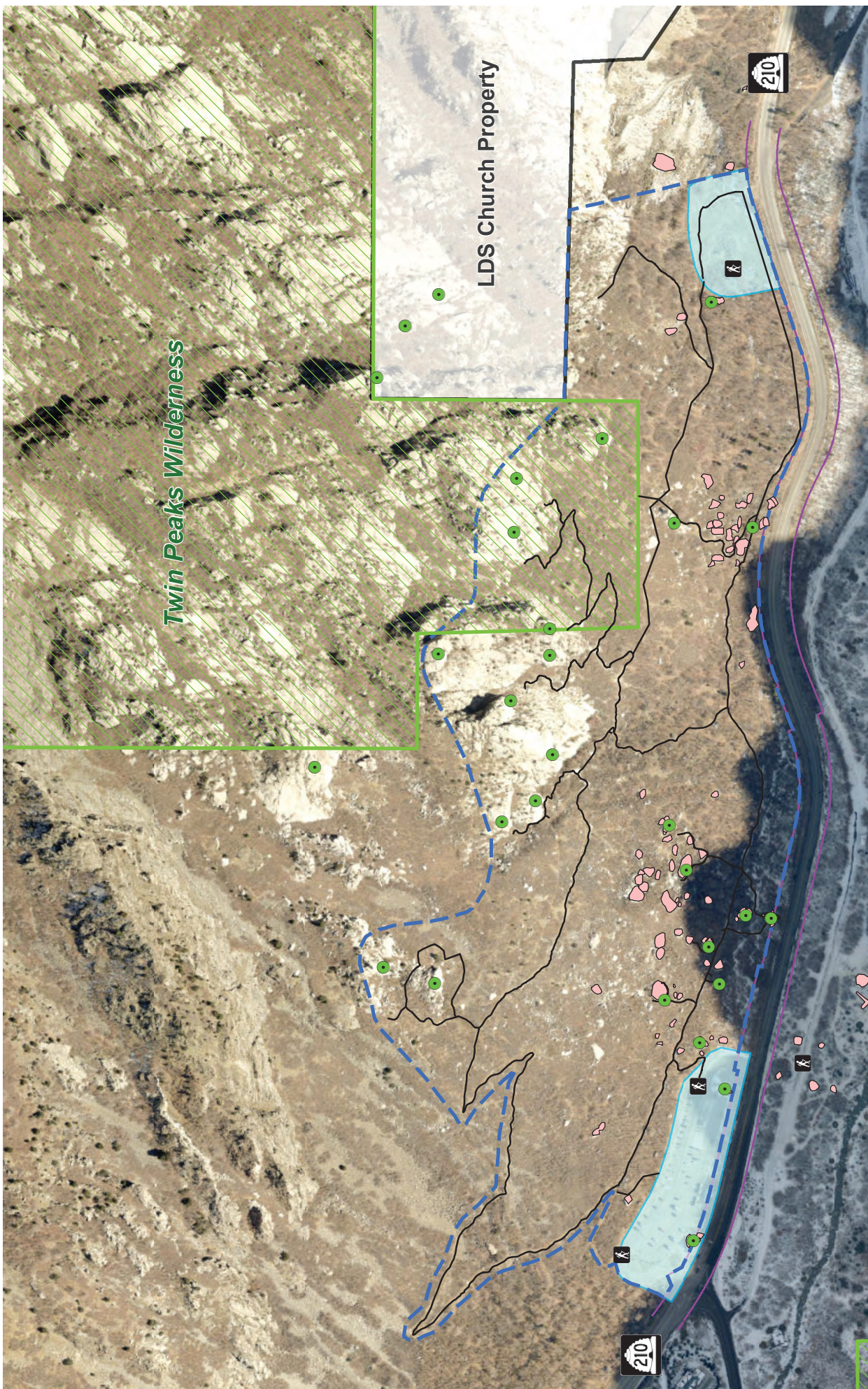
Sincerely,

DAVID

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DAVID WHITTEKIEND
Forest Supervisor

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Legend

- Climbing Trailheads
- Climbing Areas
- Alpenbock Climbing Opportunities
- Alpenbock Trails
- UDOT ROW
- Climbing Boulders
- Wilderness Area
- LDS Church Property
- USFS Recreation Site Boundaries





File Code: 1950; 2330

Date: September 15, 2020

Mr. Josh Van Jura
Little Cottonwood Canyon EIS Project Manager
Utah Department of Transportation
PO Box 141245
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-1245

Dear Mr. Van Jura,

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) recently asked the USDA Forest Service whether specific boulders on National Forest System (NFS) lands in Little Cottonwood Canyon qualify for protection under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966. In response, the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest has determined that the following boulders or groups of boulders identified as Parking Lot-West, Bathroom Boulder, Secret Garden, Cabbage Patch, Syringe, 5-Mile, and All Thumbs, do not appear to meet the applicability requirements of 23 CFR §774.11(d) and therefore do not qualify for protection under Section 4(f) of the Transportation Act.

While the Forest Service recognizes that the identified boulders provide convenient recreation opportunities for climbers, the climbing boulders do not play a significant role in the function or availability of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, and are not specifically managed, protected, or otherwise designated in the Forest Plan as a significant recreation resource. Furthermore, other similar recreation opportunities exist in the vicinity of these boulders, and across the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest.

Although the identified boulders do not qualify for protection under Section 4(f) of the Transportation Act, the Forest Service requests that UDOT attempt to preserve these boulders and/or consider relocating boulders, as technically and financially feasible, to maintain recreational opportunities for forest visitors if the current locations of one or more of these boulders conflict with future transportation system improvements.



If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our UDOT Liaison, Mr. Lance Kovel, at 801-999-2131 or lance.kovel@usda.gov

Sincerely,

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DAVID WHITTEKIEND
Forest Supervisor