

Surplus Water Concerns in Big Cottonwood Canyon

Some of these concerns affect the annual 1.7 million visitors to the canyon.

- Salt Lake City Watershed and the Forest Service have plans to disconnect the toilets at Cardiff Fork from the sewer system. Also, when the toilets at Storm Mountain and the S-Curve fail, they also plan to disconnect them from the sewer. The resulting visitor experience would be dismal. The reason given is cost and lack of surplus water shares.
- Salt Lake City rejected a bid by Unified Fire Authority to connect to a surplus water system in Brighton when they built Fire Station #108 in 2010. The water system pipes were within 100 ft. of the Fire Station property. Instead, UFA was forced to connect to the Camp Tuttle water system which was unable to supply sufficient water at the time. UFA was then forced into a costly upgrade of the Camp Tuttle water system (at taxpayer expense). The water tank kept floating to the surface, so it now looks like a semi-buried hobbit house in the forest.
- There is no public drinkable (potable) water in Big Cottonwood Canyon, except at the Brighton Loop. Visitors have no place to fill a water bottle or wash hands. We have been told that Salt Lake City's watershed ordinance will not allow surplus water shares for this purpose.
- In 2016, Salt Lake City watershed prevented the Pine Tree community (38 homes) from upgrading their water system by the use of a natural spring in the neighborhood, saying the spring produced too much water. The watershed ordinance doesn't allow connection to a major water source. Sadly, the community was forced (at great expense) to connect to a distant spring (2000 ft away) through a wetland. The water system has still not been activated.
- Salt Lake City watershed supported a federal Wilderness designation in 2010 that would have covered over 5 canyon water systems thereby preventing mechanical repair and maintenance. The Wilderness bill did not pass Congress, and the mayor eventually apologized to canyon residents for causing undue concern and anxiety about maintaining their water systems.
- Canyon water fees for raw water have increased an average of about 10% every year, including a whopping 465% increase in 2012. Officials say the increases are necessary to bring canyon water user fees to parity with valley water users. However canyon water companies must supply all infrastructure, maintenance, personnel, and emergency services. Salt Lake City Public Utilities supplies those types of services to valley water users.
- Canyon homeowners are not allowed to use any water for landscape maintenance. Culinary water only is permitted.
- Salt Lake City owns the property on two major canyon trails: Donut Falls and Willow Heights. There has been no funding for trail maintenance or wildfire mitigation. Willow Heights has no restroom or signage to help hikers get back to the beginning of the trail where they left their car. Many families wander along "social trails" that put them back onto the rocky shoulders of crowded Highway 190, almost a mile below their car.