

Officials: 'Fecal Time Bomb' Threatens Utah Backcountry

Forest rangers and residents are worried that an increase of visitors to Salt Lake County's backcountry is resulting in more human feces in watershed streams.

By Associated Press, Wire Service Content July 4, 2019

COTTONWOOD HEIGHTS, Utah (AP) — Forest rangers and residents are worried that an increase of visitors to Salt Lake County's backcountry is resulting in more human feces in watershed streams amid E. coli fears.

KSL-TV reports Central Wasatch Commission officials are questioning if visitation to the Wasatch canyons has reached a tipping point as more people venture out to the canyons for recreation, KSL-TV reports .

Save Our Big Cottonwood Creek creator Evan Johnson said visitors have come into the canyon and relieve themselves near Big Cottonwood Creek. He says that's caused E. coli counts to rise in recent years and warns the canyon is a "fecal time bomb" as more people visit this summer.

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There are no bathroom facilities," Johnson said. "There's so much that the creek water is contaminated."

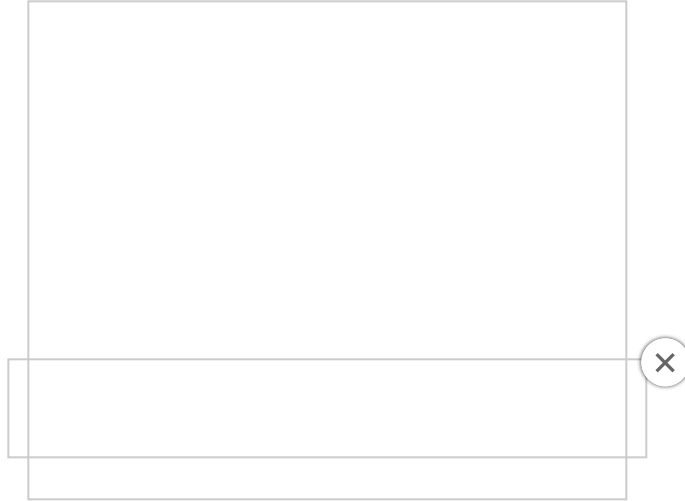
Water samples seem to support Johnson's claim, said Marshall Alford, district recreation staff officer for the U.S. Forest Service Salt Lake Ranger District. According to E. coli testing results from 2015 through 2018, there were five times the E. coli counts that were above the county maximum detection limit. Each occurred in a July or August month, where more people are more likely to visit the backcountry.

"The impacts of these activities in these canyons have an immediate impact on water quality," Alford said.

The Big Cottonwood Creek Watershed exists between Mill Creek and Little Cottonwood Creek canyons and the water from Big Cottonwood Creek creek is used for both recreational and culinary reasons, according to Salt Lake County Watershed and Restoration.

It runs from unincorporated land down through areas in Cottonwood Heights, Murray and Holladay. Salt Lake City owns nearly all of the water rights, but most of the land in the

backcountry is owned by the U.S. Forest Service.



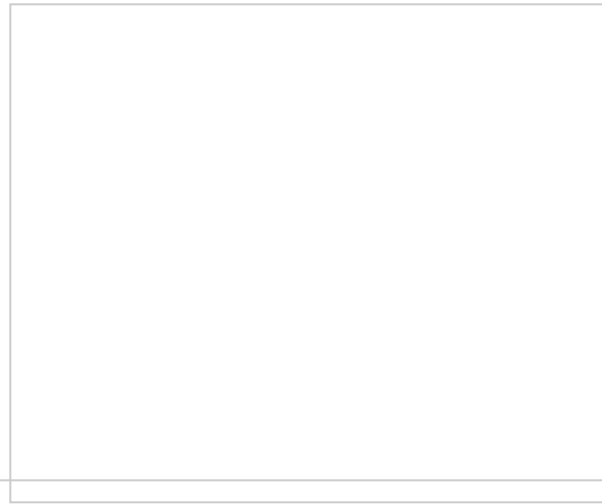
Johnson said the U.S. Forest Service should invest in more toilets for health reasons.

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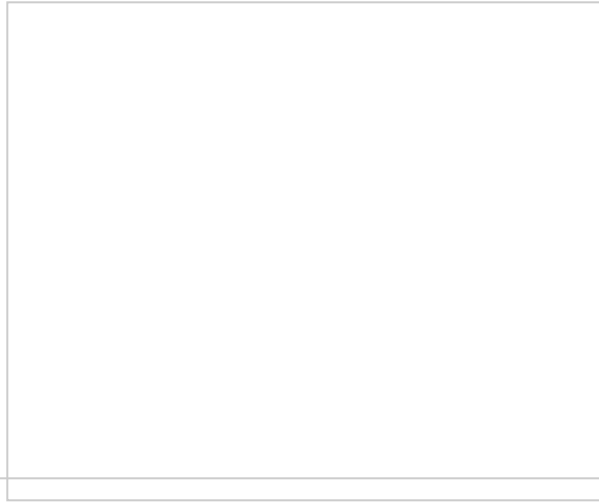
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