Mill Creek Community Collaborative
Recommendations for Mill Creek Canyon
2021
Memorial Day 2020  Photo credit Brian Murdock
The Falls are the “Delicate Arch of Mill Creek”
Challenges

If anything the pressures being discussed since 2015 have become more intense over time.
Challenges – Spring 2020: 9 injuries in 9 days (Memorial Day)
Mill Creek Project Timeline

- Project kickoff Oct 2018
- Site visit Nov. 2018
- Situation assessment 2015-18
- Vision & Goals Feb. 2019
- Analysis Definition of zones/conditions, Challenges/opportunities Fall/Winter 2019
- Survey #1 Spring/Summer 2019
- Discussions between BLM, City, County; Mayor’s focus groups 2015-18
- RTCA application
- Site visit Nov. 2018
- Survey #2 Summer/Fall 2020
- Working group on recommendations Winter 2021
- MCCC consensus on recommendations
- Development of options/alternatives Winter 2020
- Document finalization
- Presentation to joint City/County councils, BLM
  Spring 2021
Mill Creek Community Collaborative

- City of Moab
- Grand County
- Bureau of Land Management
- Grand County EMS
- Grand County Search & Rescue
- Grand County Active Transportation & Trails
- Sand Flats Recreation Area
- Moab Area Travel Council
- Moab Valley Fire Department
- SE Utah Health Department
- Grand Conservation District
- Grand & San Juan Watershed Coordinator
- Rim to Rim Restoration
- Moab Solutions
- Ride With Respect
- Mill Creek Village POA
- Nearby property owners
Mill Creek Project Timeline

**Project kickoff**
Oct 2018

**Situation assessment**
Site visit Nov. 2018

**Vision & Goals**
Feb. 2019

**Analysis**
Definition of zones/conditions, Challenges/opportunities
Fall/Winter 2019

**Survey #1**
Spring/Summer 2019

**Development of options/alternatives**
Winter 2020

**Survey #2**
Summer/Fall 2020

**Working group on recommendations**
Winter 2021

**MCCC consensus on recommendations**

**Document finalization**
Presentation to joint City/County councils, BLM
Spring 2021
Mill Creek Vision

Collaboratively address impacts from increasing recreational use in Mill Creek Canyon by providing access to a quality experience for canyon visitors in a way that protects the natural and cultural resources of Moab’s backyard and addresses impacts to nearby neighborhoods.
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MCCC Outreach Efforts

2019

- Set up website
- Set up FB page
- Survey
- LOTS of meetings
- Articles in the paper
What do you think is important about Mill Creek?
#1 Riparian habitat/wildlife
#2 Beauty
#3 Primitive, undeveloped nature

What are your biggest concerns when it comes the canyon?
#1 Too many people
#2 Danger to the environment/resources
#3 Social (unplanned) trails causing erosion/damage

How would you protect the values of the canyon and creek?

69% of responses involved limits to use, such as limiting daily access or establishing a fee system (many mentioned a free or reduced price for locals)

59% of responses gave suggestions for management actions such as better signage, patrols by volunteer stewards, or education about Leave No Trace principles

What do you like to do when you come to Mill Creek?
#1 Enjoy solitude or quiet
#2 Enjoy nature
#3 (tie) Swim/get wet
#3 (tie) Hike
MCCC Outreach Efforts

• 2020
  • Developed management options
  • Expanded website content
  • Another more in-depth survey
  • Articles in the paper
  • Attended Market on Center to engage more residents
2020 Survey

The survey presented 4 different management options as well as a suite of specific management actions and was presented along with updates to the website as a community meeting was impossible due to Covid.

Around 400 people responded to the survey over the summer of 2020.

A tally of the responses as well as detailed responses can be found on the MCCC website (https://moab84532.wixsite.com/mccc/2020-community-input-survey)

There were some complaints that the survey was hard to navigate and answer. Covid complicated efforts to present the concepts to the community or provide other face to face meetings to do so.
Option A

- **Information / Signage:**
  - Kiosk with information at trailhead at Powerdam

- **Access / Trails:**
  - Trail link through new Abbey Subdivision with pedestrian/bike trail connection from Rotary Park
  - Bike racks at Powerdam Trailhead

- **Powerdam Area:**
  - Toilet remains; no trash receptacles or other infrastructure
  - Parking at Powerdam lot unpaved

- **Potato Salad Hill Area:**
  - Informal and limited parking
  - 4WD feature

- **Parking:**
  - Main parking at Powerdam
  - Parking lot is unpaved, largely undelineated
  - No RVs or trailers allowed

- **Fees:**
  - No fees
  - Donations are currently acceptable

(See more info on website bit.ly/MillCreekCC)
Option B

- **Information / Signage:**
  - Kiosk with info at all trailheads
  - Wayfinding signs on trail to waterfall, parking
  - Encourage visitors to use areas of creek in town

- **Access / Trails:**
  - Trail parallel to Powerhouse Lane on south side
  - Bridge over creek to connect path from Powerdam to Potato Salad Hill, Sand Flats
  - BLM process to designate a trail into canyon
  - Harden some pathways to make them more accessible (e.g. pathway to dam)
  - Park on City parcel with vehicle turnaround, info, and some parking

- **Powerdam Area:**
  - Use parking availability as a control
  - Benches and hardened or paved paths in area between parking lot and dam

- **Potato Salad Hill Area:**
  - Formalized as a secondary parking area for overflow

- **Parking**
  - Powerdam parking paved and striped
  - Secondary parking at Potato Salad Hill
  - Parking for access via hiking or bicycle at other locations such as Rotary Park

(See more info on website bit.ly/MillCreekCC)
Option C

- **Information / Signage:**
  - Kiosk with info at all trailheads
  - Wayfinding signs on trail to waterfall, parking
  - Information booths staffed during busy seasons

- **Access / Trails:**
  - Bridge over creek to connect Powerdam to PSH
  - Gate on Powerhouse Lane with turnaround area on City parcel
  - Paved road and parking access at Potato Salad Hill

- **Powerdam Area:**
  - Parking area and road closed to vehicles spring-fall (SAR/EMS access allowed)
  - Walk/bike only spring-fall

- **Potato Salad Hill Area:**
  - Improve trail access to creek
  - Bike racks, toilets, shade, info kiosk at parking lot.
  - Parking and trail access designed to minimize user conflict with 4wd feature

- **Parking**
  - Potato Salad Hill parking paved and delineated
  - NO parking at Powerdam spring-fall

- **Fees**
  - Fees similar to Sand Flats, work for annual pass option
  - Fee station off Sand Flats Road

(See more info on website bit.ly/MillCreekCC)
Option D

- **Information / Signage:**
  - Kiosk with info at all trailheads
  - Wayfinding signs on trail to waterfall, parking

- **Access / Trails:**
  - Trail parallel to Powerhouse Lane on south side of road
  - Bridge over creek to connect Powerdam to PSH
  - Pave pathways around parking for accessibility
  - Pave Powerhouse Lane and road to Potato Salad Hill

- **Powerdam Area:**
  - Establish picnic zone with amenities to concentrate use near the parking area (flush toilets, water stations, trash cans, picnic tables, benches, shade structures)
  - Benches and hardened paths between parking & dam
  - City parcel park with fee booth, turnaround, parking

- **Potato Salad Hill Area:**
  - Improve trail access to creek
  - Bike racks, toilets, shade, info kiosk at parking lot
  - Redevelop old landfill into city park with parking

- **Parking**
  - Parking lot at Powerdam enlarged, paved, striped
  - Potato Salad Hill parking paved and delineated

- **Fees**
  - Fees similar to Sand Flats, work for annual pass option
  - Fee stations on both entries

(See more info on website [bit.ly/MillCreekCC](https://bit.ly/MillCreekCC))
There was equal disdain for continuing current management efforts which include some clean up and revegetation work in areas like the Powerdam but no other changes as there was for making infrastructure changes to accommodate much larger numbers of visitors.
The number of visitors using the Powerdam area to access the North Fork Falls area is comparable to other popular trailheads in the region.

These other trailheads, however, have more room for expansion and are not located in or accessed through residential neighborhoods.

In some cases visitor numbers are determined through trail counters. In others through vehicle numbers with an estimation of number of people per vehicle. Counters placed near Powerdam and Potato Salad Hill are often vandalized.
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MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Riparian Corridor
  • Vegetation management
  • Erosion control
• Trails and Signage
  • General trail recommendations
  • General sign recommendations
• Back Country
• Middle Country
  • General recommendations
  • Trail recommendations
  • Sign recommendations

• Front Country
  • Connection to town
  • General recommendations
  • Trail recommendations
  • Sign and information recommendations
  • Powerdam Trailhead recommendations
  • Enforcement recommendations

In order to provide guidance for land managers and agencies that can adapt in the future the recommendations include statements of intention in addition to specific suggestions.

The MCCC found consensus on almost all topics except for the Powerdam Trailhead Area where the supermajority of the group agreed with a few members in disagreement. The perspective of the dissenting members is presented in the document in that section.
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Riparian Corridor
  • Vegetation management
  • Erosion control

Intentions
• Well marked designated trails system
• Improve and regenerate native vegetation
• Allow SAR and EMS access and improve signage to assist visitors in finding their way in the canyon
• Work together to improve the condition of the riparian corridor

Recommendations
• DESIGNATE A TRAILS SYSTEM including
  • areas where trails need to be hardened;
  • determine the level of trail building required based on use levels;
  • identify locations for constructed erosion control structures
• DEVELOP A LONG-TERM VEGETATION PLAN including
  • native and non-native plant distribution and
  • once a trail system is designated create a revegetation plan
  • include vegetation monitoring to guide future work.
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Trails and Signage
  • General trail recommendations
  • General sign recommendations

Intentions
• Well marked designated trails system
• Improve and regenerate native vegetation & crusts where damaged by social trailing
• Allow SAR and EMS access
• Improve signage particularly in the front country
• Protect archeological sites through information and trail rerouting

Recommendations
• DESIGNATE A TRAILS SYSTEM knowing that not all trails need to be signed
  • Trails will appear on BLM maps;
  • Complete environmental surveys and NEPA and create structure for consistent, legal and coordinated trails work;
• SIGNAGE SHOULD include
  • Trailhead signs with consistent info about erosion, crusts, safety etc
  • Information so visitors understand how actions harm or help
  • Minimal use of signs in backcountry and middle country
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Back Country

The zone is characterized by an expectation for solitude or quiet, it is rare to see other people, except close to lower falls, graffiti is rare and SAR/EMS activity does occur in the backcountry from time to time.

Monitoring use impacts should drive any actions in the Backcountry.
• Increase in number of people using the area
• Decrease in perceived solitude/quiet
• Increase in social trails
• Erosion increases (parking areas, streambank, trails)
• Increase in damage to rock art, graffiti
• Water quality degrades
• New user-created access areas are popping up
• Increase in camping activities

Recommendations
• DESIGNATE A TRAILS SYSTEM, as a lower priority than in other zones
• No wayfinding signage in this zone
• Trails may need maintenance, but are not heavily hardened
• Monitor use impacts – if methods for this don’t exist, develop them
• Map current use impacts and levels
• Develop a monitoring plan with a timeline for repeated data collection
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Middle Country**

Is a more experiential zone including various access points/trailheads in different areas from Highland, Navajo Heights, behind the Golf Course and Flat Pass. This is primarily BLM managed areas with interfaces at private lands at some trailheads.

### Intentions
- Protect existing vegetation and crusts
- Provide safe parking
- Allow EMS/SAR access
- Prevent congestion in neighborhood areas near access points

### Recommendations
- DESIGNATE A TRAILS SYSTEM and revisit old trail inventories from the 90s
  - Standardize trail work
  - Determine locations for critical signs for wayfinding
  - Coordinate with larger efforts in the area & work on a youth program
  - Monitor use impacts
- SIGNAGE SHOULD
  - Be consistent with signage at trailheads & in other zones
  - Install a kiosk at each trailhead & wayfinding signs in key locations
  - Create a plan for the Highland trailhead and engage neighbors
  - Consider using more trail counters in Mid Country to help assess impacts
- BEGIN TO MONITOR USE AT OTHER ACCESS POINTS
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Front Country
  • Connection to town
  • General recommendations
    • Trail recommendations
    • Sign and information recommendations
  • Powerdam Trailhead Recommendations
  • Enforcement recommendations

A destination focused area including heavily used BLM, County and City areas around Powerdam. This zone extends from the Powerdam Trailhead area (both sides of the creek) to the falls.

The Front Country Zone is the most complex area of the canyon in terms of land ownership, uses, and opinions of how to address them, especially in the Powerdam Trailhead Area. The MCCC was unable to reach full consensus on some recommendations in this zone and opted to use majority voting to reach agreement on these recommendations. The majority of the group approved the recommendations included in this document either in a meeting (18 members) or by email. Two members either did not vote to approve or indicated that they would approve as long as their concerns were articulated here.

Yellow text boxes in this section include concerns expressed by the two MCCC members who could not come to consensus.
The BLM has used vehicle counters at Powerhouse Lane and PSH. At times over 17,000 vehicle trips are made to the Powerdam parking lot in a month (or around 573 vehicle trips a day). Access to the Potato Salad Hill side of the creek is currently rarely higher than 2,500 vehicles a month with a maximum of 3,256. It is rare PSH access road sees more than 80 vehicle trips a day, except in the spring season. The Sand Flats Road sees an average of 402 one way trips through the fee both a day – with spikes over 1000 a day in the spring months.
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Front Country
  • Connection to town

Intentions

• Provide well marked clear trails in designated locations to protect existing vegetation and crusts and facilitate plant regeneration
• Provide safe parking with clear aces to Powerdam area, & to trail to N Fork Falls
• Allow for SAR/EMS access when needed for rescues
• Reduce congestion in neighborhood areas by improving bicycle and pedestrian access to the trailhead area
• Reduce overflow parking in nearby neighborhoods and minimize spread of this and other impacts to other locations

Recommendations

Connect the Mill Creek Parkway to Sandflats in a way that separates bike and motorized vehicle traffic through both a bike lane on Sand Flats Road and designating a bicycle route up Powerhouse Lane and across the creek up the PSH access road.

The MCCC supports efforts to implement a shuttle system with a stop at Powerhouse Lane.

One MCCC member is concerned a bridge across the creek could damage the sensitive riparian area and may increase use levels in the canyon even more.

A coordinated plan between City, County, and BLM is suggested.
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Front Country
  • General Recommendations

Trail Recommendations

• Prioritize archeological clearance so that a trails system can be designated in the front and middle country by the end of 2022.
• Involve Trail Mix with trails work and stabilization to keep it consistent with other trail work in the region
• Install trail counters and incorporate revegetation actions in areas off trail
• Consider a bridge across Mill Creek in the Powerdam Area
• Make sure beaver dams and flash floods are considered in all trail crossing areas
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Front Country
  • General Recommendations

Welcome to Mill Creek Canyon Trailhead

Plan for Your Adventure
- Stayhydrated by drinking at least three liters of water per person per day. (These three liters is one 96 ounce water bottle.)
- Prevent getting lost by familiarizing yourself with the trail and knowing your destination.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing sunscreen, a hat, and covering your skin with light, loose clothing.
- Be prepared for all seasons. The trail traverses Mill Creek wash twice. Checkhead shoes that can get wet are recommended.
- Please no hiking past the end of the trail. Look for these signs showing the end of the trail. The area beyond the end of the trail can be dangerous, and yellow/orange is the trail.

Visit with Respect
- Look for small rock piles. (This is a trail marker.)
- Leave it clean. Carry out all human and big waste.
- Respect the rocks. Do not walk on them.
- Leave artifacts for all to enjoy.
- Let the natural nature enjoyment. Please others enjoy by leaving the plants with your foot.
- Stop on the trail to respect the plants and disperse desert soil.
- Keep pets under control at all times.
- No glass containers allowed.

Sign Recommendations
• Place wayfinding or directional signage in key locations to assist new hikers in finding the falls and parking areas
• Place clear signage prohibiting bicycles off trail
• Involve archeologists and create informational signs and addressing graffiti
• Include signage on roadways in the City to assist motorists in finding the trailhead and Potato Salad Hill
• Provide information about other locations with recreational access to water
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Front Country
  • Powerdam Trailhead Recommendations

As the primary access to the trail to the N Fork Falls this area sees the highest visitor activity. Currently parking is on the south side of the creek primarily which creates overflows down the road and recently onto private land near Mill Creek Drive. This topic was the one area where the group did not manage to reach consensus on the recommendation to move the primary parking to PSH, although a supermajority of the group did agree with that recommendation.
• Both sides of the creek are important to consider in planning parking and access that allows for management actions that can limit use at appropriate levels for the canyon, minimize user group conflict and mitigate impacts on existing and future residential neighborhoods.

• Access from PSH provides better opportunities for orientation due to its location above the Powerdam and trails.
TRAFFIC FLOW

• Powerhouse Lane is a small dead end residential road that is not designed for the thru traffic to the Powerdam. The new development in process between Mill Creek Drive and Powerdam will increase this pressure

• Sand Flats Road, while heavily traveled at times, has always been a thoroughfare for recreation and mountain access and can be designed to handle larger traffic flows.

Two MCCC members don’t agree that Sand Flats/Potato Salad Hill road is a better access route than Powerhouse Lane given the road types and proposed subdivisions that will impact each.

A traffic assessment is needed for Sand Flats Road to determine capacity and what changes may be needed to accommodate future traffic.

Any changes to old dump road to Potato Salad Hill need to be done in collaboration with County road engineers.
MCCC RECOMMENDATIONS

• Front Country
  • Enforcement

  • Coordinate law enforcement between the City, County and BLM as the group agreed without enforcement there is no way to change these behaviors.
  • County funding for a trail ambassador program coordinated with the BLM can begin to address some of the safety and resource concerns. The 2021 pilot program should also develop a long term outreach and monitoring program for the area
  • Monitoring use impacts in this zone should be part of the enforcement process.

• User Fees

  A significant number of survey respondents in both surveys expressed more appetite for fees to access the canyon than anticipated, though there were those who were unhappy with that idea. A way of collecting fees that can allow locals a way to volunteer to have the fee waived was also suggested.

  The MCCC realizes that enforcement and active management costs money – and fees are seen as a means to raise some of those funds.
  • Use an “iron ranger” or QR code system for fee collection to park at Powerdam and Potato Salad Hill, and at any trailhead where fees may be deemed necessary.
  • Fees should be used at the trailhead and in the Canyon.