

Improving Utah's Water Quality

Mill Creek Watershed



Utah State University
WATER QUALITY EXTENSION

Revised November 2012

MAJOR WATERBODIES

Mill Creek

NEAREST CITIES

Salt Lake City

MAJOR LAND USES

Urban

Recreation

LOCAL WATER QUALITY ISSUES

Total Coliforms

Sediment

Habitat Alteration

LOCAL CONTACT:

Salt Lake County
Watershed Planning and
Restoration Program

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Watershed Description:

Mill Creek is located in the northern portion of the Wasatch Mountains near Salt Lake City, Utah. The watershed comprises 23,644 acres ranging in elevation from 8,700 feet at its headwaters in Mill Creek Canyon to 4,221 feet in the Salt Lake Valley. The creek is 18.5 miles in length and flows perennially.

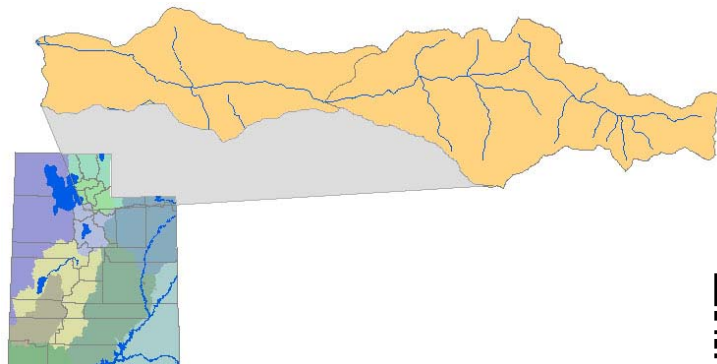
Mill Creek Canyon is a popular recreation site for many Salt Lake City residents. Prior to the 1990s, much of the canyon, including the Mill Creek stream channel, was degraded largely because of human activities. Streamside vegetation was trampled, pet waste was fouling the trails and streams, stream banks were incised, and as a result, the water quality in Mill Creek suffered.



Mill Creek was listed on the Clean Water Act 303(d) list of impaired water bodies

in 1998 for total coliforms, sediment, and habitat alterations. Immediate action was taken by the U.S. Forest Service and Salt Lake County to remediate this over-loved watershed. Many picnic areas were rehabilitated and a fee station was installed at the mouth of the canyon. User revenues were applied toward restoration and continued maintenance of the canyon and the creek's riparian zone. In addition, public awareness programs addressing responsible dog waste cleanup have improved public understanding of this issue.

In 2002, after re-assessed coliform data, habitat improvement and sediment controls, Mill Creek was removed from the 303(d) list as fully supporting cold water fishery and recreation beneficial use designations.



Mill Creek Water Quality Improvement

Project Description:

With the help of many citizen volunteers, the U.S. Forest Service and Salt Lake County restored upper Mill Creek to a more natural state than existed in the late 1990s. The campgrounds and riparian areas in the canyon were rehabilitated because they attract many visitors. To accomplish the restoration, the partners conducted the following efforts:

- Reinforced the stream channel using rock and fabric (rock toe protection and coir fabric).
- Planted riparian vegetation creek-side within the wetted width and upland plants outside the wetted width.
- Built rock stairways providing fishing access along trails leading to the stream to further protect against trail and bank erosion. Pedestrian hard surface pathways were added along the stream in the most severely degraded portions.

The toe protection and coir fabric have withstood 14 years of seasonal creek ebb and flow, and have provided a protective habitat for the riparian plants to reclaim their place along the stream. The final result is a natural looking stream capable of accommodating seasonal flooding, high pedestrian usage and providing diverse, healthy riparian habitat. The toll fees remain and visitors have not decreased despite the user fee. In fact, despite a 25% fee increase in 2008, user numbers increased.



Partners

U.S. Forest Service, Salt Lake Ranger District
Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation Department
Salt Lake County Watershed Planning and Restoration Program
Salt Lake City Public Utilities
Utah Department of Agriculture
Utah Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Water Quality
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Utah Division of Water Rights
Tree Utah
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Funding

Total (through 2008) \$2,058,000

For funding opportunities in the Mill Creek Watershed, contact the Salt Lake County Watershed Planning and Restoration Program.

To learn how you can participate or lend your support to Utah community water quality projects, please contact your local conservation district or county agent.

Produced by USU Water Quality Extension, Utah Watershed Coordinating Council, Utah Association of Conservation Districts, and Utah Division of Water Quality.

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