

Graffiti on Public Lands in Utah

Location: Little Cottonwood Canyon, on scree field, next to site of former pavilion (note this field of rocks is dangerous, due to snakes, hypodermic needles, possible rock movement)

Date: Recent, Summer of 2018

Type of graffiti: Vandal and gang



Location: Little Cottonwood Canyon old pavilion site—since removed

Date: In recent years

Type of graffiti: Vandal and gang



Other types of behavior that we find associated with graffiti, especially in our canyons, includes drugs, sex, littering, guns—a good reason not to engage with people who are tagging. We advise that people call UPD instead.

Would you think that removing graffiti in the canyons, from boulders and other surfaces, would be different from removing it from an urban/city environment? Do you think that graffiti in the canyon might do more damage than urban graffiti? What does it damage? Answers: rocks for climbing, watershed (that's where our drinking water comes from!), the view/canyon experience for residents and visitors.

Our **US Forest Service District Ranger Bekee Hotze** advises that:

- “Graffiti destroys property, historic structures, natural features, and vegetation...”
- Graffiti impacts how people relate to the Forest:
 - Many people escape from city life to enjoy the peace and natural setting the National Forest System lands provide.
 - Graffiti within these areas goes against the purpose of having wilderness areas and degrades the natural setting.
 - Graffiti adversely impacts many visitors’ experiences and may sometimes prevent people from connecting with nature.
- Graffiti in the watershed
 - The Salt Lake Ranger District manages ***land that supplies more than 60% of the drinking water for Salt Lake City residents.***
 - No pollution of any kind is allowed in the watershed to protect this valuable resource to the residents.
 - In areas where graffiti dominates the natural setting, human waste, used hypodermic needles, and empty and broken alcohol containers were also commonly found.”

What does it take to clean graffiti off rocks? One answer came from USFS District Ranger Bekee Hotze:

“We have a standard rate for how much an hour of a volunteer’s time is worth. I think the Federal government us[es] something close to \$27... The other thing is the extent to which a person has to work to get the graffiti off. Scott [Whipperman] is much more efficient with his power washer than Dave [Fields, Snowbird] and I were with brushes and elephant snot. Dave and I spent 4 hours cleaning a few rocks while Scott was able to clean much more with his equipment. But his equipment also has a cost associated with it.

And the problem is, it’s not just one rock. Once an area starts getting tagged, people keep going back to it and spreading out from there. I would say 10 volunteers for 4 hours x \$27 + \$150 for equipment, supplies and PPE (personal protection equipment). So \$1230 as a rough estimate for a relatively small area. **And the rocks never really looked the same.”**

Elephant snot was mentioned as a way of cleaning off graffiti.

Elephant Snot is actually the brand name of a graffiti remover that is safe in the watershed. It costs \$84-\$95/gallon and the work needed to remove graffiti with it is as substantial as its price.]