



# **CULTURAL RESOURCES REPORT**

## **MILL CREEK CANYON ROAD IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT**

FHWA Project No. UT FLAP SLA 10(1)



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Highway Administration, Central Federal Lands Highway Division (FHWA-CFLHD), in coordination with Salt Lake County, the City of Millcreek, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS), is proposing improvements to a section of Mill Creek Canyon Road in Salt Lake County, Utah, to enhance access and safety for motorists and recreationists visiting federal lands in upper Mill Creek Canyon on the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The proposed improvements extend along 4.6 miles of upper Mill Creek Canyon Road from the Winter Gate to the Upper Big Water Trailhead (Figure 1). FHWA-CFLHD is contributing funding through its Federal Lands Access Program with Salt Lake County contributing a portion of the funds.

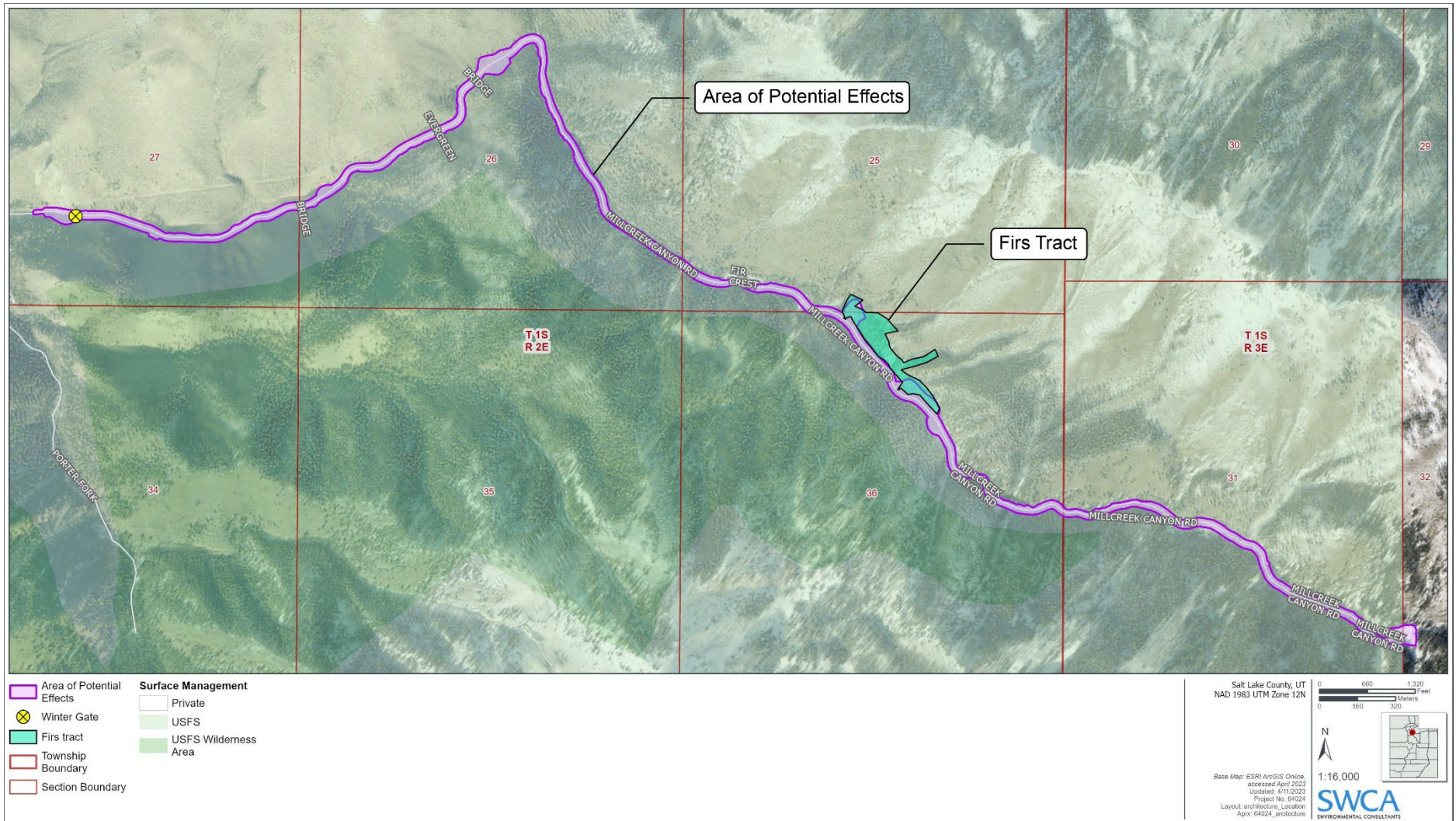
The project is in the preliminary design phase, and proposed improvements include roadway widening, modifications or relocation of trailhead and informal parking areas, establishment of an uphill bicycle lane from the Winter Gate to the Elbow Fork Trailhead, drainage improvements, and associated improvements, such as retaining walls, new signs, and pavement striping. Pending completion of the environmental review process and receipt of necessary approvals and permits, construction of the improvements is anticipated to begin in summer 2025.

This report presents an overview of cultural resources, including archaeological and architectural resources, that could be affected by the proposed improvements and discusses FHWA-CFLHD's approach to assess effects and ensure compliance with applicable regulations, such as the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The purpose of this report is to share information with the public as part of the environmental process. Information contained in this report is expected to be incorporated into an environmental assessment, which will also be made available for public review in the near future. Information presented in this report is based on two cultural studies conducted for the project: *Archaeological Resources Inventory for the Mill Creek Canyon Roadway Improvements Project*, dated February 2023, and *Architectural Resources Inventory for the Mill Creek Canyon Roadway Improvements Project*, dated May 2023 (both conducted by SWCA Environmental Consultants).

The studies entailed background research through Utah databases, the USFS, and other resources; field surveys along the road to record resources; and evaluation of the resources for listing to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). As part of the NHPA compliance process, FHWA-CFLHD established an area of potential effect (APE) based on the preliminary design to focus the assessment on those resources that could be affected by the proposed improvements (Figure 1). The APE encompasses approximately 71 acres along 4.6 miles of Mill Creek Canyon Road, including a corridor about 100 feet wide and adjacent areas associated with parking improvements and potential indirect (visual) effects where retaining walls are proposed.



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**Figure 1. Area of Potential Effect**

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

### 2.1 Affected Environment

Archaeological resources are artifacts, features, sites, or other remnants of past human life that are of interest in understanding the way people lived. They can be prehistoric, which is generally considered before Native American contact with Europeans, or historic, which is after European contact and settlement. Examples of prehistoric archaeological resources include temporary living areas or campsites, artifact scatters (e.g., pottery fragments, grinding stones, beads, shells), petroglyphs, rock shelters, and areas of cultural importance to tribes. Examples of historic archaeological resources include remains of old buildings, historic roads, evidence of past mining and agricultural uses, and artifact scatters (e.g., cans, bottles, fragments).

Based on the archaeological resources inventory for the project, the following archaeological resources were identified in the APE:

- **Mill Creek Hydroelectric System:** This 3-mile-long site historically contained a system of water control and associated features along Mill Creek and Elbow Creek, most of which was outside the APE, and dates to the early 1900s. It has been affected by current uses of the area, erosion, and structural decay. The USFS previously evaluated the site and determined it eligible for listing to the NRHP, which is being retained for this project.
- **Elbow Fork trail network:** This historic trail follows Elbow Creek on the north side of Mill Creek Canyon Road and dates to the mid-1900s. It is associated with Civilian Conservation Corps work. The trail has been affected by modifications and regular use. A previous evaluation concluded the trail was not eligible for listing to the NRHP, which is consistent with the current evaluation for this project.
- **Dendroglyphs:** Carvings on trees near the road were identified during the current survey effort. The carvings date to the mid-1900s. They are not considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- **Mill Creek Canyon Road:** The road itself in the APE dates to the early 1900s and contains associated structures, such as bridges and culverts, that are also historic and date to the early to mid-1900s. Based on its importance for local uses and events, the road is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP. The structures are considered architectural resources and are discussed in the next chapter.

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## **2.2 Anticipated Resource Issues**

Based on the cultural studies and a preliminary review of the proposed road improvements, FHWA-CFLHD anticipates evaluating the following issues in more detail in the environmental assessment:

- Direct disturbance to components of the Mill Creek Hydroelectric System is not anticipated based on the current design, and the rock retaining wall near the Elbow Fork trailhead parking area would be identified as an environmentally sensitive area on the design plans to ensure avoidance during construction.
- The proposed road improvements would modify Mill Creek Canyon Road, although its use and general characteristics would remain the same. Associated features, such as proposed retaining walls and drainage improvements, may alter the visual character of the road corridor or modify features or structures that contribute to the eligibility of the road.
- The Elbow Fork trail network may require modifications to accommodate the proposed road and parking improvements, which would require further coordination with the USFS as part of the design process.
- The dendroglyphs are not in an area that would be subject to disturbance or tree removal as part of the road improvements and are expected to be avoided completely.

FHWA-CFLHD will also be analyzing the effects to the Mill Creek Hydroelectric System and Mill Creek Canyon Road, which are considered historic properties, under the NHPA. The NHPA process entails coordination with the USFS, as another federal agency involved with the project, and consulting with interested tribes (to date, only the Hopi Tribe has expressed interest in prehistoric sites) and the Utah State Historic Preservation Officer. The outcome of the consultation process will be presented in the environmental assessment or decision document for the project.

## **3. ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES**

### **3.1 Affected Environment**

Architectural resources are associated with the built environment and include buildings, structures, objects, and groups of structures or buildings (referred to as historic districts) that are generally more than 50 years old. From an age perspective, they are associated with the historic era or post-European contact with Native Americans. Examples of architectural resources include houses, churches, commercial buildings, bridges, culverts, sculptures, and other historic

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structures. Based on the architectural resources inventory for the project, 10 bridges/culverts, nine cabins, and one weir were identified in the APE. Other structures, such as picnic facilities, were also assessed, but they were not considered to be old enough to be classified as architectural resources.

### **3.1.1 Bridges/Culverts and Weir**

Four of the 10 bridges/culverts are along Mill Creek Canyon Road, and the other six bridges/culverts are associated with side access to the Firs Cabin Tract and picnic areas. The weir, which is actually a Parshall flume, is along Mill Creek near the Elbow Fork trailhead. Key characteristics of each resource are below.

- White Bridge is a box culvert with a concrete slab bridge on top and formed concrete balustrade for the bridge railing. The bridge spans Mill Creek along Mill Creek Canyon Road in the western portion of the APE. Due to minimal alterations since its original construction, the bridge is important for its association with Mill Creek Canyon Road and its distinct design from the early 1900s. This architectural resource is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Three stone bridges also span Mill Creek along Mill Creek Canyon Road and have similar associations and characteristics as White Bridge. Stone Bridge 1 is concrete slab bridge with sandstone ashlar wingwalls and is located near White Bridge in the western portion of the APE. Stone Bridges 2 and 3 are arched culverts with uncoursed rubble stone wingwalls and are located just east of the Firs Cabin Tract in the eastern portion of the APE. These architectural resources are considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Two metal culverts span Mill Creek to provide access to the Firs Cabin Tract. Firs Bridge 1 is a modern culvert with loose, stacked fieldstone and compacted earth around the culvert. Due to its modern nature and lack of association with the historic period of development of the Firs Cabin Tract, it is not considered eligible for listing to the NRHP. Firs Bridge 2 is an older culvert with stacked fieldstone and compacted earth around the culvert. It appears to date to the mid-1900s and is associated with the Firs Cabin Tract development, making it eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Four bridges span Mill Creek to provide access to the Clover Springs, Evergreen, and Maple Cove picnic areas. All are timber stringer bridges and appear to have been modified recently, which means they no longer maintain a strong association with a historic period or have distinct design characteristics. None of the bridges is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- The weir is a concrete Parshall flume with a metal grate bridge and sheet metal shed with an assumed date of initial construction of 1966. Although the concrete part is old enough

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to be considered historic, the metal and wood structures appear to be modern. The weir does not have unique characteristics and is not considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.

### **3.1.2 Cabins**

The Firs Cabin Tract is a group of 24 recreation residences built on established tracts on the National Forest mostly between 1922 and 1976, with some being newer replacements of older structures. Nine of the cabins are in the APE in areas where indirect effects could occur. The other cabins are outside the APE and masked by dense vegetation between the road and the structure. Based on the history of the tract, the collective group of cabins is considered a potentially eligible historic district, with some cabins contributing to the overall eligibility and characteristics of the district and some being too modern and not contributing. Only the nine cabins in the APE were evaluated and are described below.

- Firs Cabin 1 is a rustic style cabin built in 1935 with no recent alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 2 is an A-frame style cabin built within the past 45 years, which may be in place of a previous cabin, and is not associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is not considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 3 is a vernacular style cabin built in 1939 with some modern alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 4 is a rustic style cabin built in 1933 with some modern alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 5 is a rustic style cabin built in 1930 with no recent alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 21 is a rustic style cabin built in 1938 with some modern alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 22 is a late 1900s-style cabin built in 1976 with some modern alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.



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- Firs Cabin 23 is a neo-rustic style cabin built within the past 45 years in place of a previous cabin and is not associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is not considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.
- Firs Cabin 24 is a post-World War II style cabin built in 1933 with no recent alterations and is associated with the historic period of the overall tract. It is considered eligible for listing to the NRHP.

### **3.2 Anticipated Resource Issues**

Based on the cultural studies and a preliminary review of the proposed road improvements, FHWA-CFLHD anticipates evaluating the following issues in more detail in the environmental assessment:

- Replacement of the existing culvert associated with White Bridge is proposed to accommodate the road improvements, which would alter the eligibility of the structure. FHWA-CFLHD is considering design features to retain the character of the existing structure, such as using a similar appearing rail, and will coordinate further with the USFS and State Historic Preservation Officer to identify appropriate mitigation measures to offset the loss of a historic structure, such as historic documentation or interpretive panels.
- Minor modifications to Stone Bridge 1 to accommodate the road improvements would introduce modern design styles, and FHWA-CFLHD is considering design features to mimic the appearance of the current structure, such as using similar stones and concrete. The need for other mitigation measures is not anticipated based on the nature of the proposed modifications.
- Stone Bridges 2 and 3 are along the road where the proposed improvements are not expected to require modifications to the structures.
- Roadwork on top of Firs Bridges 1 and 2 is not expected to require modifications to the culverts and associated fieldstone, and FHWA-CFLHD anticipates including notes on the design plans to ensure the culverts and fieldstone are not disturbed during construction.
- Direct disturbance to or modification of cabins associated with the Firs Cabin Tract are not anticipated based on the current design. Noise or vibration effects are also not anticipated based on the nature of the construction activities, although changes to the visual setting near some cabins could result from the proposed retaining walls.
- The picnic area bridges are not in areas that would be subject to disturbance as part of the parking improvements and are expected to be avoided completely.

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- The weir is not in an area that would be subject to disturbance as part of the road improvements and is expected to be avoided completely.

As noted above for archaeological resources, FHWA-CFLHD will be analyzing the effects to historic properties under the NHPA. For architectural resources, this includes White Bridge, the three stone bridges, Firs Bridge 2, the overall Firs Cabin Tract, and seven individual cabins. The consultation process is anticipated to focus on those structures that would be modified or altered as a result of the proposed road improvements, with mitigation measures being identified for changes to structures that could affect their eligibility. Results of the consultation process will be presented in the environmental assessment or decision document.