



## **Official Statement by Wasatch County Parks and Recreation Friday, April 26, 2024**

Since Southfield Skate Park was built, the Parks and Recreation Department has been happily astonished by the number of skate park enthusiasts using the facility. While we have always had minimal vandalism and graffiti, the destruction and graffiti has increased drastically in the last year to 18 months.

In the summer of 2023, we were getting tagged 2 to 3 times a week and replacing pieces of the restrooms just as often. We rebuilt the entire restroom on the north side of Southfield Park 3 times: partitions were ripped off the walls, the offenders were lighting toilet paper on fire, and dispensers were being ripped off of the wall for a Tiktok challenge.

We are also aware of the drug use, foul language, bullying and “fight club” activity at the skate park involving minors.

Beginning in March, we launched a social media campaign to prepare for the opening of our restrooms and increased use of the skate park. This campaign, called the “Antivandalism Project” promotes the protection of our public parks for future generations, and of course, if you “See Something, Say Something.”

Friday, April 19<sup>th</sup> our restrooms were reopened for public use after countless man hours of rebuilding stall walls out of steel and installing stainless steel toilets. Not 36 hours later, we had a broken sink and toilet paper lit on fire within a stall. On Tuesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> we had additional fires lit, tags throughout the restrooms and skate park, and antivandalism signs completely ripped down and torn to shreds.

After the vandalism and destruction occurred for the second time within less than 72 hours of a total rebuild, our directors made the decision with support of County Council and Heber City Police Department to temporarily close the park at 3pm on Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. This decision was not made lightly, but primarily as a safety concern to those that regularly enjoy the park and follow park rules.

The decision was made to close the skate park completely and have supervision of the Heber City Police Department and surveillance of our security cameras to ensure no one was trespassing. Additionally, the restrooms have been set with pre-programmed locks to only open during the daytime from 7am-3pm and for our spring soccer programs on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings.

Within hours of the announcement of our closure, Wasatch County Parks and Recreation and the Heber City Police Department were given the names of more than half a dozen individuals that could potentially be involved with the criminal activity. Most alleged offenders are males and females between the ages of 12 and 16 years.

In addition to the safety concerns, Parks and Recreation wanted to make a statement to get the attention of the community as this is becoming a bigger and bigger problem not just within our parks, but also at local schools, businesses, and even private residences.



The closure of the skate park is temporary: we know it is not ideal and certainly not the long term solution. We recognize that closing the park makes skaters feel targeted, though we're not targeting anyone except those committing the crimes of vandalism, destruction and trespassing. We simply needed to close the park in order to focus on a solution before anyone gets hurt or more damage is done.

We anticipate reopening soon, with the possibility of the end of next week (May 3<sup>rd</sup>). It is not our intention to punish the community, rather to increase awareness of the issues we're facing and to find a long-term, positive solution. Just within the 24 hours since closing, the community support we've received has been tremendous and we want to use that momentum to move forward.

Wasatch County Parks and Recreation will be hosting a Community Meeting regarding the Southfield Skate Park on Wednesday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at 7pm at the Wasatch County Recreation Center located at 345 West 600 South. All are invited and encouraged to attend.