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Matt Lane
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6944 South 3000 East
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RE: Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest Proposes Fee Program for Local Canyon Sites

Friends of Alta is Alta's local land trust, our mission is to protect and conserve Alta's environment. Since the early 80's FOA has been working with the USFS and other local stakeholders to manage and conserve the "Alta Experience." Alta holds a special place in our hearts because of one's ability to connect with nature (flora and fauna) and the iconic mountain landscapes coupled with recreation opportunities in an area not overexploited by development. Our comments are mainly focused on the sites in Alta. Cecret Lake and Catherine's Pass are both uniquely situated in Albion Basin and accessed by the seasonal unpaved Alta Summer Road.

When the USFS proposed a fee booth in Alta for Albion Basin in the early 90's Friends of Alta and then Alta Mayor Bill Levitt wanted Alta to remain a fee free area but be able to offer watershed education and best practices for safe recreation. The Town of Alta has been operating the Alta Summer Booth ever since and FOA provides an \$8,000 grant to the Town of Alta to aid in personnel expenses. Summer booth counts continue to jump each year and the demand for parking spaces in Albion Basin far exceed the supply. When all spaces are taken on a particular day, the result is a public safety hazard as the road is jammed full of cars searching for a spot and a degraded visitor experience for everyone in the area follows. If automobiles are parked efficiently, the unpaved lots host a total of 54 spaces (Cecret Lake 24, Catherine's Pass 30). While the booth is not a part of the fee site proposal for Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon it is difficult for us to consider this proposal without thinking through the entire Alta Summer Program (booth, shuttle service, enforcement, and user experience) and how this proposal relates to the rest of the management of the area.

We feel that this proposal, while limited, is a small step in the right direction and want to encourage the USFS to continue working with stakeholders to take additional steps to enhance the user experience and protect the natural resources. By limited, we mean that further consideration of the following services should be considered holistically: enhancing public transit in the Cottonwood Canyons, operation of and services provided by the Alta Summer Booth, and operation of the Alta Summer Road.



FRIENDS OF ALTA

As a means of enhancing the recreation experience for forest visitors we support (with criteria) the proposal to include Secret Lake and Catherine's Pass Trailhead as two of the 10 sites in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon proposed as day-use sites as standard amenity fee sites under the authority of the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act. We feel that the various fee options including America the Beautiful, a Cottonwood Canyon annual pass, a \$6 day use pass (good up to 3 days) that can be purchased on site, and free parking within a 1.5 mile hike provide reasonable fee options for users of varying financial means. We support the proposal because the added fee would provide a reliable stream of income for site facilities, maintenance, and operations that are badly needed due to high user numbers. We hope the fee creates a sense of value for the area and further enhances protection of the area. However, our support of the proposal hinges on several items 1) the fees collected stay local and are reported on an annual basis to the public and stakeholders 2) the added financial resources result in increased USFS presence in the canyons - multiple visits to each fee site, each day 3) there is added financial support to the Town of Alta for their role in enforcement, public safety, and Summer Booth Services 4) the USFS increases it's law enforcement capabilities to avoid straining local Town of Alta enforcement and 5) there is a commitment to continued coordination with local stakeholders, namely Town of Alta to discuss the future of fee program's integration with other summer management efforts (enforcement, Alta Summer Program, Albion Basin access, and what services the booth program offers and how it's managed). We have concerns that the fee program will not raise enough funds to adequately enhance the visitor experience, add extra enforcement pressures that exhaust already strained resources, and add to resource degradation by not addressing the larger question of crowding on the Alta Summer Road. It is also unclear how the proposal will integrate the Alta Summer Booth personnel duties – if personnel are contributing to the execution of the program and/or even if by default falling into the role of being responsible for program information (if so, compensation needs to be adequate).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to seeing how you plan to address our comments and concerns if the proposal is acted upon.

Mimi Levitt & Jen Clancy
President, Executive Director

The Mission of Friends of Alta is to protect the environment of Alta, including watershed and wildlife habitat areas; to preserve Alta's unique character and heritage; and to encourage stewardship and sustainability of Alta's environment and community.