



3/16/2015

Dear Mt Accord Executive Committee,

The Mountain Accord program has provided a unique and unprecedented challenge in planning for the future of the Central Wasatch. We appreciate the opportunity to participate and your willingness to consider many wonderful opportunities and the concerns raised by us and our community. Friends of Alta (FOA) participated in the Mountain Accord program understanding that there would be some give and get – our eyes and ears are open to compelling compromises that result in a “public” benefit.

Very quickly in the Mountain Accord program, it was recognized by the environmental stakeholders that there was not enough scientific data or analysis to adequately consider the environmental impacts of actions that were later proposed by the system groups. The right information and analysis is still not available - sound scientific data is imperative - we are encouraged by the effort to develop a framework for assessing and monitoring the environmental health of Alta and rest of the study area. Additionally, decisions made on the Blueprint should address the resulting impacts of visitation numbers (capacity) in order to preserve the unique character of Alta and enhance the quality of life while conserving wildlife habitats, ecosystems and the delicate watershed in order to prevent irreversible environmental and character degradation of the area.

The Alta experience can generally be characterized by stunning backdrops such as: Mt. Superior, Wolverine, Devil’s Castle and Baldy; high alpine ecosystems blanketed with 200+ species of wildflowers, 500” of snow annually, aspen and spruce forests; opportunities for solitude; and a chance to view moose, pika and other wildlife.

We acknowledge the need for more detailed information yet we have not held back in making broad statements about some of the proposals we feel will degrade the environment and threaten our community’s character. As we continue to move through this planning process we hope that there is room for the nitty gritty details to be openly discussed and considered so that as decisions are made unintended consequences can be avoided. Please see specific comments on each of the Blueprints four systems in the attached pages.

Sincerely,

Mimi Levitt, President & Jen Clancy, 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.

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In Memoriam

Bill Levitt, 1917 – 2009

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Environment

1. Under environment, the Blueprint's key actions of 1) conserving land, protecting watersheds and water resources, 2) monitoring environmental health, and 3) protecting and restoring the environment must be held at the HIGHEST PRIORITY when pursuing any action on behalf of Mountain Accord because the natural environment of the Central Wasatch is our Golden Goose – the thread if you will, that is common to the four systems of Mountain Accord.
2. The natural environment is an economic engine for the businesses and governments in the Central Wasatch, as well as the State of Utah. In addition to the unique product and experience being sold in Alta, it's the outdoor experiences and opportunities (being surrounded by Devil's Castle, Catherine's Pass, Secret Lake) to connect with nature that make Alta a unique destination.
3. Watershed protection is a critical investment in public health because it is a proactive tool in minimizing water treatment costs for the growing population.
4. Greater populations bring increased development pressures on undeveloped open spaces; population increases also increase impacts to the environment and put a greater reliance on our natural resources which could lead to environmental degradation. We aim to have the least impact on the environment by limiting our footprint and conserving important areas such as Albion Basin.
5. We strongly support the following next steps: protection of key wildlife corridors, implementation of an environmental restoration program, and development of a monitoring and adaptive management plan for environmental resources.
6. Every visitor, employee, and resident has an impact on our canyons character, environment, transportation system, and economy; each scenario proposed in the Blueprint will have different impacts. We request that decision makers in the Mountain Accord process VERY carefully study and consider the resulting impacts of visitation numbers in order to preserve the unique character of Alta, enhance quality of life, conserve wildlife habitats, ecosystems and the watershed to prevent irreversible environmental and character degradation of the area. The Blueprint references an annual increase in visitors from 5.7 to 7.2 million and population increase from 1.1 million to 1.6 million from 2014 to 2040. Without further study and analysis, we don't necessarily believe that the Blueprint should accommodate every new visitor coming to the Central Wasatch because every visitor, employee, and resident has an impact on our canyon's character, environment, transportation system, and economy that should be considered.
7. If the premise of Mountain Accord is to balance the four systems (Economy, Transportation, Environment and Recreation), then each system should receive the same financial investment. At this time, it appears that a larger portion of funding is committed toward the transportation proposed actions.
8. How will environmental impacts of the Blueprints proposed actions and alternatives be measured?

Land Swaps - Cottonwood Canyons Scenario Negotiation

1. As Alta's local land trust, FOA supports conservation of the land from Superior to Flagstaff to Emma Ridge to Grizzly Gulch for public benefit. It appears that this negotiation process is fluid and we continue to cautiously evaluate the details as they become available.

2. It is critically important to know how the lands received by the Alta Ski Area would be zoned by the Town of Alta.
3. FOA has generally been supportive of economic growth in the base facility zone as determined by the existing water contract between the Town of Alta and Salt Lake City.
4. FOA feels that there should be further discussion about increasing the Town of Alta's surplus water contract agreement with Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities for Alta Ski Area's potential base facility zone development.
5. If one of the incentives for a land trade between the USFS and Alta Ski Area is to transfer lands so that the USFS can focus on upper mountain management and get out of base facility decisions, then ALL land owned by Alta Ski Area in the upper mountain area should be included in the land trade.
6. While FOA recognizes that Grizzly Gulch is private property we do not currently support putting a lift in that area or ski area interconnect with Big Cottonwood Canyon/Park City.
7. FOA supports the existing Alta Ski Area special use permit boundary with the Forest Service.

Federal Designations

1. FOA supports an additional layer of protection that preserves habitat connectivity and conservation of ecosystem services (benefits to humans from the environment) on USFS lands in the Central Wasatch that are not currently managed as Wilderness. Additionally, we support the continued efforts of Brad Barber and the land designation committee to identify specific opportunities for federal land designation that can be integrated in the Mountain Accord program.
2. One of the environment systems goals was to create a formally established structure to streamline coordination between overlapping jurisdictions and ensure that all jurisdictions are working together toward a common goal. The intent is not to create another layer of jurisdiction or to strip any jurisdiction or authority but communicate more effectively. This type of coordinated effort should be broad reaching across all types of management for the Central Wasatch. This is essentially what the Mountain Accord program is facilitating currently; FOA supports continued coordinated management of the Central Wasatch.

Recreation

1. FOA supports preservation of Alta's unique "top of the canyon" recreational experience which cannot be replicated but could be destroyed. The Alta Experience is broadly characterized by stunning backdrops such as: Mt. Superior, Wolverine, Devil's Castle and Baldy; high alpine ecosystems blanketed with 200+ species of wildflowers, 500" of snow annually, aspen and spruce forests; opportunities for solitude; and a chance to view moose, pika and other wildlife.
2. FOA supports enhancements to a Central Wasatch regional trail network that accommodates and reduces different user group conflicts. Enhancements may include additional trails, connectivity, and enhancing facilities such as pit toilets.
3. FOA encourages the Mountain Accord program to develop and make recommendations for an ongoing, coordinated effort to address trail stewardship, funding and implementation of operations and maintenance of trailhead facilities in the Central Wasatch.

4. FOA supports securing new designation on USFS lands to protect areas from development while allowing current recreational uses.
5. FOA supports conservation of wildlife habitat that also enhances the outdoor experience.
6. FOA supports preserving a variety of recreational uses because those opportunities are valued highly in our communities.
7. FOA supports the existing Alta Ski Area special use permit boundary.
8. FOA supports maintaining the current balance of dispersed and commercial recreation in Alta; we also support the Blueprint Key Action of preserving key backcountry terrain.
9. FOA supports improving transit service to recreation areas, as long as it also serves dispersed backcountry users.
10. FOA supports studying user fee options to incentivize transit options and generate funds for environmental and recreation stewardship efforts.
11. FOA is supportive of directing recreationists to identified high-use nodes with infrastructure that can accommodate those recreationists.

Economy

1. FOA supports the Blueprint's key action to "Encourage development patterns that preserve community character and quality of life" because watershed, wildlife and open spaces are the foundations of Alta's economy. We support focusing development outside of the mountain areas, in urban areas and within the existing surplus water contract between the Town of Alta and Salt Lake City.
2. Alta's perch at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon provides an economic advantage to local businesses and also provides economic benefit to the greater Salt Lake Valley. FOA is concerned about changes that an interconnect transit system would have on the unique character and appeal of Alta. These concerns include losing the "end of canyon" charm by becoming a throughway. For many visitors Alta is a destination that should be preserved for future generations to be able to experience.
3. FOA is supportive of discussing minimal development in the mountains that is focused around thoughtfully designed transit stops at existing development nodes in the canyons (at the ski resorts).
4. FOA supports the development of an Alta Community Center as this is something our community has discussed for many years and has unified support.
5. FOA supports a limited scope of economic growth (within the Town of Alta's surplus water contract agreement with Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities) to be able to fund protection of the natural environment of Alta.
6. FOA supports enhanced avalanche mitigation techniques above Alta for safety along Highway 210 as determined by professionals.
7. FOA does not support extraordinarily expensive, taxpayer-funded solutions to problems mainly benefitting private industry businesses.

Transportation

1. In considering transportation solutions watershed protection must be our highest priority!

2. FOA supports enhanced transit combined with incentives to reduce vehicles and traffic on the canyon road. The preferred transit system solutions should be safe, reliable, responsible and phasable with convenient parking near the base of canyon that provides stopping points for dispersed recreation. FOA supports studying a vehicle and/or user fee for transportation in LCC as long as it is consistent with the other canyons.
3. In determining mode, the Mountain Accord program should study what the appropriate capacity or number of visitors to the canyons is in order to maintain a quality experience while preserving the environment and ecosystem services which provide for our communities.
4. FOA opposes a train coming up LCC because of the anticipated cost, inflexibility in phasing, potential irreparable environmental harm to the canyon and changes to Alta's low key character. We are concerned about massive public financing for a train that will likely serve a small portion of the local population while deferring funding from potential transit connectivity improvements in the Salt Lake Valley, where the majority of tax payers reside.
5. FOA feels that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) will be much less disruptive to the watershed than a train. We believe the BRT will be less costly and that a flexible and phased bus system would retain more of the environmental character of Alta's end of canyon location. With lane adjustments, BRT can make use of an existing roadway to provide a viable transportation solution. If the train is an acknowledged marketing effort, wouldn't it be more responsible to use marketing dollars to support BRT? We feel that an enhanced bus option, combined with transportation system management alternatives (such as incentives and disincentives) could be incrementally implemented and assessed, take advantage of updated technologies in a phased approach, and evolve with demand. Additionally, the current bus system is far from optimized (such as no Alta express option) and with better implementation, and incentives could service both the ski resorts and dispersed users on a year-round basis. Without trying an optimized bus system using the existing infrastructure we feel it is impossible to justify major infrastructure changes.
6. FOA fears that a connection with Big Cottonwood Canyon and Park City via a tunnel would be extremely detrimental to the character of Alta. Improved transit in LCC could alleviate some of the traffic and safety issues that have called for a tunnel.
7. FOA supports further examination of avalanche control mitigation along the LCC road corridor to enhance public safety. We also support improvements for the safety of road cyclists on the Little Cottonwood Canyon road.
8. FOA supports further examination of the critical component of parking in the valley and outside the canyons. More specifically 1) Temple Quarry trailhead which is now closed in the winter, could be utilized 2) Consider constructing parking garages (building up not out) 3) Explore using the gravel mine/quarry north of BCC to convert into parking/transit center.