

Preserving the Nature of Alta

Here in Alta, the aspen leaves have turned to gold, the Summer Road is about to close, lift maintenance is wrapping up, and we have already seen a few dustings of snow. This summer was the busiest on record, recording 20,000 more visitors than last year during the Alta Summer Booth operations. This increase keeps the challenges we face forefront in our minds and we are not alone in considering what the future holds for the greater Central Wasatch. Perched at the top of the canyon, Alta is a glorious space shared by locals and visitors, flora and fauna, and various businesses including the Alta Ski Area. Your support keeps Alta a place for us all to share.

This summer was a period of transition within the FOA office. Stella Day left FOA in August to pursue a degree in education at Westminster College, while Christine Doman joined our team as the new Operations Manager. She grew up in Salt Lake, worked at the Alta Lodge in 2010-11, and just completed a master's degree at Pennsylvania State University. She's thrilled to be back at Alta.

As you will read, Alta is under constant threat from many sides. FOA fills an unmatched role in our community. Your donation to FOA is both a statement and an action to conserve Alta's open spaces, protect your watershed, and preserve recreation opportunities. This newsletter contains our annual financial report and updates on our programs. FOA is your advocate for keeping Alta as open and wild as possible.

Mimi Levitt & Jen Clancy



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In Memoriam

Bill Levitt, 1917 – 2009

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Jen Clancy, Executive Director
cell (801) 742-9719
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www.friendsofalta.org

Mt Baldy Photo by Lee Cohen

Litigation: Utah State Engineer

FOA and Salt Lake City are challenging whether it was proper and legal for the State Engineer to allow a transfer of a point of diversion from Sandy up canyon to Albion Basin. This would be a devastating precedent resulting in large scale development pressures by linking dry lots in the canyons with water rights downstream.

At the September hearing, our motion to dismiss all of the defendants' counterclaims and equitable defenses, Judge Stone ruled in our favor except four factually based equitable defenses. At this point, without any discovery by either side, any factually based allegation can't be dismissed. It was a good sign, both that Judge Stone is careful, as is his manner, and that the several issues in the form of counterclaims posed by the defense are dismissed.

However, at the hearing and subsequently Mr. Haik, representing the Haik Group and Butler Management asked Judge Stone to make a final ruling on the motion to dismiss so he could appeal the matter to the Court of Appeals or the Utah Supreme Court. The prevailing parties, FOA and SLC, submitted a draft which was objected to by Mr. Haik. Judge Stone took some time to issue his own order, which may be appealed, but is very strong and probably won't be overturned. But, if it is appealed, and appellant review is granted, we are looking at least another five to six month delay before any discovery or other procedures can move forward.



Female Rufous Hummingbird by Lucinda Mullins

Bill Levitt Fellow, Ellie Johnson

Ellie had a busy summer answering questions from the public at the naturalist booth outside the Albion Grill. She also worked with the Alta Environmental Center on a forest health assessment, tree plantings, seedling survival study and collecting vegetation data for the bird survey. She traversed the entirety of Albion Basin multiple times weighed down with equipment but buoyed by her infallible attitude.

Alta Bird Survey Found 82 Species

FOA partnered with Tracy Aviary, Rocky Mountain Observatory and Alta Environmental Center, to initiate the Alta Bird Survey to help assess the health of Alta's ecosystem. This is the first systematic survey of the bird species present at Alta. The baseline survey is a three year project running through 2017 and will be followed by a citizen science monitoring program. Breeding bird surveys are done in June and July and resident bird surveys monthly from August to May. The first year recorded 4,259 individual birds, and documented 82 species. The five most abundant species were the White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Clark's Nutcracker, Chipping Sparrow, and Pine Siskin. There were six new bird species never before documented at Alta, including the Northern Goshawk, American Pipit, White-winged Crossbill, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Yellow Warbler, and Plumbeous Vireo. In addition to the birds recorded, the birds not recorded can say a lot about forest health. American Three-toed Woodpeckers and Evening Grosbeaks feed exclusively on Spruce Bark beetles and budworms. The lack of these birds indicates that population of these beetles and budworms are low in Alta. Vegetation data was also collected for study area, so that bird species can be correlated with habitats related to feeding and nesting. This information will help with future efforts in habitat protection and management.

Volunteer for Winter Bird Surveys

December 8	Discounted full day lift tickets are available. Registration is required by noon the Sunday before. Register by emailing environment@alta.com
January 12	
February 9	
March 8	
April 12	

Mountain Accord

Mountain Accord achieved a milestone on August 13th when the Accord was signed by Governor Herbert and the Executive Board. The Executive Board reached consensus on the Accord after two years of public involvement, various taskforce recommendations, and board discussions. This represents unprecedented consensus on goals for the future of the Central Wasatch.

With our help, the Accord, assembled stakeholders and decision makers, made a commitment to environmental preservation. Draft legislation is being written to add another layer of federal protection to approximately 80,000 acres of US Forest Service land in the Central Wasatch. Within that legislation is the rightful designation of Albion Basin as a Botanical Area. We are especially excited about this proposal and appreciative of the Alta Ski Area's support. Another important outcome is the Environmental Dashboard, which will provide environmental monitoring and an adaptive management plan. It will give us a better understanding of the area's ecological health, and help inform policy decisions going forward. We are encouraged, and feel heartened by these accomplishments. You helped us achieve all of this, and we need to keep up the momentum.



Winter Bird Surveys



Superior and Wild Flowers by Marguerite H Roberts

On the flip side, substantial questions continue to loom over us. Should Little Cottonwood Canyon (LCC) connect with its neighbor Big Cottonwood Canyon (BCC), and if so, how? Is the Alta land swap, as presented in the Accord, in the public and community's best interest? Alta is special, precisely because it is isolated at the end of the canyon and the majority of the land is publicly owned. We need a clear vision of the Alta Ski Area's plan for the base area. We are also working towards a better understanding of both the monetary valuation and intrinsic values for the lands to be swapped so that we can thoughtfully consider this proposal. We continue to be very concerned about the impacts of a train up LCC, and a tunnel connection with BCC.

While these proposals may address some of the transportation issues, we feel the cost to the environment is too great. Trains and tunnels do not fit the character of our beloved community. Both options would require large-scale construction projects that would cause irreversible damage to the affected areas. Instead, we support an expanded bus system that could use existing infrastructure and provide service with more flexibility and lower cost than trains and tunnels. FOA is committed to being directly involved in the next phases of Mountain Accord, including any NEPA processes and legislative actions. We will keep you apprised of this complex planning process and our efforts.

Treasurer's Report Skip Silloway

This year the FOA Board of Directors was presented with extraordinary circumstances that resulted in an operations shortfall. Of note, FOA purchased another lot in Albion Basin, developed a new website, participated in Mountain Accord, and funded litigation against Utah's State Engineer. The addition of these expenses was determined to be absolutely necessary to honor our mission.

We continue to actively seek willing sellers so that FOA can purchase land in Albion Basin for conservation. Our Conservation Fund balance allows us to quickly perform due diligence necessary for acquiring land. Building up the fund is essential to recover from each acquisition and be ready for the next.

The gravity of the case against Utah's State Engineer has called for our aggressive support. As you will read in this newsletter, we have also made headway affecting positive outcomes for the Mountain Accord program, yet proposals for a train and tunnel are still serious threats we must oppose. The combination of these efforts will open Alta to a high potential for development and result in ecosystem and watershed deterioration. We must not sit idle or we may lose Alta forever.

Your contributions validate our mission and enable FOA to take on these challenging issues. I hope you share our mission and conservation goals for Alta and Albion Basin and support FOA with a donation today.



Mother and Calf by Marguerite H Roberts

June 30, 2015 Annual Report

Revenue

Contributions	\$164,881
Directed Conservation Fund Contributions	\$14,917
Conservation Fund Investment Income	\$23,960
Directed Alta Defense Fund / Litigation Contributions	\$7,000
Directed Bill Levitt Fellowship Contributions	\$2,730
Fundraising Programs ¹	\$19,600
Special Events: Alta Gala & New York "net"	\$27,164
Total Revenue	\$260,253

Expenses

Operations	\$55,539
Alta School & Community Grants	\$2,234
Alta Community and Governmental Relations	\$30,541
Environmental Education, Studies & Sustainability ²	\$54,914
Land Conservation ³	\$69,448
Litigation Against the State Engineer	\$43,439
Fundraising	\$50,570
Conservation Fund Management Fees	\$4,056
Total Expenses	\$310,742

Conservation Fund Market Value on 6/30/2015 \$850,241

1. Alta Shuttle Donations, Alta Mid-Winter Study Group, Love Utah Give Utah, Memorial Tree Program, Merchandise
2. Alta Summer Booth Personnel Support, Summer Stewardship Programs, Wetland Study, GIS Mapping
3. Acquisition of One Parcel, Due Diligence, Conservation Easement Monitoring, Insurance, GIS Mapping, Conservation Resources & Planning

Milestones

- > FOA holds 19 conservation easements, and owns 4 properties that are being conserved
- > 2.3% increase in contributions
- > 7.5% increase in revenue
- > 83 first-time donors
- > 68 donors gave more than once

Goals for 2016

- > Contribute to and have an effect on Mountain Accord's direction
- > Acquire privately held undeveloped land for open space preservation
- > Stop any effort to transfer water rights from the SL Valley up to Albion Basin

Thank You For Your Support

Friends' Donations: Fiscal Year July 2014 through June 2015

We deeply appreciate the support of all our contributors. It is our policy to only list people who have provided permission. Please accept our sincere apology for any errors or omissions. To be added to this list or make corrections email info@friendsofalta.org.

Columbine \$1000+

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Alta Avalon by Sheridan Davis

"All people have a liking for some special animal, tree, plant or spot of earth. If they would pay more attention to these preferences and seek what is best to make themselves worthy of that to which they are attracted they might have dreams which would purify their lives."
Brave Buffalo, Lakota

This summer has been a summer of contemplation. I've spent time rambling in Alta as the earth has been warmed by the sun, guided to be present in silence, listening to the language of the natural world. My mind and spirit have hummed with the vibrancy of this lush summer season, and my heart has grown. If I may, I would like to share with you something of my experience of Alta and what is at stake regarding its future.

Alta is mythical to me. Sometimes I feel like being here, especially walking outdoors in silence, is like living in dream time. Slowly, slowly, I've come to know specific rocks and trees on trails I've meandered down. Slowly, slowly, I've begun to see tracks of animals and sometimes the animals themselves—moose and their calves, mule deer with velveted racks, coyotes, the red tailed hawks above Eagle's Nest, endlessly curious hummingbirds, marmots, pika, mountain goats and rainbow trout.

Walking on winding singletrack with wildflowers, I've lived in a state of wonder, watching the pine pollen in the summer light, the many aspects of Superior throughout the day, the rise and fall of Little Cottonwood Creek, the rich, lush sounds of Alta's flora and fauna. Exposure to this beauty has recalibrated my internal compass. In almost an epigenetic sense a different kind of knowing has been illuminated in me about this light-filled, scent-filled, life-filled place. This quiet language is available to everyone,




but requires being present in a place like Alta, and places like Alta are becoming harder to find.

Watching fragrant artemesia and wallflowers begin to grow in the warm spring earth as the snow retreated has been pure pleasure. Early spring elephanthead and bog orchid emerge near the rope tow, while lush bluebell and white columbine under the forest canopy give way to daisies, mint and paintbrushes of all shades. Walking the change of seasons from spring, summer, and early autumn, smelling those changes, and feeling the thrumming vibrant life of this green world, compels me to write to you about the beauty of this imperiled place.

The urge of human beings to increase our footprint on the beauty of the world has not escaped Alta. There is a proposal suggesting a tunnel and train pass through the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon to connect Big Cottonwood and Park City skiers. This plan is a neat workaround for the current visitation limits (set by the Forest Service) based on availability of parking in the canyon—with a train, there is no projected upper limit to the number of people that could flow in and out of Alta.

It has been said that the last best places of the world are being loved to death. National Park visitation is again setting records this year. The Central Wasatch alone, is receiving visitor numbers that rival those of Utah's five National Parks combined. It is past time to create protections for Little





Cottonwood Canyon that respect the end of canyon geological limits, and maintain the unique character of open, undeveloped green space. Our current visitor numbers seem to ski out the snow faster than ever and pack the summer road with more and more people every year. Backcountry touring is growing exponentially. Introducing an easier means of accessing Alta is not a way to increase the value of the experience for canyon visitors—or (increase value for) canyon businesses.

Like Edward Abbey, I believe that when we pave it (or in this case railroad it) we don't improve the experience of wildness. In many ways, we kill the reason we wanted to create access in the first place. It is poor business to create a race to the bottom in striving to build a resort just like every other. Alta is special because it is so lush, lightly developed, steep and deep. Don't ruin the business legacy that helped create success—protect it. Perpetuate it. Alta deserves a premium to visit and to ski because our steep canyon walls and lush environment are unique. Federal protection that permanently limits the human footprint here is a long term lucrative play, for the Alta Lift Company as well as for all Alta businesses.

More importantly, the idea of losing something lovely, changeable, and impossible to recreate once despoiled is motivating. The lushness of all seasons where the sounds of birds, the wind through tall grasses, wildflowers, firs and aspens fill up the senses... the geological character of this

canyon and the sense that we are small beings and the stone, the earth, the animals are the true denizens here—these are invaluable experiences and correctives to human hubris. Nature, snow, interlodge—that wonderful and rare community experience of being locked into a place with other humans because of tremendous snowfall—they all loom large here and are priceless.

Like the idea of epigenetics, I am worried that if we continue to develop the last best places of the world, we will lose that ability to sense that which is beyond ourselves and integral to understanding who we are. The universe cannot and does not fit our measure; some places remind us that not all is cut to human size and understanding. Moving through snow on skis, like the freedom of riding a bicycle, is for many of us a simple wordless joy, and our experiences in Alta are the peak of that.

I look forward to your vigorous support of our organization to protect the Alta we love.

Sheridan has been a resident of Alta since 2002 and has served on the FOA Board since 2011.



Fall Color by Howie Garber

Tree Program Adds 7 New Trees to Alta's Memorial Grove



2015 marked the fifth year of our Memorial Tree Planting Program. On September 11th, with perfect weather, and the aspens just starting to turn to gold, a group of friends, family, and volunteers joined us to plant trees. Trees were donated by Alta Ski Area and planted in memory of Naomi Wain, Jean and Harold Berlfein, Jim Linneman, and Bill Lennon. In addition to the transplanted trees, 100 seedlings were planted in honor of all of our loved one's lost over the last year.

If you would like to add a tree to the grove, please contact us.

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.

Ways to Support FOA

We have a whole suite of FOA merchandise ready for the holiday season on our website. Check out the 2016 Calendar, Erni the Ermine, tee shirts, and more.



Alta Shuttle donates 2% of all services to/from the Town of Alta during the winter season to FOA. Special thanks to Alta Shuttle, Tom, the shuttle drivers, and Alta Shuttle's patrons for supporting FOA. Altashuttle.com



Mention the Friends of Alta Real Estate Advantage Program program to broker Jim Williams and he will donate \$1,000 to FOA from his commission with the closure of a real estate transaction. WilliamsRealtyUtah.com



Local photographer John Blumenkamp of Teton Trail Photography donates 50% of the net proceeds from the online Albion Basin Gallery to FOA. TetonTrailPhotography.com



Visit Friendsofalta.org/donate for more details and links to donate through AmazonSmile or Smith's Community Rewards where your regular purchases support FOA.



Protecting Alta's natural resources TODAY means a legacy of outdoor recreation and watershed protection that your family and future generations can continue to enjoy tomorrow.

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