Dear Friends:

As Alta Ski Area celebrated its 75th Anniversary this past winter, we were given the opportunity to honor Alta’s past and to look forward. Because of thoughtful development, land conservation, and stewardship, Alta retains much of the charm it had when Alta first opened Collins Lift in January 1939. In this newsletter we provide updates on planning and partnerships that affect Alta, our current efforts in land conservation, and this summer’s planned stewardship work.

This past winter the Bill Levitt Fellow, Ashley Sullivan and FOA staff started a comprehensive inventory of privately owned undeveloped parcels in Alta and began reporting on the parcels that exhibit watershed and open space values. This work helps FOA prioritize our efforts as we continue annual outreach to landowners with undeveloped property. The undeveloped lots in Albion Basin remain a priority for our conservation efforts because of their location at the headwaters of Little Cottonwood Canyon watershed and because of the benefits that contiguous open space provides to wildlife and recreation.

The long march of the Patsey Marley Hill Subdivision litigation continues. This litigation was brought by the Shrontz Estate against the Town of Alta (Town) and Salt Lake City (SLC) after the Town unanimously denied the Estate’s 10 lot subdivision application on a 26 acre parcel in 2009. Denial was based on the application’s failure to meet all of the Town’s ordinances. Judge Kennedy recently ruled against SLC and the Town on two motions for partial summary judgment. SLC filed a petition, which the Town joined, for an interlocutory appeal (meaning an appeal before the case is completed at the trial court level) but it was denied. There are at least two additional pretrial motions pending. In summary, the legal process trudges along with the Town and SLC still determined to defend their regulations and processes. Friends of Alta remains dedicated to assisting the Town defend its zoning regulations which have helped protect Alta and Albion Basin from unwarranted development.

We give our heartfelt appreciation for your efforts to preserve the Alta we cherish for future generations. Your support is an investment in preserving the landscape, watershed, wildlife, and charm of Alta for the next 75 years and beyond.

Sincerely,

Mimi Levitt and Jen Clancy
The Alta Planning Commission and Alta Town Council have been updating the Town's General Plan, a non-regulatory document that serves as a general guide for future land use decision making. FOA has been an active participant in the process of public input for the plan's revisions, encouraging the planning commission and council to envision thoughtful development that is consistent with preserving the environs of Alta while still promoting growth that will sustain Alta's community. The update added a Vision Statement focusing on “responsible and sustainable growth and development” with an emphasis on winter recreation and the desire to develop Alta's summer economy. The Town included that they “will carefully consider the effects on the environment, including the watershed, wildflowers, and wildlife; public safety; and traffic in evaluating transportation options within Little Cottonwood Canyon and for transportation and skier connections to Big Cottonwood Canyon and the eastern side of the Wasatch Range.” The vision closes with an emphasis on Alta as a “sanctuary” and “place of inspiration, relaxation, and enjoyment” which you may recognize as an FOA mantra.

The Town Center Commercial Element section is also being worked on with emphasis on developing a recognizable commercial core / town center in the area between the Peruvian Lodge and the Albion Base. Thus far, the planning commission's revision process has strived to encourage long term year round commercial ventures in this “core” and to promote open communications amongst federal and private landowners and service providers in the canyon. There will likely be a recommendation to amend the zoning code for the commercial core of town to increase density, height, and coverage.

Plan and more info. at: www.townofalta.com/gov_plan.php

Merebea with the Alta School for the Leaf Pack Program

Phased Hydrologic Investigations of Albion Basin fieldwork, Dr. John Skalbeck & Jen

The Alta School examines aquatic life through the Leaf Pack Program
Alta Ski Area Updates & Alta Time Capsule

Alta Ski Area’s Master Plan Updates
At the end of October 2012, the Alta Ski Area submitted proposed updates for their Master Development Plan (MDP) to the US Forest Service (USFS). The MDP serves as a long-term planning tool, and with USFS acceptance it becomes part of the ski area’s special use permit. However, acceptance of projects into the MDP neither signifies approval of, nor creates an obligation for the USFS to approve projects in the future. The MDP update is the first step required before National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review for individual projects.

Alta Ski Area’s proposal included projects both inside and outside of their special use permit boundary in the following areas: renewable energy, parking, avalanche control alternatives, replacement of lifts, new lifts within existing special use permit, ski connections and possible use of Alta Ski Area’s private land, Town of Alta and Salt Lake City partnerships, lodging, adjustments to existing infrastructure, and snowmaking refinement.

The section on Avalanche Control Alternatives indicated all alternatives to artillery are under consideration. Proposals for the area above the Town of Alta from East Hellgate to Grizzly Gulch included snow fences, Gazex or similar technology, and new ski lifts to provide safe access for avalanche control personnel. The proposal noted that the ski lift option would be best combined with skier compaction for greater stability. Also proposed was a small tram to the top of Mt. Baldy and the use of Gazexs or equivalent technologies in all of the avalanche paths on Sugarloaf Mountain, Devil’s Castle, Wolverine, and Patsey Marley. For avalanche control methods on National Forest Service (NFS) lands outside Alta Ski Area’s special use permit, authorization would have to be approved under a separate permit.

The proposed update also listed a lift up Grizzly Gulch and connections with other ski areas. The lift up Grizzly Gulch would have several towers within Alta Ski Area’s special use permit on USFS land near the Albion Base with the remainder of the lift constructed on private land outside Alta Ski Area’s permit boundary. The proposed Mt. Baldy tram would also start within the ski area’s permit boundary and extend onto private land.

In a response letter from the USFS on March 14th, Forest Supervisor David Whittlekiend said “the elements of the MDP that are within your existing permitted area would be consistent with the screening criteria, though project level design and location information will be needed before we can complete the screening process and decide whether it would be appropriate to process a proposal seeking authorization for these operations and facilities.” The letter also said the USFS would be unlikely to consider a formal proposal to expand overnight lodging on NFS lands. The USFS response to the Grizzly Gulch lift and Mt. Baldy tram stated “that they likely would not be consistent with several of the screening criteria. Therefore, the Forest Service would be unlikely to consider a future proposal for authorization of those elements of your MDP submittal.” However the letter did not rule out the review of a formal proposal for these lifts.

FOA will consider the possible impacts of Alta Ski Area’s MDP projects on the local environment and open space character of Alta as individual projects move forward and undergo NEPA, which includes an opportunity for public input. Lastly, we would like to congratulate the Alta Ski Area for receiving LEED Silver Certification of the new skier services building.

MDP and more info at: www.alta.com/pages/futureplans

Alta Time Capsule
We would like to thank all those who participated in the Alta Time Capsule which captured images, stories, and videos from Alta’s 75 years of skiing and also allowed contributors to “make their mark” at their favorite place in Alta. There are some great memories saved and it will be fun to look back at these contributions in the future!

Thank you to everyone who supported this community project by sharing their content and with donations to the time capsule that supported FOA, Alta Community Enrichment, and the Alta Historical Society.
Access Wasatch Project
This winter, after thoughtful groundwork done by SLC Mayor Becker, the Governor’s office formalized the Access Wasatch project; the official project name is still being debated. The purpose of the project is to propose an approach to finalizing the Central Wasatch Mountains land-use and transportation planning work done in recent years and to embark upon a holistic evaluation and collaborative resolution for transportation improvements, wilderness and watershed protection, land-use planning, and economic opportunities. An approach to the project is being worked out so that a Notice of Early Scoping and the NEPA process can progress; phase 1 of the project is estimated at $5 million; the State of Utah has approved $2.5 million while the rest will be contributed by various stakeholder agencies and private funding. There is a tiered structure of committees working on the project which includes a stakeholder advisory group. The advisory group consists of five federal agencies (one of which is the Congressional Delegation), four state agencies, four regional government groups, three counties, ten municipalities, five chambers of commerce and visitor’s bureaus, all seven ski resorts, four conservation groups including Friends of Alta, the Wasatch Mountain Club, and the Utah Avalanche Center.

Wasatch Water Legacy Partnership
As a member or the Wasatch Water Legacy Partnership (WWLP), FOA has been involved in the group’s Alta projects. The WWLP leverages private and public support to undertake creative and effective actions that conserve and sustain critical resources, create resilient ecosystems, and enrich the quality of life for the region, its residents, businesses, and canyon visitors. The USFS leads the WWLP which is made up of other federal, state, county, and municipal governments, nongovernmental organizations, and ski resorts, with support from the outdoor retailer industry. A growing population is increasing demand on the watershed and recreation in the canyons along the Wasatch Front. In addition to growing recreational use, the watershed is also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, invasive species, and other stressors. Facing increasing pressure and reliance on public lands amidst declining budgets, the federal government desired to build innovative public-private partnerships involving public lands, and the WWLP is among the first such projects which may serve as a model for similar programs nation-wide. This partnership also helps FOA to leverage our resources and gain support for our stewardship volunteer opportunities and efforts.

Currently, there are two projects in Alta benefitting from the WWLP. FOA is a key partner addressing a zinc impairment in Little Cottonwood Creek which has negative impacts for aquatic life such as trout and macro-invertebrates. The second is a project to modify the Cecret Lake trailhead parking area to address public safety concerns and improve access to/from this popular destination.

More info. at: www.sites.google.com/site/wasatchlegacy

SkiLink Update
The original SkiLink bills expired at the end of the previous Congressional session and the legislation has not yet been reintroduced, but we are on the lookout. Friends of Alta opposes SkiLink because of the precedent it would set for selling or leasing public lands to a private development company in order to bypass the USFS’s NEPA process of environmental review and public input.
Love Give Utah and the Alta Gala

We give our sincere thanks to those of you who supported us and the other Alta nonprofits during two recent fundraisers. On March 22nd The Community Foundation of Utah hosted the inaugural Love Give Utah campaign; this one-day statewide giving event raised nearly $900,000 for Utah nonprofits. The “Give to Alta” project raised $5,700 for the benefit of FOA, Alta Community Enrichment (ACE), and the Alta Historical Society. The Alta Gala raised another $24,000 for these organizations; this festive evening also builds awareness for the arts, environment, and history of Alta.

2012 Calendar Year Contributors

In addition to those listed below, we would like to thank all of those who wished to remain anonymous. We apologize for any misspellings or omissions; please notify us at info@friendsofalta.org if either has occurred. Also, please note that going forward we will report contributors according to our fiscal year which ends June 30th. Thank you!

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Love Give Utah and the Alta Gala

Hazel Blum, Merebea Danforth, Fred Swetland, & Ashley Sullivan
We are gearing up for a busy summer of stewardship efforts in Alta. In addition to continuing efforts with invasive weed removals and tree and seedling plantings, we are excited to announce a special week of trail and restoration efforts with our partners and Alta’s first BioBlitz.

Invasive plants threaten the ecological integrity of the biodiversity found in Alta and the stability of the watershed. These non-native “weeds” often are the first to grow in disturbed areas and tend to out-compete native species creating large swaths of a single species. Invasive plants are known to increase fire danger and can increase erosion. The efforts of FOA, our partners, and our volunteers in removing invasive species helps reduce their spread and allows a diversity of native plants to re-establish in areas once taken over by invasives. Please join us this summer to help protect Alta’s spectacular native wildflowers and the health of our watershed.

We are excited to co-host Alta’s first BioBlitz. This two day event will be an intense period of biological surveying which brings together science professionals and volunteers to inventory species throughout Alta and provides an opportunity for education and engagement with the public. We are partnering with the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation, the Alta Ski Area’s Alta Environmental Center, and will have additional support from other local non-profits including Hawk Watch International to host the event. We will share more details as the planning continues, but for now we hope you will tentatively mark your calendars for August 3rd and September 14th.

In July FOA will be working with the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation, the USFS, Alta Ski Area, and the Town of Alta, with support from REI to close an illegal bike trail in Albion Basin. The rehabilitation of the affected area will include native plant restoration. We will support our partners’ efforts to improve existing multi-use trails. We are seeing strong momentum to improve the network of trails in Alta and to better incorporate the needs of all users, including the mountain bike community. Alongside our partners we will also continue the conversation about the current trail system in Alta and desired future conditions.

**How to Support Friends of Alta**

- Send a check payable to Friends of Alta to PO Box 8126, Alta, UT 84092
- Donate with a credit or debit card online at www.friendsofalta.org/support/donate
- Make a gift of securities, your tax advisor can provide information about your personal tax benefits. Contact Jen at 801-742-9719 / jclancy@friendsofalta.org
- Visit www.friendsofalta.org/support/volunteer or contact Jen for volunteer opportunities

*Friends of Alta is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible.*