

Wasatch Backcountry Alliance
Central Wasatch Commission
2024 Call for Project Ideas

1. Briefly describe your idea. How will it implement transportation and transit solutions, protect the ecosystems that originate in the Central Wasatch, steward recreational access, or sustain the economic viability of the project area?

Since 2016 the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance (WBA) has conducted an annual shuttle day to demonstrate that micro-transit solutions can work for wintertime dispersed recreation users. We contract with Utah Mountain Shuttles and have done so since 2016. In 2021, in response to Alta Ski Lifts' new paid reservation parking system that penalizes non-resort patrons, the WBA scaled its annual shuttle day up to a weekly shuttle day running on Saturdays with the goal of maintaining access to backcountry terrain in upper Little Cottonwood Canyon while demonstrating that backcountry users can play a role in helping to reduce traffic congestion.

During the 2022/2023 season thanks to the Central Wasatch Commission and one additional sponsor, we nearly doubled our financial resources for this project and thus expanded our service to Big Cottonwood Canyon. This was due to the success of our shuttle in Little Cottonwood Canyon and requests from the community to offer the Backcountry Shuttle in Big Cottonwood Canyon as well. Unfortunately, our additional sponsor was unable to contribute for the 2023/2024 season, so we operated the shuttle at a reduced capacity during the 2023/2024 season.

With the help of a CWC short-term project grant for season 2024/2024 and additional partnerships that we are pursuing this summer, we will continue to meet backcountry user needs and provide our shuttle service in Little and Big Cottonwood Canyons. We will continue to partner with Alta, Brighton, and Solitude for drop-off locations. In addition, we are working with the Forest Service to allow for trailhead drop-offs during the 2024/2025 season.

WBA's Backcountry Shuttle directly stewards recreational access. Our shuttle is an equitable grassroots transportation solution that serves a unique but large user group, as it costs less to ride than parking reservations in the Cottonwoods. The need for our service will be further exacerbated with the implementation of Forest Service trail fees next season. By working with Butler Elementary as the parking location for our shuttle, we are helping reduce traffic to the cottonwoods by creating a new transportation node and reducing the bottleneck effect that occurs when transportation nodes are located at the base of the canyons.

For the upcoming 2024/2025, WBA continues seeking funds from the CWC to continue to support our increasingly popular micro-transit program.

2. Does this idea result in other benefits to the Central Wasatch and its users?

The shuttle is currently available to anyone who wants to access Upper Big or Little Cottonwood Canyon on Saturdays, though the primary users have been backcountry skiers. Traffic congestion and recreational access in the Central Wasatch continue to be front-and-center issues in the Central Wasatch. Our shuttle mitigates traffic congestion, parking issues, and air quality impacts. The Backcountry Shuttle is a proactive response to the evolving needs of our community and the environment. Providing a season-long shuttle service for backcountry users in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons demonstrates that the backcountry community can both adapt to the realities of transportation problems in the Central Wasatch and address those problems with simple, flexible solutions today. Thanks to the CWC for your continued support.