

Central Wasatch Commission Call for Ideas Application



Grant Request: \$20,000 for the Cottonwood Canyons Watershed Education Program – Junior Ranger, Wasatch Wildflower Festival (Kids Component), and Canyons' Kids Days

The Cottonwood Canyons Foundation (CCF) was founded in 1999 with the mission of supporting the environment of the Cottonwood Canyons through stewardship and education. Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons (located east of Salt Lake City) serve as a recreational destination to more than 3 million visitors a year (hikers, bikers, bird watchers, skiers). More importantly, the Canyons are a protected watershed (providing drinking water to 60% of Salt Lake).

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 economic viability of the project area?

The Cottonwood Canyons Watershed Education Program is designed to teach principles of ecosystem and watershed education to learners of all ages. This program will utilize three educational opportunities: the Wasatch Wildflower Festival, Canyons' Kids Days, and the new and improved Canyons' Junior Ranger Program. This project specifically meets the CWC/Mountain Accord criteria of **protecting the ecosystems or watershed originating in the project area** by educating canyons' users about ecosystem and watershed protection and how they, as users, can implement them.

The Wasatch Wildflower Festival. Occurring in July in the Cottonwood Canyons, this program reaches approximately 6,000 canyon visitors each year. Under the umbrella of the wildflower season, each tour (be it in person or self-guided), includes a watershed and ecosystem health component. Recreators are taught that the Cottonwood Canyons comprise a unique and protected watershed, and the actions they can take to protect it.





Canyons' Kids Days. Occurring in August at Solitude and Alta, this program is directly targeted toward families and children. Several outdoor education organizations - such as Hawk Watch, Wasatch Mountain Institute, Discovery Gateway, and many more - join in this event to share ecosystem information and activities.

The Junior Ranger Program. Over 100,000 people frequent the Silver Lake and Albion Basin areas in the Cottonwood Canyons each year. Roughly half of these visitors are under the age of 18. Studies have shown that learners retain more information about science principles when the scientific information is presented in a multi-media format. Learners at Silver Lake and Albion Basin need supplementary materials (beyond signage and interactions with naturalists) to fully engage in the educational process as they are learning about species habitat, adaption, habitat protection, and maintaining a healthy watershed (the main foci of the CCF Watershed Education Program).

To meet this need, CCF created a Junior Ranger Program to fully engage learners in retaining information about habitat, flora and fauna, habitat protection and maintaining a healthy watershed. The program will have a digital and print-version of the Junior Ranger Guidebook. The Guidebook will be scalable (with materials to engage learners from age 5 to 18). The Guidebook will be presented in a format accessible via QR code on a cell phone or tablet, and a print version (for individuals without electronic resources). Learners will also have the option of checking out a Ranger Pack (complete with magnifying glass, ruler, and bird, mammal, and plant laminated guides). As learners proceed around the boardwalk at Silver Lake, or through Albion Basin, they can use the tactile biofact items to supplement their learning experience. After they return to the Visitor Center (and return the Ranger Packs), they will receive a Junior Ranger sticker or patch (depending on availability).



In addition, the digital Junior Ranger Guidebook will be available online via the CCF website to be accessible to individuals in under-resourced and under-represented communities who may be unable to access Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons. The Guidebook information will be

presented in such a way as to also be applicable to any green space (local park, local schoolyard, apartment commons area, etc.) While learners may not see the same animals as are highlighted in the Guidebook, species habitat and the need for protection are universal messages.

2. Does this idea result in other benefits to the Central Wasatch and its users? This program also meets the CWC/Mountain Accord criteria of both **stewarding recreational access** and **sustaining the economic viability of the project area**.

By enhancing the recreational experience of hiking at Silver Lake and in Albion Basin, the Junior Ranger program entices learners to engage in recreational activities in a fun and interactive way. While not necessary creating a new recreational venue, this program enhances access by attracting users (families and children) to recreational experiences by making them exciting and stimulating (intellectually and via senses). Both the Wasatch Wildflower Festival and Canyons' Kids Days, directly steward recreational access by creating events to draw users to the canyons.

All three components of the Watershed Education Program directly contribute to the local economies of the canyons. CCF does not provide food or beverages at its venues or events, relying on local restaurants and stores to serve guests. For instance, rarely does a visitor at Silver Lake not ask for directions to the closest restaurant or place to grab a snack.

