

# ALTA SKI AREA

P.O. Box 8007 • ALTA, UTAH 84092-8007  
PHONE 801-359-1078 • FAX 801-799-2340  
www.alta.com

March 3, 2019

Central Wasatch Commission  
10 West 100 South, Suite 300  
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

To the staff and members of the Central Wasatch Commission,

Alta Ski Area is supportive of solutions that help accommodate current and increasing demand in Little Cottonwood Canyon while protecting the water and environment in the canyon. Transportation needs are at a critical state and need our primary focus. We are not supportive of unbalanced solutions or solutions that may restrict transportation solutions. This document presents some facts regarding the situation in Little Cottonwood Canyon, concerns regarding the proposed legislation and two possible approaches that Alta Ski Area is willing to support.

## FACTS

1. Alta Ski Area's ski area boundary includes private lands in Grizzly Gulch which it has used for snowcat skiing for over 15 years and a special use permit that includes an area authorized for lift served skiing and an avalanche control area.
2. The Town of Alta is the most convenient access point on the Wasatch Front for backcountry winter human powered recreational activities. Winter visitation to the backcountry from the Town of Alta is at least double any other entry point on the Wasatch Front.
3. No public backcountry lands are accessible from the Town of Alta without crossing private property or lands under special use permit with the US Forest Service. Over 90% land on the North side of Little Cottonwood Canyon that is used by backcountry users is private land.
4. Private landowners in upper Little Cottonwood Canyon such as Alta and Snowbird, have allowed public recreational use of their private lands. These private lands are used by the public for backcountry skiing, snowshoeing and access to public lands for recreational activities.
5. Most of the parking in the Town of Alta is on private property or Forest Service property under permit with Alta Ski Area. On weekends, holidays and after storms backcountry users are consuming parking that has been developed, maintained and plowed by Alta Ski Area and is needed for ski area visitors.



ESTABLISHED 1938

6. The 2015 Mountain Accord is a non-binding formal recommendation which recognized that removal, addition or alternation of agreed upon actions could occur and necessitate re-negotiation.
7. In the Mountain Accord, Alta Ski Area's inclusion of its private lands in Grizzly Gulch in the proposed land exchange was conditioned upon a tunnel or other type of connection between Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon, water for a 100 room hotel and approval to build a 100 room hotel. Due to complications in these conditions and to preserve its flexibility to accommodate growth and preserve connection options, Alta Ski Area has removed its private lands in Grizzly Gulch from the land exchange. Alta Ski Area still has other private lands that are used by the backcountry community and have watershed value that it desires to include in the land exchange. CWC has been unwilling to include these lands in the legislative land exchange.
8. Through the Mountain Accord land trade process and the legislative land trade process there has always been an understanding that the ski areas or the Forest Service may remove any of their lands from the land exchange process for any reason. The proposed legislation only authorized the US Forest Service to proceed with an exchange.
9. NEPA concerns, valuation estimates and split estate issues regarding the private lands in the proposed land exchange may exclude parcels from eligibility for exchange. Initial trouble spots identified are the Flagstaff area and Grizzly Gulch.
10. The legislation introduced by Representative Chaffetz in 2016 stalled in committee primarily because it was one sided. On one side it created wilderness, a new federal land designation and legislatively authorized a land exchange. On the other side was a promise to address transportation issues. The current legislation proposed by the CWC has the same problem.
11. We are experiencing a great snow year along the Wasatch front. Skier visits are up all across the West. We may have a record skier visit year in Utah and across the Nation. Alta Ski Area's skier visit numbers have increased 25% over the past 15 years. While the ski areas have adjusted to accommodate growth on their mountains, the road and parking capacities are the same as they were 15 years ago.
12. Hundreds of cars are being parked on the shoulders of Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon every weekend, holiday and powder day because the parking capacity in parking lots today is the same level as it was 15 years ago.
13. Travel times getting to and from ski areas in Big and Little on weekends and holidays have increased to between 1 and 2 hours in ideal weather conditions and regularly 3 hours plus when you add some snow to the commute. The capacity of Hwy 210 has not significantly changed in the past 15 years and is not adequate to efficiently handle the current demand on weekends, holidays and days with snow.

14. UTA ski bus ridership in the Cottonwood Canyons was 375,000 during the 2004-2005 ski season, dropped to less than 200,000 between 2008 and 2014, but has climbed to almost 275,000 for the past two seasons and is up for this current season.
15. On March 1, 2019 Alta ski Area conducted a survey of cars coming into the Albion Parking Lot between 8:30 am and 10:45 am. We found that 30% of the cars had come from the Park City area and 31% of the cars were rental cars. Further study of where vehicles are coming from should be completed before deciding on transportation solutions.
16. The last version of the CWC legislation contains language that would prevent connections between the ski areas that could reduce the number of vehicles visiting the Cottonwood Canyons. Connection options should be preserved not restricted.

**Why is it premature for the Central Wasatch Commission to introduce legislation that creates a National Conservation and Recreation Area (a new federal designation)?**

- Transportation solutions should be developed and agreed upon before or in concert with a new federal designation. The current legislation only contains a promise to continue to work on transportation solutions.
- Land exchanges between the US Forest Service and the Cottonwood Canyon ski areas are being refined and may impact the conservation and recreation area boundaries.
- Management guidelines and regulations for a conservation and recreation area have not been defined and agreed upon by the stakeholders. Creating a new federal designation without knowing its impacts doesn't seem to make much sense.
- Salt Lake City's Olympic bid configuration and needs have not been determined and agreed upon. A new federal designation should support and assist the Olympic bid not restrict or curtail it.

**Two approaches that Alta Ski Area can support to move legislation forward**

1. **Delay the creation of a new federal designation until after transportation solutions are developed and agreed upon.** Modify the proposed legislation to create the additional wilderness, create the white pine special management area and facilitate the exchange of privately held upper watershed lands with environmental and recreational values by all Cottonwood Canyons ski areas into public ownership. Delay the creation of the new federal land designation until after the transportation solutions are developed and agreed upon, the management plan and guidelines are developed for the new federal designation and Salt Lake Olympic bid configuration and needs have been determined and agreed upon.



2. **Remove the Cottonwood Canyons ski areas and Town of Alta from the new federal designation and preserve transportation options within the federal designation.** The proposed legislation would create a new federal designation and not include the ski areas and the Town of Alta, create the White Pine Special management area, facilitate the exchange of privately held upper watershed lands with environmental and recreational values by all the Cottonwood Canyons ski areas into public ownership and preserve transportation and connection options between the ski areas, Summit County and Salt Lake Valley.

As indicated in the beginning of this document, Alta Ski Area is supportive of solutions that help accommodate current and increasing demand in Little Cottonwood Canyon while protecting the water and environment in the canyon. We believe both of the approaches presented above do so. We seek your support of one of these approaches so we can jointly move legislation forward, rather than oppose the legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael R Maughan", written in a cursive style.

Michael R Maughan  
President and General Manager  
Alta Ski Area