I’ve always had a strong interest in the outdoors, but my time as the Bill Levitt Fellow led me to explore aspects of the natural environment that were almost completely new to me. Alta’s unique high mountain environment provided many opportunities for me to learn about and encounter Utah’s native plant and animal species that are less common in the valley. I also made great connections with community members and members of other local environmental organizations who share my passion for conservation. Throughout the summer, I developed a deeper personal connection with the environment, and was able to share that with the community.

 One of my favorite aspects of this job was sharing experiences with and knowledge of wildlife with others. As a naturalist host, I worked with several environmental organization representatives each Sunday. I learned a lot about the wildflowers from the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation hosts, and was able to share that information with visitors to Albion Basin. Educating visitors about the environment was rewarding work because we were helping people develop a personal connection with nature. It was exciting when hikers would return to the trailhead and tell us their stories of what they encountered, whether it was a moose or a field of wildflowers in full bloom. When I explored on my own, I took many videos and photos of my wildlife encounters to share my experiences with others. Being a host brought me closer to Alta's environment, locals, and visitors.

 Within the first few weeks of being a host at Albion Basin, I realized that many visitors to Little Cottonwood Canyon are unaware that it is a protected watershed canyon, meaning it supplies Salt Lake Valley with drinking water. We often got questions about why certain rules were in place which prohibited dogs and swimming up the canyon. Occasionally, we had to turn visitors away because they had a dog with them. These interactions gave me the idea of designing an educational brochure to hand out to visitors. The brochure is titled “Responsible Recreation in a Watershed Canyon,” and it provides information on how visitors can keep their drinking water clean. It includes a section listing different local hikes that allow dogs, as many people are disappointed when they are turned away after bringing their dog up the canyon. I proposed this project and spent most of my time designing it during my first month as a Fellow. The brochures are now stocked at the Alta Fee Booth and FoA’s office to be handed out to visitors.

 Before this job, most of my experience had been with community outreach in relation to the environment. This summer I gained more experience with fieldwork. Our Invasive Weed Program and Native Planting with Alta Environmental Center (AEC) were two programs I worked on to encourage native plant growth. I spent multiple days on mountainsides planting wildflowers with the AEC summer crew or removing invasive weeds that crowd out native plants. I enjoyed this work as I gained a better understanding of practical methods of preserving the environment. I also applied my outreach skills with our Invasive Weed Program by organizing a volunteer event with Black Diamond Equipment. This event was very successful as we removed most of the weeds in one of our biggest weed zones in two hours! Working with great people to preserve Alta’s natural beauty was very impactful to me.

 As a local who grew up close to Little Cottonwood Canyon, I greatly appreciate the experiences I had working as a Fellow. I loved learning about the culture of Alta and the ecosystem of the canyon as a whole. This place means a lot to me personally, and I was overjoyed to have the opportunity to do my part in protecting it and sharing it with others.