Every day at Alta is a new adventure. As the Bill Levitt Summer Fellow, I felt the immense privilege of deeply immersing myself in the natural rhythm of a summer in Little Cottonwood Canyon. When I began working for Friends of Alta it was early July, and the first round of wildflowers were just beginning to make their presence known. One of my consistent duties this summer was working Alta’s summer information booth in the Albion Basin parking lot every Sunday. For this job I would spend half of the day walking the trails of Alta answering people’s questions. On these regular hikes, I began to notice the subtle changes that occurred week to week and found myself marking the progression of my summer by the flowers I was seeing. As my time with Friends of Alta comes to an end, it feels fitting that it is accompanied by a chorus of fall foliage and the first snow!

Among the most rewarding experiences of this summer was getting to help represent Friends of Alta at a variety of educational and volunteer events. It was very valuable for me to see firsthand the challenges and opportunities that come from being a small non for profit trying to communicate its mission to the public. I also appreciated summer events because they seemed to attract a more diverse and wider demographic of people than I had experienced in a winter at Alta. This difference emphasized the importance of outreach and education in order to make all visitors to Alta feel included but also invested in the future of the area. With this goal in mind, I designed an educational book of activities that will hopefully engage and excite young people and their families as they visit Alta. I hope that Friends of Alta continues to emphasize education as an avenue to inspire conservation here at Alta. This book will be ready to distribute next summer.

Much of this summer was dominated by UDOT’s proposed transportation alternatives that forced many people who love Little Cottonwood Canyon to think hard about what is in store for the future. I personally felt frustrated to see how bureaucracy can seem like it is bypassing logic and the desires of local community to serve larger corporations. Experiencing this debate through the eyes of Friends of Alta made me appreciate how long the fight for conservation is and how important a strong vision for the future is. I remain hopeful that logical, long-term solutions will prevail over short-sighted money grabs but regardless I am grateful that there are committed people who will continue fighting against the over development of beautiful spaces.

I will leave Friends of Alta with a better understanding of how dynamic the battle for preserving natural spaces is and an increased appreciation for the people who tirelessly fight these battles. I appreciate this opportunity I was given to dive deep into the social and natural landscape of Alta. I have a whole new perspective as to why this place is so special and I will always love Little Cottonwood Canyon.

-Eliza Van Wetter

Summer 2021 Bill Levitt Fellow