

December 2023 Issue no. 28

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In Memoriam

Bill Levitt, 1917 - 2009

Friends of Alta

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Let It Snow

As the landscape of Alta completes its metamorphosis from the vivid golds and reds of fall to the all-encompassing blanket of winter, the anticipation and excitement for the winter recreation ahead becomes palpable. The greatest snow on Earth has officially touched down in Alta! The 2022-2023 ski season broke all previous records for Utah, with an estimated 7.1 million skier visits during the season. That beat the previous record of 5.8 million visits during the 2021-2022 season, and the prior record of 5.3 million in 2020-2021. This trend shows a large increase of skiers at resorts across the Wasatch Front, which means greatly increased environmental pressures for a place like Little Cottonwood Canyon. Alta is not Park City, nor is it the Swiss Alps. The risk of Alta and Little Cottonwood Canyon being "loved to death" is very real and something that can no longer be ignored. Alta is truly one-of-akind, and that uniqueness necessitates its protection.

The Gondola Fallacy

Regardless of what rhetoric you may have heard, the issues caused by increased human impact and traffic congestion in Little Cottonwood Canyon cannot be solved by a billion-dollar gondola. Construction of the gondola towers would detrimentally harm the vital Little Cottonwood Canyon watershed, which contributes nearly 60% of Salt Lake County residents' safe drinking water. Not to mention the destruction of flora, fauna, and the canyon's majestic viewscape, all of which Friends of Alta have worked diligently to protect for over 40 years. The placement of the gondola towers and the impact of construction would also irreparably harm popular climbing, biking, backcountry skiing, and hiking areas. The gondola may move traffic out of the canyon, but it would only push it onto Wasatch Blvd, I-215 and surrounding neighborhoods in Cottonwood Heights, Sandy, and Granite. By simply moving the "choke point" of traffic congestion, the gondola will only create new issues while solving nothing. In this instance, the remedy is simply worse than the disease.



The True Cost

As it stands, Utah taxpayers would pay, on average, \$1000 per family to fund the construction of the gondola with a 1.2-billion-dollar price tag. Only 10% of Utahans downhill ski yearly on average, which leaves 9 out of 10 Utah taxpayers footing the outlandish bill while receiving absolutely no benefit. We know from the record-breaking 50,000 comments sent to the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) that citizens are overwhelmingly opposed to the construction of a gondola in Little Cottonwood Canyon. Most Utahans will never ski Alta or Snowbird, but they all see the crumbling infrastructure throughout the state and the needs of the communities they call home. Ignoring the needs of the people statewide in order to construct this gondola does not promote justice, impartiality, or fairness for our Utah communities.

Friends of Alta vs. The Gondola

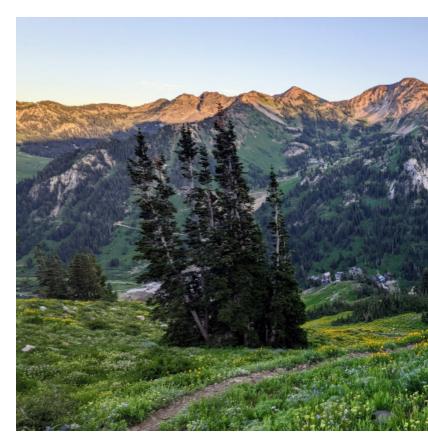
Today, the fight to stop the gondola has entered a new stage. Friends of Alta, together with a coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to finding sensible and less damaging solutions for transportation bottlenecks in Little Cottonwood Canyon (LCC), have filed a lawsuit challenging UDOT's decision to install a gondola system as its solution. Friends of Alta did not enter into this lawsuit lightly, but did so because it is the right thing to do and necessary to protect Alta and Little Cottonwood Canyon from irreparable harm. Craig Heimark, the spokesperson for the plaintiffs in this lawsuit states, "We hope the lawsuit will induce a pause while additional analysis is performed, providing legislators time to review the over \$1B cost of the Gondola Project, which is opposed by over 80% of the public respondents and all the affected areas' mayors... Little Cottonwood Canyon is a world-renowned venue that could be irreparably damaged by a hasty decision focused only on traffic congestion rather than on protecting the interests of all Utah citizens and canyon users."

Heimark continued, "we expect the lawsuit will create the time and space for Utah legislators to review and direct UDOT to consider and test cheaper and more effective transportation solutions by using

the \$150M recently authorized BEFORE allocating additional taxpayer dollars or making a final decision."

Alternative solutions include:

- Improving the quality and frequency of existing public transportation as mandated and funded by the State legislature.
- Testing the effectiveness of electric bus technology and service to satisfy demand.
 - Requiring reserved parking in advance.
- Enforcing mandatory vehicle traction laws for LCC, November 1 to May 1.
- Testing selected lane closures for private vehicles during peak traffic hours to reduce the transit time of buses and micro-transit vehicles.
- Installing tolling infrastructure that includes variable pricing to promote carpooling and microtransit solutions.
- Comparing the cost and effectiveness of modern Remote Control Avalanche equipment to the



proposed installation of very expensive snow sheds.

The lawsuit will challenge several aspects of UDOT's process in its review and selection of the Gondola Project. Plaintiffs seek to invalidate the Final EIS and Record of Decision and require UDOT to consider the full impact of the Gondola Project in LCC, on its water resources and in the nearby neighborhoods and canyons.

Among other issues, the lawsuit alleges UDOT failed to:

- Identify an appropriate purpose and need for the transportation concerns to justify the Gondola Project impacts and costs.
- Consider reasonable alternatives and present unbiased analyses.
- Adequately scope their Environmental Impact Statement to analyze impacts to views, wildlife, air and water quality, roadless areas, hazardous waste sites, and impacts to areas outside Little Cottonwood



Photo By Jacque Tietjen

Canyon as required by law.

- Substantively respond to public comments throughout the NEPA process, including those related to the above impacts and full/accurate costs of the Gondola Project.
- Properly coordinate with the United States Forest Service, which manages nearly all of the land through which the Gondola system will be constructed and operate; and
- Comply with the 1966 Transportation Act enacted to protect our public recreation area, our trails, and our local climbing areas.

Friends of Alta are committed to stopping the gondola no matter how long it takes. If you, like us, believe that Alta and Little Cottonwood Canyon are jewels of the West that are worth protecting, please consider making a donation to support our lawsuit to stop the gondola. Your support can go a long way to helping us even the playing field.

Gratitude

We have a real fight in front of us, but I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to thank our supporters for making 2023 such an incredible year. Because of your support, we have been able to create new programs and expand existing programs designed to protect and preserve Alta's unique environment, heritage, and character. We have also created fun and exciting new merchandise that we know you are going to love (and that make great gifts for the holidays!) We have the best supporters in the world, and we are grateful for each and every one of you! Have a wonderful holiday season and know that Friends of Alta will continue fighting for

you and fighting to protect our Alta!!!

Kody R. Fox Executive Director



Summary of Summer

We were able to host and participate in a variety of events this past summer. Thank you to everyone who participated, and we hope to see you again next year!

Alta Gala:

The 2023 Alta Gala was another huge success! The event sold out within 19 minutes of opening ticket sales and raised a record amount of funds to support the work done by Friends of Alta, Alta Community Enrichment, and the Alta Historical Society. If you missed the event this year, do yourself a favor and make sure to attend the 2024 Alta Gala! You won't regret it.

Bill Levitt Fellowship:

The Bill Levitt Fellowship program is an annual opportunity for selected individuals to work with our Executive Director for three months. The fellowship focuses on how Mayor Levitt's standards of excellence, intelligence and integrity in public process can combine with Friends of Alta's conservation efforts to protect Alta's environment and unique character. Those who wish to further their knowledge and experience in conservation and local government are encouraged to apply! This years' Fellow did an amazing job and her reflection is available below!

Wasatch Wildflower Festival:

Friends of Alta participated in the Wasatch Wildflower Festival hosted by Alta Environmental Center and Cottonwood Canyons Foundation. The event was a great opportunity to speak with the public about the work being done by Friends of Alta and the principles of leave no trace, as well as



Photo by Johnny Adolphson

hand out educational materials like the Alta Junior Ranger Program booklets to families visiting our table. The event saw over 1,200 attendees and seems to be growing every year!

Alta Kids Day:

Friends of Alta participated in Alta Kids Day again this year. Our activity booth taught kids about various aspects of the environment specific to Alta. This fun-filled educational event was a wonderful opportunity to connect with the youth and families who recreate in and care for the future of Little Cottonwood Canvon.

Volunteer Planting Day:

Friends of Alta co-hosted a volunteer planting day with Alta Environmental Center. We helped replant a total of 273 native plants near the Albion Grill!

Memorial Tree Planting:

We were fortunate enough to meet some wonderful families who purchased trees to memorialize their loved ones. We planted 6 new trees in the Memorial Grove and replaced 4 existing trees that didn't make it through the winter.

FOA & SLCAS Star Party:

We hosted our second annual star party this year with the Salt Lake City Astronomical Society. Participants were able to go from telescope to telescope to view and learn about what each astronomer was studying. We were joined by 40 participants at this year's family friendly event.

Black Diamond Volunteer Day:

Friends of Alta hosted a volunteer day with a group of amazing Black Diamond employees to help with our invasive weed zones near the Rustler/Snowpine. We were able to remove 9 trash bags full of weeds in the area!

~New Events & Programs This Year~

Friends of Alta Membership Program

Our new Membership Program offers a convenient way to support Friends of Alta in our efforts to protect and preserve Alta's unique environment, heritage, and character. We are driven by conservation values that bind our ever-growing Friends of Alta family. Your membership contributions generate reliable income to fund our important conservation and educational programs. This allows our team to focus more on our work and less on fundraising. In addition to supporting our programs, our membership tiers also include perks such as access to member events, a Friends of Alta calendar, a member refrigerator magnet, priority enrollment for specific FOA events, and discounts on FOA merchandise. For more information visit: https://www.friendsofalta.org/membership-information

Mine Tour:

Friends of Alta partnered up with Keith Hanson (GM of Salt Lake County Service Area 3) to do a educational mine tour /water treatment tour. After the tour, participants joined us for some wine and hors d'oeuvre at the Alta Lodge.

Winter Junior Ranger Program:

Given the success of the Alta Junior Ranger Program, Friends of Alta teamed up with Alta Environmental Center and Visit Salt Lake to create a booklet focused on the environment of Alta during the Winter. This is a fun-filled guide designed to help families explore, learn, and protect Alta. The book covers topics ranging from geology to wildlife and environmental stewardship using kid-friendly puzzles and games.

Club U Hike:

This year, Friends of Alta and Club U guided an educational hike for their youth summer camp. We hiked around Alta and discussed a variety of topics including Alta's unique history, it's vital watershed, and flora and fauna.

Enhanced Forest Ranger Program:

This past summer we supported an enhanced Forest Ranger program. The rangers were on the trails reminding people to be good stewards of the environment.

Friends of Alta Speaker Series:

Friends of Alta is extremely pleased to announce our upcoming FOA Speaker Series! Our Speaker Series will begin in early 2024 and will be led by FOA board member Paul Brooks. Paul is a professor of Hydrology and Biogeochemistry, founding director of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Hydrology and Water Resources at the University of Utah, director of the Wasatch Environmental Observatory, and Fellow of the American Geophysical Union. More details to come!



Photo By David Heatley

Letter from Our Board President

Dear Friends,

The first snows of the autumn have fallen. Although a few stubborn leaves remain on the trees, it is clear that the winter season is almost upon us. I find this is the time to take a deep breath and reflect on the past spring and summer.

Our summer program was as robust as always, and for me, one highlight was FOA's annual Star Party. Attendees observed star clusters, constellations, planets, and the enormity of the cosmos. Dark skies are becoming extinct in our country. While Alta doesn't qualify as a "Dark Sky" community due to its proximity to Salt Lake City, it certainly comes close. Through its conservation efforts and its opposition to the gondola, Friends of Alta works to keep the skies dark.

There is a saying that goes, "If it's not the damn summer people, it's the damn winter people," which is so, so true. Alta is on the verge of being loved to death during both seasons. This past summer we supported an enhanced forest ranger program. The rangers were on the trails reminding people to be good stewards of the environment. We support common sense solutions to the transportation problems of our snowy winter seasons, such as enhanced bus service, carpooling, parking reservations, and perhaps tolling. Our goal is *not* to greatly increase the number of people in the canyon, but rather to allow visitors to get up and down the canyon safely and with less gridlock.

I hope to see many of our "Friends" on the slopes this winter. Let's take a few runs.

Peace and Powder Snow Cassie Levitt Dippo Board President – Friends of Alta



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 Canvons 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.

Thank you, Shayna Pugh 2023 Bill Levitt Fellow



THE GONDOLA

Friends of Alta was formed in 1980 by Bill & Mimi Levitt and myself. We were concerned that Alta, Albion Basin, and Little Cottonwood Canyon would become another Park City with endless rows of condominiums and McMansions. We started out as the Alta Legal Defense and after we raised our first significant donations, became the Friends of Alta.

In the past 43 years, we have been involved directly or indirectly with six different lawsuit that were filed to stop development. We were successful in five of these lawsuits, and the sixth is still being negotiated. Each of these confrontations pale in comparison to the destructive impact of the proposed GORILLA GONDOLA. To put it bluntly, it is a \$1.2 billion boondoggle to be built at the taxpayers' expense. The world's longest gondola at 8 ½ miles long, would service and benefit two private ski resorts.

The complex and well-funded Construction, Real Estate. Asphalt Road Building, and Public Relations/Tourism Industries' (CRAP) sees the Central Wasatch for its development and money-making opportunities. CRAP is blind to our population's dependence on water coming from the Central Wasatch. Moreover, CRAP does not value the remarkable majesty of a canyon carved by glaciers, which has created a beautiful place of great solace and unparalleled recreational activities.

On the technical/scientific side, the consultantdevised Environmental Impact Study (EIS) issued by UDOT is so deeply flawed that a lawsuit (FOA v. UDOT) challenging its validity is now more than forty pages long. The analysis of the traffic flow is mostly limited to Alta's renowned powder days. The projected time to travel from the base to Alta would be slower than a car or a bus. It is estimated a round trip will cost a minimum of \$35.00, unless Utah taxpayers chip in funds. The two thousand parking spaces at the base of the gondola will move the gridlock from the Alta road to other locations along Wasatch Boulevard. The EIS fails to consider that the construction and operation will destroy historic climbing areas on the north side of Little Cottonwood Canyon. Further, the EIS declares there are no threatened, rare, or endangered species, while the Utah Native Plants Society lists at least six flora species in one of the above categories are found in Little Cottonwood Canyon. Finally, the EIS did not recognize that golden eagles are present in the canyon, in violation of the Bald

and Golden Eagle Act, which prohibits any federal project from proceeding if either of these species are within half a mile of the federal project. The EIS is deeply flawed and FOA is supporting a legal challenge against UDOT.

Now is the time for FOA to act. We need your help. Please, please help us by getting the word out about the Gondola and by donating to Friends of Alta to support our efforts to protect and preserve Little Cottonwood Canyon and Alta.

Pat Shea

Legal Counsel - Friends of Alta



Photo by Foster Collins

New Communications Manager Nikki Zaja

Introducing our new Communications Manager, Nikki Zaia. Nikki was born in New York and moved to Salt Lake City to transfer to the University of Utah where she earned a Bachelors Degree in Communications. Nikki has been skiing since she was a toddler and fell in love with bouldering and sport climbing soon after coming to Utah. She is passionate about environmental sustainability and loves any activity that involves enjoying Utah's spectacular wilderness. Nikki is super excited to be filling in at Friends of Alta and can't wait to spend even more time in Little Cottonwood Canyon.



Welcome Glenn Eurick back to The Friends of Alta Board!

Glenn Eurick was born. raised. and educated in Butte. Montana. His life was heavily influenced the culture and environmental consequences of hardrock metal mining in Montana. He achieved a B.S. in Environmental Engineering from the (then) Montana College of Mineral Science & Technology. Glenn continues a 45+ year career as an environmental engineering professional principally in natural resource industry environmental management, advocacy & policy.

Alta was Glenn's first exposure to the Wasatch Front experience when his career brought him to the Utah hardrock metal mining industry in 1979. To this day, Alta remains the primary focus of his interest in all things environmental and recreational, including photography, hiking, and snowshoeing.

Glenn lives and works in Salt Lake City, continuing to both consult in environmental engineering and volunteer for such organizations as The Nature Conservancy, Red Butte, Gardens, and Great Salt Lake Rowing.



Looking for New Board Members

Friend's of Alta is looking for new board members to join our organization. For board members, we're currently looking for candidates with core competencies in finance/ capital campaign, community development/marketing, and legal professionals. For a full job description see the listing at www.friendsofalta.org/jobopenings.

Iune 30. 2023 Annual Report

june 50, 2025 Himaar Report	
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\$12,450	
\$6,483.59	
\$0	
\$150,853.54	

Conservation Fund Market Value on 6/30/2023 \$1,296,896.24

- 1. Individual Contributions, Love Utah Give Utah, Memorial Tree Program
- 2. Alta Gala & East Coast Fundraiser
- 3. Employee Salary, Employee Benefits, Office Rent, Office Supplies
- 4. Alta Summer Booth Grant, Alta Summer Host Program, Summer Stewardship Programs, Wetland Study, Alta Bird Study, GIS Mapping
- 5. Conservation Easement Monitoring, Insurance, GIS Mapping, Conservation Resources & Planning, Land Trust Alliance
- 6. Event Expenses, Marketing, Merchandise Purchase



Photo by John Frawley



Photo by Jeff Santry

The Alta Way of Life

"I tell people who come here: 'You're an Alta person now. When the world gets to be too much and you feel like you have to flee, you just come to the bottom of the canyon. We'll have your name on a list, we'll close the gates, we'll point the avalanche guns down the canyon. The bad guys won't come up after you." -Bill Levitt

As Bill Levitt said in his quote above, Alta is a special place - a place to make home or just to escape the stress of everyday life.

Thank you for your help in protecting the environment, preserving the unique character and heritage, and encouraging stewardship and sustainability in the area.

Donations are always welcome to help Friends of Alta continue to protect the area we all love and stop those who want to develop our beautiful home.

The mission of Friends of Alta is to protect the environment of Alta, including watershed and wildlife habitat areas; to preserve Alta's unique character and heritage; and to encourage stewardship and sustainability of Alta's environment and community.

Ways to support FOA

Ask your employer if they have a matching gift program and make your contributions to FOA go twice as far! We have a variety of FOA merchandise ready for the holiday season that would make perfect gifts. Check out our 2024 calendar, Adult shirts, Alta Ski Resort Trail Map Hooded Blanket and more!









FOUNDATION

FOA Partners













Salt Lake Ranger District of the UWC NFS

Alta Historical Society



Alta Shuttle donates 2% of all services to/from the Town of Alta during the winter season to FOA. Special thanks to Alta Shuttle, Tom, the shuttle drivers, and Alta Shuttle's patrons for supporting FOA. Altashuttle.com



Mention the Friends of Alta Real Estate Advantage Program to broker Jim Williams and he will donate \$1,000 to FOA from his commission with the closure of a real estate transaction. WilliamsRealtyUtah.com



Visit Friendsofalta.org/donate for more details and links to donate through AmazonSmile or Smith's Community Rewards where your regular purchases support FOA.



Alta Gala Save The Date

The Alta Gala will be Friday, April 12, 2024 at Snowpine Lodge again this year. Updates will be posted at altagala.org

Friends of Alta is a 501(c)(3)organization, donations are 100% tax-deductible.

Donate today at friendsofalta. org/donate

FOA Memorial Tree Planting

Each summer Friends of Alta hosts a day of planting trees for people interested in planting a memorial tree in honor of a loved one. Please contact us if you would like to join us for our 2024 planting. More details at www.friendsofalta.org/memorialtree-planting







Follow us on social media for updates



Thank You For Your Support

Friends' Donations: Fiscal Year July 2022 through June 2023

We deeply appreciate the support of all our contributors. It is our policy to only list people who have provided permission. Please accept our sincere apology for any errors or omissions. To be added to this list or make corrections email info@friendsofalta.org.

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