

September 19, 2019

Alta Ski Area's comments regarding proposed CWC legislation to the Federalism Commission of the Utah Legislature

Relevant Facts

- Last season was a record skier visit number for the State of Utah at 5,148,062 visits. Ski Utah reported that the economic impact of the ski industry spending reached an all time high of \$1.66 billion which reduced the annual tax burden of every household in Utah by \$1,375 and provided over 20,000 winter jobs.
- Skier visits to the Cottonwood Canyons have increased 40% since the year 2000. The ski areas have made infrastructure changes within the resorts to accommodate the growth, however the transportation system and parking capacities have not significantly changed. The canyon highways and parking lots have the same capacity today as they had in the year 2000. UTA ski bus ridership to Alta last season was less than it was in the early 2000's and accounts for less than 3% of our skier visits.
- Backcountry use of upper Little Cottonwood Canyon has increased significantly during the past 10 years. Since there is no public parking for backcountry use within the Town of Alta, Alta Ski Area is regularly losing 150-200 parking spaces, or 10% of our capacity, to non-ski area patrons visiting the backcountry on most weekends, holidays and powder.
- While the ski areas have the capacity to accommodate the current demand and some future growth within their resorts, the current transportation system does not. Last season it often took 2 hours or more to travel up or down the Little Cottonwood Canyon on weekends, holidays and powder days. Hundreds of cars are parking on the shoulders of the state highway and visitors are walking into the resorts compounding traffic congestion and delays, impinging snow removal and creating safety issues. Neighborhoods near the mouth of the Canyons are experiencing grid lock for hours on most weekends, holidays and powder days.
- A significant amount of the visitors to the Cottonwood Canyon ski areas come by vehicle from the Park City Area. During the first 13 days of March this year, a survey done at Alta's Albion Parking lot indicated that 30% of the vehicles in that parking lot had come from Summit County. It is a 42 mile drive from downtown Park City to Alta. As a bird flies it is only 8 miles from downtown Park City to Alta.
- The State of Utah, Ski Utah and local communities have done a great job attracting business and individuals to Utah on selling the proximity of an outdoor lifestyle that includes winter recreation. We now have the challenge to deliver on that brand and promise.
- Given the projected growth of the population in the Salt Lake Valley, the popularity of Utah as a ski destination and growth in backcountry/sidecountry use, we anticipate that the number of visitors seeking experiences with the greatest snow on earth will continue to grow. A recent study completed by Ecosgin, a leading ski area planner, indicated that Alta Ski Area's terrain has a significantly greater comfortable carrying capacity than can be provided from the current transportation system, parking lots and base area lodging.

CWC Proposed Legislation

Our concerns about the proposed CWC legislation are as follows:

- The Central Wasatch Commission continues to propose legislation to create a new federal designation, a National Conservation and Recreation Area (NCRA), which does not have consensus from primary stakeholders and may hinder, rather than facilitate transportation solutions and limit rather than accommodate recreational access or growth.
- In 2012, the Utah State Legislature and Governor passed a joint resolution (SCR10) expressing support for low-impact interconnection of the ski areas given the economic benefit to Utah's taxpayers and cleaner air and water that would be achieved by reducing traffic from Summit County to the Cottonwood Canyons. Alta Ski Area continues to support a low-impact interconnection along with other transportation solutions. We are concerned that the draft legislation may block non-vehicular transportation solutions, such as gondolas or trams, for the destination visitors staying in the Park City area that visit the Cottonwood Canyons as part of their ski trip to Utah. These are important possible solutions that would reduce traffic congestion and air pollution and deserve further consideration and should not be taken off the table prematurely. The CWC's proposed draft legislation does nothing to advance these low-impact transportation solutions, but rather appears intended to prevent them.
- The inclusion of the public lands adjacent to State Highway 210 in Little Cottonwood Canyon and State Highway 190 in Big Cottonwood Canyon, as well as, the public lands between the ski areas and between Summit County in the NCRA, explicitly prevents certain transportation solutions, such as tramways, that may be in the best interest of Utahns and the American people.
- Winter avalanches or summer rockslides as we experienced this summer can close the road in LCC for days. The proposed legislation does nothing to facilitate additional ingress/egress to the Cottonwood Canyons for public safety, emergency and visitor convenience.
- The Forest Supervisor met with the ski areas and the CWC in July and indicated that the land exchange between the Forest Service and ski areas as proposed was not viable due to land valuation differences and hazmat concerns regarding mining overburden and tunnels on lands in upper Little Cottonwood Canyon. CWC continues to include land exchange language in the proposed legislation despite the Forest Service's position and has unfairly excluded Alta Ski Area's land from the land exchange in the legislation.
- We question the need for a new federal designation when the public lands in the proposed NCRA already fall under the jurisdictions of the US Forest Service, Town of Alta, Town of Brighton, Army Corps of Engineers, Salt Lake County and Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities (watershed). What specific issues will the new designation address? We are concerned that a new federal designation will only add an additional layer of management that will undoubtedly have unintended and detrimental consequences.

Two Reasonable Options for Consideration

1. **Delay the introduction of legislation to create a new federal designation until after transportation solutions are developed and agreed upon.** Allow UDOT to work with the various stakeholders to develop and recommend transportation solutions that will be vetted through an environmental and public process before introducing legislation that may restrict or prevent some transportation solutions. This would also allow the land exchanges, if feasible, to be developed and vetted through a public process before being legislatively approved, as well as, some of the specifics of the currently undeveloped management plan to be developed and agreed upon.
2. **Exclude all potential transportation corridors to and between the ski areas from the proposed new federal designation (NCRA) to preserve flexibility for current and future transportation systems.** This would exclude all public lands along State Highway 210 (LCC) and State Highway 190 (BCC), as well as, public lands between the ski areas that could be used for transportation systems. This would facilitate, rather than restrict or prohibit, a wide variety of transportation improvements that could reduce vehicles in the canyons and improve ingress/egress for public safety, emergency and visitor convenience.