



newsletter

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Alta is Awarded Two NSAA Sustainable Slopes Grants—At the 2010 NSAA Annual National Convention in Orlando

May 2nd, 2010 Alta Ski Area (ASA) was awarded two environmental grants from the National Ski Area Association (NSAA) totaling \$4500. One grant of \$3000 will supplement the funding of a new energy management system that includes installing a SCADA (System Control and Data Acquisition) device to monitor electrical consumptions, loads, and demand within Alta Ski Area operations by location. Headed by Tom Whipple, the information gathered by the device will help ASA better understand how it uses electricity in order to better manage usage for long-term efficiency and upgrades. The second grant for \$1500 was awarded for the purchase of an interpretive sign to inform summer visitors of Alta's restoration efforts and increase awareness of areas under restoration in order to avoid further damage. This project will include a small restoration project to highlight the sign at the Catherine's Trail parking lot and is a partnered effort between ASA, the Forest Service and Cottonwood Canyons Foundation.

In addition to the grants, Alta Environmental Center's director, Onno Wieringa, and sustainability coordinator, Maura Olivos, were asked to give a short presentation and speak on a panel discussion on Alta's efforts on inventorying and reporting their carbon footprint.

Beetle Update

Alta Ski Area continues to be proactive in identifying infested trees and disposing of them properly within the ski area. No new infestations have been found of the Spruce Bark Beetle, but two limber pines were found this winter to be infested with Mountain Pine beetles and ASA is in the process of disposing of those trees to further prevent infestation.

For more information or to find out how to help, visit:

<http://www.slcgov.com/utilities/SpruceBeetle.htm>

Nature Nugget: The Uinta Ground Squirrel



The Uinta Ground Squirrel, *Spermophilus armatus*, is a well-known Alta local and native, also known as the pot gut. The range of this species spans from southwestern Montana into eastern Idaho, western Wyoming and into the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache range of Utah. These furry little creatures hibernate during the winter, start coming out of their underground burrows in late March, breed in April-May, feed till June, then become dormant for the summer, also known as aestivation. Aestivation is the summer term for winter hibernation and the animals do the same thing as in hibernation; decrease heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen consumption, and body temperature. Juveniles will stay out a little longer to fatten up for the summer, but not a single ground squirrel is visible by September.

This ground squirrel only mates once a year in April-May and depending on the age of the female will only produce one litter of 4 to 8 pups, approximately 28 days after mating. They live in matrilineal colonies, meaning male juveniles will leave to mate outside the colony and the females hold the territory. Territories will hold 23 to 28 individuals and colony feeding grounds will often overlap.

The Uinta Ground Squirrel eats seeds, green vegetation, invertebrates (insects), and some small vertebrates. They are also strong swimmers and are known to swim and dive for aquatic vegetation, their favorite. This ground squirrel has also been seen to feed on road kill or their own dead. The purpose of this feeding, often seen as grotesque by humans, is to retrieve the higher levels of protein found in other animals for survival and because their feeding season is short. They are not the only mammal species known to do this, other species include: yellow-bellied marmots, prairie dogs, other ground squirrels, domestic cats and dogs, hamsters, chimpanzees, polar bears, otters and humans. The act of cannibalism is never done by mammals for enjoyment (except for maybe certain human cultures); it is done out of the necessity to survive and usually falls upon the young, sick, injured or dead for the survival of the adults or a few young in a litter. Cannibalism is observed in times of stress, but primarily in times of dense populations and low natural resources, and is seen as a short-term population control and occurs upon an individual case. For the Alta ground squirrel, populations are large due to a low number of natural predators and the incidental prey by human activity, which allows the population to have a continual supply of their secondary food (vegetation being primary).

Contrary to myth, the Uinta Ground Squirrel is a natural high altitude native species and is a vital participator to the ecology of Alta. Just like the tree squirrel the ground squirrel will hide seed to feed upon later, but will often forget where they left their stash and the seed may germinate and grow to a mature plant. Their immense numbers in population and slower behavior also contribute to needed food for large predators found in Alta. Since the mining years came so early, little was known about the natural presence of large animals in Little Cottonwood Canyon. However, as native vegetation recovers and human urbanization is minimal, Alta is seeing cougars, black bear, coyotes, red fox, and birds of prey make a comeback; and thanks to our furry little ground squirrel there is plenty to eat when they are here.

Tip of the Month: Bring your own take home container to a restaurant



Do you have a favorite restaurant you go to not just because the food is awesome, but you also always have leftovers to take for lunch the next day? An employee from the Bonneville Environmental Foundation confessed that she tries to bring a small reusable take-home box to put her leftovers in. It may seem a bit *faux pas*, but she says, "I've had several restaurant owners thank me because it also saves their businesses money." There you have it! While being more environmentally responsible, you are also helping your favorite restaurants save money during these hard economic times. You may even become their favorite patron, if you aren't already. (From the Bonneville Environmental Foundation www.b-e-f.org)

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