



Image: hosmer23.deviantart.com

Please Don't Feed the Squirrels - By Marley Hil-Filben

If you have visited Alta in the summer before, even so much as a quick trip to the parking lot, chances are you have seen a cute little rodent scampering about. Referred to as chipmunks, prairie dogs, and mice by the less informed visitor, they are known by biologists as the Uinta ground squirrel (*Spermophilus arnatus*) and affectionately as the pot-gut. Even though they make a common appearance in the parking lot, these little critters live in burrows underground and feed on vegetation surrounding their dens. No doubt when someone sees an adorable pot-gut they are inclined to want to pick it up and take it home or maybe even feed it some of their lunch.

The squirrels you see in the parking lot have become tamed by constant human presence and are always looking for a crumb to nibble on. However, eating scraps of human food isn't good for pot-guts and the environment they live in. Native plants depend on the ground squirrel to eat their seeds and spread them across the forest floor. Bigger animals like coyotes, eagles, hawks, and other predators also depend on the pot-guts for food, and eating a squirrel filled with Cheetos can't be good for them either.



Image: redbuttecanyon.net

No matter how hungry the little guys look and regardless of how cute they are, next time you see one please refrain from feeding them. Not only will it help them live healthier lives but it will also keep the ecosystem natural and you safe.



Wildcat Base ca. 1900's miningartifacts.org



Wildcat Base 2009

A Beautiful Place with a Scarred Past

- By Marley Hil-Filben

You might not guess from looking around Alta today that it was once a land cratered with silver mines and speckled with buildings. But it was. In the mid-1800's the Town of Alta was home to thousands of people and 26 saloons, the marks of its past are still present at Alta. Just look at Emma ridge, dozens of mine dumps from past silver mines dot the mountain, most of which almost completely lack vegetation.

This history of disturbance is part of what makes the Alta Environmental Center's efforts so important. One of our biggest and most important responsibilities is helping manage the vegetation of Alta Ski Area. Together with our partners we spend hundreds of hours each year documenting existing vegetation, planting native plants, and removing non-native species.

Noxious weeds also known as invasive or non-native plants thrive in disturbed areas, like roadsides, along hiking trails, and old mine overburdens. They use these areas as an opportunity to take over. Now to some people this appears to be good "green" or vegetated sites, but to native plants it is a nightmare. Once an area has been taken over by weeds native plants have a difficult time becoming established. Non-native invasive plants steal native plants' water, sunlight, nutrients, and even change the chemical structure of the soil for the non-native plants' benefit.

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**“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
Nothing is going to get better. It's not.”**
— Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

A Beautiful Place *continued...*



So why is all of this important and worth an article in this month's newsletter? The importance of keeping weeds out of Alta is more than just maintaining the survival of native plants, but the survival of native animals, maintaining a healthy watershed for good drinking water, and supplying the visual and recreational enjoyment of hundreds of thousands of people annually. Wild animals need to eat and fatten up for the winter and invasive plant species do not have the same nutrients that native plants supply. Little Cottonwood Canyon, with Alta at its headwaters, supplies about 14% of Salt Lake City's culinary water.

Our native ecosystem may be resilient, but it is still recovering from historical impact from over 100 years ago. Visitors can help us by being aware of what seeds you bring with you on your shoes or car tires and taking measures to help prevent the spread of noxious plants. You may also learn your weeds and actively remove them by attending one of our summer weed pulls. **Next Weed Pull - Thursday, August 20th, 6-8pm!**

For more information on our weed program or to register for the next weed pull contact volunteer@cottonwoodcanyons.org. Alta's weed program is brought to you in collaboration with the [Alta Environmental Center](#), [Cottonwood Canyons Foundation](#), [Friends of Alta](#), and the Forest Service.

August - September Sustainability Events

If these highlighted sustainability events catch your eye, check out our full sustainability calendar at alta.com/alta-environmental-center.

- **August 20 - Alta Weed Pull:** Shake your office jitters off after work by coming up to Alta for a couple hours. Enjoy the view, the company and rip out some weeds! For more info or to register email volunteer@cottonwoodcanyons.org.
- **August 29 - Environmental Education Workshop:** Teachers, naturalists and ski instructors join us for a 3 in 1 curricula of Project Learning Tree, SKE-COLOGY and Streamside Science from USEE and USU. More info at environment@alta.com.
- **September 5 - Alta Ski Area Tree Planting:** Join TreeUtah and the Alta Environmental Center for in our annual tree planting event. It's rugged and an event to remember! For more info or to register contact volunteer@treeutah.org.
- **September 11 - Friends of Alta Memorial Tree Planting:** Remember your loved one or help others in celebrating life and the peace Alta provides for many. For more information or to register please contact info@friendsofalta.org.
- **September 17 - Alta Weed Pull & Stewardship Social:** Join us for our last weed pull and stewardship event of the season, then celebrate all our hard work afterward! To register for the weed pull contact volunteer@cottonwoodcanyons.org and for more info on the party visit altaarts.org.



Image Source: Alta Tree Planting, [TreeUtah 2013](#)