

NEWSLETTER

ALTA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

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Community Highlight: Cottonwood Canyons Foundation

Cottonwood Canyons Foundation (CCF) is an essential organization in protecting the Cottonwood Canyons, and an essential partner to the Alta Environmental Center's (AEC) year-round program. As so many of us find solace and retreat in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon and depend on the drinking water sourced from these canyons, CCF takes responsibility in maintaining and preserving these places for our community and providing educational opportunities to build awareness around the importance of these canyons.

CCF is a small, non-profit organization with a huge reach! Over 500 volunteers a year support educational and stewardship projects in Big and Little Cottonwood Canyon. Spring provides more comfortable weather conditions, opening the door for CCF to bring local, educational institutions (ranging from elementary schools to the University of Utah) to the Cottonwood Canyons for field trips and research opportunities. They focus on conserving our mountain environment through hands-on education. Summertime includes wildflower viewing, community clean-ups including noxious and invasive species removal, and completing maintenance and restoration on trails.

Winter, although colder, also brings a chance to venture onto the snow and learn how the ecosystem adapts to the changing temperatures and precipitation. CCF volunteer naturalists lead free "Ski with a Ranger" tours through Alta Ski Area, and at the other Cottonwood Canyon Resorts, on the weekends to bring adventure and learning together, shedding light on the unique ecosystem that lives and breathes here at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon. CCF also hosts snowshoe tours at Alta Ski Area for those who love getting outside and exploring but may not be comfortable on skis. Summer or winter, the AEC can always count on this wonderful organization to help care for our natural environment. Education and stewardship opportunities through our many partners, including CCF, are vital to protecting and conserving the environment at Alta. Please consider donating to Cottonwood Canyons Foundation at cottonwoodcanyons.org/donate/.

TOPIC 1

Community Highlight:
Cottonwood Canyons
Foundation

TOPIC 2

Hair the Hare

TOPIC 3

University of Utah Field
Trip to Alta

Hair of the Hare by Caroline Olson

Snowshoe hares are camouflage experts.

When days grow short, their brown coat changes to white. Come spring, when days lengthen, snowshoe hares revert to brown. Their color swap fit the changing seasons for generations, but now climate change has bungled the timeline. Snow arrives later now, and that's upset the hare's survival strategy. Camouflage only works when it's accurate – a white hare on barren ground is not hidden. Will snowshoe hares adapt, or will climate change eradicate these camouflage-dependent animals?

Research shows snowshoe hares are not aware of the mismatch when they've become white too soon, a dangerous miscalculation resulting in elevated predation. Scientists identified one population of hares that found a solution. Hares of the Pacific Northwest (PNW) don't molt to white; they stay brown. Winters are milder there and snow cover is spotty, so they adapted advantageous coloring. PNW hares are genetically identical to ours, but one gene is expressed differently, one that controls hair color.

This finding illustrates that snowshoe hares can adapt given enough time. It's too soon to tell if Alta's hares will follow suit, but it's encouraging that the possibility exists.



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Birding on Skis



Mt. Superior



2019 Earth Day



"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of a difference you want to make."
-Jane Goodall

University of Utah Field Trip to Alta

Supporting environmental education is one of the Alta Environmental Center's (AEC) and its partners core efforts. Earlier in March, over 30 undergraduate students, professors and teaching assistants from the University of Utah's Parks, Recreation and Tourism program took an annual field trip to Alta Ski Area (ASA). The AEC and the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation's (CCF) Community Education Director, Taylor Mazzacavallo, lead the field trip.

The field trip included a sustainability tour highlighting ASA's sustainability initiatives which include the LEED silver certified Skier Services building and the incorporated efficiency measures in the new building's design. The second half of the field trip included a naturalist tour on skis led by Taylor to highlight the Alta environment and ecology, and highlight environmental educational initiatives, such as ASA's SKE-cology program. Representatives from the AEC, CCF, Town of Alta, United States Forest Service, Salt Lake City Public Utilities, and Friends of Alta attended and served on a lunch panel and answered questions from the students.