

# NEWSLETTER

## ALTA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

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### A SUSTAINABLE HOLIDAY

This holiday season consider these simple, sustainable options to recycle your Christmas tree that works for you. First, let's discuss two options that are highly unfavorable but common methods of disposing your Christmas tree - burning it or sending it to a landfill. Burning your Christmas tree in your fireplace will release all the carbon dioxide it has sequestered back into the atmosphere, and the tree's natural oils can coat your chimney with creosote, which is highly flammable and can increase your risk of a chimney fire. Sending your Christmas tree to the landfill is another harmful method of disposal. The tree will not biodegrade in a landfill, rather it will be buried under trash that does not decompose naturally and the bacteria in the landfill will consume the tree and produce methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas that has a higher warming rate than carbon dioxide.

As for sustainable options to recycling your Christmas tree, there are plenty. One option, which is the simplest, is to set your Christmas tree outside for curbside pick-up from your public works facility. The trees will be picked up and turned into mulch and will be used for landscaping, returning all the carbon and nutrients from the tree back into the soil. Check out <https://slco.org/recycle/recycling-in-your-community/> for more information on curbside pick-up near your area. Tree drop-off events are also available in cities where trees can't be picked up curbside, The Home Depot stores are a great resource for tree collection events, call your local store and ask when a tree collection event is scheduled.

If curbside pick-up or drop-off events don't work for you there are some creative ways you can reuse or sustainably dispose of your Christmas tree. If you live in a rural space, consider letting your tree biodegrade in its natural habitat in a back garden, or returning it to the forest from where it came. Allowing trees the space to biodegrade naturally creates an entire micro-ecosystem, providing habitat for insects and animals. "Fungi, salamanders, and thousands of species of invertebrates will thrive in and under the rotting trunks. At least half a tree's contribution to the fabric of life comes after its death,

so one measure of a vitality of a forest ecosystem is the density of tree carcasses. You're in a great forest if you cannot pick out a straight-line path through fallen limbs and trunks. A bare forest floor is a sign of ill health." David George Haskell, *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature*. Another option is to donate your tree to a local zoo, big cats love playing with Christmas trees, providing mental stimulation and excitement for these creatures. If your local zoo will accept Christmas trees be sure to remember to remove all ornaments, lights, tinsel, and any other items. With the holiday season upon us, it's important to remember some simple measures to practice sustainability and have an eco-friendly holiday.

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## GETTING INVOLVED WITH OUR PARTNERS

People of all ages around the world are engaging in citizen science projects – these projects allow volunteers and scientists to work together to collect data and answer questions within the scientific community. Citizen science can be conducted close to home, even in our own backyard. Scientists guide and train volunteers using professional protocols and tools to help collect data. Citizen-collected data is becoming an increasingly important vehicle for data generation, a method that scientists are coming to rely upon. Citizen science also helps bring communities together into the important work of learning about why and how we can protect our natural environment.


Tracy Aviary, a non-profit partner of the Alta Environmental Center, is an organization that is committed to caring for birds and nature through education and conservation. Tracy Aviary has many opportunities to get involved, including citizen-science projects that go on year-round. The Rosy-Finch project is one you can conduct right here at Alta from December to April. You can choose to survey any publicly accessible bird feeders, some of which are located around the ski area, only accessible by skis. Volunteers to this program are crucial, as our bird feeders are not maintained by Alta Ski Area, rather by skiers and employees who enjoy observing our feathered friends in close proximity. Data collection of Rosy-finch habitat locations is crucial to helping scientists understand how species are adjusting to warming temperatures, and guiding decision making in conservation. Volunteers are trained through online web sessions, and then are free to conduct their own surveys in the field. To learn more and sign-up head over to <https://wildutahproject.org/rosy-finch>.

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*The data volunteers collect is crucial to helping scientists better understand how climate change is affecting the Rosy-finches and what steps need to be taken to protect and conserve this species.*

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Another great way to get involved is with the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation (CCF). Through stewardship and education CCF helps support the environment of the Cottonwood Canyons, and they rely heavily on volunteers to help educate and inspire participants to protect these canyons. This winter CCF is looking for volunteers to lead educational tours on skis and snowshoes in both Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons. Ski with a Ranger and Snowshoe with a Naturalist tours are a great way to get outside and connect with the mountains and community. Head over to <https://cottonwoodcanyons.org/volunteer/> for more information on their programs.



*I have come to terms with the future. From this day onward I will walk easy on the earth. Plant trees. Kill no living things. Live in harmony with all creatures. I will restore the earth where I am. Use no more of its resources than I need. And listen, listen to what it is telling me.*

*-M.J. Slim Hoeey*



Scan the QR code to  
access our Events Page

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### TREES AND SKIS

This winter we decided we wanted to hang out in the trees a little bit longer. Offered twice a month, the Alta Environmental Center in partnership with the TreeUtah will be offering an exploratory tour of the forest on the **first and third Thursday starting January 5th**. Join Ian Peisner, Tree Utah's arborist, to learn about tree species, forest ecology, threats to forest health, and efforts the AEC and TreeUtah implement at Alta to promote a healthy forest.

### BIRDING ON SKIS

Join us for our birding tours with Tracy Aviary! These tours connect skiing and the environment by helping us expand our bird list with bird surveys at Alta. Registration is required, held on the **second and fourth Thursday starting January 12th**. You will be led on a tour by Tracy Aviary's ecologists to learn about bird species that inhabit Little Cottonwood Canyon and efforts the AEC and Tracy Aviary are implementing to help protect and conserve these species.

### SNOWSHOE WITH A NATURALIST

Look for animal tracks and learn about the history of Alta while surrounded by some of Utah's most beautiful mountains. This event, in partnership with the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation, opens an inclusive space for participants to explore this beautiful mountain environment without needing skis. Snowshoes are required, and participants are led by trained naturalists up the Alta Summer Road in a thoughtful and engaging experience. **Tours are held every third Friday, starting January 20th, registration is required.**

### SKI WITH A RANGER

These family-friendly tours are offered through our partnership with the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation. Geared towards all ages and ski abilities this tour takes participants on a fun and informative experience to learn about the geology, history, watershed, and winter ecology of the Cottonwood Canyons. **Tours are offered every Saturday starting January 14th.**