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A Season Of Growth: Reflecting On A Busy Summer At Alta

As the crisp fall air settles over the mountains, the Alta Environmental Center (AEC) is taking a moment to reflect on a busy summer filled with community, construction, sunshine and high-elevation restoration.

In partnership with our non-profit organizations—Cottonwood Canyons Foundation, TreeUtah, HawkWatch International, Tracy Aviary, Friends of Alta, Alta Community Enrichment and Utah Cultural Site Stewardship—we hosted 28 educational and stewardship events, engaging a total of 2,241 participants throughout the season.

This summer, our teams took on a variety of conservation initiatives, including native plant restoration, tree planting and harvesting, invasive species management and trail maintenance across our slopes. With several new projects implemented over the summer by the ski area—such as the Supreme lift realignment and major snowmaking pipe replacements—the AEC actively managed construction efforts to minimize impacts before, during and after any land disturbance.

With the support of fellow Alta employees, partners and the community, the AEC planted 11,554 plants and 1,206 trees, harvested 143 tree saplings, surveyed and pulled 108 acres for invasive species and managed a total of 118 acres of land.

As we move into the fall season, we are grateful for the collective effort that made this summer a success and are looking forward to the work that lies ahead.

Digging Up History: Transfer Tow Construction Turns Archaeological Dig

Alta Ski Area relies on snowmaking to establish a solid base of snow during the early season—ensuring both skier safety and enjoyment. This summer, Alta replaced outdated water pipelines that supply water to snow guns across the mountain. These pipelines stretch half a mile long, running under the Transfer Tow between Albion and Wildcat Base Areas and passing through the historic Town of Alta—once a thriving mining town in the late 1800s.

Due to the historical significance of the site, the U.S. Forest Service required Alta Ski Area to hire an archaeologist from SWCA to monitor the excavation.



The original Town of Alta, circa 1873

A backhoe dug a ten-foot-deep trench, uncovering thousands of artifacts—including hats, liquor bottles, pottery, corked champagne bottles and more. Given the sheer volume of artifacts found, Utah Cultural Site Stewardship (UCSS) stepped in to quickly organize a large group of volunteers to assist SWCA in sifting through the dirt.



Volunteers cataloging artifacts

One significant discovery during the excavation was the remains of a stone building foundation believed to be that of a two-story hotel in the original Town of Alta. This hotel would have housed miners and visitors hoping to strike it rich—though few ever did. Following this discovery, top archaeologists from the USFS and State Historic Preservation Officer, Chris Merritt, joined us on-site as we temporarily halted the project to allow for careful excavation and documentation of the foundation and other findings.



Archaeologist uncovering the stone foundation

To share these discoveries with the public, UCSS and the AEC hosted an Archaeological Open House at the project site to showcase some of the notable artifacts and the remains of the

stone foundation. Hundreds of Alta community members, along with curious minds and amateur archaeologists, stepped back in time to experience what life was like for a 19th-century miner living and working in Alta.



Artifacts recovered from the historic Town of Alta site

Thank you to the many agencies and individuals involved in this endeavor, including:

- **Tom Flanigan**, U.S. Forest Service Archaeologist
- **Chris Merritt**, State Historic Preservation Officer
- **Ian Wright**, Utah Public Archaeologist
- **Lexi Little**, UCSS Program Coordinator
- **SWCA Environmental Consultants**
- **Jeremy Moore**, SWCA archaeological monitor on site and Alf Engen Ski School Instructor



Nest Box 9 | Week 6



Nest Box 9 | Week 7



Nest Box 9 | Week 8

Alta Nest Box Project

The Alta Nest Box Project was launched in 2017 as part of the Alta Bird Study—a collaboration involving Tracy Aviary, AEC, Friends of Alta, Alta Community Enrichment and the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. Although the study officially concluded in 2019, the AEC continues to independently monitor and gather data.

The goal of the Alta Nest Box Project was to gather baseline information about the breeding birds that inhabit Alta and to understand how factors such as location and habitat type affect occupancy and nesting success. Ultimately, the study aimed to determine when and where these unique high-elevation birds of the Rockies choose to nest.

Volunteers constructed a series of nest boxes which were placed around the ski area. The study consisted of six owl nest boxes and six songbird nest boxes—each located on various tree species, elevations and aspects to assess the success of each box.

From May through July, members from AEC, Tracy Aviary and Citizen Scientists visited each of these boxes weekly—skiing or hiking to each location. During these visits, they performed five-minute behavioral observations, recorded data and took photographs inside the boxes. By monitoring the presence of breeding species—such as the Mountain Chickadee, Mountain Bluebird, Wren, Northern Saw-whet Owl and Short-eared Owl—we gain valuable insights into the breeding habits of Alta's avian residents.

The AEC will continue to conduct weekly nest box checks for songbirds each year during the breeding season. By continuing to monitor these nest box checks, we can better understand our ecosystem, the wildlife inhabiting Alta and how we can implement bird-friendly protocols within the ski area.

Renewable Diesel Update

This summer, Alta conducted a trial run of renewable diesel, beginning with a supply of 1,000 gallons used in our summer construction vehicles. It was smooth sailing during this period, with zero performance or maintenance issues related to the transition from petroleum diesel to renewable fuels. We are excited to continue and expand the use of renewable diesel—however, securing a reliable supply will be our next challenge. Stay tuned for more updates on this project!



Welcome To Alta's Sawmill

Although it may seem counterintuitive for the Alta Environmental Center to discuss tree removal and sawmills, cutting down trees is an essential part of Alta's operations. Each summer, trees are removed from Alta's slopes for several reasons—including construction, safety and ecological considerations. Trees that can be salvaged are taken to our on-site sawmill, where Alta Ski Area's summer Trail Crew re-purposes them into new products.



Sawmill in action—turning cut trees into reusable timber

Viable trees brought to the sawmill are processed and transformed into timber that we use throughout the ski area. This approach helps us reduce our need for outsourcing lumber by re-purposing the wood right here at Alta.

This year's repurposed timber from the sawmill will be used for:

- Snow fences and bridges
- Avalanche shutters for the Albion Day Lodge
- Shelving and wainscoting for Alta Ski Shop
- Benches, fences and tables
- Sawdust for composting toilets
- Mulch



The next time you visit Alta's Ski Shop or notice a large wooden snow fence, take a moment to appreciate that those structures were likely made from trees that were cut down and have been given a second life.

This Winter With The AEC

Ski With a Ranger

Every Thursday | 1–2pm

- January 8th, 15th & 22nd
- February 5th, 12th, 19th & 26th
- March 5th, 12th, 19th & 26th

Trees and Skis

First and second Wednesdays |
11am–12:30pm

- December 10th
- January 7th & 21st
- February 11th & 25th
- March 11th & 25th

Birding on Skis

First and third Thursdays | 9am–noon

- December 4th & 18th
- January 8th & 22nd
- February 5th & 19th
- March 5th & 19th
- April 2nd

Snowshoe With a Naturalist

Third Friday of the month | 1–3pm

- January 12th
- February 20th
- March 20th

Journey Through Historical Snowscapes

Friday, February 27th | 2–4pm

Alta Earth Day 2026

Saturday, April 11th | All Day



Visit alta.com/environment for more information and event registration

environment@alta.com