An Unorthodox Approach to Trail Planning for a Mountain Community

National Outdoor Recreation Conference
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Today’s story

- Alta, Utah
- Winter vs. Summer
- Population Growth /Economic Development
- Trail Plan Process
- Current Status
Alta, Utah

~500,000 annual winter visitors
100,000+ annual summer visitors

Protected watershed & National Forest
Old mining town and roads
One lake...
...and it’s in Albion Basin
Education

Warning:
This is not a small-mouthed bass
Not-so-secret Cecret lake
Today’s Alta Trails
Challenges

- Multiple designations
- Numerous stakeholders
- Small town, slow change
- Established winter program and lacking summer program
- Atypical ski area summer business goals
- Mitigate impacts from visitors
The Norm - Study it!

2011 USFS Albion Basin Study

- Identified alternatives
- Big take-away: disperse visitors
- No action taken...
A New Direction

- Ski area brings in trail experts
- Mountain biking is not recommended...now what?
- Engage user groups...identify demand
- Big picture, not just Alta
- Planning a different kind of master development plan
Process

- Draft purpose and need
- Inventory everything
- Engage user groups
- Trails, restoration, and reroutes
- National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System
- Re-engaged user groups
- A final plan is born
Project Purpose

Long-term
Comprehensive
Appropriate for Alta
Connect to system trails
Mitigate visitor impact
Support quality experiences
Need

- Safety
- Population Growth & User Distribution
- Natural Resource Protection
- Partnerships
- Environmental Awareness
- Responsible Recreation
- Summer Economic Baseline
Plan Outline

**Phase I: Improve Existing Infrastructure (2-5 Years)**

Administration

- Partners & Roles (Adopt-A-Trail)
- Trail Amendments
- Trail Decommissioning
- Improve Connections (Education)

Incorporate other plans

Timeline

Estimated Capital and O&M

Improve Trailheads and Education

Improve Connections
Phase II: Improve Distribution and Connections (5-10 years)

Major Reroutes and New Trails
Framework

USFS National Strategy

- Shared stewardship model
- Sustainability
- Core Values
- Challenges → aspirations ⇒ expanding capacity
- A bureaucratic means to complete the plan
Stewardship and Education

- Build an inclusive shared network
- Provide and incorporate opportunities in everything
- Promote responsible recreation
- Foster respect for public lands
- Establish effective and measurable objectives/outcomes
Adopt-a-Trail Program

Criteria for all projects:

- Cost Share Agreement
- Provide trail standard best management practices
- Create a funding plan
- Stewardship required, but focus on quality, not quantity
Progress

- Annual Town of Alta Restoration Day
- Completed small reroutes
- Trailhead signs and directional markers
- Update interpretive signs (in progress)
- Prepared for funding opportunities
- Alta Ski Area piloting summer program (in progress)
Next Steps

• Secure funding for Environmental Analysis/NEPA
• Further refine conceptual trail alignments and other projects
• Finalize Adopt-a-Trail “contract" with USFS
• Establish Adopt-a-Trail partners per project
• Determine reasonable and sustainable public access (Visitor Use Management Plan)
Key takeaways

• Seek out all user groups
• Secure partners early on
• Look for policies and goals to support project
• Be prepared to reframe significance of project
• Identify long-term funding
Thank you!

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