Utah Chapter Weighs in on Mountain Accord

Mountain Accord is a regional planning effort established to, “preserve the Central Wasatch and ensure its long-term vitality”. Since 2013, it has included a large set of stakeholders, including various levels of government, business leaders, environmental organizations, and others. The general public has been engaged throughout. Mountain Accord addresses environmental conservation, transportation, recreation, and economic development planning for an area of Utah that includes the Wasatch Front in Salt Lake City, Park City, and Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons. Mountain Accord is managed by a Program Director and an Executive Board.

The Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club submitted written comments to the Mountain Accord program on the “Blueprint for the Central Wasatch” in March 2015 and we’re pleased to see that some of our comments have been satisfactorily addressed in the recently signed Mountain Accord agreement, including:
- Setting environment protection and conservation as the priority,
- Removing an earlier proposal for a tunnel between Park City and Big Cottonwood Canyon,
- Limiting the footprint of ski resort expansion, the need for which we had questioned given the future of global warming and other factors,
- Adding plans to address public transit needs between greater Park City and the Salt Lake Valley,
- Promoting land exchanges that protect the Wasatch backcountry. We agree with the concept of new federal designations for certain US Forest Service lands, which would bestow greater protections as wilderness areas or conservation management areas.

Some of our other comments on the Blueprint concerned issues that the Mountain Accord program has delayed for later consideration under the federal environmental impact statement (EIS) process, and include:
- Concerns about the environmental impacts of a possible tunnel between Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons,
- Concerns about the environmental impacts of a train up Little Cottonwood Canyon,
- Concerns about local residents bearing the user fees for new transportation options, and other costs of transit improvements that may primarily benefit out-of-state visitors.

With the understanding that these issues will be carefully considered at later stages, the Sierra Club supported approval of Mountain Accord in August 2015. The next step for Sierra Club will be working with Mountain Accord leaders and Congress to draft legislation for establishing greater protections for certain US Forest Service lands in the Wasatch. There will be several years of coordination and oversight ahead for Sierra Club as Mountain Accord is implemented. The Sierra Club is committed to ensuring that environmental protection and conservation of the Wasatch’s fragile ecosystems remains the paramount goal of Mountain Accord.