



Mt. Raymond, PC: Jason Dorais, winter 2014-15.

Mountain Accord Signed *Member Update*

Wasatch Backcountry Alliance Members:

You undoubtedly saw that there was a ceremony last week to commemorate the signing of the Mountain Accord, and we wanted to give you our perspective on it.

While the signing of the Mountain Accord is a big milestone, the fight to protect our Wasatch Mountains is far from over, and we're going to need your help to keep the pressure on and ensure backcountry protections remain a guiding factor moving forward.

After much discussion and full participation in the process, the Wasatch

Backcountry Alliance board gave qualified support to the final Accord.

Here's some perspective for our reasoning: over the course of 40 years of battles between development and preservation of the Wasatch, we've seen some temporary wins but we've also seen painful losses to development. When the Mountain Accord was formed, we realized that with so much on the table – preservation of our irreplaceable Wasatch backcountry, long-term transportation solutions, keeping ski resort development and expansion in check – we needed to be there to serve as a voice for the backcountry community.

Therefore, over the past 18+ months our board members and volunteers have spent countless hours ensuring the wintertime backcountry community had a leading voice in shaping the Accord. In the end, we are hopeful the signed Accord leads to significant gains in terms of permanent protection for prized backcountry terrain and holding ski area expansion in check. It also includes concessions from our community. Concessions that give us lots of heartburn. In the end our board voted for qualified support because of the potential for permanent protection of

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We focused on and will continue to pay attention to these critical areas:

- Supporting land exchanges that place permanent protections on important backcountry terrain;
- Setting limits on any future ski resort expansion onto public lands;
- Clearly stating our opposition to resort interconnect, including our stance against a tunnel concept linking Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons, and will continue to fight against any ski lifts or trams around Grizzly Gulch, and inappropriate lift expansion into lower Honeycomb Canyon that may jeopardize Silver Fork; and
- Ensuring that all future transportation scenarios support dispersed users.

We addressed these issues using a variety of tactics, including suggested changes/additions to the language in the final documents, comments, and negotiations throughout the process. Through proactive dialogue, we accomplished a lot by sitting across the table from resort operators and even more by getting out on the ground with them to show first-hand our specific concerns and discussing possible solutions.

Along the way there have been heated discussions, even within our own board, about whether or not we should support the process. While there are elements of the Accord that many of our board and active members may disagree with, backcountry users seldom have an opportunity to be involved in a process that has the potential to permanently preserve large areas of valuable terrain. We feel our involvement was critical, and the right decision, as many of our points were not only considered, but also were included in the final document.






Now that the Accord has been signed, the process is far from over – in fact, the hard part is just beginning. The Accord is a non-binding document, not enforceable, and the details contained in it can be changed according to public feedback, and study findings that come from the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process. Ensuring our interests are protected during the NEPA process is far more difficult than anything we have faced to date.


Wasatch Backcountry Alliance will advocate for extensive environmental review consistent with federal, state and local laws at every step along the way. We still

need your help. We continue to need the diverse expertise of our members as Mountain Accord elements are analyzed through the NEPA process. Just as we have tirelessly invested our passion, insight, logic, and expertise to help guide the Mountain Accord to this point, we will continue to insist that backcountry protections remain a top priority as the Accord moves forward.

We'd like to thank all of our members who volunteered their expertise, and time to help ensure the Wasatch backcountry community has a voice. To everyone who helped, thank you.

We hope you'll continue to stand with us in our commitment to protect the places we love most here in the Wasatch. More to come ...

    
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