WORKSHOP · WED, OCT 14 · 2:30-3:30 PM

Built to Last: Turning Sustainability into Standard Practice in Mountain Communities

The biggest decisions about growth, infrastructure and recreation get made long before construction, often before sustainability staff are in the room. Planners, a conservation group and two ski area sustainability leads shared how to build stewardship into master plans, NEPA and capital budgets from the start.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Avoidance is the cheapest option.** Good planning starts with the natural environment: LiDAR, topography, NRCS, USGS and SNOTEL data. Skiers and water flow to the same places, so expect wetlands and streams.
2. **Late arrival means friction.** At Alta, sustainability goals for a dining expansion came after the builder and architect were picked. Retrofitting LEED-style goals slowed the project. Set goals first, then hire to them.
3. **NEPA is no longer a reliable safety net.** Public comment periods are shrinking and agencies are under pressure to permit. Proponents should take plans to the community and NGOs before the permitting agency.
4. **Restoration costs less than people think.** Sun Valley's reseeding after an ADA ramp at Roundhouse cost about 2% of the project. Fixing invasives across a whole run later costs far more.
5. **Trust is built on the ground.** Alta's sustainability lead walks lift lines with operations staff a year or two ahead. Now maintenance and slope directors call her first when they spot a nest or a problem.

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Get into the capital meeting.** That is where dollars are decided. Listen first, then come back to the next meeting with researched, attainable ideas.
- ☐ **Screen the annual project list.** Sun Valley flags each of about 40 planned projects for waste, energy load and land disturbance.
- ☐ **Set triggers that bring sustainability staff in.** One town triggers review for any project in its natural resource overlay. Consider the same for building energy.
- ☐ **Start with energy projects.** Utility incentives (Idaho Power, in Sun Valley's case) give project owners a reason to call you early.
- ☐ **Write design criteria into construction plans.** Wash trucks to stop weeds, save topsoil for reveg, flag wetlands and protected trees, and be on site the day work starts.
- ☐ **Budget a share of each capital project for restoration,** and require a reveg plan whenever soil is disturbed.
- ☐ **Use a resilience framework to find weak links.** Nederland, Colorado's community plan exposed a single water intake pond that one watershed fire could wipe out.

BY THE NUMBERS

~2%
Share of project cost for Sun Valley's reseeding

$100K+
Yearly mine payment into an Idaho conservation fund

30+ yrs
Typical life of a new lift, if done right

~40
Capital projects on Sun Valley's 2027 list

Under 10%
Survival of planted whitebark pine (Sun Valley: under 5%)

1 to 2 yrs
How far ahead Alta walks project sites with operations

WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Whitebark pine was listed as threatened after Sun Valley's lifts went in. Replanting rarely works, so protect trees in place.
- ! Sometimes the sustainability goal won't beat the money goal. Keep relationships intact for next time.

RESOURCES

Idaho Conservation League
idahoconservation.org

Upper Salmon Conservation Action Program
Mine-funded grants made jointly with ICL

SE Group
segroup.com

Peer community
Nederland, Colorado's resilience-based plan

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