

## ALTA SKI AREA

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January 6, 2021

Dear Members of the Alta Town Council,

Alta Ski Area developed the attached proposal entitled a path forward, which would exchange private lands outside of the ski area for and address backcountry parking issues in the Town of Alta. This proposal was presented to the Forest Service, Salt Lake City Public Utilities, the Central Wasatch Commission, Mayor Sondak, the Friends of Alta, the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance, and Save our Canyons for review and comment in the fall of 2020.

Prior preparation and submission of this proposal representatives from Alta Ski Area, the Forest Service, the Town of Alta and the Wasatch Backcountry Alliance met in June of 2020 to discuss the increasing use of parking lots developed and maintained by Alta Ski Area for ski area patrons. A summary of the points discussed at the June 25 meeting are also attached.

In the June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting the Forest Service confirmed that under Alta's special use permit, Alta Ski Area has the right to restrict use of its parking lots to ski area patrons and that the Forest Service would approve this request if Alta Ski Area put it in its winter operating plan. Recognizing that Alta's developed and maintained parking areas are used backcountry users, cabin owners, Grizzly Gulch property owners and guests and employees from other Alta businesses, Alta Ski Area has sought alternatives to accommodate ski area patrons rather than restricting the use of existing parking.

Alternatives which have been explored and were discussed at the June 25, 2020 meeting included restricting parking to ski area patrons only, creating a backcountry ski area on the North side of the Canyon with parking lots and facilities, creating a backcountry user parking lot outside of the ski area boundary on Forest Service land above the current Town post office and allowing Alta Ski Area to modify existing parking areas to offset parking being used by non-ski area patrons.

The consensus of the group at the June 25, 2020 meeting was that allowing the ski area to create additional parking to offset parking being consumed by non-ski area patrons was the least disruptive and made the most sense. Based on that consensus, Alta Ski Area developed a plan to modify existing parking lots to create additional parking. A plan overview is presented in the path forward document.

Alta Ski Area prepared a proposal to modify the existing parking lots and submitted to the Forest Service for initial feasibility. The Forest Service has requested Alta Ski Area to seek support and approval from the Town of Alta regarding the proposed modifications before submitting drawings plans for approval.

Alta Ski Area is ready to submit plans for the parking lot modifications to the Forest Service if the Town of Alta is supportive of the proposal. I will make a brief presentation of our plans at the Town Work Session on January 13 and be available to answer questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me before the meeting with questions if you so desire.

Thank you,

  
Michael R Maughan  
General Manager  
Alta Ski Area



ESTABLISHED 1938

## **Alta Ski Area Proposal 2020**

### **A proposal to exchange private lands outside of the ski area and address backcountry parking issues in the Town of Alta.**

Alta Ski Area has put this proposal together in harmony with the Mountain Accord's purpose of preserving the legacy of the Wasatch through responsible stewardship of the natural resources, providing quality recreation experiences, development and implementation of an environmentally-sustainable transportation system and supporting a vibrant economy. This proposal addresses a purpose of the Mountain Accord and interests expressed from the Central Wasatch Commission by moving private lands outside of Alta Ski Area's area boundary into public ownership, as well as, providing a short term relief to a backcountry user parking issue in Alta until longer term transportation solutions can be developed and implemented.

Alta Ski Area has private lands outside of the ski area boundary on the North side of Little Cottonwood Canyon, as well as, in Big Cottonwood Canyon it would be willing to exchange for lands within the ski area boundary, in conjunction with replacing parking spots within the ski area boundary that are being used by backcountry users. Currently, there is very little public parking in the Town of Alta for backcountry users. During the past two seasons, over 200 parking spots in Alta Ski Area's parking lots have been used by backcountry users on days when Alta has turned skiers away due to the lack of parking. Alta Ski Area estimates it has lost more than \$250,000 in revenue over the past two seasons due to the use of its parking by backcountry users.

To address Alta Ski Area's concerns regarding parking for backcountry users and to move private lands located outside the ski area boundary which are used by the backcountry community to public ownership, Alta Ski Area proposes the following:

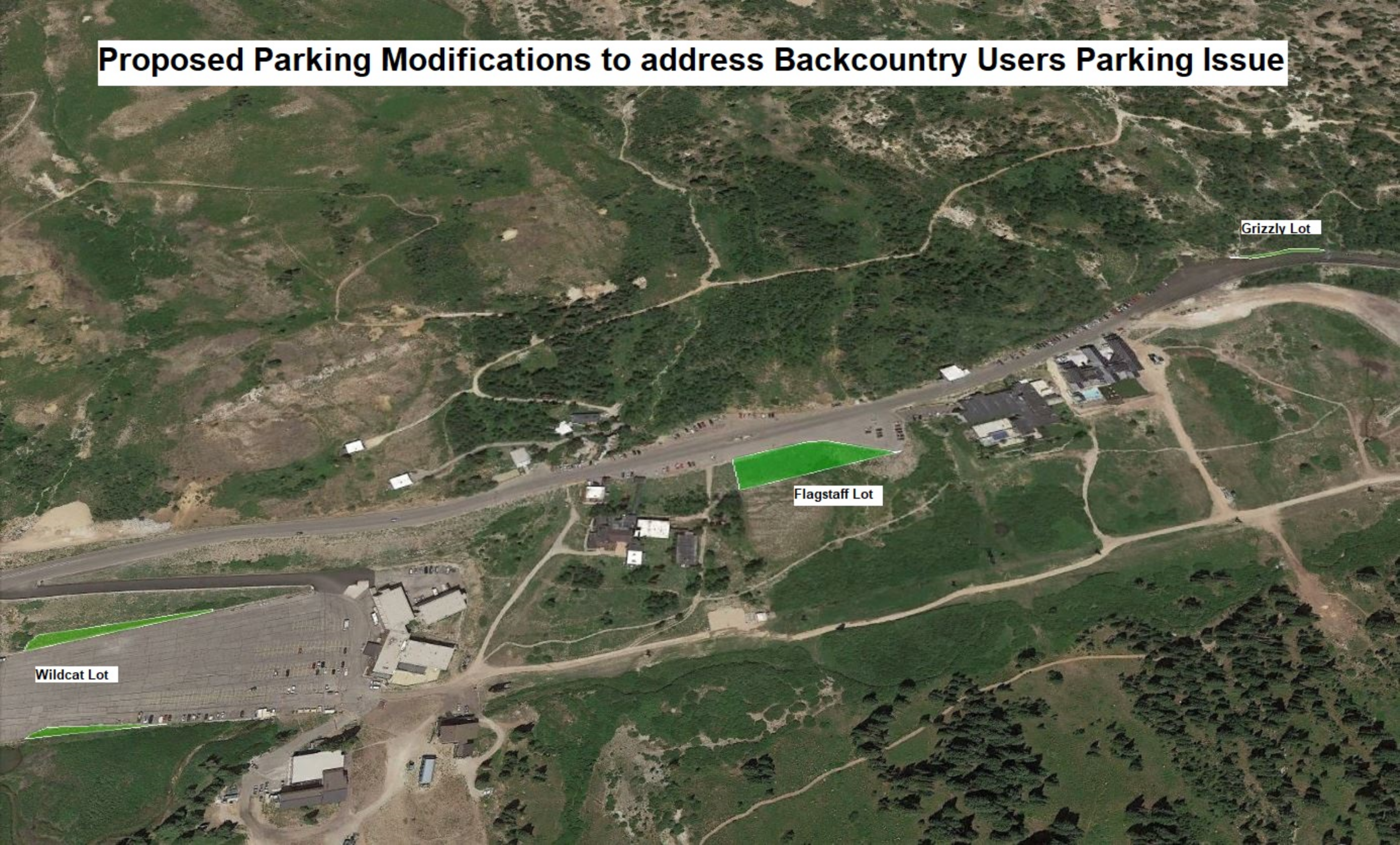
- Modify existing parking areas within Alta Ski Area's special use permit to add 220 parking spots to replace parking spaces being regularly used by backcountry users. These parking spaces can be added by squaring up the Wildcat, Flagstaff and Grizzly parking areas which are located on Forest Service land within Alta's Special Use permit. The Flagstaff modifications are located adjacent to a proposed transportation hub site location along State Road 210 across from the Town of Alta's proposed Community Center. These modifications will provide some relief for the parking issues in the Town of Alta until longer term transportation solutions can be developed and implemented.
- Alta Ski Area owns a 40 acre parcel located in Big Cottonwood Canyon's Mineral Fork, adjacent to the Twin Peaks Wilderness Area and only ½ mile away from Lake Blanche. Alta Ski Area proposes to exchange this parcel for mineral survey fractions owned by the Forest Service that are interspersed in the private lands owned by Alta Ski Area within Alta's and Solitude's ski area boundaries under the Small Tract Act of 1983. Mineral survey fractions are small parcels owned by the Forest Service interspersed in private lands which cannot be efficiently administered, accessed or used because of their size, shape and location. Alta Ski Area has identified 34 mineral fractions within Alta's private lands in Grizzly Gulch and Honeycomb Canyon, that qualify for exchange under the Small Tract Act of 1983.

- Alta Ski Area owns 144 acres of land on the North side of Little Cottonwood Canyon and in Silver Fork that it is willing to exchange on a FMV basis for privately owned lands within its ski area boundary. Alta Ski Area has identified 15 acres owned by Salt Lake City that meet this criteria for which Alta has interest in exchanging for. This exchange would provide backcountry users access from the Town of Alta to the North ridgeline without needing to cross privately owned lands.

Alta Ski Area, the Forest Service and Salt Lake Department of Public Utilities are long-term partners in providing outdoor recreation on public lands while minimizing and mitigating the impact upon watershed and natural resources. This proposal appropriately reflects this ongoing partnership and furthers the purposes of the Mountain Accord while preserving access for dispersed recreation users.



# Proposed Parking Modifications to address Backcountry Users Parking Issue



Grizzly Lot

Flagstaff Lot

Wildcat Lot



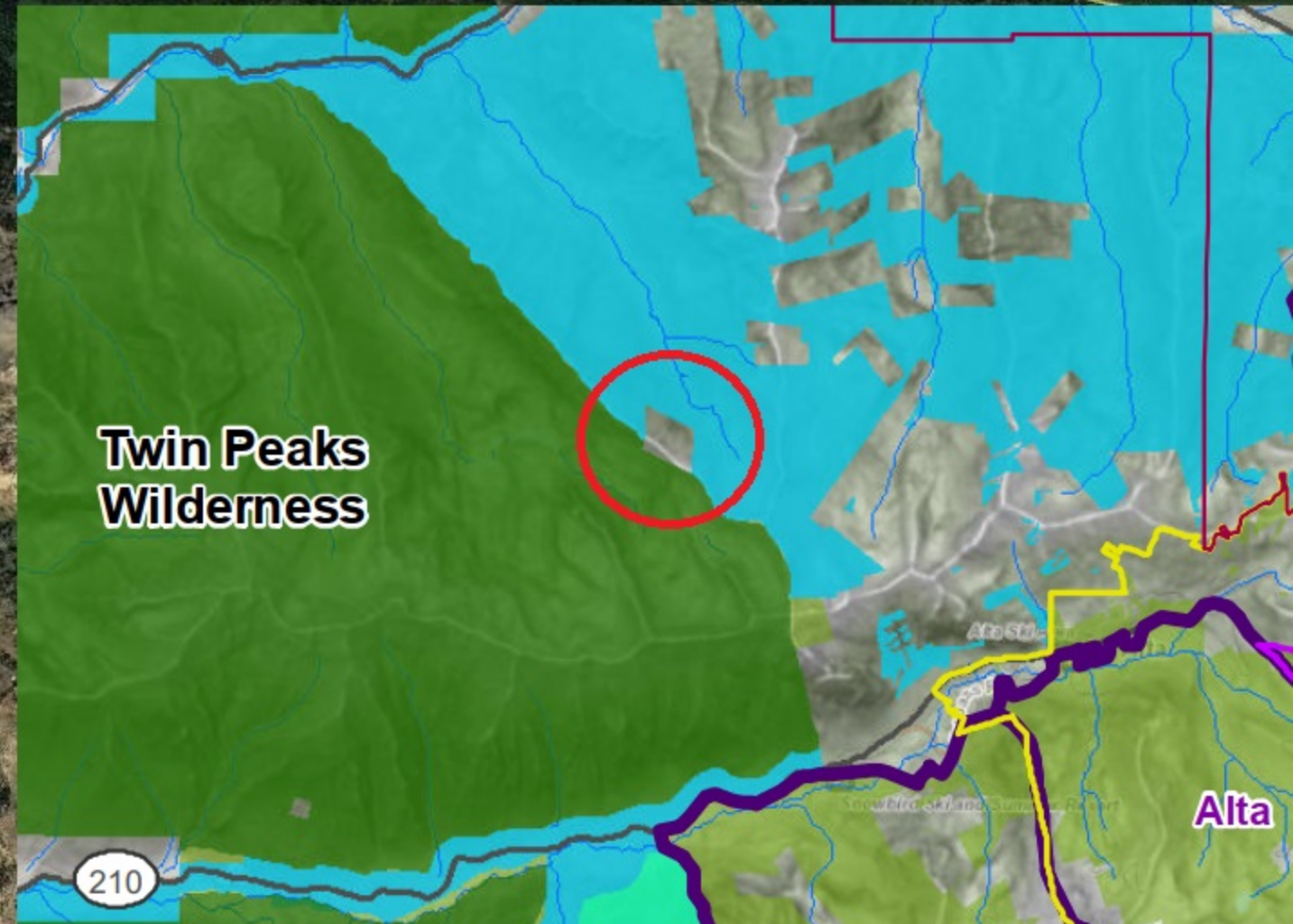
# BIG COTTONWOOD PARCEL

Wilderness Boundary

Alta 40 Acre Parcel

Lake Blanche

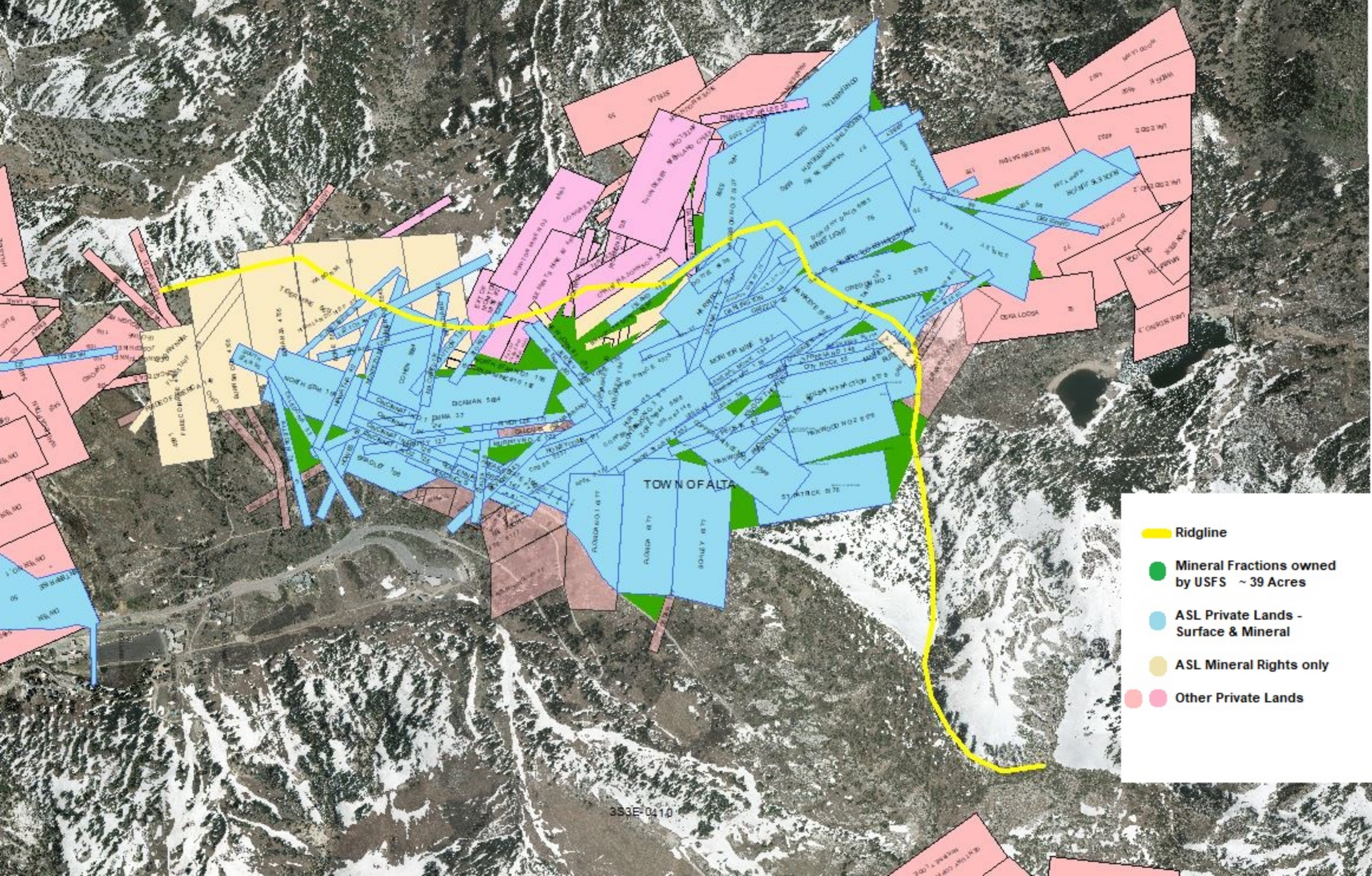
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Google Earth

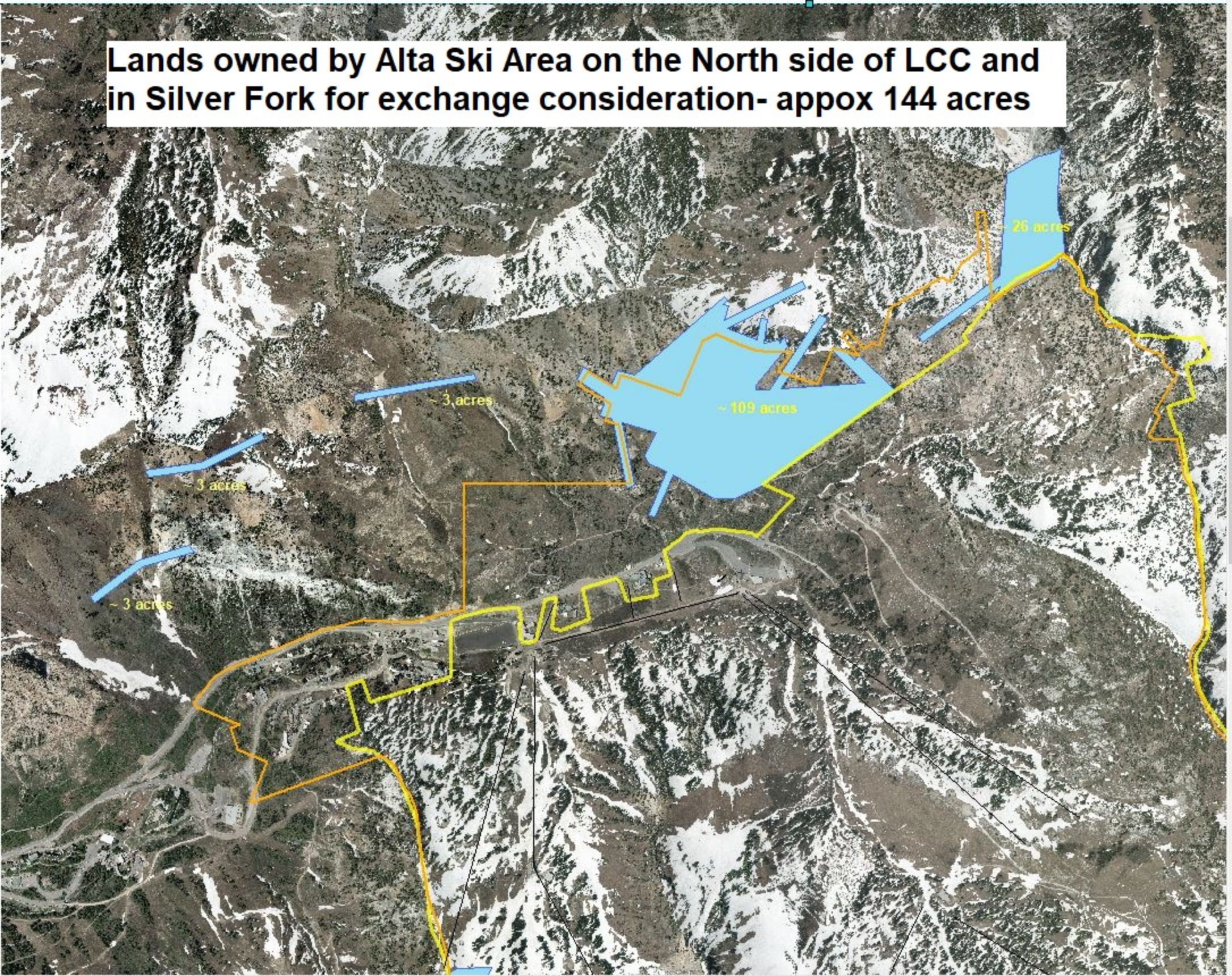


## Forest Service Mineral Fractions





**Lands owned by Alta Ski Area on the North side of LCC and in Silver Fork for exchange consideration- appox 144 acres**





## **Background**

- Alta has supported human powered recreation through allowing permissive use of its private lands in the Town of Alta and allowing uphill travel within the ski area pre- and post- ski area operations.
- Alta has supported non-ski area patrons by allowing use of its developed and maintained parking within its special use permit for many years.
- There is very limited public parking for non-ski area patrons within the Town of Alta. Most of the parking is privately owned or within Alta's Special Use permit.
- Parking lots developed and maintained within the Alta's Special Use Permit are assets of the ski area. The ski area has the right and privilege to restrict use of those parking lots to its patrons.
- The number of visitors accessing the backcountry from the Town of Alta has increased exponentially during the past 20 years (possible more than 300%).
- To access public backcountry terrain from the Town of Alta, users must cross private land or land within Alta's Special Use Permit.

## **The Issue**

The number of non-ski area patrons parking in Alta's developed and maintained parking lots is materially impacting the ski area and is inconsistent with the ski area's rights and privileges under its Special Use Permit. This has resulted in the loss of thousands of dollars in revenue over the past two seasons. Alta Ski Area desires to exercise its rights and privileges allowed under its Special Use Permit and would like to find a solution that also continues to support non-ski area dispersed recreation.



## **Options for Discussion**

The following options for discussion are consistent with the ski area's rights and privileges under its special use permit.

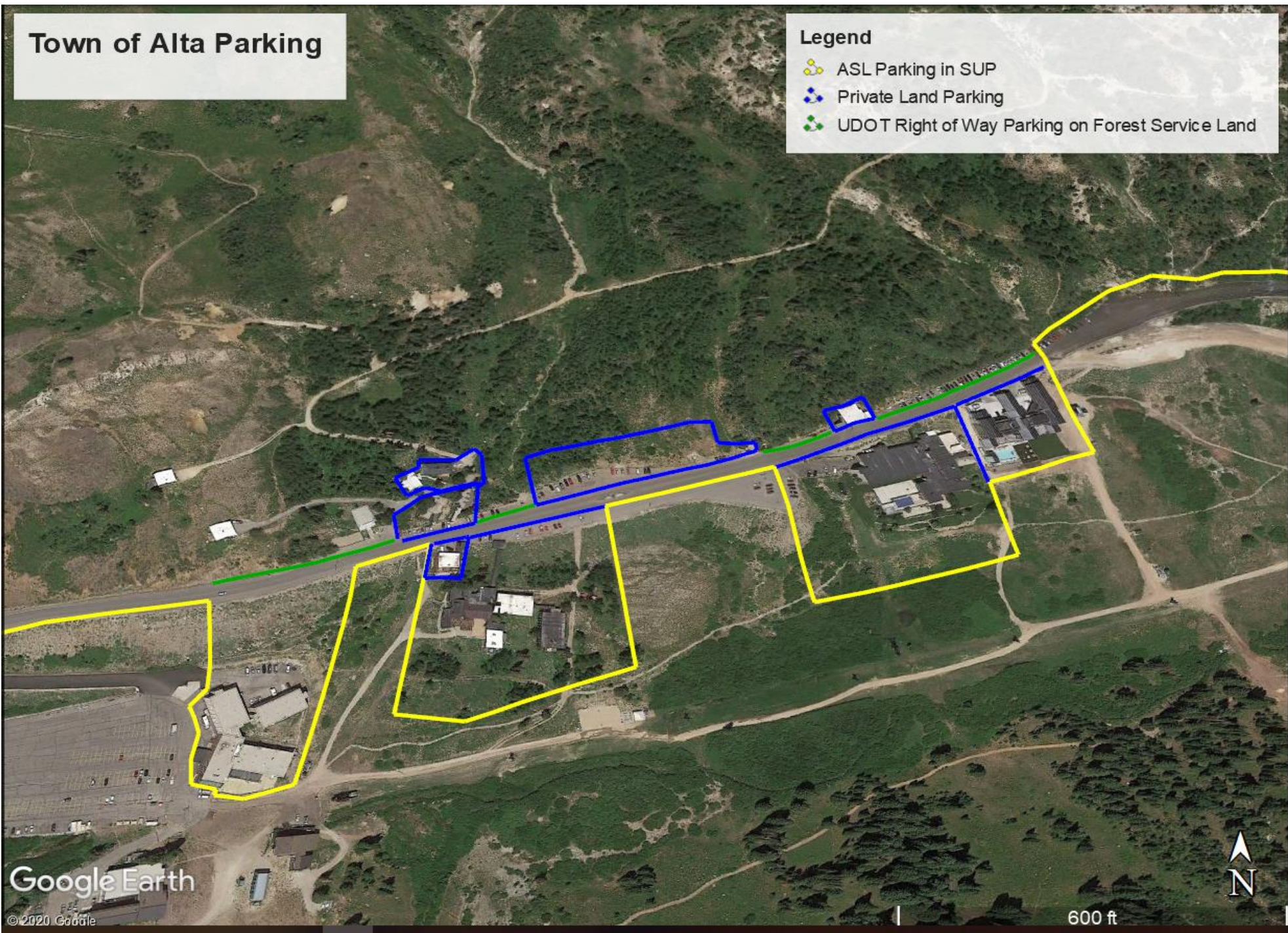
1. Reduce or eliminate the backcountry demand by closing Alta's private lands or restricting parking to purchasers of ski area lift tickets.
2. Create a backcountry ski area on the North side of Little Cottonwood Canyon with parking and restrooms. Backcountry users would pay a fee to use amenities supporting the backcountry ski area (parking, restrooms, etc.).
3. Create a backcountry parking lot with restrooms above the Town of Alta outside of Alta's Special Use Permit. Under this option Alta would consider selling its private lands on the North side of the Little Cottonwood Canyon to WBA or another third party to ensure public access to these lands.
4. Create additional parking within Alta's Special Use Permit to offset parking being consumed by non-ski area patrons. A proposed location would be between the Alta and Rustler lodges. The parking area would be across the highway from the Town of Alta's community center and adjacent UDOT's proposed transportation center or gondola station.



# Town of Alta Parking

## Legend

- ASL Parking in SUP
- Private Land Parking
- UDOT Right of Way Parking on Forest Service Land



Google Earth

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600 ft

