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Message from the Mayor

April 17, 2023

Alta Community Members,

I know the news media has made you aware of the extreme snow and avalanche conditions we have experienced in Alta this spring. However, the general news has not publicized the heroic efforts of our staff to protect the public safety and mitigate any potential damages from these extreme conditions.

Accordingly, I want to share with you some of the details of the behind-the-scenes events and the efforts of our Town of Alta staff and Alta community to cope with these unusual circumstances.

Summary for March - April 2023

The past 30 days have greatly stressed our Alta community. Our town has been subject to some unprecedented challenges, which so far, we have been able to meet. Some of the emergency equipment that was supposed to automatically activate didn't. Human intervention saved the day. Here is a partial list of notable events:

3/15: A roof slide in front of the Superior Point condominiums buried a 9 year old child. Deputy Ted Spencer was on site in minutes, started an avalanche probe, found and unburied the child. Others from UDOT Avalanche Safety, Alta Ski Patrol and Unified Fire Authority aided in the rescue. The child was air lifted out and recovered. These heroes saved a kid's life.

3/24: A natural slide came across Highway 210 in early afternoon. Interlodge was declared shortly after 2:00 PM. Everyone got off the mountain and into shelters, including more than 1,100 visitors. Vigorous avalanche control was conducted. Interlodge was lifted and the road opened at 6:45 PM, but another closure was declared at 10 PM. Our marshals and dispatchers were able to clear the town and get all who needed to be down canyon on their way and out of the canyon in time.

3/28: The community center started to show signs of stress under the snow load. The town commissioned snow shovelers to clear the roof to prevent collapse.

3/29: A power pole above the community center/post office broke at about 4 AM. That left the community center and post office without power, with the help of Dan Foxman and Dana Shaw of Alta Ski Area, a temporary solution was put in place to provide power to the facility, while Rocky Mountain Power navigated road closures and challenging weather conditions to restore utility service to the building several days later.

Later that same day, a town-wide power failure occurred around 6 PM. Some of the auto-start generators did not come on. Alta Central lost its communications and servers. In one neighborhood, cellphone service and water were also lost. Power and water were restored to most of the town by the next morning and to all by late in the afternoon of 3/30.

4/1: Mike Morey sent the following message to: Chris Cawley, Alta Avalanche Forecaster Station, Shawn Wright, Jake Treadwell, Dave Fields, Dave Richards, Randy Kaiser, Mike Maughan, Jake Brown, Coleman Worthen and Cottonwood Canyons:

Hello Friends-

There really aren't words powerful enough thank you all for the tireless and monumental heavy lifting you've all done to protect the lives and livelihoods of Little Cottonwood Canyon.

We're in uncharted territory that even many of the legends that taught us our jobs have not seen. It is right now and without exception, our duty to measure every step we take based on a single goal, the protection of the entire canyon community.

I'm writing to share what's on my mind.... I won't try to "pull the Garbage Truck with a Subaru" while we're in these conditions. I'll be pushing hard to not be open when we shouldn't be, not put more people in the canyon than we should when there's uncertainty about getting them out, and not pushing already over-stressed resources beyond their capabilities.

I'm asking you all to think and act along these same lines.

The next round might test us hard. We'll get through if we act together.

Thanks for the ear..

Mike

4/2: Sunday night the real trouble started. A huge storm hit us with more than 5 feet of snow over 3 days. Road closed, interlodge declared.

4/3: In anticipation of the danger to the community the next few days posed, Marshal Morey deputized the entire Alta Ski Patrol and our dispatchers to help with interlodge enforcement.

4/5: A break in the storm brought some relief, but the snow clearing and avalanche protection required continuing interlodge and road closure.

4/6: Natural slides at Entry 4. Immediate interlodge and mountain closure declared.

4/7: SR 210 openings were significantly restricted due to the avalanche threat. The road was closed from 9 AM to 7 PM and overnight.

4/8: Impending high temperatures led to the threat of wet slides threatening our town and its surroundings. An alert was issued for possible future directives or actions.

4/9 and since: Message from Alta Central: Vehicle and foot travel severely limited throughout the town.

Road closed until further notice.

Several items in our infrastructure failed. What didn't fail was our community, our people. I recall Onno Wieringa (former ASL General Manager) describing an era when "the lifts were made of wood and the men were made of steel." Well the lifts are no longer wood, but the people, men and women, are still steel. If I step back and ask how was it that we went through this period with no injuries, no serious damage, everyone safe, all prepared...? How were so many willing and able to step up, with little rest, to tackle this event so effectively? Because of their commitment to our community, all those named in the marshal's message quoted above plus our dispatchers who run Alta Central, round-the-clock to ensure or emergency services, are always there when needed. The principal credit is due to the leadership of our incredible marshal Mike Morey. There are not enough hero medals to go around even though many are due, but if I had only two, I would pin them on Deputy Ted Spencer who saved a 9 year old and our never defeated marshal Mike Morey.

Be safe,
Roger Bourke
Mayor of Alta