

## Save Our Canyons Continues the Fight for Wasatch Wilderness

Contributed by Keese Lane  
Thursday, 29 October 2009

The non-profit organization Save Our Canyons (SOC) has been fighting for the protection of wilderness outside of Salt Lake City for over three decades. Formed in 1973 in opposition to the opening and expansion of Snowbird Ski Resort, the group continues to fight commercialization and development - most currently Snowbasin's avalanche training classes and Alta's proposed ski lifts on Flagstaff Mountain.

The non-profit organization Save Our Canyons (SOC) has been fighting for the protection of wilderness outside of Salt Lake City for over three decades. Formed in 1973 in opposition to the opening and expansion of Snowbird Ski Resort, the group continues to fight commercialization and development - most currently Snowbasin's avalanche training classes and Alta's proposed ski lifts on Flagstaff Mountain.

SOC often faces off against everyone from government officials to heli-skiing operators. But the group gets results: Formation of three wilderness areas and the Wasatch Master Plan; resisting development and growth of commercial ski resorts; regulation of sewer lines; avalanche control techniques and public transport into and out of the canyons; maintaining access to trailheads and constant conflicts with the heli-ski industry continue to keep SOC busy. It's all in the name of "protecting the beauty and wilderness of the Wasatch" whether from the bombing and noise pollution of the heli-ski industry or the watershed from development in the canyons.

According to David Grisson, Salt Lake City - based Voile's sales and marketing manager, the backcountry - and backcountry skiers - have benefited from the efforts of SOC. "The backcountry would be dramatically different," he says. "There would be - and would have been - more rapid expansion of ski areas into the adjacent backcountry. SOC provides balance and oversight to this development."

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|SOC| title=|Carl Fisher - Y Couloir - Little Cottonwood Canyon.|}images/stories/features/soc/SOC\_1.jpg{/rokzoom}

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|SOC| title=|Carl Fisher - Cardiac Ridge - Big Cottonwood Canyon.|}images/stories/features/soc/SOC\_3.jpg{/rokzoom}

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|SOC| title=|Carl Fisher - Y Couloir - Little Cottonwood Canyon.|}images/stories/features/soc/SOC\_2.jpg{/rokzoom}

As SOC prepares for its upcoming ULLR Ball, Backcountry sat down with Executive Director Carl Fisher to talk about the organization's accomplishments and plans for the future.

For more info on the Ball, visit [saveourcanyons.org/event/community\\_outreach/ullr\\_ball\\_0](http://saveourcanyons.org/event/community_outreach/ullr_ball_0)

Backcountry: "What is Save Our Canyons?"

Fisher: Save Our Canyons started back in 1972 when Snowbird first opened. The land Snowbird was built on is also part of the the watershed for over 600,000 people. That is our number one priority: protecting the drinking water for everyone here in SLC.

Backcountry: And what are the current challenges you are facing?

Fisher: Well we just saw the renewal of the Wasatch Powderbirds [Heli-Skiing] permit, which we weren't happy about. The Powderbirds conduct early morning avalanche bombing in the mountains. And the locals here feel it is just a matter of time before someone gets injured. We also face the constant threats of ski area expansion, and private property owners trying to develop ridge-lines, slopes, and along streams. We are also an older organization, having been started in the '70s. We want to get more involvement from the younger generation.

Backcountry: How are you going about that?

Fisher: We have our ULLR Ball, Nov. 12th, to which I want to invite all the Backcountry readers in SLC, or anyone visiting the area who cares about wilderness. The ULLR Ball is a fundraiser for SOC and a get together for all backcountry enthusiasts who also enjoy live music, beer in steins, and lots of great raffle prizes.

Backcountry: SLC is growing, so isn't development inevitable?

Fisher: The old timers say there are more people in the backcountry now. But, I think there's a difference between saying "hi" to someone else skinning up, and not being able to have a conversation with your partner because of the noise from the helicopters.

Backcountry: So what do you tell the people who argue that more growth and development means more business and jobs?

Fisher: Depends on the business. SLC is home to a lot of outdoor businesses like Black Diamond, Voile and Petzl who support us and what we do, as well as manufacture backcountry equipment, so I would say more wilderness means more jobs.

Backcountry: What can people do to preserve wilderness and wilderness access, whether in SLC or around the country?

Fisher: People need to get involved, either with a group or on their own, 'cause there is a lot of money on the other-side that needs to be balanced. People need to pay attention to Management/Recreation plans and comment on them. Also, watch where you spend your money. If you enjoy backcountry recreation, support companies who do, too.

Backcountry: And we should avoid?

Fisher: Could be the ski areas. I'm not saying every ski area is evil, but some definitely have their eye on public land, and want to make money off public land.

Backcountry: Thanks for talking to us Carl. One last thing, AT or Tele?

Fisher: Splitboard.