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Vail Achieves Recertification as Sustainable Destination under Mountain IDEAL Standard

(Vail)— Following a rigorous audit process in late 2020, Vail is celebrating the achievement of recertification as a Sustainable Destination under the Mountain IDEAL standard. This coveted achievement builds upon the initial certification in 2017 when Vail became the first Certified Sustainable Destination in the United States. The Mountain IDEAL standard is recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and is a sustainability standard specific to mountain resort communities. The certification was awarded through Green Destinations, one of only three international certification bodies accredited by the GSTC.

Led by Vail's Destination Stewardship Council and Steering Committee, the collective efforts of community stakeholders showed continuous improvement on the 44 sustainable destination best practices covering themes such as community planning, visitor use, stakeholder engagement, emergency response, cultural and natural heritage preservation, and environmental conservation. Some highlights include the creation of an Attraction Protection Plan and a Monitoring Plan for the top attractions in Vail, development of a Register of Risks for the Vail Destination, and the creation of the Cultural Heritage Committee to preserve, enrich and sustain the cultural and historic legacy of Vail. Melissa Kirr, Senior Programs Director of Sustainability at Walking Mountains Science Center shared, "It has been wonderful to see how much progress the destination has made in sustainable initiatives since starting this journey of global certification in 2015."

The journey to certification began in 1966 when protection of open space was written into the Town Charter. Building on the Charter, the creation of the Vail Nature Center and Preserve in the 1970s, and the 1% Real Estate Transfer Tax in the 1980s improved parks and open space for recreation opportunities that further supported environmental sustainability practices. The conversation around sustainable tourism started in earnest in 2013 while planning to host an eco-conscious FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in 2015. Local stakeholders, led by Walking Mountains Science Center and Town of Vail, rallied to implement the Actively Green Business Training and Recognition Program designed by Sustainable Travel International. After hundreds of businesses participated in the training and dozens were certified, support and interest in sustainability grew. The next logical evolution was to focus on destination planning, development, and management best practices. This led to the creation of the Mountain IDEAL Standard, an internationally recognized set of destination stewardship best practices for resort, rural, recreation, and gateway communities. Vail defines the destination as everything within the Gore Creek Watershed which is 69,987 acres. Given the scope of the defined destination, the certification requires continuous collaboration between diverse stakeholders including Town of Vail, Vail Resorts, U.S. Forest Service, Walking Mountains Science Center, Vail Recreation District, Holy Cross Energy, Eagle River Water and Sanitation District, and many other entities such as Betty Ford Alpine Gardens, Vail Valley Mountain Trails Association (VVMTA), Vail Chamber and Business Association, Vail Valley Partnership, and many more. The collection of Vail's destination stewardship policies, programs, and activities from all stakeholders were

rigorously audited by an independent third party and certification was awarded by GSTC-accredited Green Destinations.

The recertification focused heavily on Vail's COVID-19 response. In light of the incredible challenges faced, the Vail Destination quickly responded to the global pandemic and began recovery efforts to adapt, support local community members, and reboot Vail's business economy, bringing vitality, tourism, and economic drivers back to the valley with public health and safety at the forefront of all decisions and initiatives implemented. It was clear Vail's earlier commitment to sustainability management systems better prepared it to respond to impacts of the global pandemic. Vail was recognized as a Global Top 100 Destination in 2020 through Green Destinations Top 100 Destination Sustainability Stories award program for its COVID-19 response, recovery, and resilience. Read the Good Practice story [here](#).

Other recent achievements include the town's commitment to restoring the water quality of Gore Creek, implementation of the Actively Green Sustainable Business Certification Program, which has over 220 businesses engaged and 64 certified, implementation of Vail Valley Mountain Trails Association Trail Ambassador and Town of Vail Trail Host programs, Holy Cross Energy's 100X30 plan to provide 100% renewable energy by 2030, and Vail Resort's ambitious commitment to a zero net operating footprint by 2030. In 2020 Vail was also awarded the Best in Americas designation through Green Destinations and ITB Berlin for its continued improvements in waste reduction, now with a 29% recycling rate. Through support of Green Destinations, Vail developed a [Good Travel Guide](#) to provide sustainability information to visitors interested in traveling to sustainable destinations.

But this isn't the end of Vail's story.

As a tourist destination it is critical for Vail to continue to balance tourism growth with the local environment and community needs. As such, Town of Vail, with support of the Destination Stewardship Council, will be developing a comprehensive Destination Management Plan over the next 18 months. Also, Vail's visitor economy relies heavily upon the recreational value provided by the mountain ecosystems and freshwater resources - frozen and liquid alike - which are threatened by climate change. The community has developed and implemented an Environmental Sustainability Strategic Plan and Climate Action Plan for Eagle County, and Vail Resorts has launched their Commitment to Zero, a goal to achieve a zero net operating footprint by 2030. Finally, Vail was an early adopter and Signatory for the Future of Tourism, a global coalition seeking to reimagine tourism post COVID-19 to be more resilient and regenerative through the commitment of [13 guiding principles](#).

"Innovation, entrepreneurship, and environmentalism is in Vail's DNA. Couple that with an actively engaged community, leadership buy-in at the highest levels, and a desire to do better, you have a recipe for measurable impact," says Robert (Bobby) Chappell, Vail's lead destination stewardship advisor since 2013. "It has been a real pleasure to witness the progress Vail has made. They have earned their recognition as leaders in sustainable destination management while also acknowledging there is always room for improvement."

For more information on Vail's Sustainable Destination certification and other sustainability initiatives, contact Beth Markham, Town of Vail environmental sustainability coordinator, at 970-479-2333 or at bmarkham@vailgov.com. For more information on the Mountain IDEAL standard, visit Walking Mountains Science Center's Sustainability webpage [here](#).

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