

From:
To: [FS-comments-alaska-tongass-juneau](#)
Subject: MGRA
Date: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 4:05:17 PM

Comments on MGRA plans

As presented in the poster session, the plan is faulty several respects. In the first place, the very premise of the plan is mistaken. It is NOT necessary to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of visitors to the area. The natural ecology of the area sets limits to the number of humans: increases in the numbers of humans will lead inevitably to a decreased quality of the experience there. No amount of lectures and movies can substitute satisfactorily for seeing real live bears, porcupines, mountain goats, terns, beavers etc. doing their natural activities, with the opportunity of informal on-site education.

Not one of the poster presentations dealt with the consequences of the proposed changes (except for humans). But consideration of multiple consequences needs to be part of any responsible plan of development, along with plans for mitigating negative effects.

- What are the consequences of making a very long board walk along Steep Creek (from near the falls almost to the pond with resident beavers)? Will bears have adequate access to fish if the whole stretch is lined with visitors, who often don't know how to behave in those circumstances? That is true in the off-season as well as during the peak of visitor numbers. How will human behavior be monitored and controlled? Monitoring would be needed throughout the summer and fall! (I note that this is a difficult job even with the present boardwalk; visitors often misbehave.) What would be done to mitigate these consequences?
- What are the consequences of restricting bear access to the creek to just the lakeshore and the double culverts, blocking many of their traditional routes to Steep Creek? Will bears just get hungry and cranky and potentially get into trouble? What would be done to mitigate these consequences?
- What are the consequences of a huge bus parking lot placed close to the creek, with inevitable runoff of toxins? The current, smaller bus parking lot oozed pollutants into Dredge Creek and necessitated mitigation, such as a pit to collect runoff. What would be done to mitigate these consequences at the planned large parking lot?
- What are the consequences of a new trail on the west side of the lake, plus increased boat traffic, on the colonies of nesting birds on the recently exposed rock faces? How would the colonies be protected?
- What are the consequences of the proposed bridge from the campground, over the river, leading to a new trail to the VC area? The route goes through a part of the MGRA that has been considered a place where wildlife is not (much) disturbed—a place without much human activity. The proposed plan would remove that area of relative peace. Is there any plan to mitigate the impact on wildlife?
- The proposed bridge would be served by a new parking lot in the thick of the campground. That would surely diminish the camping experience! And what if bears decide to use that bridge?
- What are the consequences for fish of moving the stream? It would render the Pond of Time completely inaccessible to juvenile salmon and thus result in a loss of rearing habitat (that pond is now at least sometimes accessible). Together with the destruction of the large pond below the double culverts a few years ago, it means a loss of critical rearing habitat. Juvenile success is key to having a good run of spawners eventually returning. What would be done to mitigate these consequences?
- What are the consequences of paving over a small pond (between the first and second parking lots) that is used by small fish (at times), beavers, kingfishers, and ducks?

Questions such as these about varied consequences of the planned project were nowhere addressed in the poster presentation. The FS representatives by the posters were very casual about the wildlife consequences of the proposal, generally passing off questions with a shoulder shrug or other indication that the wildlife would just fend for itself somehow. That attitude clearly shows that the consequences for wildlife have not been considered seriously.

In view of the fact that the glacier is disappearing, its value as an 'attraction' is waning, it is financial folly to invest a lot of money in 'chasing the ice' with more and more infrastructure. Meanwhile, the wildlife near the VC could remain a living, renewable attraction. It is worth protecting and irresponsible not to do so.

Mary F. Willson, ecologist