

From:
To: [FS-comments-alaska-tongass-juneau](#)
Subject: MGRA NEPA
Date: Thursday, March 19, 2020 11:03:20 AM

General design comments and suggestions:

- 1) I want to state off the bat I am an employee but am commenting on my own time and my own computer as a private citizen of the United States and resident of the Juneau area. Disclaimer out of the way, my main issue with this plan is that the design team seems to have a clear lack of understanding of what MGRA is actually like during tourist season, and there is a clear biased towards the visitor and not the protection of the resource. In fact, the Master Plan even states that it has "one goal in mind", which is "to improve visitor experiences at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and within the larger Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area." I believe every single issue I bring up stems from this "visitor over resource" issue. It also seems that no one on the design team has much knowledge about the complex ecological balancing act that exists in the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area... people don't need to see the salmon at eye level. The designers seem to be in love with this idea that they got from hatcheries, but this isn't a hatchery, it's a national forest. They should really consult the rangers at the glacier and the local guides who actually have boots on the ground in this area before moving ahead with things. They probably have all sorts of knowledge about operations that might otherwise be overlooked but are important for the protection of both the resource and the visitor.
- 2) This is the point I feel most passionately about: There is currently little to no cultural/historical interpretation at the glacier, which is pretty silly since human history has played such a role on climate change and the receding of the glaciers. There is a shameful lack of any sort of attempt to mend some bridges between the Forest Service and the local Tlingit people by incorporating any cultural history into this design. I think a little could go a long way here: why not make all the new signs for everything in Formline (commonly known as the "Totem pole" type of art), and hire local artists to design the signs? It's a win-win: new signs will have to be designed and installed, why not have them designed by local artists and gain some community good will along with an easy-ish incorporation of cultural history to the site. Most importantly, ALL SIGNAGE SHOULD ALSO BE IN THE TLINGIT LANGUAGE. This is already being done by the city, some state areas, and in many national parks. It's shameful the Forest Service hasn't already implemented this at the "most visited site in Alaska." Regardless of who designs the signs, all text should be in both English and Tlingit.
- 3) The more seating near the bus pick up area, the better! The more (unobtrusive) seating everywhere, the better! The cruise ship set is overwhelmingly older and WE DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH SEATING OUTSIDE.
- 4) All new building should absolutely be LEED-certified and sustainable. In the literal face of a melting glacier, it would be irresponsible if they weren't. All electronic signs outside should be powered by solar or wind energy like already existed on a lot of highway signs.
- 5) I do not like anything about the idea of taking visitors to the face of the glacier. Motorized boats are disruptive and leak stuff into the lack. Infrastructure at the face of the glacier is questionable. The glacier is receding because of the actions of people; I think not being able to get to the glacier anymore when they could just a decade or two ago is actually a really powerful tool in helping people understand the real world implications of climate change...it's an unfortunate truth that many people don't take action unless climate change interferes with their life. So maybe this is a case where NOT being able to touch the glacier will be more powerful than being able to.
- 6) Along that line, I'm all about expanding/redo-ing the West Glacier trail to make it easier

to get closer to the glacier, just not right to the glacier. I'm very pro-west side development if it avoids the use of motorized boats.

7) I would like to suggest more infrastructure that would give rangers a "formal" place to talk on the trails and other places outside. Just a little spot in some of the more popular areas to be out of the way but still give people the opportunity to join the ranger program. This would be especially helpful in incorporating shorter ranger programs and interpretative opportunities, which are imperative because although the master plan says the average visit is an hour and half, I know for a fact that many, many visitors only get an hour at the site. We need more infrastructure designed to give those people an interpretative moment that is meaningful, while also getting them back on their bus in an hour.

8) I think expanding the Steep Creek area across the road is mistake. The Dipper Falls area is rarely visited by the cruise ship visitors and therefore has become sort of a "sanctuary" that allows locals to enjoy the area in the summer as well. Why bring attention to this area? Let the locals (and the bears) have it.

9) Speaking of bears, has anyone looked at the path of existing bear trails and tried to mitigate how much the bear trails are impacted? Same thing with the Photo Point trail expansion. I'm not against the loop in principle, but it impacts prime bear habitat area—they have a popular groundcone spot that will be destroyed by the current design of the trail.

10) Parking. Main point: yes, we need more parking, but I do not think we need nearly the amount of personal vehicle spots as the design adds. Although it's a heavily visited area, the vast majority of the visitors come by other means of transportation, such as motorcoach, shuttle, or taxi. A very, very small amount of visitors actually rent a car and since you can't drive here they rarely have their personal vehicle. I think the personal vehicle parking can be reduced. And while I am okay with parking for locals at the trailheads, I think parking lots for 12-20 cars at the trailheads is way too much. Again, few visitors to Juneau have a personal vehicle. And I have never seen that many locals using the trails at once. I think spots for 5-10 personal vehicles would be totally acceptable. I like the idea of separate drop off and pick up points, but I think the design underestimates how much many visitors---how to say this nicely---lack common sense and basic sign reading skills. In other words: I've seen first hand how confused and lost visitors get when they are looking for their bus, even if they are getting on in the exact same spot they got off. I love this idea, but I worry it's too complicated for "vacation brain." Perhaps with lots of signage?

11) I like the idea of drop off and pick up points, but not at the expense of the Zig-Zag pond! That's literally paving paradise and putting up a parking lot.

12) I do like a lot of this plan, even though it doesn't seem like it. I just want it to be as informed as possible.

My info:

Amber DeBardelaben

Thanks for listening!