I am from Lutsen and am an avid alpine and Nordic skier. I taught my kids to ski at Lutsen and purchased season passes for many years. That being said, I am opposed to the expansion proposal on multiple grounds, both economic and environmental.

I do not believe the expansion can be an economic success and will result in significant long term irreversible environmental damage. The alpine ski industry is very mature and national skier days have been flat to down for 20 years. The ski experience has grown much to expensive to have broad appeal. The demographics do not support renewed growth the anytime in the near to medium term future. This is particularly true of western resorts which has been driven to massive consolidation due to rising costs and declining skier days. The key to Lutsen’s economic viability is not to compete with the west on terrain variety, steepness, or any other ski terrain issue. Expansion to try to offer what vastly superior western climate and terrain offers is folly. It will just drive up costs and force ticket prices up beyond the reach of the typical Midwest skier. The key to Lutsen’s economic viability is to stay focused on offering an affordable ski experience to the Midwest ski family, a place where you can teach your kids to ski and have an affordable weekend or week ski experience. Lutsen needs to know its customer. It is not the western skier and never will be. Once a skier gets good enough or financially secure enough to head west, they won’t be back. So if Lutsen expands to try to compete, it will drive its costs out of reach of its key customer base. In addition, it does not have the climate to compete and does not have the steep terrain to hold snow without becoming a dangerous ice sheet. The two runs off the back side of Moose Mountain are almost always closed due to poor coverage and ice.

The cost of this folly is extensive environmental damage to a unique area. The forest area to be utilized has many native plant communities and species that have Outstanding Statewide Biodiversity Significance according to the Minnesota DNR’s Biological Survey. The opening and thinning of the forest in glade areas will destroy understory shrubs and eventually trees over a wide area. Paper birch is dominant in much of this area and its decline will be accelerated as this species is sensitive to disturbance, soil warming and climate warming. Expansion appears to include extensive areas of upland white cedar forest which the DNR rates as vulnerable to extirpation. The expansion would destroy significant habitat for the threatened Canada Lynx and other region 9 sensitive species.

The Forest Service’s goal of maintaining a scenic landscape would be permanently set back by such a large permanent clearing of forested land on slopes so visible from many outstanding viewpoints. It would not allow timber harvesting of this magnitude in this prominent location even if replanting was mandated. There would likely be significant drainage and erosion issues associated with such massive clearing and development affecting both public and adjacent private lands in ways unlikely to be fully anticipated and mitigated. The increased carbon footprint from forest destruction and energy to operate the area and make snow on south facing slopes next to a continually warming Lake Superior need to be considered in a warming climate.

In summary, the economic returns are marginal, risky, and likely doomed to fail, while the environmental impacts are potentially huge and at this time poorly understood. This project should not be approved.