May 22, 2020

Connie Cummins

Forest Supervisor, Superior National Forest

c/o Michael Jimenez, Project Leader

8901 Grand Avenue Place

Duluth, MN 55808

*comments-eastern-superior@usda.gov**.*

**Subject: Comments on the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project**

Dear Ms. Cummins:

I am writing today to provide comments on behalf of the Minnesota Ski Areas Association on the Forest Service proposed Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project. Lutsen Mountains is a member of the association and all 18 alpine areas in Minnesota that make up the membership of the association endorse the efforts of Lutsen Mountains to enhance the winter experience for all their guests.

The Minnesota Ski Areas association values the contribution of Lutsen Mountains, to the industry but also to the overall economy of the state and to tourism in Minnesota.

Lutsen Mountains ski area is such an important amenity and provides a unique and fun recreation experience for both locals and destination visitors. The consolidations in the ski industry over the past decade, enhance the importance of improving the guest experience as a means of ensuring Lutsen Mountains continued competitiveness and survival in the Midwest ski area market.

The Minnesota Ski Areas Association is very supportive of the project objectives and agrees with the Forest Service that this project provides an opportunity to achieve the recreation goals outlined in the Superior NF land management plan. Expanding Lutsen on a small portion of the national forest also enhances socio-economic benefits to the state area. There is a shortage of beginner and expert terrain at the existing ski area and constructing traditional ski trails and glade skiing as part of this project can address that deficit. The project will significantly improve skier circulation and provide for more reliable snow due to upgraded snowmaking. Lastly, the proposed improvements in guest services, base area improvements, additional parking, etc., should address longstanding needs at Lutsen Mountains. We think this project, and the master development plan (MDP), are well designed and will transform the downhill skiing experience at Lutsen Mountains in a way that is environmentally and economically sustainable.

Project design and environmental elements of the plan that are important to the Minnesota ski industry include:

* ***Recreation***
	+ The socio-economic benefits from increased recreation such as more jobs and tax base are good for the local community and the state of Minnesota in both the short and long run.
	+ Outdoor recreation, and alpine skiing is a “clean industry” with very limited negative effects on clean air, clean water and other natural resources.
	+ Winter outdoor recreation opportunities help compliment the summer recreation that is so prevalent across Minnesota. Creating increased winter visitation helps provide year-round employment, tax revenue, and business in general.
* ***Protecting jobs and fragile economy***
	+ Tourism is a vital economic driver in Cook County and throughout Minnesota. The recent COVID-19 stay at home order has made this dynamic all the more obvious, with many job losses and many small businesses on the verge of not surviving.
	+ With the many consolidations within the ski industry including the mega passes and capital improvements by the Western resorts, we believe that the proposed expansion by Lutsen Mountains is essential to the long-term survival of the ski area.
	+ A strong and stable winter economy helps provide year around jobs for residents and promotes higher wages with benefit

On behalf of the members of the Minnesota Ski Areas Association, I again reiterate the associations strong support of this project.

Sincerely,

Luci R. Botzek

Luci R. Botzek, JD

Executive Director

Minnesota Ski Areas Association

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