

# Mary Junnila, MPP

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Ms. Constance Cummins, Forest Supervisor,  
c/o Michael Jimenez, Project Leader,  
Superior National Forest,  
8901 Grand Avenue Place,  
Duluth, MN 55808

**Dear Ms Cummins:**

**I am writing to strongly urge you to approve Lutsen Mountain's request for expansion.**

I offer my point of view from several different vantage points relevant to this issue. Although I now live and work in Duluth, I am a former Executive Director of the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority (1994-96), and founder of the innovative Cook County Higher Education project (now a thriving local nonprofit and national model for distance learning). I have also been a retail business owner at Lutsen Mountains since 1995 ("The Mountain Shop").

What is really most important to me, I am a public policy professional. For the past decade, I have been the Executive Director of the Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind, an organization rapidly expanding and innovating to serve individuals of all ages and all disabilities, as well as all older adults facing challenges to aging in place. My career goals have always been to help people and to help build stronger communities. That is why I chose to earn a masters' in public policy from Harvard University (graduated 1989) and a bachelor's in economics from Carleton College (1984).

I tell you about my own background because I hope you will see my input as that of someone who truly cares about the community of Cook County, its diverse workers and families, and the best possible public policy. My husband, children and I lived in Cook County for more than a decade. I grew to love it for its natural beauty and the community of extraordinarily hard-working residents.

Lutsen Mountains is a central attraction on the North Shore that helps individuals of all abilities and disabilities appreciate and participate in the rugged, natural beauty of the surrounding area in all seasons. As you well know, it is important that residents across Minnesota have places they can go to experience the land in or close to its natural state. Outdoor recreation brings families together, it helps young people grow into healthy adults, and it makes us all be better human beings. It is an essential part of our human existence. Sadly, there are too few places we can go to experience it in this way. Some people can take hikes in the wilderness. For others, a gondola ride may be their best way to access stunning views.

Consider that in recent years Lutsen Mountains has collaborated with Courage Center to offer accessible skiing to individuals with a multitude of disabilities. I am told the experience has been extremely popular and is growing rapidly. This experience has been possible only because of the investments

Lutsen Mountains has made in newer more accessible lifts and more wide-open spaces – that make it easier for individuals with physical disabilities to get both up and down the slopes.

Lutsen Mountains is also a driving force in the local economy – an economy that will most assuredly be struggling in the aftermath of COVID-19. In Cook County, people have long struggled to make ends meet. Holding multiple jobs is not the exception; it is the norm. Many people live very simple lives on low incomes. The slow and steady expansion of Lutsen Mountains since the 1980s has fed the local economy, and it has provided meaningful career paths for many talented professionals at that organization and many others. It has enriched quality of life in many different ways.

As you well know, in economics, some growth is often required for survival. “Standing still” may not be a viable option. So it is for Lutsen and the economy of the north shore. A further expansion of Lutsen Mountains – carefully planned and carried out to maintain all that the rugged beauty of the area has to offer – can continue to feed the health of the local economy and its residents.

By expanding the space available to skiers, more Minnesotans will be able to continue to appreciate the environment and experience outdoor recreation at its best. A physical expansion also ensures that more individuals can continue to appreciate skiing with a wilderness experience.

Especially in the aftermath of Covid-19, Minnesotans will want to be able to enjoy the outdoors with adequate space. They may not want to fly to the western Mountains, and it would be better for our local economy and perhaps even our residents’ health if they do not.

Lutsen Mountains is a true gem for Minnesota. There is nowhere else like it. Please help it retain its rustic, wilderness flavor and its economic sustainability by supporting a lovely and reasonable expansion into the beautiful land that surrounds it.

Best regards,

*Mary Junnila*

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