

March 30, 2022

Catherine Fritz
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Mr. Earl Stewart, Tongass Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Tongass National Forest
3031 Tongass Avenue
Ketchikan, AK 99901

RE: Comment Period Extension Request for Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Delivered via email to: earl.stewart@usda.gov

Dear Mr. Stewart,

I am requesting that you please extend the period to receive public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for proposed improvements at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA).

I am a 39 year Juneau resident who lived very near the MCRA for 30 years. My husband and I never tired of the extensive year round recreation opportunities at MCRA. It remains a very special place for us, and for our three (now adult) sons. I continue to use the area year round, and am very concerned about negative impacts that seem to be part of several of the ideas in the proposed improvements.

The three options outlining proposed improvements are very detailed. It is clear that a lot of dedicated effort has been put into the work to date. However, this detail also means that it is very difficult to take in all of the information to make thoughtful, constructive comments in a short amount of time. In my 35 year career as a public sector architect, I learned that there are two important aspects to public comment. The first is the legal basis – in other words, doing what is required by the EIS process. The second is the ethical and moral aspect – doing what is right for the people and community groups that are affected by the project. I am appealing to you to extend the comment period so that additional engagement with people and groups can be gained. This will make the project more meaningful, and grow public confidence in the US Forest Service to “do the right thing.” In the life span of any of the proposed improvements, a few additional weeks for public process is a tiny “blip,” yet is so crucial to building success.

I attended the March 15, 2022 Open House at the Mendenhall Visitors Center and spoke with many of the staff and consultants about the development options. I sincerely appreciate the desire to address current problems relating to summer usage, while also looking to the future for both visitors and local users. As an architect, one of the things that struck me the most was the significant amount of human built structures (buildings, bridges, parking lots, docks, paved trails, etc.). I truly fear that the extensive amount of human forms on the glacier landscape could lead to “loving the place to death.” Of course I also recognize (and appreciate!) that recreation is a critical part of our national forest mission. Where is the balance? This is a very difficult question to answer, and it is precisely why more time is needed now, during the DRAFT EIS to assess development on the MGRA and make sure we are not only doing what is legally required, but also what is good and right for the Tongass for many, many years ahead.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Trife". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "T".

cc: Monique Nelson (project leader) at: monique.nelson@usda.gov
Tristan Fluharty (Juneau District Ranger) at tristan.fluharty@usda.gov