

## Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center

Submitted by:

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May 9, 2022

My comments are as follows.

### Structural Plans

1. None of the alternatives are protective of the existing habitat, and fish and wildlife use of this area. Alternative 4 has the least adverse impacts with some exceptions such as the large welcoming center obstructing the view of the Mendenhall Glacier. New construction at National Parks places large visitor centers away from the natural landscape that they feature. There were no proposed alternative designs for the welcoming center, NEPA requires alternatives. The present visitor center could be expanded in keeping with the historic and appealing value of this existing building. For a fine example of a new building, I recommend Laurie Craig's design which was posted on Facebook. There was no assessment analysis of disruption to bears, fish, and other wildlife with the proposed welcome center siting.
2. The addition of a café and food service is the exact opposite of what is recommended in bear use areas, there should be no food served or allowed in the MGVC. If a café is needed, place it in an area before the main visitation area such as near the entrance of the Forest Service property.
3. Do not demolish the existing pavilion.
4. Do not fill or pave over Zigzag Pond for parking. This wildlife habitat is a great introduction into the area for our visitors.
5. Remote visitors center – NO! There is no need for this structure as there should be no motorized boats on Mendenhall Lake. The newly exposed rock in the proposed area is important for seabird colonization
6. No docks on the lake for boats.
7. Bus parking areas should not be paved unless permeable asphalt is used. Standard asphalt creates rapid runoff that carries a host of pollutants into nearby waterways. A permeable surface allows pollutants to enter the ground where they can be broken down by numerous microorganisms.
8. All buses should be electric buses. The Forest Service should not continue to support fossil-fuel burning vehicles of any sort.
9. The entrance road should not be widened. A wide straight road encourages speeding. It would be preferable to change the present road route to one with more curves to enhance the view 'surprise' for visitors.

### Mendenhall Lake

1. Boat traffic on the lake presently includes kayaks and large canoes. Addition of powered boats will create wakes and waves, not compatible with human-powered boats. Shoreline erosion can result from these boats and disturb and destroy fish habitat at the mouth of Steep Creek. Waterfowl use of the lake will also be disrupted by motorized boats. Afternoon winds on the

lake can be quite strong, having these power boats on the lake could interfere with safe routes chosen by kayakers and the canoes. There is no discussion of boat safety, accidents, lake bathymetry, etc. See Jim Sepel's Opinion piece in the May 4 Juneau Empire for details on these concerns. I totally agree with his comments.

2. No lakeshore trail, more on this topic under my trail section comments.

#### Trails

1. A trail should not go around the beaver lodge to the beach, this is an area that is critical bear habitat. Continued human disturbance could also disrupt the beaver's use of this area.
2. Trail platforms should not be placed over water but alongside waterways such as Steep Creek. Human traffic can disrupt bear feeding and even fish passage.
3. Instead of a lake shoreline trail create a 'hidden' perimeter trail. This will be less disruptive of lake views from other areas. Habitat edges such as the shrub and herbaceous areas between the lake and the forest are important wildlife habitat. A paved 14-foot-wide trail is not compatible with the wild aspects of the MGVC that visitors come to experience. A hardened trail will also discourage wildlife use and crossing.
4. There should be no blind at Dipper Falls as this encourages human use in a critical wildlife use area.
5. Nugget Falls Trail could be widened to accommodate 2-way foot traffic. It should not be moved to the lakeshore to further disrupt views.
6. The Moraine Trail is closed to the public during the primary bear use period. A commercial company, Gastineau Guiding has been allowed access during the closure period. Commercial use of this trail should be discontinued immediately in all fairness to the general public.
7. The proliferation of developed trails will fragment wildlife use areas and disrupt wildlife corridors. Concentrate visitors vs dispersing them throughout the MGVC, we don't need more wildlife disturbance or social encounters.

#### Dredge Lakes Area

The Dredge Lakes area should not be open to commercial use. This area is extensively used by residents and independent tourists during all seasons for introducing their children to nature, walking, birding, dog walking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, etc. Commercial use is in direct conflict with the reasons many residents use this area - to get away from large numbers of tourists. Many of the trails in this area are not well, if at all maintained, and additional foot traffic will further degrade trail conditions. Volunteers do some trail improvement work in Dredge Lakes but that is not close to adequate trail maintenance. Bears use this area and adding commercial use to the trail system in this area can disrupt bear use and potentially create negative bear-human interactions. In addition, the parking area off Back Loop Road, which allows good access to this area is abhorrent and should be repaired.

#### Mendenhall Campground

Small cabins added to the existing campground would be an asset. However large cabins as proposed in the DEIS are an invitation to large groups and parties with subsequent noise and other issues. The campground is presently a quiet and relaxing place, and the inclusion of large cabins would change the atmosphere of the campground for the worse.

Because the campground road is one of if not the most favorite place for Nordic skiers, no vehicle traffic should be allowed during the winter months. In fact, additional parking near Skaters cabin is needed for the volume of vehicles present on winter weekends. There should be no additional parking within the campground. An addition to the campground could be a small group open shelter with a fire pit for day-use picnickers and skiers.

Although I am a frequent visitor to the campground for skiing, walking and biking, I do not favor a bridge over the Mendenhall River. I believe a bridge will open the area to excessive human disturbance to resident wildlife and migratory waterfowl such as trumpeter swans that are often seen in this area during late winter/early spring.

#### Capacity

Cruise ship visitor capacity presently exceeds the MGVC capacity. As trailheads and other managed areas are overloaded, limiting entry would be a plausible idea. Other National Forests and National Parks are limiting use at trailheads, campgrounds, and even entry. Limiting entry and/or requiring reservations sounds unpalatable but may be a necessary option to consider. Tour companies should be limited to the number of buses or visitors allowed each day. Popular commercial-use trails could also have restricted commercial use visits.

In general, the proposed alternatives enhance all commercial uses but does not address displacement of residents to industrial tourism. Increasing visitor use must have recognized limits to make visiting the MGVC an enjoyable experience for everyone. Just like not all visitors can descend into the Grand Canyon but must view it from the rim, not all visitors to the MGVC should have access to the face of the Mendenhall Glacier or be able to visit the entire area. That is a reality of life's limitations.

Thank you for considering these comments. Considering the information gaps in this DEIS, I recommend that a Supplemental DEIS be prepared.

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