

I've been a resident of SE Alaska for 42 years and have lived in Juneau (the valley) for 25 years. The MGRA is my favorite place to recreate year round. My kids grew up hiking, biking and swimming at the glacier. Now I share it with my grandson. Over the years we've enjoyed trips to the ice caves, sledding, ice skating, and skiing on the lake listening to Romeo howl. Sometimes we would wake our kids and bundle them in their pajamas to drive out and watch the aurora flicker above the lake. I've never forgotten how lucky we are to have this unique gem in our backyard.

I have worked as a naturalist/guide with Gastineau Guiding as well as having led bike tours with Cycle Alaska. I enjoyed both experiences and loved sharing my home with visitors from all over the world. It also gave me valuable insight into their perspectives and expectations. I never had a single guest complain about being disappointed they didn't get to 'touch ice.'

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the DEIS for the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area. I attended the open house, viewed the online video and tuned into the Zoom presentation and can see that a lot of thought and effort has gone into educating the public and making information available.. With the projected exponential growth of tourism (2% p/yr in your assessment; 14% in 2019) I understand the need for a comprehensive plan in order to accommodate these visitors. In the past, the strategy seemed to be one of containment in and around the Visitor's Center area while preserving some of the outlying areas for locals. These proposals now seem to throw the gate wide open for development everywhere?

While I acknowledge this need, I can't help but wonder at the approach taken in this current iteration. With the glacier in full retreat, why are you choosing to 'chase the ice' (introducing boats) rather than address global warming, the elephant in the room? Why wasn't there more emphasis placed on addressing this by prioritizing green energy, i.e., keeping diesel spewing buses outside the visitor area and encouraging electric shuttles? The receding glacier presents a teachable moment for visitors about the cause and effect of a changing environment. You missed an opportunity to create something more forward thinking. This was a priority for the MGRA at one time.

SPECIAL INTEREST AREA

The MGRA is designated as a Special Interest Area and, as I understand it, has different criteria for management purposes. The proposed actions seem to be driven by exponential growth with a priority given to commercial use. Rather than consolidating visitors in a predominant area (the east side) with consideration for local use in other areas such as West Glacier where weekends used to be off limits to commercial guiding, this plan appears to take the opposite approach without consideration for customary and historic use by locals. By developing more trails in Dredge Lakes, along the lakeshore into Mendenhall campground, connecting to the peninsula out West glacier and constructing 3 docks to facilitate a commercial concession for boat tours, there's fewer places for locals to enjoy their own backyard. Aren't you supposed to 'protect the existing characteristics and attributes of the area?'

PARKING ACCESS AND EXPANSION

I support Alternative 1

PARKING ACCESS AND EXPANSION: COMMERCIAL OVERFLOW PARKING LOT

I support Alternative 2

TRAIL EXPANSION

DREDGE LAKE :

I think the addition of parking areas off Glacier Spur Rd so that hikers can access the Dredge Lake trail system is a good idea. This will keep vehicles out of the bike lane and be safer all around. It's also a good idea for access to the Powerline trail. I am not opposed to some trail improvements being done within this area to alleviate flooding, erosion, etc. I am not in favor of creating a 14' wide loop around the outside of Dredge that connects to the Lakeshore Trail. Nor do I want to see commercial bike groups (55,000) buzzing around what has historically been a popular local, off leash dog area. Connecting this area to the west side of the lake through the campground sounds like mayhem. This area is also a major wildlife corridor connecting through the Brotherhood Bridge trail system out to the wetlands for wolves, bear and deer, among others. It also facilitates movement for wildlife transiting from the east to west shores. Have the wildlife within this specific area been monitored and documented? What are the numbers for seasonal movement of bears? What mitigation strategies are in place to safeguard their numbers as you grow the trail system thereby increasing pressure from humans? What's your baseline?

I support Alternative 1

STEEP CREEK HABITAT RESTORATION

I support Alternative 2

STEEP CREEK TRAIL EXPANSION

I support Alternative 4

STEEP CREEK TRAIL EXPANSION: DIPPER FALLS

I support Alternative 1

LAKESHORE TRAIL

The piece of shoreline running from the sledding hill around to Mendenhall river is one of the few quiet, more out of the way places to walk, bird watch and enjoy the scenery. Building a 14' wide road from the campground along this shoreline connecting to the Dredge Lake system complete with bridges would destroy this wild pristine shore. I understand that the Nordic Club and bike groups are pushing for this as well as commercial vendors who want to run tours. When you add skiers, snow grooming equipment in the winter and bike tour groups in the summer, With greater traffic, the chances for interaction with wildlife decrease. This morning I was walking my dog along this shore and discovered wolf scat and prints. There is great value

in maintaining an intact landscape without the footprints of humanity tromping all over it. It's bad enough you can't escape the drone of nonstop helicopter traffic April-Oct. Alternative 4

CABINS

I'm not opposed to public use cabins but making them 6-800 sq' is excessive. Because of their accessibility they will invite large groups and the propensity for parties is significant. If you build the bridge that connects to the lakeshore as proposed, you would only compound the user pressure on this previously undeveloped area. I would support building fewer, smaller cabins with hopefully, no access to the east.

NUGGET CREEK TRAIL

It makes sense to turn this into a loop to relieve the out-and-back traffic to the Falls but that doesn't mean you should do it. This proposal is in direct contrast to the current vision of the Forest Service; recreating while giving space for bears, birds, porcupines, etc., to live their lives with minimal disruption. What about the Arctic terns? I taught my kids about their northerly migration from the Antarctic and how special it was that they stop here, at our glacier to lay their eggs. I realize their numbers are dwindling for a variety of reasons but funneling thousands of visitors adjacent to their nesting sites seems ill-advised. With the periodic fluctuations in lake level due to a seemingly annual jokulhlaup event, will this portion of the trail be elevated? The kettle ponds along the lakeshore are a popular swimming spot for locals. Again, this has historically been an alternative route for locals during the busy months of tourist season and one we use to escape the throngs of visitors going to the waterfall.

I support Alternative 1.

WEST GLACIER TRAIL

As both a guide and a local hiker, I have turned back many visitors who were looking for the ice caves after watching a youtube video about them. The majority of them had no idea how far it was, were not prepared with proper clothing, food, water or footwear. Many people are rescued from this area every year. How do you build and maintain a trail in such a dynamic landscape? My son and his friends hiked out there in high school and his friend's dog slipped on scree (on ice), fell 80' and broke its pelvis. What kind of emergency services will you have in place? When I asked if the proposed trail improvements would allow vehicle access, I did not get a clear answer. Will snowmobiles and 4 wheelers be allowed?

How will you deal with waste from the porta potties installed for the stream of visitors arriving by boat and on foot? Helicopter it out like they do for the dog mushers? This also opens up a whole new trail system to be maintained. Does the FS have the resources to do this? Will hikers be allowed to boat back?

I support Alternative 4

WELCOME CENTER

I understand and appreciate the need for expanded visitor services. I've experienced the congestion of the Visitor Center in the summer and know it is not adequate. I applaud many of the features of the proposed Welcome Center including more restrooms, information about trails, programs, a lounge so people not interested in hiking, etc, can relax and take in the view.

Just because people ate pie at the glacier in the past doesn't mean it's a good idea to bring it back. Once you introduce food in the cafe, you will start to see evidence of food around the glacier no matter how many guards you post by the door. This will ultimately change the behavior of the bears that frequent the area. I agree with incorporating a book store/gift store in this structure as well. What I object to, is the location. This was a perfect opportunity to design an aesthetically pleasing building in harmony with the historic Visitor Center and blending with the environment. Laurie Craig has a beautiful, complimentary design for a new Welcome Center that doesn't obscure the best view of the glacier. I know people had the best of intentions in the design being presented but it looks like someone dropped a double wide trailer right in the middle of the plaza? Why were other design ideas not developed or presented? Shouldn't we get a choice? What was the rationale for choosing this one? Cost? If the current visitor center has been listed on the National Historic Register, why couldn't you honor that by building something more architecturally compatible? If you're worried about access, install elevators. It could wrap around the base of the current Visitor Center and be adjacent to off-loading buses. This would leave room for a large, open plaza area where people could move about freely and enjoy an unobstructed view of the glacier. Do not fill in the pond! This would also be less disruptive to the bears and allow them natural areas to move about as usual.

I like keeping the interactive displays and exhibits in the Visitor Center. I still enjoy taking company into this beautiful, distinctive building and looking at the exhibits or going to Fireside Chats in the winter. Why not convert the existing theater to an IMAX? This seems far more reasonable and attainable than putting boats on the lake. Visitors who are less mobile, have health restrictions, or just want to be inside can learn about this diverse area including the icefield that feeds the Mendenhall glacial system, the ice caves, succession after glaciation, birds and animals, the history of the area? This is an educational opportunity and a realistic approach to engaging visitors.

I do not support any of the alternatives put forth by this proposal. I'd like to see another design before I comment.

BOATS

Of all the proposed changes to the MGRA, this proposal will have the greatest impact on the MGRA, deemed a 'Special Interest Area'. The 'need' for such an attraction is not driven by locals. If we want to 'touch ice,' we hike there. How would the wave/wake action impact the shore? Every picture taken of this iconic glacier would be marred by a steady stream of boats parading back and forth. A flotilla of boats capable of carrying 30-50 passengers, projected average passenger load of 1,000 people per day April through October would have a net negative impact on the currently wild and intact landscape/view shed of the glacier. What are the documented effects on the Sockeye and Coho who transit up the Mendenhall, utilize the lake for rearing and spawn in Steep Creek? I don't believe it's the job of the Forest Service to cater to visitors as if this were Disneyland.

Dispersing tourists into a rugged, recently glaciated landscape is dangerous. As a naturalist/guide I learned that you have a huge cross section of people who may or may not be prepared to deal with the environment they find themselves in. It was not uncommon to have

guests admit half-way through a hike that they had just had a hip or knee replacement and couldn't walk. The emergency room at Bartlett is flooded with patients from the cruise ships who are doing things they are not equipped to do.

The glacier is famous for its katabatic winds and can change conditions on the lake suddenly. I remember a couple of years ago when this happened and a father fell out of his kayak while paddling with his 7 yr old son. Luckily, someone in the visitor center saw the incident and they were rescued. Once these boats are allowed, what's to stop others from demanding their right to use motorized craft on the lake? What's the plan for accommodating non-motorized craft in this event? A friend's daughter was killed on Auk Lake a few years ago when it first became accessible to boaters. She was being pulled on an inner tube and collided with a jet skier. I understand Governor Dunleavy has recently weighed in on who has jurisdiction of the lake and apparently, he thinks it's the state. This will present a Pandora's Box of user groups demanding equal access to the lake. Be careful what you wish for.

Global warming is here to stay. Let this be the lesson. Right now the lake is full of ice after some significant calving. Soon the glacier will be out of the lake. UAS scientists have found carbon on the ice attributed to cruise ships and helicopters; human activity. Putting more pressure on this sensitive landscape will only hasten its retreat. If people want to touch a glacier they can drive to the Exit Glacier near Seward, the Matanuska near Anchorage or the Worthington glacier near Valdez.

I support Alternative 4: No motorized boats on the lake. Without going through each project component, it goes without saying that I do not support the construction of any docks or related support facilities.

REMOTE GLACIER VISITOR AREA

I support Alternative 1

VISITOR CAPACITY AND COMMERCIAL USE MANAGEMENT

I support Alternative 4

FOREST ORDERS

I support alternative 1.

Alaska is a bucket list trip for many people. They are generally on a 7 day cruise and visiting the glacier is only one of many activities they will have. These proposals appear designed to disperse an ever increasing number of visitors over the entirety of the MGRA leaving few areas for locals that don't overlap with tourists 6-7 months per year. I am very concerned about the adverse effects some of these proposals will have on wildlife. The Mendenhall Valley houses 1/3 of the population of Juneau. So far, we have been fortunate to co-exist with the wolves, bear, deer, otter, beaver, porcupine, mink and other animals that live here, too. It's a fragile balance that takes community buy-in but it's our home and we want to continue to enjoy its beauty and protect it for our children.

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on these proposals. I hope to be considered part of the conversation as this project evolves.

Sincerely,
Jean M Shannon

