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200 Ranger Station Rd.
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Comments: Re: Proposed Holland Lodge Expansion

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed lodge and cabin expansion at Holland Lake by POWDR Corp. Thank you for the September 8, 2022 open house at the Holland Lake Lodge barn, and for the Forest Service employees who were available to answer questions and take comments.

I oppose the project at the scale proposed. I recommend the project be reduced by about 25 percent in size and impact to the community and the area's natural ecosystem.

Expansion activities should maintain the historical and cultural heritage of the Swan Valley. An appropriate expansion would allow for improvements to make the lodge and cabin operation economically viable for a small business, in a scale that honors the character of the Swan Valley and the history and culture of the area. The project proposal as presented is way too large.

The old log building described as a welcome center or gift shop was built in 1924. This building should be preserved.

I know it has been said that Holland Lake is only a small lake in a big Forest. This sentiment flies in the face of the many decades of conservation work by Swan Valley residents, and many, many other Montanans, with the Montana Legacy Project to protect the area's habitat integrity and natural quality. While Holland Lake is a special place for people and wildlife, it would be equally inappropriate for any small lake on the Flathead National Forest to be subjected to such expansive recreation development, as described in the Holland Lake proposal.

The project should protect the native vegetation and wildlife habitat on the site and in the surrounding forest. The footprint of the proposed lodge is too large and too close to the lakeshore. The cabin expansion extends too far into the woods and would dramatically reduce the forest habitat for small mammals and the birds that people like to hear and watch. The proposed parking areas are immense and if built to those sizes would decimate any the native habitat there.

The Holland Lake area should not become a sacrifice zone for increased recreation use. I heard it said that the habitat at Holland Lake is already significantly damaged because of the current impacts of recreation in the area. This comment was used to justify further habitat loss for native species. The fact that the area is already negatively impacting habitat integrity should caution the Forest Service to limit any further losses, not increase them.

While education about recreating in grizzly habitat is essential, it is never enough. With more people there will be more conflicts, no matter how much education is delivered and received by visitors. Bears will continue to seek out the shoreline habitat and will be enticed by the smells of human and pet foods, even when such attractants are properly stored. Expansion at the scale described will result in the loss of bears and put humans at risk.

I'm concerned about bull trout in the lake, which are already in danger of extinction due to lake trout encroachment. The proposal will bring in more anglers and put bull trout at further risk.

I appreciate the promise that the new lodge owners will not promote or offer motorized boat access on the lake. Motorized boating is already negatively impacting the quality of the visitor experience at Holland Lake and is damaging the lakeshore. Unfortunately, if the lodge and cabins are expanded, there will be increased pressure to enlarge the boat ramp at the west end of the lake, which would further degrade the visitor experience and lakeshore integrity.

It's time to limit trail access to Holland Falls during the busy summer season. Expanding the trailhead parking area and trail improvements will encourage more use on an overly used trail. I recommend that the Forest Service develop a pay-to-go permit system for the Holland Falls trail that would limit the number of hikers on the trail during the busy summer season. The permit system could be managed by the campground hosts, as is boat access is at the west end of the lake.

The loons that nested on the shore of the lake this year were harassed by dogs off leash. Leashes should be mandatory for dogs on the Holland Falls Trail.

Increased visitation at Holland Lake Lodge will result in further pressure on already over-used trails in the Mission Mountains Wilderness, in particular the Glacier Lake trailhead and trail system. It's already time to develop a permitting process for the Glacier Lake trailhead, with or without Holland Lake recreation expansion.

The proposed scale of the POWDR Corp project for Holland Lake Lodge will drastically alter the character of the Swan Valley. Please reduce the scale of the project to protect the culture and ecological integrity of the area.

Sincerely

Anne Dahl