September 12, 2022

USDA Forest Service

Flathead National Forest

Bigfork, MT

RE: Holland Lake Lodge 2022 Development Plan

Dear District Ranger,

This letter is written to express my concerns regarding the proposed expansion plans of the Holland Lake Lodge, and in hopes that you will seriously consider these concerns in your decisions. In a single word, my primary concern is that of “overcrowding”.

You are well aware of the existing recreational facilities at and adjacent to Holland Lake, but to summarize, there are: 1). Two public campgrounds with 40+/- units which are continually full from June through September, 2). A public swimming beach which is also very crowded from June through September, 3). A public group camp site which is continually busy all summer, 4). A public boat launch which many weekends during the summer is completely full of boat trailers, 5). The Owl Creek Packer Camp which accommodates horse packers, corrals, campers, backcountry hiker parking, and a rental cabin, 6). The trailhead leading to the Holland-Gordon connector trail and the National Recreation Trail to Holland Creek Falls which is seeing burgeoning numbers of hikers and maximum crowding at the parking lot, 7). A public Nature Trail loop, 8). A public RV dumping station, 9). A dozen seasonal cabins and boat docks on USFS leases along the south shore of Holland Lake, 10). At least two dozen private residential cabins on Alpine Drive and Hopkins Road within ½ mile of Holland Lake, 11). And last but not least the Holland Lake Lodge with a restaurant, bar, cabins, water sport rentals, and horseback riding, plus a full summer schedule of weddings, reunions, and other private events. It is obvious to see why my concern is “overcrowding”.

I am sure that one of your USFS priorities is to provide for public recreation. Certainly, you are succeeding with this goal at Holland Lake. But the question is, “How much more crowding can the Lake area withstand?”

I live at 353 Alpine Drive, on the south side of Holland Lake, and have owned the property for over 30 years. I have thoroughly enjoyed the lake and the trails and all the public facilities. Over the years, and especially in the past five years, I have seen the popularity of Holland Lake increase exponentially. This current summer season has experienced a peak of usage which is seriously impacting and degrading the very reasons why people are drawn to Holland Lake; to experience the natural beauty and recreational opportunities afforded by the public access.

It is no question that you must be very concerned already about the health, safety, and environmental issues developing at Holland Lake. The quality of the lake water and the upkeep of the camping and trailhead facilities, just to name a few. The next question, therefore, that must be considered is how will these issues be affected with even more public pressure from an expansion of Holland Lake Lodge? You have your hands full at Holland Lake already, how are you going to manage the area with even more expansion?

The public documents detailing the expansion proposals presented by POWDR Corp. seem to address the necessary items of how to manage wastewater, well water, traffic, etc., etc., etc. What the major concern now is, “How does the USFS plan to manage this increased public pressure when you are struggling to manage the area now?” You have given the public access to the POWDR proposals, how about giving the public access to YOUR revised area management plan to handle more people? I would be very interested in seeing that.

I understand the current concerns of the Holland Lake Lodge owners. They need to upgrade an aging facility, and they want to attract customers that are expecting comfortable amenities. They have been good neighbors over the years. But, expanding the property to include more visitors is not going to be beneficial for Holland Lake. You, the USFS, the stewards of this area of beautiful public land and water, must realize that.

I hope that you approve a facility upgrade for Holland Lake Lodge, but not approve an expansion. If you ultimately approve an expansion, I sincerely hope that you address all the details of how POWDR Corp. must manage the many aspects of protecting the lake area from further degradation, and furthermore that you address how YOU are going to manage this valuable resource for us, the people.

I wish you wisdom in your considerations.

Sincerely,

Leo Heath

353 Alpine Dr.

Condon, MT 59826

Mailing Address:

13 Redwood Dr.

Butte, MT 59701

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