

Thank you for the opportunity to register an opinion on the proposed expanded development of the Holland Lake Lodge complex in Condon. I can think of many reasons why it is a bad idea and not one that suggests it will result in any benefit to the Flathead National Forest or to the residents of the Seeley-Swan Valley .

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is **to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.**

First, there is nothing in this proposed development that will help to sustain the health of the Flathead National Forest. Just the opposite. It proposes to increase traffic to the area, increase stress on limited resources, and increase human impact on one of the most unique ecosystems in the state, and perhaps the nation. It has been written that the Swan Valley has a greater density of wetlands than any other place in the state. It is unique.

In 2018, a report (Forest Carnivore Monitoring in the Southwestern Crown of the Continent: Final Baseline Report 2013-2016) produced by a team including five Forest Service representatives from the Flathead, Lolo, and Helena National Forests determined that the area around Holland Lake is rich with forest carnivores, including lynx and wolverine. The report shows a corridor across the valley, connecting the Swan Front with the Mission Mountains Wilderness, that runs from Holland Lake south to Seeley Lake, where lynx and wolverine were detected all four years of the study.

This report suggested these species would benefit from vegetation restoration, efforts to reduce road densities and an increase in security habitat for wildlife species. How this development will support those goals is beyond my understanding.

In 2021, wind events produced blowdown that destroyed a bridge over Crazy Horse Creek in the Glacier Lake drainage, on the western side of this corridor. This bridge supported foot traffic to Glacier Lake and the lakes above. The Forest Service decided not to replace the bridge, making it a dangerous trek during the spring and early summer. This was reported to be to reduce traffic to this fragile, overused ecosystem. One must wonder why the same approach is not being used at the other margin of the corridor. I understand that this bridge is in the "wilderness area", and this may have influenced the decision of the Forest Service, but I doubt the carnivores in question understand or care where the boundary is.

I am hard pressed to think of any way in which this proposed development will help the Forest Service accomplish its mission with respect to the forest itself.

So if the animals and plants will not benefit from this, that leaves the human piece of the equation. Who benefits from this project.

Admittedly, more Americans will travel the valley to partake in the beauty. That is a benefit to some individuals. But there is a cost to that benefit. I would say that many, many Americans already experience the beauty of the valley. Each summer, the number of vehicles using MT 83 to find a way to get to Glacier National Park, or similar points of interest seems to be increasing steadily. This summer I personally witnessed a 40 vehicle line of traffic and multiple 30 vehicle lines at a time when there was no construction happening that would warrant this. We already have more traffic than would seem reasonable and prudent.

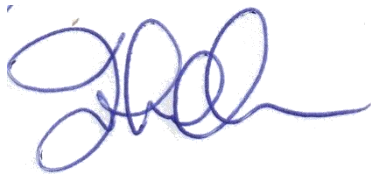
Glacier National Park has set a limit on the number of vehicles entering the park during the summer months. Why? Because of both the burden on their resources and the impact on the park itself. For some reason they decided it was more important to protect the park than to increase the availability of the experience for more Americans. They went with less, not more.

The residents of the valley will see no tangible benefits from this. Jobs? Service jobs are among the lowest paying jobs in the nation. Many a corporation and politician will yell "jobs" when they want to push through a project that has little benefit for those not directly connected to the effort. I have heard not one valley voice in favor of this. I hear much concern that this will begin the destruction of a way of life that many here have embraced while voluntarily giving up so called benefits that might be derived from an influx of outside interests and money. The residents of Seeley-Swan Valley are outspoken and united in their opposition to this development.

The animals do not benefit. The forest does not benefit. The residents do not benefit.

Undoubtedly, the corporation proposing to develop Holland Lake (POWDR) will benefit from the project. Anyone else?

I don't think so.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Orr', with a stylized, cursive script.

John Orr

Condon, MT