



October 31, 2022

Tristan Fluharty  
Juneau District Ranger  
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801

Via: <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=60550>

**Re: Comments in support of Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area Withdrawal Project #60550**

Dear Mr. Fluharty,

Please accept these comments on behalf of Trout Unlimited (TU) in support of the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area Withdrawal, #60550. Trout Unlimited is the nation's largest sporting organization dedicated to coldwater conservation with more than 400 chapters and more than 300,000 supporters nation-wide. Trout Unlimited has more than 20,000 supporters in Alaska that are passionate anglers, business owners, fishing and hunting guides, and commercial fishermen, among other various occupations. Many of TU's members live and work in the Tongass National Forest, and rely on its important fish, wildlife and water resources for fishing, hunting, recreation, and for employment in related industries.

Clean water and intact forests are essential for Juneau's rebounding tourism and recreational economy. The Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MRGA) is an integral piece of the statewide tourism industry. The Mendenhall Glacier is one of the top three visitor destinations in the state with around 700,000 visitors annually. Numerous tour operators provide helicopter, kayak, canoe, hiking, cycling, and transportation tours for visitors there. The MRGA provides seasonal and year-round employment opportunities in tourism, scientific research, and area management. As a recreational and employment resource, the MRGA is invaluable to the local Juneau and statewide economy.

The glacier itself has long been a defining feature in the cultural landscape of the Áak'w Kwáan, and remains important to Juneau residents today. The rapidly receding Mendenhall Glacier is significantly farther from the MRGA Visitor's Center than it was in 1963 when the Forest Service's first major interpretive facility was built. The rates of glacier loss continue to increase in Southeast Alaska. At rates of 26%-36% predicted in the next 80 years, more lands are being exposed throughout the Tongass. The Mendenhall Glacier has seen dramatic glacial loss which may lead to the glacier being out of sight from the Visitor's Center in the future. The approximately 4560 acres adjacent to the MRGA are critical to maintaining the predominantly natural setting for recreation and tourism. Withdrawing these lands from mining activities will have great benefits for the recreation and tourism economies while maintaining the natural setting in the MRGA. The Forest Service seeks to keep the continuity of the MRGA as recreational and interpretive site by addressing the changing local environment.

The Mendenhall Glacier is one of the most visited and accessible glaciers in the world. Trout Unlimited applauds the Forest Service's efforts to prioritize recreation and tourism in the MRGA, and appreciates that the Forest Service is being proactive in the face of a changing climate. Trout Unlimited supports the Forest Service's request, and encourages the Department of Interior to finalize the

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*Trout Unlimited: America's Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization*

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withdrawal. Doing so is consistent with the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, will help support robust recreational tourism opportunities at the MGRA, and help ensure the beauty and natural resources of the MGRA continue to serve the public interest. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Austin Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "W".

Austin Williams

Alaska Director of Law and Policy