



CENTRAL COUNCIL
Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Native Lands & Resources Division • Edward K. Thomas Building
P. O. Box 25500 • Juneau, Alaska 99802

October 31, 2022

David Schmid, Regional Forester
United States Forest Service Ranger Station
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Mendenhall Glacier Mineral Withdrawal #60550, Draft Environmental Assessment

Dear Regional Forester Schmid:

Gunalchéesh for your work to prepare and take public comment for the U.S. Forest Service's Mendenhall Glacier Withdrawal project draft environmental assessment regarding 4,560 acres of National Forest System lands near the Mendenhall Glacier.

The Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) is a federally recognized tribe with its primary government offices in Juneau, Alaska. Tlingit & Haida's tribal territory includes the area designated as the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) in the Tongass National Forest¹.

The lands and waters of the region now commonly referred to as the Tongass National Forest have been occupied and stewarded by the Tlingit and Haida peoples since time immemorial. These lands and waters are of tremendous unique, cultural, ecological, subsistence, economic, and recreational value and have provided resources that are actively used by Tlingit & Haida's Tribal citizens and citizens of other federally recognized Southeast Alaska tribes.

It is of great importance that climate change impacts are considered for the management of the MGRA - now and into the future. Tlingit & Haida fully supports Alternative A – the Proposed Action for Withdrawal of 4,560 acres of National Forest System lands near the Mendenhall Glacier from mineral exploration and development. Alternative A will ensure that: 1) our community and the surrounding environment are protected from the adverse effects of mining activities, 2) our community has access to the MGRA, and 3) consistency with the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan will protect the recreational and scenic integrity of the MGRA.

¹ Pub. L. 103-454, title II, Nov. 2, 1994, 108 Stat. 4792.

Tlingit & Haida greatly appreciates your analysis to create “reasonably foreseeable scenarios” to illustrate how mineral exploration can significantly impact the recreational and scenic integrity of the MGRA. Tlingit & Haida acknowledges that the Secretary of the Interior does not have the authority to make this a permanent withdrawal, but we would welcome and encourage an act of congress to consider this withdrawal’s permanency to protect this area for the generations to come.

Furthermore, Tlingit & Haida would also refer you to the report published in *Nature*, Glacier retreat creating new Pacific salmon habitat in western North America (Kara J. Pitman et al 2021), which suggests that there are projected salmon rivers for the Mendenhall Glacier area: 18,847m (10% threshold), 24,845m (15% slope threshold) in years to come. Considering this, Alternative A may benefit future salmon habitat to sustain the cultural resource we have depended upon for thousands of years.

And finally, it is our recommendation that the U.S. Forest Service include in its description of MGRA, the first peoples to inhabit this area, and the great cultural significance of this area to the Áak’w Kwáan Tlingit peoples.

Gunalchéesh/Háw'aa/Thank you,



Richard J. Peterson, President

Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Cc: Jill Weitz, Natural Resource Manager, CCTHITA