



RENEWABLE
JUNEAU

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Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest
648 Mission Street, Suite 110
Federal Building
Ketchikan, AK 99901-6591

February 20, 2023

Dear Supervisor Sherman,

Renewable Juneau hereby submits our comments on the SEIS for Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements.

Three new alternatives have some elements that are attractive additions and others that are less so. Many new suggestions are only possible if the Forest Service adjusts down the capacity of the Visitor Center Unit from the previously proposed maximum of a million visits shown in Alternatives 2, 5 and 7. Allowing something closer to 800,000 visits is a more reasonable 30-year estimate.

New shuttle trams from a remote parking area would help ease congestion as visitors would largely be efficiently transported from the remote lot to the end of the road, unless they choose to walk that short distance along Steep Creek. This will not only keep from burying wetlands under large amounts of asphalt parking lots but will demonstrate efficient public transportation that should be electric and therefore sustainable, giving your interpreters talking points for the ride in. Renewable-energy powered public transit solutions are good for everyone.

The lakeshore trail and new bridge over the Mendenhall River would encourage another more sustainable way to arrive at the end of Glacier Spur Road, by bicycle. Limit the amount of guided use to ensure a quality experience and room for residents, who would prefer to keep tourists on the main path. Provide bicycle parking facilities and bike-friendly infrastructure at the destination.

Your new alternatives for the Welcome Center behind the Visitor Center or in the remote parking lot will please many Juneau residents who don't want it in their prime view. All new buildings should meet the highest levels of renewable energy efficiency and sustainability, using heat pumps and tight thermal envelopes to conserve power. The historic Visitor Center should also be improved to meet a similar standard

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and should include updated exhibits on glaciers, climate change, and how fossil fuels affect them. The Welcome Center should be kept open all year to serve warm drinks on cold days. The new coffee shop and expanded retail space should be run by Discovery Southeast.

Motorboats on Mendenhall Lake are unpopular with Juneau residents. If you feel you need to get people close to the glacier, please at least ensure the boats are electric, slow and wakeless, and continue to allow access for residents who want to kayak to the NW shore of the lake.

Nordic skiing on Mendenhall Lake has become sporadic due to climate change, and trails on the land would help. Constructing new trails that are wide enough to be groomed by the Nordic ski club would help residents find healthy ways to move around in winter.

Expanded boardwalks for wildlife viewing along Steep Creek are big improvements but it is unsafe to route walkers across the Glacier Spur Road with all the traffic. Better to make the trail continuous under a free-span bridge. Alternative 6 proposes separate culverts for people and bears to pass under the road, which might be cheaper than a bridge but doesn't offer the same advantages.

Expanding the campground parking lot near Skaters Cabin to the north is much needed and a better idea than expanded parking within the campground. New walking access trails within the campground also make sense to allow walkers and their dogs an alternative to tromping down the freshly groomed ski trails along the campground roads. New cabins in the campground make sense only to some extent, but not where they will encourage walkers along the groomed roads such as along the RV loop.

Sincerely,

Margo Waring

President, Renewable Juneau

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