

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/1/2020 11:00:00 AM

First name: Helen

Last name: Unruh

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for this opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the proposed visitor facility "improvement" project.

I understand the need to safely and efficiently move visitors from place to place.

My concerns are that the FS is thinking more about what works for the Cruise ship schedules than what is appropriate, responsible, & sustainable. I feel the focus should be on a true, unique "wilderness/rainforest" experience..... not just another amusement park.

In the plans, I saw no mention of impacts to the environment, such as erosion, water & air quality, noise pollution..... how this effects the fish, eagles, beavers, bears, martens, arctic terns, mink, wolves, owls, song birds, etc The plans are all about people..... as the glacier retreats seems we should focus on enhancing the forest, salmon, wilderness experience.

The original design of the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, a first for the Forest Service, took into account the environment. The entire plan of the center focused on it blending into the natural environment and making the focus the glacier. As I look at the current "improvement" plans I see little or no thought about the focus of the facility. Isn't the point to showcase the glacier? the incredible first hand viewing of spawning salmon, the bears, eagles, killdeer, and even the trees that benefit from this phenomena ?

Instead, I see elevated trails everywhere (I do agree the elevated trails do help contain people and keep them & maybe critters safer). I worry that having trails in all the prime bear fishing areas might discourage the bears from these areas. These proposed trails have people spread out over a large area. More rangers to patrol? Many visitors (& locals) don't use common sense when seeing wildlife, they need supervision in order to be safe.

The plan also has numerous structures: Welcome center (looks bigger than current center), amphitheater, 3 boat docks, & more) Seems the focus is more on structures than the glacier & rainforest environment. What is the mission? focus? If the focus is strictly on managing people, you may lose the very appeal those people come to see.

I'm especially concerned with the amount of pavement, the decreased accessibility for animals to reach feeding areas, the increased deterioration of air quality, more noise pollution..... it is inevitable with more buses and now adding motorized boats! Noise & fumes may not be a positive experience for visitors..... not to mention the flora & fauna of the area.

Regarding boats: The native canoes currently in use are great, they highlight the local culture and maintain the quiet and peaceful aspect of the valley. Motorized boats are a bad idea! What next? jet boats? snow machines? etc.....

Food: people will be taking food out of the facility, endangering themselves and bears, not to mention more litter along all those new trails along the creek. Why do they need food? Add more water fountains.

I wish more effort had been spent on the earlier plan to park buses at the head of the spur road and use electric buses to shuttle visitors to the visitor center area. I still feel this is a viable option to be less disruptive to the fragile environment and the animals who call it home. With continuously running electric shuttles I don't think the wait time would be any more than buses parked waiting to unload & load passengers. It also seems with the added noise and fumes inherent with the current expansion plan, visitors may be put off. This is supposed to be an "Alaska" trip of a lifetime, to see & experience the unspoiled last frontier, not just another noisy, smelly extension of urban America.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.

Helen Unruh