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First name: Mary

Last name: DeSmet

Organization:

Title:

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Comments for Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area Visitor Improvement Project (MGRA)

To Whom It May Concern -

After spending months reading/digesting everything about this proposal posted online by the USFS, viewing the placards on display at the MG pavilion, reading editorials and comments in our local newspaper and on public media platforms, in addition to having many conversations with local residents, I am ready to make my voice heard.

I'm a Juneau resident and for 50 years have lived in the Mendenhall Valley just 2 miles from the Mendenhall Glacier. The glacier is in my "backyard" and I enjoy this pristine environment for recreation and as my "quiet" place for reflection when I need to be still. Especially these past two pandemic years, it has been my church. It's my refuge and the place I find solace. When visitors come, I enjoy sharing this special spot. Frequent activities for me include biking to the glacier, paddling on the lake, hiking on Dredge Lake and East/West glacier trails, wildlife viewing and skiing in the winter. I remember when the glacier was much closer to the visitor center and Nugget Falls fell onto the glacier. These days I can walk to the falls as our glacier is so quickly melting due to our changing climate and the increase of buses and pollution. In the past 50 years I've witnessed the steady growth of Juneau tourism - both in numbers and sizes of ships in the channel as well as the extension of the tour season which is now April to October - SIX MONTHS! The noise and exhaust from the numbers of tour buses alone has become untenable. How much is enough and why are we locals who live and pay taxes here just sitting back and allowing this to happen? Just WHO is benefiting?

I am not comfortable with ANY of the proposals but am most concerned with power boats on Mendenhall Lake. Refer to recent letter in Juneau Empire written by Jim Sepel, an accredited marine surveyor, a retired USCG commander, a member of American Boat & Yacht Council AND State of Alaska Boating Safety Advisory Council, which states all the reasons why this is a VERY BAD idea. I doubt I'll be able to enjoy safely kayaking on the lake in the future. More research and analysis must be done on how these proposals will negatively impact locals and wildlife habitat. What is the rush and WHO or WHAT is driving this? Why can't we have an eco-friendly plan which won't adversely impact the view we all enjoy, the precious wildlife that depends on this fragile habitat and a plan that will safeguard the natural beauty of this sacred place? If ponds disappear, bridges and trails are constructed and a huge visitor center is erected impeding the view we are certainly "paving paradise and putting up a parking lot" - just like the song says. We are risking wildlife/human encounters - especially with visitors who don't really understand how to behave in bear country. One time I actually witnessed an excited father (tourist) with his young son excitedly breaching a barrier of yellow tape and signage which had been placed by rangers in a "bear area-bear sited" near Steep Creek. The father said "Come on, son, the bears are over here...let's go see if we can find them." Really? This isn't a zoo nor is it Disney Land. And, is it really necessary to have a restaurant/snack bar when tourists have such a limited time during a glacier excursion and have ample opportunity to eat five times a day on the ship? The risk of litter and food in bear country is far too risky. I have so many strong emotions and feelings about this topic. What is the HUGE hurry to forge ahead so quickly with such a project that has forever implications on so many levels? The residents of Juneau have given so much of our place over to the tourism industry - it's important to give more study and time for input BEFORE moving forward.

In closing, I applaud former ranger, Laurie Craig, for the time, research and effort she has expended on behalf of

this project. I believe Laurie's suggestions, comments and drawings have great merit. It would be a VERY GOOD idea going forward to form a steering committee with locals involved in the process.