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First name: John

Last name: Neary

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest

648 Mission Street, Suite 110

Federal Building

Ketchikan, AK 99901-6591

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Dear Supervisor Sherman,

I hereby submit my comments on the SEIS for Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements. The Forest Service is to be commended in preparing the SEIS in response to many negative comments to the draft alternatives previously proposed.

Three new alternatives (5, 6 and 7) have some elements that are attractive additions and other elements that are much less so. I base my comments on six years as the Mendenhall Visitor Center director when I had thousands of conversations with visitors and Juneau residents about their experiences and ideas.

The arrival sequence is very often hectic and confusing for many visitors and frustrating for residents. A new shuttle from a remote parking area would go a long way toward easing this since residents could bypass the shuttle while 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 should help prevent burying wetlands under large amounts of asphalt parking lots at the end of the road, and it demonstrates efficient public transportation that can be sustainable (electric). Exceptional experiences and resources are more important than convenience and efficient, renewable-energy powered public transit solutions are good for everyone.

Another more sustainable way to arrive at the end of Glacier Spur Road is by bicycle. The lakeshore trail and new bridge over the Mendenhall River would encourage this as well as allowing for outstanding walking, skiing and cycling trips for residents. Allow guided use of this trail for cycling access to the Visitor Center similar to the way "Cycle Alaska" now gives an alternative access method to their clients. Control the amount of guided use to ensure a quality experience and room for residents. I've observed clients of Cycle Alaska to be much better-behaved on road edges and paths than a lot of Juneau residents! The number of "off ramp" paths from the paved trail to the lakeshore and Dredge Lakes Unit should be minimized however to prevent resource damage to bird nesting habitat, and to ensure cover for bears and other wildlife who frequently transit the area.

It's great to see the Welcome Center is proposed to be located on the rock behind the Visitor Center or in the remote parking lot. This keeps it out of the main viewshed at the end of the road. The placement of the Welcome Center within the remote parking lot is confusing in that the orientation wouldn't allow any decent views of the most scenic aspects of the valley toward the glacier and Steep Creek. Why not move it to the small ridge close to Steep Creek where views to the north would be dramatically improved and people attracted to visit? Or if the site on the rock behind the Visitor Center is chosen the views would be even better and the size more appropriate to the large crowds needing cover on rainy, cold days. The building should be kept open all year and so the site on the rock is preferred for the views it offers, the café to serve warm drinks on a cold day, and other aspects residents would appreciate. The new coffee shop and expanded retail space should be run by Discovery Southeast as a way to optimize revenue and environmental education for this valuable partner. Most importantly, any new building should be certified to the highest levels of renewable energy efficiency and sustainability, using heat pumps, conserving water and power, demonstrating how the Forest Service sustains the land. The historic Visitor Center should also be improved to meet a similar standard and should include updated exhibits on

glaciers, climate change, and the link to fossil fuels.

Proposed motorboats on Mendenhall Lake, however, remain controversial with Juneau residents. I have not spoken to a single Juneau resident who favors them. This puts me in an awkward position because I came up with the idea as a way to forestall the construction of a road along the west side to deliver tourists closer to the glacier face. I don't want boats or roads for this purpose, but if you feel you need to get people close to the glacier, please at least ensure the boats are electric with the quiet, renewable energy advantages they contain. They should also be slow, wakeless and should share their dock with residents who want to kayak to the NW shore of the lake. And if motorboats are to be allowed then seasonal structures and access trails would need to be constructed near the glacier dock. The structures shown in Alternatives 2 and 3 make the most sense as they could possibly double as a warming hut for winter skiing if trails are developed there with ski grooming in mind. The Juneau Nordic Ski Club might be interested in running such a warming hut.

Please develop the upper and lower loop multi-use trails on the west side to connect to the West Glacier Trail, and also improve the informal trail across the peninsula to the glacier. It would be most helpful if all of these trails were made wide enough to be groomed for skiing in the winter. Skiing toward the glacier on the lake itself has become increasingly difficult due to climate change, and trails on the land would help.

Developing the shoreline access to Nugget Falls in order to create a loop trail is unnecessary and would deprive Juneau residents of yet another opportunity to escape the crush of tourism. The Photo Point trail, however, would really benefit from a loop return along the edge of the water and over a short bridge. Make it a one-way loop to facilitate flow.

Restoration of Steep Creek is a positive habitat change and expanded boardwalks for wildlife viewing along Steep Creek are big improvements. They should maximize the amount of deck space, distance and continuity for walkers, meaning, choose the option with the most boardwalk and make it continuous under a free-span bridge along the Glacier Spur Road up to Dipper Falls. It is unsafe to make walkers cross the Spur Road with all the traffic as proposed in alternatives 5 and 7. It is not an impact to bears to have a free-span bridge where people and bears use alternate banks of the creek, separated by a fence as designed in Alternatives 2, 3 and 4. Indeed, this scenario works all over the Steep Creek boardwalk system and has for years. Sows bed down to feed their cubs within a few feet of the fences and in full view of crowds. Please don't listen to inexperienced critics who believe bears to be negatively impacted by this scenario. 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. The bridge allows for more natural light and less possibility of encountering a scared bear (in the long and narrow culvert tunnel), and more opportunity for winter winds to blow snow under the bridge for skiers to use. The more expensive bridge option is reasonable for Alaska DOT to construct using funds only they can access. The Forest Service should jump at the chance for them to do so by agreeing to take back ownership of the entire Glacier Spur Road and then convincing the CBJ to assume winter maintenance costs as they now do on the west side.

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.

Many of the above suggestions are only possible if the Forest Service adjusts down the capacity of the Visitor Center Unit from the maximum of a million visits described in Alternatives 2, 5 and 7. Allowing 800,000 visits is a more reasonable 30-year estimate that would allow management flexibility in the development of infrastructure over time in the adaptive management style you propose.

Sincerely,

John Neary  
17735 Pt. Stephens Rd.  
Juneau, AK 99801