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Comments: Regional Forester David E. Schmid

USDA Forest Service, Alaska Region

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June 26, 2023

Dear Mr. Schmid,

This letter represents my formal objection to the draft Record of Decision for the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Visitor Facility Improvements Project under the 36 CFR 218 Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process.

I provided written comments in response to scoping on March 20, 2020, on the DEIS on January 12, 2021, and on the SDEIS on January 27, 2023, which gives me standing to object to the project. I commented on several components of the project, but I am specifically appealing your response regarding e-bikes. Below I copied your summary of my SDEIS comments and your responses.

424-1: Parking for buses and all tour vans at the bus/snow storage area with a new walking path/trail for tourists. It would be so nice to go to the glacier and not hear or smell diesel buses. Electric shuttles are not necessary. My mom is in a wheelchair and would be happy to be pushed along a walkway. *Encourage or mandate that cruise ship buses entering the area be 100% electric within five years. A trail along the lakeshore that connects to the campground. Please ban e-bikes from this trail and plan the trail so that bikes, hikers, walkers, and dog walkers can use it without conflict. A demarcated bike lane might help. Improved trails on the West Glacier side with the 3 caveats: 1) tour groups be capped, 2) mountain bike trails be separated from hiking trails, and 3) e-bikes be prohibited. Additionally, at least one day a week should be made a no-tour-groups day. Other comments (no motorized boats, trails improvements, impacts to wildlife and locals from MGRA expansion) have been noted in previous comment rounds.

USFS response:

Thank you for your comment. Commercial providers operating under a special use permit would be incentivized under the Adaptive Management Plan (Appendix B of the EIS) to use electric vehicles to bring visitors to the MGRA. Under Alternative 6, any new transportation special use permits would be required to be fulfilled by electric vehicles. Prohibition of riding wheeled devices such as bikes, electric bikes, skateboards, and roller skates on sidewalks and plazas would only be enforced in the Visitor Center unit and on the Steep Creek boardwalk, from April 1 to October 31 each year to minimize disturbance to wildlife and conflict among users. Wheeled devices can be walked in these areas.

The Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Visitor Facility Improvements Project includes expansion of existing trails and the creation of new trails in all units. Therefore, all classes of e-bikes should be prohibited from all trails within all the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) units, year-round. E-bikes are motorized vehicles. Before they can be authorized on a road, trail, or area, the USFS must make changes to the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

The MGRA is already crowded; that's why you are expanding trails, improving trails, increasing parking, and adding new structures. Allowing fast moving e-bikes to the mix of users - pedestrians, tour groups, dog walkers, joggers, families, walkers, xc skiers, etc. will lead to user conflict and accidents. I live in Bend, Oregon, part of the year. It's a mountain bike mecca and very, very few trails allow e-bikes because e-bikes go up to 28 MPH, which is dangerous for all other user groups. Additionally, many of the current MGRA trails are single track and congested with the current user groups. E-bikes will allow more bikes to access trails that are steep and mostly inaccessible to bikers, trails like the upper parts of West Glacier and most of East Glacier.

Please address this oversight. Prohibit and enforce the prohibition of e-bikes in all units of the MGRA year-round.

Sincerely,

Marina Lindsey