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Organization:

Title:

Comments: October 1, 2022

US Forest Service

Swan Lake Ranger District

Attn: Shelli Mavor (Holland Lake Lodge)

200 Ranger Station Road

Bigfork, MT 59911

Re: Holland Lake Lodge Inc. Expansion.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. My name is John K Mercer. I am a fourth generation Montanan. I have been playing, living, working, and studying the Seeley Swan Area for nearly 7 decades starting as child at our family's cabin on Lake Inez. I have both a bachelors and a master's degree in Forest Ecology with experience in recreation management, resource inventories, recreation inventories and habitat mapping and analysis. I am currently vice president of the Swan Valley Fire Service Area Board, and President of the Swan Valley Community Foundation. I have lived in the Swan Valley for the last 32 years.

This was very difficult to write because there are so many different issues with the proposed Holland Lake Lodge Project under a Categorical Exclusion. The number of issues prompts me to formally request that the USFS extend the comment period to 60 days and begin a full EIS process before any further work on this project occurs.

#### Public Involvement, and CE Scoping Process

The letter dated September 1, 2022, File code 1950 signed by Kurtis Steele, Flathead National Forest Supervisor, notifies "Dear Interested Parties" that the USFS is proposing "the Holland Lake Lodge Facility Expansion project to repair the existing historic lodge and improve or replace facilities to provide modern amenities and respond to the growing public demand." The letter further states the intent to "to categorically exclude the proposed project from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(22)."

This process has been extraordinary in that the public was not informed, nor were certain materials presented for review in a timely or transparent fashion. Again, these are issues that the NEPA EIS requirement was developed to prevent. The USFS knew about this project as early as late fall 2021 when ownership of the Holland Lake Lodge changed when POWDR apparently bought into the corporation. The HLL Master Development Plan (MDP) is dated April 15, 2022. Mr. Steele's letter announcing the proposed development dated September 1, 2022, states "The full public scoping package can be found on the Holland Lake Lodge Expansion project webpage at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61746>."

The letter was released on a Friday of the Labor Day weekend, when many of the "Interested Parties" were ironically recreating outdoors on the three-day weekend. The notice was not mailed or distributed electronically to the general public in the Swan Valley on initial release of the letter. Nor was it placed or posted at prominent locations throughout the Swan Valley, or printed in the local newspaper of record, the Pathfinder on September 1. Indeed, information about this project was spread more by word of mouth and social media, than by USFS efforts.

While the USFS did not adequately notice interested parties of this proposed action, they set a 21-day comment period deadline. But in fact, the full scoping package was not complete or available on September 1st. Several important documents were missing.

The 33-page Master Development Plan Dated April 15th was not posted to the USFS web site until September 6th. September 15th saw the posting of two more important appendices to the master development plan, the

exceedingly dense 8-page sewer system assessment technical memorandum and the 65-page National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility for the Holland Lake Lodge. More information was posted to the webpage on September 16th, including the 35-page current existing special use permit SWA 456, Expiration date 12/31/2036 User code 133.

The September 16 posting also included the Special Use Authorization Amendment#: 2 dated 8/22/22 and signed by Permit Holder: Christian Wohlfeil, Holland Lake Lodge Inc. and Brian Stewart, Holland Lake Lodge Inc., and US Forest Service: Kurtis E Steele, Forest Supervisor. This amendment references the current special use permit SWA 456, and authorized drilling of two new wells for pump testing and ends with the cryptic statement: "Authorize [sic] a Holland Lake Lodge Inc. representative to sign permit applications." This raises the question of pre decisional bias by the USFS approving an action central to the proposed development before formally approving the development.

Only after great pressure did the USFS increase the comment time to 37 days, supposedly ending on 10/7/22 at midnight, exactly 21 days after the last major posting of information on the USFS webpage on September 16th. Yet the public discovered on 10/4/22 the USFS website stated comments would be accepted only until 11:59 PM 10/6/22. The USFS identified this as a "mistake" when it was pointed out 3 days before the deadline at a public meeting in Condon.

The USFS invited Condon residents to a brown bag lunch meeting with USFS and POWDR representatives. They did not initially advertise this on their website or provide public notice to all the people that submitted comments that they were holding a public comment meeting in Condon. They began to advertise this as a public meeting after it was pointed out that this was a public meeting open to all. At the Condon meeting, in response to a question about the disparity between acreage listed in the current special use permit of 10.53 acres and the 15 acres in the proposed expansion, Forest Supervisor Kurt Steele admitted to the audience that the existing permit was accurate at 10.53 acres. He said, "we made a mistake, and I am here to own it."

The second paragraph of the existing permit states "10.53 acres" in underlined bold type. Interestingly, POWDR's press release about Holland Lake Lodge states: "The MDP proposes to restore the old lodge, add buildings, and upgrade infrastructure within the existing 11-acre permit area." But somehow, the "mistake" expanded the existing permit by 42%, and POWDR filled that up with additional shoreline and space for the planned. This raises issues with pre decisional bias in that rather than sending the project back to the drawing board to be reduced to fit into the 10.53 acre footprint, the Forest Service wrote it off as a mistake and accepted the expanded permit request, without notifying the public.

At the same meeting when asked about the large mobile housing unit that is now at Holland Lake Lodge, the Forest Supervisor stated that it was simply parked there, not hooked up and could be easily removed. But no documentation of an additional amendment was provided either at the meeting or on the webpage. This again raises the question of pre-decisional bias taking an action that benefits Holland Lake Lodge Inc. before formally approving the development. Where is the amendment authorizing this action?

The USFS advertised a public meeting in Seeley Lake on 10/4/22 that was open to all and would be available for online questions and viewing through web streaming. Subsequently, they changed the initial link that they advertised and used a different streaming service that confused many people that wanted to attend electronically. For those that managed to access the meeting online, viewers could not hear the public comments from attendees because of a microphone malfunction for the first hour and 21 minutes of the two-hour meeting. Nor could viewers see who was responding to the comments and questions as the camera was focused on the audience not the USFS and POWDR representatives. This led to confusion for the viewers if it was a USFS employee responding or a POWDR employee responding. And in many cases, in both the Condon public meeting and the Seeley public meeting, the USFS deferred to POWDR employees or to one of the owners of the lodge to respond to questions about USFS process and steps in the expansion. Many of the people who choose to participate by watching via web streaming were frustrated and would have come in person if they had known that they were not going to be able to see and hear the event.

While any one of these missteps maybe could be considered minor, the combined impact of all of them is significant. The public involvement process has been severely hampered with errors and admitted mistakes. To remedy these mistakes, the USFS should expand the initial comment period to 60 days and begin a full EIS on this project.

The current special use permit issued to Holland Lake Lodge Inc. contains very specific language and conditions in clauses pertinent to any sale, change of ownership or effective control of the entity holding the permit. It is important to understand how Holland Lake Lodge Inc. and POWDR has honored these clauses as that provides insight into how they will honor the other requirements of the existing special use permit.

The permit under Terms and Conditions, clause I. D Renewal states: "This permit does not provide for renewal...Renewal of the use and occupancy authorized by this permit shall be at the sole discretion of the authorized officer..."

Clause I. J. Notification of Change in Control states: "The holder shall notify the authorized officer when a change in control of the business entity that holds the permit is contemplated."

Clause I.J.1.a states: "In the case of a corporation, control is an interest, beneficial or otherwise, of sufficient outstanding voting securities or capital of the business as to permit the exercise of managerial authority over the actions and operations of the corporation or election of a majority of the board of directors of the corporation."

Clause I. J. 1. c. states: "In other circumstances, control is any arrangement under which a third party has the ability to exercise management authority over the actions or operations of the entity."

Clause I.J.2 Effect of Change in Control states: "Any change in control of the business entity as defined in clause J.1 shall result in termination of this permit. The party acquiring control must submit an application for a special use permit. The Forest Service is not obligated to issue a new permit to the party who acquires control. The authorized officer shall determine whether the applicant meets the requirements established by applicable regulations."

The Montana Secretary Of State Principal Report for Holland Lake Lodge Inc. dated 10/7/22 shows Directors/Officers with Justin Sibley as President, and Tim Brennwald as other officer, and Christian Wohlfeil as Shareholder. Given the fact that Justin Sibley is listed as President and Tim Brennwald as other officer and the special use amendment# 2 dated 8/22/22 includes the signature of Brian Stewart for Holland Lake Lodge Inc. along with the somewhat of a non sequitur ending statement "authorize [sic] Holland Lake Lodge Inc Representative to sign permits. It appears there are at least three individuals associated with POWDR that have some managerial control. This raises several questions.

When did Holland Lake Lodge Inc. notify the authorized officer that it was contemplating a change in control of the corporation?

When did the board composition change?

When did the Holland Lake Lodge Inc. ownership change?

When did Holland Lake Lodge Inc. submit an application for a new permit as required by clause I.J.2?

Was that application approved?

Please provide documentation for all these questions and the new application if submitted.

#### Categorical Exclusion

According to the 36 CFR 220.6

(a) General. A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and if:

(1) The proposed action is within one of the categories established by the Secretary at 7 CFR part 1b.3; (It is not) or

(2) The proposed action is within a category listed in § 220.6(d) and (e).

The USFS is proposing a Categorical Exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6(a) stating there are no extraordinary circumstances, and the proposed action is within:

#### 36 CFR 220.6(e)(22)

Construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, or disposal of buildings, infrastructure, or improvements at an existing recreation site, including infrastructure or improvements that are adjacent or connected to an existing

recreation site and provide access or utilities for that site. Recreation sites include but are not limited to campgrounds and camping areas, picnic areas, day use areas, fishing sites, interpretive sites, visitor centers, trailheads, ski areas, and observation sites. Activities within this category are intended to apply to facilities located at recreation sites managed by the Forest Service and those managed by concessioners under a special use authorization. Examples include but are not limited to:

(i) Constructing, reconstructing, or expanding a toilet or shower facility; New construction of approximately 60 bathrooms with toilet and showers in 32 new construction buildings is far beyond the scope and scale of a CE. This constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

(ii) Constructing or reconstructing a fishing pier, wildlife viewing platform, dock, or other constructed feature at a recreation site; Constructing one or two floating docks in endangered Bull Trout Habitat does not qualify the entire project for CE. No discussion is made of the impacts of concentrated water recreation on endangered Bull Trout, to the recreation resource, to other users of the lake, and the likelihood of user conflicts.

(iii) Installing or reconstructing a water or waste disposal system; This is far beyond the scale of a CE. Expanding the wastewater system to handle the load of the additional users according to the Technical Memo could require handling up to a staggering 13,593 gallons of effluent per day times 22 weeks equals millions of gallons of wastewater all within the alluvial flood plain of Holland Lake. The HLL Sewer assessment is speculative, not conclusive and presents several potential alternatives and requires more specific data. It does not address underlying issues, potentials, and mitigating measures for damage to the local environment, alluvial water table, water quality, Holland Lake, and the endangered Bull Trout population from leakages and spills. Nor does it address the need for qualitative and quantitative base line water quality data, plans for monitoring water quality and concerns for wildlife issues. Given that the Swan Valley has a high incidence of earthquakes, power outages and other natural perturbations such as fire and windstorms, the potential for irrevocable disaster with a leak or spill needs to be addressed. This does not provide justification for applying a Categorical Exclusion to the entire proposed expansion. This constitutes an extraordinary circumstance related to a proposed action that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

(iv) Constructing or reconstructing campsites; This does not apply as the Master Development Plan does not address any campsites. And even if it did, a campsite would not be sufficient reason to apply a CE to the entire project.

(v) Disposal of facilities at a recreation site; Removing nine structures is far beyond the scope of a CE. And even if it wasn't, it would not justify A CE for a project that includes new construction of 32 new structures and a total of 32,000 SQFT of new construction. It is also problematic that that the National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility for The Holland Lake Lodge, Condon, Missoula County, Montana, found several of these structures to be historical. Removing them will forever eliminate the possibility of the Holland Lake Lodge property remaining eligible for or being listed in the NRHP as a historic district. This constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

(vi) Constructing or reconstructing a boat landing; This is not part of the proposal or Master Development Plan.

(vii) Replacing a chair lift at a ski area; This is not part of the proposal or Master Development Plan.

(viii) Constructing or reconstructing a parking area or trailhead; Both are proposed, and both are significantly out of scale and character in relation to the area. And neither provide justification for applying a Categorical Exclusion to the entire proposed expansion.

(ix) Reconstructing or expanding a recreation rental cabin. It would be disingenuous to attempt to apply expanding a recreational rental cabin CE to this project which includes new construction of a 13,000 SQFT two story Lodge, a 3,000 SQFT Restaurant, a 2,000 SQFT Welcome Center, ten 650 SQFT cabins, 16 additional cabins, a water sport building, a 2,000 SQFT maintenance building, and a 2,000 SQFT employee housing structure, expansion of the permit size of over 100%, increased shoreline, 1.7 acre parking lot, two new water wells, and associated infrastructure. This is a major new development with significant potential to impact the immediate site, and a greater potential through significant increase in outdoor recreation use by lodge guests to adversely impact Holland Lake, the nearby Bob Marshall Wilderness area, the protected proposed Swan Face Wilderness Area, three endangered species, Bull Trout, Grizzly Bear and Lynx, numerous species of concern

and special interest, including nesting common loon, beaver, wolverine, fisher, wolves, and significant high quality winter range for deer and elk. This constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

36 CFR 220.6 (a) General. A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action...

36 CFR 220.6(b)(1)(i)

Resource conditions.

(1) Resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or an EIS are:

(i) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species; This is a major new development with the stated goals in the USFS scoping document dated September 1, 2022, of serving "...increased public demand for outdoor activities in the Swan Valley. Promoting non-motorized watersports and swimming by installing seasonal floating docks and expanding equipment rental. Offering educational information to visitors on local wildlife, heritage and cultural resources, and hiking trail opportunities."

The Master Development Plan dated April 15th, 2022, states: "POWDR is a private, family-owned, Adventure Lifestyle Company that is locally focused,

delivering soulful experiences that matter to our guests and communities." The MDP further states that benefits

of the project include: "Expanding non-motorized water sports rentals, ... Offering educational information to visitors on hiking, the environment and wildlife and that... the services presented in this MDP are already approved services in the SUP, including, ... rental services and outfitting and guiding." The MDP goes on to describe how the Lodge expansion will "... help promote the abundant recreation

activities available in the Swan Valley." And states "New contract opportunities for guides, caterers and recreation specialists will also be brought to the Swan Valley." Finally, they note that: "Local trail maps..." and "Docent guided hikes and fireside chats" will be offered."

The POWDR web site states "POWDR is an Adventure Lifestyle Company® that inspires every human being with cool experiences in awesome places. " It cites a press release "Holland Lake Lodge serves as a gathering ground for adventure..." POWDR clearly markets outdoor adventure activities and experiences as the keystone of its services. And while the Lodge will no doubt serve as a gathering place and home base for its clients, it is also clear that many if not most of the clients will come seeking adventure recreation in the stunning and beautiful Swan Valley. It is also clear that most of that recreation will take place on National Forest Lands, on the protected Swan Face and the nearby Bob Marshall Wilderness where there are numerous peaks to summit, high mountain lakes to explore, slopes to telemark, cross country ski mountaineer, trails to run and explore on horseback. With numerous other outdoor activities available in the valley, including mountain biking, hunting, fishing, river rafting. The Swan Valley must appear like an undeveloped outdoor adventure gold mine for POWDR and its clients. It appears that instead of seeking to install chair lifts, they will use the services of outfitting company companies to provide access and support for their outdoor adventure-oriented guests.

Swan Mountain Outfitters, the current concessionaire for horseback riding in Glacier Park and in adjacent national Forest lands, recently requested the expansion of their USFS outfitting permit area to include the entire upper Swan Valley from the Swan Crest, to the Mission Mountains Wilderness, and from the USFS boundary at Summit north to Goat Creek. Along with areas of the upper Swan on both sides of the Swan Crest.

With 156 guest capacity as well as 25 employees attracted to the adventure lifestyle and "New contract opportunities for guides, caterers, and recreation specialists..." There is the potential for significant increases in recreation visitor use days. And at full occupancy, year-round outdoor recreation visitor use days could increase by as much as 33,000 adventure seeking visitor use days. This will adversely impact Holland Lake, the nearby Bob Marshall Wilderness area, the protected proposed Swan Face Wilderness Area, three endangered species, Bull Trout, Grizzly Bear and Lynx, numerous species of concern and special interest, including nesting common loon, beaver, wolverine, fisher, wolves, and significant high quality winter range for deer and elk. There are numerous scientific papers and studies documenting the significant and adverse impacts of outdoor recreational

use.

Hammit et al. 2015 in their introduction to their seminal book on wildland recreation, ecology and management state: "Recreational use of wildland areas has increased dramatically during the past half century. Along with this increase in recreational use have come human disturbance and degradation to the conditions of wildland areas. Examined in this book are the nature and degree of these disturbances and ways in which they can be managed. First, we need to define wildland recreation and recreation resource impacts. Then, we must consider the importance of recreational-ecological impacts and the role of the wildland recreation manager in balancing use and preservation of wildland areas."

In discussing wildland recreation impacts they note: "In particular, we want to stress the interrelated nature of these different types of impact. One theme that should emerge in this book, particularly when we get to management, is that impacts do not occur in isolation; single activities cause multiple impacts, and each impact tends to exacerbate or compensate for other changes. Management solutions to impact problems must recognize this, or the solution to one problem is likely to be the cause of another."

Assessing wildland recreation impact is complicated and requires research. Impacts on wildlife are real and there is extensive research on this topic. They state: "...numerous impacts on wildlife as a result of recreation have been documented and, in some cases, well researched (Boyle and Samson 1985; Knight and Cole 1991; Knight and Gutzwiller 1995; Taylor and Knight 2003; Steidl and Powell 2006; Stetsinger and White 2009). Boyle and Samson (1985), for example, reviewed 166 articles that contained original data on the effects of non-consumptive outdoor recreation on wildlife. Stetsinger and White (2009) provided a good review of the literature on road and trail impacts on wildlife species. These studies show that human disturbances result in changes in wildlife physiology, behavior, reproduction, population levels, and species composition and diversity."

Clearly an increase in outdoor recreation visitor use days will impact the Grizzly Bear, Lynx and Bull Trout and numerous other wildlife species not just at the Lodge or even Holland Lake but in the much larger landscape of the Upper Swan Valley. This raises the following questions:

Why is this very real potential impact as a result of the Holland Lake Lodge Expansion not addressed in either the Scoping Document or the Master Development Plan?

Please provide documentation of recreational use trends in the Upper Swan Valley.

Please provide documentation of the most recent recreational use survey completed by the USFS in the Swan Valley including survey methodology, instruments used and the statistical analysis.

Please provide USFS baseline recreational use data for the Upper Swan Valley that describes source of data, and the types, amounts and locations of recreational use.

Please provide most recent dispersed campsite inventory for the Upper Swan Valley, Holland Lake, the Swan Face, and the Mission Mountains Wilderness.

Please provide the outdoor recreation management plan for Holland Lake, the Swan Face, the Mission Mountain Wilderness and the Upper Swan Valley.

Please describe how the USFS will use the best available science as described in Hammet et al. 2015 to assess and identify potential impacts from increased outdoor recreation associated with this project in the Upper Swan Valley, the Swan Face, Holland Lake and the Mission Mountain Wilderness.

The potential impacts from outdoor recreation use facilitated by Holland Lake Lodge constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action with potential cumulative impacts that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

(ii) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds; The lodge is located within 20 to 40 feet of Holland Lake high water mark. In addition, the proposed expanded septic system is located above the lake on the alluvial flood plain and concentrates hundreds of thousands of gallons of effluent in septic tanks and lagoon. The proposed expansion will nearly double the current capacity. Septic lines will run to the cabins within 50 feet or less of the lake shore. It is inevitable that over time one or more of those will fail exposing the lake to raw sewage. The MDP also proposes cutting down 200 trees near the lake to open up views. There are numerous state and county restrictions on lake shore disturbance. For example, the Montana Streamside Manage Zone requires any disturbance of class 1 waters be keep a minimum of 50 feet from the high-water mark. While the risk of an accident spill or leak may not be high for this project, the consequence of irreparable damage to the water table and the lake is very high if there were a failure of the septic system. For this reason, the concentration of use and

human waste adjacent to the relatively pristine lake constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action with potential cumulative impacts that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

(iii) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas;

As mentioned above, the proposed project is within a few miles of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex adjacent to the Swan Face proposed wilderness. It is near the Holland Gordon Trail that is one of the major routes through the Swan Face into the Bob Marshall Complex and a major attraction for the adventure recreationist. It is very likely it will receive increased recreational use via the Holland Gordon trail by guests of the Lodge by guest day hiking or trail running to access the Upper Holland Lake Basin, summit the Swan peaks and access the BOB Marshall.

(iv) Inventoried roadless area or potential wilderness area; The Lodge is adjacent to the Swan Face; a protected roadless area managed for wilderness values and proposed for Wilderness various legislation. The lightly used eight-mile Foothills Trail that runs along the protected Swan Face from its terminus near the Lodge to the Cooney lookout will attract a significant increase in day hikers, trail runners and horseback riders associated with the Lodge.

It will also be used by adventure mountaineers and extreme trail runners seeking to bag the highest peak in the Swan Range. The foothills trail provides access to the unplanned impromptu human trail that ascends straight up the Swan Face to the Rumble Basin, Lakes and Waterfall and the approach to summit Holland Peak. This basin supports a population of mountain goats and is often frequented by Grizzly Bears. At the upper lake, snowfields persist well into July and in some years year-round. It is incredibly fragile, with short growing season, thin soils and is easily damaged by the recreational use that has increased over the last ten years. An increase in recreational use constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action with potential cumulative impacts to the Swan Face that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

(v) Research natural areas;

(vi) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; This area was historically used by several tribes, including the Salish, Kootenai and the Blackfeet and it is puzzling that neither the Scoping Document nor the Master Development Plan address if there are any religious or cultural sites near the lodge, Holland Lake or the Swan Face. Please provide documentation that the religious and cultural leaders of these tribes have been consulted. If any religious or cultural sites are identified, that constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action with potential cumulative impacts from recreational use and warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS.

vii) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. the National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility for The Holland Lake Lodge, Condon, Missoula County, Montana, found Holland Lake Lodge site eligible being listed in the NRHP as a historic district. The proposed development will forever remove that opportunity along with the historic buildings. The Holland Lake area is shrouded in the history of the origins of the early settlers and homesteaders in the Swan Valley. This will be an incalculable loss to history and culture of the Swan Valley. This constitutes extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action that warrants further analysis and documentation in an EIS. A full EIS should be completed that analyzes alternative actions such as repurposing the Holland Lake Lodge into a living history museum of the Swan Valley open to the public and operated as a nonprofit and managed to maintain and refurbish the existing structures using materials and methods that preserve their historical integrity. There is no mention of archaeological sites either in the scoping document or the Master Development Plan. Please provide documentation of an archaeological survey to identify and preserve any potential sites before they are destroyed by development.

(2) The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion (CE). It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions, and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.

The scale and scope of the project is extraordinary.

Clearly the scale and scope of the project is extraordinary. Onsite, the current special use permit is expanded by 42% from 10.53 acres to 15 acres. And when the proposed wastewater treatment system expansion is surveyed and added to the permit as described in the Master Development Plan that will result in almost a hundred percent

increase or doubling of the permit.

The sheer size of the new structures is over 32,000 SQFT and building 32 new structures is not a simple renovation by any definition. Expanding the overnight capacity of the project from 45 to 156 is a 246% increase, that is further increased by 25 employees. Expanding the lake shore, parking lot, the septic and sewer lagoons, cutting 200 trees along the shoreline, are extraordinary actions along a pristine mostly undeveloped mountain lake. Especially given that they individually and collectively violate several standards and best practices like the MT SMZ regulations.

Offsite this project is extraordinary in that it will be the largest single development in the Swan Valley, and the largest commercial development from Clearwater Junction to Swan Lake. Besides that dubious distinction, the proposed project will impact wildlife, natural resources, the local community and public health and safety in numerous ways. Using a CE to restrict the analysis of these impacts violates the very spirit and purpose of NEPA and subsequent laws seeking to protect communities and the environment from long term cumulative impacts of poorly thought out and conceived projects simply oriented around making money. An EIS is more appropriate for this project.

Public health and safety:

This project will impact the culture and community of the Swan Valley. 156 Guests along with 25 employees may increase the daily population of the valley by as much as 25%. Unfortunately, most if not all those visitors will be transient.

Traffic in the valley will increase along with accidents and medical emergencies which will translate into increased calls for service from Swan Valley Emergency Services. Additional traffic will result in higher wildlife mortality along the highway 83 corridor. This will increase Grizzly Bear mortality as well as deer, elk and other wildlife.

There will be likely more calls for water rescue given the intention to focus use on Holland Lake. And with the focus on adventure recreation emergency services, law enforcement and search and rescue are more likely to be called out. If the Lodge attracts trail runners and mountaineers, there will be an increase in more complicated and difficult mountain rescues. There may be an increase in human caused back country fires.

Law enforcement calls will increase also putting a heavy burden on our Law Enforcement Officers who are already stretched thin.

POWDR has suggested that they will have staff trained in First Aid, but that is not likely to alleviate the stress on our first responders and EMTs. Anyone who has been trained in first aid knows, first aid is just that, and its purpose is to buy time until the patient can be transported to advanced medical care, almost always by ambulance or helicopter.

Recreation conflicts between day users, campground use, hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers, skiers, snowmobilers, motorized recreationist, wilderness users, and lodge guests will likely increase. Especially as the lodge seeks to exclude people from crossing its permit area with installing gates to control access as described in the Master Development Plan.

While the Lodge touts having employee housing and attracting year-round employees, the reality is likely to be very different. If for no other reason than housing is expensive in the Swan valley, there are very few rental opportunities. While the employee housing as described in the Scoping Documents and Master Development Plan is a 2,000 SQFT structure designed to house 12 employees. Which works out to 166 SQFT per employee.



But once space is dedicated to a common area, kitchen, bathrooms, hallways, laundry room and mechanical room, that number per person is likely to be much smaller, perhaps 120 SQFT if there are private rooms. Perhaps it will be more like dormitory or hostel housing with multiple people per sleeping room. It is unlikely that many people are going to want to stay in such a small, crowded space for long term especially during the short days and long nights of our Swan Valley winters. The reality is that this housing is probably geared more toward short term transient seasonal employees.

The scoping document and the Master Development Plan do not adequately address these issues. Perhaps not any one of these issues by itself may rise to the level of an extraordinary circumstance, but collectively these issues will seriously strain the fabric our small rural community and represent an extraordinary circumstance and challenge beyond any the valley has faced in its history. A full EIS is warranted to describe and assess these challenges to Public Health and Safety and to explore and develop alternatives to the pathway proposed by the USFS and POWDR.

Please see attached formatted letter with footnotes and citations. Thank you

The clock on this comment page is wrong. See attached picture.