

May 22, 2020

Ms. Constance Cummins
Forest Supervisor, Superior National Forest
c/o Mr. Michael Jimenez, Project Leader
8901 Grand Avenue Place
Duluth, Minnesota 55808
Via US Mail and email, comments-eastern-superior@usda.gov

Re: Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project

Dear Ms. Cummins,

Thank you for taking the time to review our comments in support of the expansion of the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area.

Odyssey Resorts operates and owns parts of six resorts along the north shore of Lake Superior, strung between Duluth and Grand Marais. One of those, Caribou Highlands, is situated just a few hundred yards away from the epicenter of the ski area. In fact, Charles Skinner's father Charlie, shortly after his purchase of the ski area in 1980, approached the original developer of Caribou and founder of Odyssey Resorts – Bob Ryan – with the suggestion that he build lodging accommodations on the mountain to further attract the downhill skiing community, and subsequently sold to Mr. Ryan much of the land on which Caribou now sits. The elder Mr. Skinner was prescient in this suggestion, as Caribou, which started as a modest 30-room lodge, expanded along with the success of the ski area to now be the largest resort in this region, with a sleep capacity of more than 800 people. Ours has been a highly symbiotic and friendly partnership for 40 years.

During peak season, Caribou Highlands employs about 150 people including eight salaried managers. Over the years, many of those managers have served in leadership roles of various business and civic organizations – most often tourism related – and have been part of the guiding hand in a 25- or 30-year effort to develop the broader Cook County economy into a year-round, tourism based engine, due in large part to the original vision of Charlie Skinner, and for the last 25 years, the broader vision held by Charles and Tom Rider.

Although the economy in Cook County has become increasingly year-round, it remains fragile. Increased competition in the form of regional and national destinations – ski destinations in particular – has made it that much more essential that the county's recreational attributes be targets of ongoing re-investment and creative thinking. Should that occur successfully, the county will become less and less vulnerable to unanticipated conditions that threaten jobs and livelihoods; a vulnerability amply exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cook County economy is also highly scalable, with much of the infrastructure already in place to serve an even greater visitor base. Indeed, many retailers, restaurateurs, and other small business owners pin their success to the quality and breadth of attractions and destinations in the area, most notably the ski

area, and Mr. Skinner and Mr. Rider have demonstrated over the years that Lutsen Mountains can truly be more than just a ski destination.

Although the broader economic infrastructure is in place, ski area ownership is facing a new set of demands and expectations from the downhill skiing marketplace. These demands, in addition to an anticipated increase in visitors, require added, expanded or enhanced services to better align with changes in consumer preference. The plan as stated appears to address those needs, and we are in full support of each component of this portion of the plan.

It is within the 'corporate DNA' of Odyssey Resorts to be the best stewards we can be of the beauty that surrounds our resorts, and to do what we can to engender that same sense of stewardship in our employees and our guests. This value is certainly not unique to our company, and we know full well that we share it with Mr. Skinner and Mr. Rider and their organization. We are satisfied that the plan as stated is purposeful in the preservation and protection not only of the defined SUP area, but also of neighboring areas. We are further satisfied and confident that efforts related to the expansion will be highly mindful of wildlife and wetland preservation.

In summary, we believe the plan not only assures the survival of the ski area and its impact on the local economy but will deliver a newly thriving destination which has proven to be necessary to a thriving year-round economy in Cook County. We believe the plan will be executed in ways that are environmentally responsible, and thus will assure that visitors and residents will enjoy the natural beauty and attractions in the region for generations to come.

We highly value our relationship with the ski area, and we believe that feeling to be mutual. We are confident that any questions we may have relating to operations of the newly expanded ski area will be listened to and addressed productively. We stand fully in support of both the large and small efforts of Lutsen Mountains Resort to further develop a best-in-class ski and recreation destination.



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