**National Park Service Comments on Proposed Lutsen Mountains Ski Expansion Project and impacts to the North Country National Scenic Trail / Superior Hiking Trail**

**Location:** Lutsen Resort in Cook County, Minnesota | Superior National Forest - Tofte Ranger District

**Background:**

In August 2017, the Superior National Forest published a pre-scoping letter announcing expressed interest by Lutsen Mountains (Lutsen) in expanding their ski resort on 550 acres of adjacent National Forest System lands administered by Superior National Forest (Forest). A copy of the Lutsen Master Plan is available at: <https://www.lutsen.com/upload/photos/page_274_lutsen-mountains-master-development-plan-summary-pdf.pdf> . The map included in the Lutsen Master Plan shows the proposed expansion area will extend over the Superior Hiking Trail (not yet the official route of the North Country National Scenic Trail at the time). Comments for the pre-scoping phase were requested to be submitted to the Forest by September 29, 2017. The Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) did submit comments to the Forest at that time.

Following the announcement of the proposed Lutsen expansion, the SHTA began a map analysis of potential trail reroutes that would avoid the expansion area. The SHTA has identified a preferred reroute that will completely avoid the proposed expansion area, reduce complications from transitioning through wet areas, and maintains the character expected on a National Scenic Trail. While this reroute has not been fully ground-truthed, it has been shared with the Forest and remains the preferred route.

On March, 12, 2019, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (S.47) included legislation to adopt the proposed NPS “Arrowhead Reroute Project” in Minnesota, which designated sharing the existing Superior Hiking Trail as the official route of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

On April 15th, 2020, a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the Lutsen Ski Area Expansion Project was to be published in the Federal Register. According to a statement provided by the Superior National Forest, this publication date was earlier than the Forest anticipated, therefore project scoping documents are not currently available on their website. To address this error, the Forest will publish a correction in the Federal Register with an updated scoping comment period and update their website with scoping materials at that time.

**National Park Service Comments:**

The proposed expansion of the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area into the Superior National Forest will directly impact the North Country National Scenic Trail / Superior Hiking Trail. While the Lutsen Master Plan does include their own proposed reroute for the Trail, this route remains within the ski area, does not avoid the impacts of the expansion, and is not the preferred reroute option. Having the trail pass through an active ski area will require increased trail maintenance, extended trail closures from autumn/early winter into the summer months, and involve other potential impacts related with snow production, snow compaction and icing.

The Superior Hiking Trail Association has identified a preferred reroute that will avoid the ski area and related impacts while maintaining the Trail’s availability, it’s associated scenic, and aesthetic attributes, and the experience the Trail is intended to provide. If the proposed expansion of the Lutsen Mountain Ski Area is to move forward the Trail must be relocated; and Lutsen must work with the Superior National Forest to provide additional planning and all necessary resources to implement the SHTA’s recommended trail reroute.

**Attached:**

Attached please find a map showing the proposed Lutsen Mountains Ski expansion area as well as the existing route of the NCT / SHT, the reroute proposed but Lutsen, and the preferred NCT/SHT reroute.

For more information, and future discussions, please contact:

Chris Loudenslager

Superintendent, North Country National Scenic Trail

PO Box 288

318 East Main Street, Suite K

Lowell, MI  49331

(616) 970-7026