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May 22, 2020

Connie Cummins
Forest Supervisor, Superior National Forest
c/o Michael Jimenez, Project Leader
8901 Grand Avenue Place
Duluth, MN 55808

Dear Connie Cummins:

I write on behalf of the Cook County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors in favor of the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project. Indeed, it is an honor to do so, because for several generations, Lutsen Mountains has been an exemplary Cook County business leader and the backbone of the Cook County winter economy. This expansion project is the key to ensuring that this legacy ski resort, one of the original resorts started by veterans of the Tenth Mountain Division following World War II, remains a county leader and economic lynchpin for additional generations to come.

The Cook County economy draws nourishment almost exclusively from tourism. In the summer, visitors are drawn by our lakes, the Boundary Waters, the Big Lake and attractions like the Superior Hiking Trail and our state parks. Many resorts and other hospitality focused businesses earn roughly 75-85 percent of the revenue they need to break even during the short summer season. The activity that ensures their profitability each year is the draw of downhill skiers to Lutsen Mountains. Without the resort and the business it generates, our winter economy would shrink to an anemic shadow of what it is. And along with it would go our hope of ever achieving a true year-round economy that supports more full-time, permanent, benefit-paying employment for Cook County residents.

Without this expansion, we are at a serious risk of losing Lutsen Mountains. Over the past four decades, more than half the smaller ski resorts in the United States have closed because they were too small to make the investments needed in new technology — high-speed lifts and gondolas, for example — that skiers increasingly demand and that the larger players in this consolidating industry can easily provide. Lutsen Mountains' recent investment in a new gondola, for example, is very likely the largest single private investment in a business ever made in Cook County. Cook County is fortunate that the owners of Lutsen Mountains have chosen to expand and survive rather than shrink and die as their future.

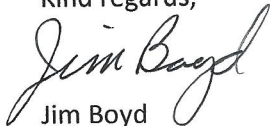
Lutsen Mountains and the families which own it also have proven themselves impressively responsible environmental stewards over the years. When confronted with degradation of the Poplar River from silt, much of which they were not responsible for, they stepped up with commitments of money, energy and time to turn the river around. As a consequence, Poplar River is one of very few rivers in Minnesota that has had been removed from the list of impaired waterways. In 2019, the Poplar River Management Board, whose chair at the time was Tom Rider, co-president of Lutsen Mountains, received an Environmental Initiatives Award from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for its work to restore the Poplar River.

The Chamber Board has reviewed Lutsen Mountains' plans for this expansion and notes that the company has made every effort to design the expansion with environmental protection and enhancement as key elements. Project design, for example:

- Ensures ski runs, glades, lifts and snowmaking will minimize soil disturbance.
- Adopts best management practices in all construction and ground disturbing aspects of the project
- Expects that all U.S. Forest Service land management standards and guidelines will be enforced and that significant damage to soils or watersheds will be minimized.
- Minimizes effects on old growth forest and expects to continue working with the Minnesota DNR to minimize potential impacts.
- Avoids significant impacts to wetlands and mitigates unavoidable impacts to meet applicable state and federal standards.

We believe the master development plan for this project will transform the downhill skiing experience at Lutsen Mountains in multiple ways that are both environmentally and economically sustainable.

Kind regards,



Jim Boyd

Executive Director