

Connie Cummins
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c/o Michael Jimenez, Project Leader
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Comments on the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project

Thank you for requesting comments regarding the expansion at Lutsen Mountains Ski Area. I am the director of Cook County Higher Education (CCHE) located in Grand Marais. We strive at CCHE to keep our residents in Cook County by providing long distance secondary education. While students go to school from Cook County, they continue to work in the community. Lutsen Mountains provides a range of employment opportunities for residents – from minimum wage to professional salaried positions.

I have also lived in Cook County for 25 years and raised a family here. I worked for 10 years at the ski hill as the Controller and my children and husband have recreated at Lutsen Mountains in the summer and winter. They are very excited at the opportunity to experience extended terrain!

As an employee of Lutsen Mountains, I know Charles Skinner and Tom Rider very well. I trust them and grateful that they are managing the expansion. As a family member, former Lutsen Mountain employee and a local professional, I support the project.

I understand the Purpose and Need for project

Lutsen Mountains ski area is such an important amenity and provides a very unique and fun recreation experience for both locals and destination visitors. With all of the consolidations in the ski industry over the past decade, I completely understand the importance of improving the guest experience so that Lutsen Mountains can stay competitive.

I also understand the project objectives and agree with the Forest Service that this project provides an opportunity to achieve the recreation goals outlined in the Superior NF land management plan. Expanding Lutsen on a small portion of the national forest also enhances socio-economic benefits to our area. AS I WELL KNOW, there is a shortage of beginner terrain at the existing ski area – I never got off of Ullr! It is exciting to know that I can expand my personal recreational activities. From what I can see, the project will significantly improve skier circulation and provide for more reliable snow due to upgraded snowmaking. The proposed improvements in guest services, base area improvements and additional parking will address longstanding issues at Lutsen Mountains. I think this project, and the master development plan (MDP), are well designed and will transform the downhill skiing experience at Lutsen Mountains in a way that is environmentally and economically sustainable.

Project Design and Environment Effects

- **The Expansion Protects Jobs**

As everyone knows, the economy of Cook County depends primarily, directly or indirectly, on visits from vacation homeowners and tourists. The recent COVID-19 stay at home order has made this dynamic all the more obvious, with many job losses and many of our small businesses on the verge of not surviving. Most of the tourism occurs in the summer months. Many employees in Cook County work for Lutsen Mountains in the winter and in summer resorts in the summer. If Lutsen Mountains did not exist, these employees would not be able to remain employed year round which leads to an unhealthy, transient community.

It is difficult to attract skiers to Lutsen Mountains when so many other “deals” and bells and whistles are being developed by the western resorts. In order for Lutsen Mountains to remain viable, they NEED to expand.

- **Old Growth**

From what I can tell, the project design appears to have avoided significant effects on old growth. I know the Minnesota DNR will monitor the project to minimize potential impacts.

I believe that all of the plans are in place to create a responsible expansion of Lutsen Mountains and I support the development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Blackburn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Blackburn
Executive Director, Cook County Higher Education
Local Resident
Former Lutsen Mountains Employee
PO Box 1217
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