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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Faelan Coldwater, I'm 16 years old, and I live in Finland, MN. I learned to ski when I was 7 years old at Lutsen Mountains, and skiing has been a huge part of my life ever since. I have had a season pass at Lutsen for as long as I've been skiing, and I ski there every weekend I can, and some weekdays. I am an avid backcountry as well as downhill skier, and the public lands of Moose Mountain Eagle Mountain, and some of the surrounding area, are my primary go-to spots due to their ski-ability (lack of brush, pitch, etc.), vertical feet, terrain variability, beauty, scale, and access.

Skiing professionally as a career is a big goal of mine, and I put a lot of time into that goal. Because of the proximity of Lutsen Mountains and because the surrounding area contains the best backcountry skiing in the state, that goal is heavily dependent on the fate of those spaces.

I have chosen to comment because of my background in the Lutsen area, which influences my hope that the beautiful and geologically prominent Moose Mountain is not industrially developed, as is being proposed by Lutsen Mountains Corporation. I am aware that LMC is not proposing to develop the entirety of Moose Mtn., but the development would eclipse almost all of the backcountry terrain, leaving mostly just extremely thick brush or wind swept rocky sections.

I believe that LMC's MDP is an unnecessary development of a special and unique part of the north shore for a number of reasons.

Firstly, I think that Lutsen Mountains' management should use the funds they would invest in the expansion to instead improve/better maintain their existing infrastructure. The lifts, for example, are mostly very old and have technical difficulty very often. They stall frequently, sometimes for up to 20 minutes, and occasionally are closed from morning to closing time on days they are scheduled to be open. That happening is a fairly rare occurrence, but being stuck on a stopped lift for 5-7 minutes is not at all. In my memory it happens on average several times a weekend, much more than the numerous other ski areas I have visited.

My younger brother also experienced this maintenance deficiency when a partially rotted plank of the decking of the Eagle mountain chalet cracked under him and he sunk up to his knee. That plank was replaced, but the aging deck remains.

Those maintenance issues could be solved for a fraction of the price of a full-blown expansion, and also LMC might be able to afford decent grooming. The grooming is very sub-par at Lutsen with icy areas often occurring on steep headwalls and other places, and anything from quarter-sized ice pellet fields 50 feet long being created (where it feels like skiing on marbles), to ice boulders being left on the side of ski runs where one could run into them. In LMC's proposal I read that they are claiming that the expansion would increase skier circulation, and therefore solve the problem of recurring ice spots. I think a much more cost-efficient solution would be to use a power tiller attachment before grooming, which is a device that is attached to the back of a groomer, and chops and churns the ice or snow at an average depth of 5 inches. Most resorts use power tillers, as they remove icy patches and improve the quality of the snow.

Secondly, I am very concerned about what an expansion, however slow and measured, would do to day ticket and season pass prices. Lutsen Mountains is already overpriced for the experience, even compared to ski resorts out west. When the new gondola was installed, ticket prices jumped to over a hundred dollars a day after taxes and fees for a single adult. My family is not very affluent, and neither am I, so I am worried that season passes might not be affordable if Lutsen Mountains doubles it's skier acreage and installs eight new lifts.

Generally, I am not convinced that an expansion, which might put day tickets in the \$150 range, and which has a primary goal making mostly more of the same terrain they already have (and do not adequately maintain), just with new lifts, would attract any substantial amount of new skiers.

What I believe would attract new skiers and also excite locals is something that would be entirely new to Minnesota, a gladed backcountry ski area on Moose Mountain.

This brings me to the final part of my comment, which is my support for Superior Highland Backcountry's (SHB)

plan for a minimal impact gladed backcountry or sidecountry zone. Data gathered by the Snowsports Industries of America shows that while the participation rates of downhill skiing are steadily going down, backcountry skiing and snowboarding are on an opposite path, and numbers have been climbing for many years. I am part of the demographic of people who went into the backcountry once, loved it, and are now regulars. I use the public lands of Moose Mountain (and to a lesser extent Eagle) frequently, have taken friends there, filmed skiing there, and participated in guided tours there. I can attest to the value of those places, and to the value of the opportunity to create something new that I believe would bring true variety to the north shore, not just a costly and environmentally damaging development for a declining industry.

I urge the Forest service to reject at least the Moose mountain section of LMC's Master Development Plan, and instead consider SHB's proposal, which will most likely be resubmitted if the MDP is rejected.

Thank you for hearing out my concerns.