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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project

Dear Supervisor Constance Cummins,

Thanks for the opportunity to submit scoping comments regarding the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project, although the comment period is far too short during this pandemic for concerned citizens to review and comment on the Notice of Availability and Proposed Action. Also there aren't any public meetings scheduled or opportunities for the public to engage directly with the Forest Service and Lutsen Mountains Corporation (LMC). This is unacceptable. The Superior National Forest should extend this comment period until after the pandemic has subsided and everyone is able to provide informed comments.

The Superior National Forest should not grant LMC a Special Use Permit to expand onto Forest Service land. John and I have explored this region as we have relatives in MN. Backcountry skiing, which is becoming more popular, is a great way to experience the beauty of Superior NF, and it takes virtually no infrastructure.

The proposed Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project threatens the future of backcountry skiing opportunities on the North Shore. Moose Mountain holds the most unbroken ski-able vertical feet in Northern Minnesota and is a valuable resource for backcountry skiers. Given that half of Moose is already owned by LMC, the public lands on Moose Mountain should be left for everybody else to enjoy.

Rather than granting LMC a Special Use Permit, the Superior National Forest should consider the development of a backcountry ski area on Moose Mountain. I support Superior Highland Backcountry's vision for a Backcountry Ski Area on Moose Mountain and believe this would be a better use of these public lands. An expansion of the same old type of ski area is likely not going to bring any new visitors to our region. No matter how much Lutsen expands, the fact remains that there is only 700' of vertical terrain. While this is impressive for Minnesota, it can't compete with the draw of Western resorts for the destination skier. However, diversifying the variety of winter sports available in northern Minnesota will draw new visitors. Backcountry skiing is the fastest-growing segment of the ski industry, and adding a backcountry ski area to the mix of winter opportunities already available in Lutsen will entice more people to visit the area and strengthen the economy.

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project should include an alternative that analyzes a backcountry ski area, as proposed by Superior Highland Backcountry. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Ms. Gail M Richardson

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