

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/14/2020 2:48:13 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project

Dear Supervisor Constance Cummins,

I appreciate the opportunity to submit scoping comments regarding the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project.

I believe the Superior National Forest should not grant LMC a Special Use Permit to expand onto Forest Service land, at least as the proposal exists today.

I am concerned the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project does not consider the impact of this expansion to other users of this land. I believe this shortsightedness limits the tourism opportunities for Cook County as we look to the future.

According to unofficialnetworks.com, alpine skiing participation has dropped significantly since 2008/2009, while telemark skiing increased 44% since 2008. In October 2019, The Washington Post highlighted uphill (yes, uphill) skiing as one of the fastest growing winter sports. The sport of backcountry skiing is very popular in many of the same Western ski destinations Lutsen Mountain and Cook County naturally competes with, including Colorado (Aspen, Vail), Wyoming (Teton Pass,) Lake Tahoe (west shore), and Utah (Little Cottonwood Canyon).

Lutsen Mountain likes to point out that ski resorts across the country are built on NPS land. However, I do not find that a compelling argument, due to the unique nature of Moose and Eagle Mountains as some of the highest points in Minnesota. In many other parts of the country, there is a plethora of skiable acreage. In MN, vertical feet of quality skiable pitch is a severely finite resource. The proposed Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project threatens the future of backcountry skiing opportunities on the North Shore and severely limits future tourism growth in the area to respond to changing consumer preferences. Moose Mountain holds the most unbroken skiable 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.

Speaking of enjoyment, I am also concerned about the proposal's impact to the 'wilderness' experience of those hiking the Superior Hiking Trail. I recently through hiked this precious MN resource. While spending time at Lutsen Mountain Resort was a nice reprieve from my days on the trail, there is no denying the resort's impact to the environment around it; the resort sat in clear, man-made juxtaposition to the nature surrounding it.

Rather than granting LMC a Special Use Permit as currently proposed, the Superior National Forest should consider the support and '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 environmental and economy-building utilization of these public lands.

An expansion of the same old type of ski area is NOT likely 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.

Sincerely,

Ms. Kayla Joachim

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