

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/13/2020 2:24:18 AM

First name: Steven

Last name: George

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project

Dear Supervisor Constance Cummins,

It's frustrating and disappointing that you are holding a 30-day comment period in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic makes it much more difficult for people, especially those without broadband internet access, to review and comment on the Notice of Availability and Proposed Action. This is a major development proposal and to move forward without any public meetings or opportunities for the public to engage directly with the Forest Service and Lutsen Mountains Corporation (LMC) 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.

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. Vertical feet of skiable pitch is a finite resource in our region, and needs to be shared. 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.

I live less than an hour from Lutsen Mountain and I am both a Backcountry skier as well as an Alpine skier. I have Backcountry skied the area of proposed expansion and I have Alpine skied at Lutsen Mountain. I have also skied many times in my life in the Western States. I believe that Lutsen Mountain's proposed expansion is a bad idea for business reasons since it will inevitably drive up the lift ticket prices and push more Midwestern Alpine skiers towards taking a trip out West instead of to Lutsen after comparing prices. I have many friends who have worked at Lutsen Mountain and I think this is a bad economic decision for their resort and for the local economy. More Backcountry skiing options will draw more visitors while I believe the resorts expansion has the potential to drive some visitors away.

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

Sincerely,

Mr. Steven George

5970 Blesner Lake Rd Finland, MN 55603

roachven7@gmail.com

