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Comments: The planned expansion of the Lutsen Mountains ski area will provide a net benefit to the region and to greater Minnesota. The plan represents a substantial investment and ongoing commitment by the owners of the ski area to provide their valuable service. The North Shore, in general, is beloved for its scenery and year-round outdoor recreation. For the winter months, the ski area is a principal means by which visitors can enjoy the gift of the North Shore. It is also an essential economic engine that attracts tourism, appreciation of property values, and jobs. With respect to the latter, the jobs which are made possible by the ski area are not only those directly at the ski area, but also in the hospitality, restaurant, retail, and other sectors within the surrounding communities. In short, the ski area is an important economic engine. It must not be taken for granted. The ski/snowboard industry is a competitive one, and Lutsen Mountains needs to continue to attract visitors. Lutsen's competition includes ski areas in the Rockies, which are fairly easily accessible with low-cost flights to Denver in particular. Vail Resorts and others continue to make massive investments to raise the standard for their visitors' experiences, and Lutsen Mountains needs to respond in kind to remain a viable choice for their customer base. The expansion plan will make Lutsen Mountains more attractive, particularly for families. If there is desire to continue having Lutsen Mountains ski area, the owners need to be permitted to make necessary improvements to their business to remain viable. Unless you are fundamentally opposed to having a ski area there, who wants to see Lutsen Mountains struggle financially a la Spirit Mountain?

The expansion plans would expand the footprint of the ski area by a fractional amount, and not fundamentally alter their operations. Apart from clearing some trees for ski runs, parking lot, and buildings, the area as a whole will remain as it has been - overwhelmingly forested and undeveloped. Only a tiny fraction of the forest would be impacted, and wildlife will have plenty of surrounding forested land in which to thrive. Skiing is a non-motorized and quiet activity. Ski-area operations use motorized machinery, but the ski area's existing equipment may be used in the expanded portions. The expansion is not of a character that would call for substantial changes over and above existing operations in terms of air-polluting activity. Moreover, any pollution-related impact from increased visitors would appear to be marginal at most. Moreover, are the expected additional visitors attributable to the expansion more numerous than in the peak summer months? It would seem the infrastructure and essential services in the area are more than equipped to handle the additional traffic, if any.

In summary, the ski area is perhaps the best use for the land that it is on. It draws visitors from the surrounding region and makes the precious resource of the North Shore more inviting and accessible during the winter months. It is a major economic engine for the surrounding community. Like any business, Lutsen Mountains needs to continue improving to survive. I respectfully urge the decision makers to permit the expansion substantially as planned.