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First name: Taylor

Last name: A Hines

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project #52440

I am an educator, an avid skier, and an outdoors enthusiast. I have lived in Minnesota my entire life and have spent a great deal of time in Lutsen and Grand Marais, and at the surrounding hiking trails, including the Superior Hiking Trail and North Country North Star Trail. Only after hiking on the superior hiking trail did I truly fall in love with all that northern Minnesota has to offer. I look forward to my annual summer and winter trips to the Lutsen and Grand Marais area to enjoy the scenic forest.

I would like to raise concerns regarding the loss of approximately 495 acres of national forest and the loss of integrity to Minnesota's only thru-hiking trail, the SHT. I believe that my experience on the trail will be diminished under both Alternatives 2 and 3 that the current plan has listed. Snowmelt/spring run-off at a ski resort is not natural, due to snow-making activities, tilling and compacting, and ski traffic. The result is far more snowpack, which often compacts like ice that lasts far into the spring and even summer after the snow has melted everywhere else. This is what causes a trail, especially on the north side of a slope to never dry out and suffer from severe mud issues. Or, in the case of heavy spring rains, an excessive amount of runoff causes erosion to hillsides and trails, and floods streams and rivers, eroding banks and taking out our bridges.

Additionally, the plan does not address seasonal closures that would be inevitable. How will hikers be accommodated during the winter months? Will there be an alternative route that the Forest Service provides?

The SHTA, a nonprofit entity, provides free recreational access to public land, while the ski area, a for-profit and private company, is requesting to take public lands to profit. I would request that the project does not move forward until an acceptable route can be identified and approved and that an agreement between the SHTA, Lutsen Mountains, and the U.S. Forest Service regarding the payment and construction of that route be in place before proceeding.

Sincerely,

Taylor Hines, M.S.