Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/10/2021 5:05:57 AM
First name: Jim
Last name: Vick
Organization:
Title:
Comments: I would like to start with a sincere thank you to the Forest Service for the study of this project with the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. I did not realize how thorough this evaluation was until I observed the two Open House sessions and listened as staff responded to difficult questions with precise expertise. Rather than comment on the content of the DEIS, which I feel the Forest Service has adequately addressed, I would like to share my observations of the Reading Room comments.

A prevailing sentiment in opposing comments is the loss of public access. I feel I am in a unique position to evaluate this. I have worked for Lutsen Mountains for more than 35 years. I have hiked, biked, skied and hunted in the SUP area for more than three decades. I designed and built the Superior Hiking Trail spur trail with the assistance of the SHT maintenance coordinator and a Minnesota Conservation Corps crew. At one point, there were so few tracks in this forest outside of the designated trails that I knew each of these users. Today, while there are a few more tracks and I no longer know all the names, I can still count users on any given day on my fingers. The SUP, if approved, would vastly change this public access. Thousands more each season would have easy access to the National Forest. While some have claimed this is elite only access, I see it as a different model. Ski areas operate on a user pay model, the price of a lift ticket covers the costs of building, grooming and maintaining that access. Other users - accessing bike trails, hiking trails, snowmobile trails, boat launches, campgrounds and forest roads - are not paying for their direct use but rather by subsidy through tax dollars. I am an ardent supporter of these uses, they are great community assets, as is a downhill ski area. While we all aspire that public access makes for equal access, minority communities and low income persons are still underrepresented as Forest users. Lutsen Mountains is committed to working with the Forest Service to expand the diversity of Forest users.

My other observation is the frequency of comments, whether focused on wildlife, plant communities, hydrology or other issues, that have a surprising bias on perceived profits. Heated phrases, "individuals and companies profiting directly from the resources", "only people who can pay the price of a lift ticket will be allowed through the gates", "greedy", "only the wealthy will be able to afford to use it", "commercial interests which only benefits the few", are stated without any context to a balance sheet or the true cost of operations. The premise of this proposal is to reinvest user fees into an enhanced visitor experience. I implore you to evaluate comments in their full context and fete out concerns not addressed in the DEIS from those based on an emotional response to an unfounded perception of profit motive. Please use the science of the DEIS as your guiding principle.

Lutsen Mountains is not an international mining operation, a multi-state ski area conglomerate or even a large corporation. This is a small family company that has significant impact in our local community. The employees of the mountain, our resort partners and the contractors that support us are residents of our community. They support our schools, our grocery stores and our local health care. The vision of this plan is to find a sustainable way to allow more visitors share in the cost of improvements that the market demands, allowing Lutsen Mountains to continue to engage visitors in outdoor winter recreation and remain an anchor in the local economy for the next generation.

Thank you for your thoughtful evaluation of this proposal.