Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/10/2021 5:41:46 AM
First name: Chel
Last name: Anderson
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Michael Jimenez, Project Leader (michael.jimenez@usda.gov)
Constance Cummins, Forest Supervisor?Superior National Forest?8901 Grand Avenue Place
Duluth, MN 55808
RE: Comments on the draft EIS for the Proposed United States Forest Service Special Use Permit for the Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project

Dear Mr. Jimenez and Ms. Cummins,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. The EIS identifies and provides data on many potential impacts that are of concern to me. That said, I submit the following questions and comments on some of the content.

Missing Information
Lutsen Scientific and Natural Area (SNA)
This SNA, designated by the State of MN, is adjacent to the proposed project and is an important part of the context of the proposal. Yet, the Draft EIS does not mention it, or address the impacts of the proposal on the Lutsen Scientific and Natural Area. Both need to be included in the EIS.

Light and Noise
Dark skies and quiet are diminished and lost in a "death by a thousand cuts" manner. The impacts of this proposal to these "resources" and their values constitute a more significant "cut" than most.
The SNF is undoubtably aware of the values, recreational, economic (including "Dark Skies" designation) and biological, associated with darkness. Yet, darkness is not identified as a resource or as having value and impacts to it are not considered in the Draft EIS. Although the proposal is focused on winter activities, it is probable (if not planned given this is a year-round resort), for some of the new facilities to be used year round. The location of most of the proposed developments on comparatively higher elevations and in the open will exacerbate the associated light pollution of the night sky and the landscape. This "resource", its value and the proposal's impacts need to be included in the EIS.

Similarly, quiet is widely recognized and cited as a resource and as having social, economic and biological value. "Noise" is mentioned, but expect for in the analysis of wildlife impacts, is dismissed as an "indicator" because it "would be similar to surrounding areas within Lutsen Mountains" for "sensitive noise receptors like private residences and the SHT/NCNST". Given the new developments proposed and their location the noise associated with all the facilities, equipment and activities will be broadcast to a wider area. The impact and its effects need to be considered in the EIS.

Special Use Permit
The EIS should explain how the SUP will be managed given the scale and intended permanence of the project. Also, what recourse does the SNF have if permit conditions are violated? Under what circumstances can and would the permit be revoked?

This SUP is a substantial subsidy to a private company. Just the NEPA process associated with the request has already come at substantial cost to the public. If granted, what costs associated with the SUP will be public and which will be private? Does the SUP include a substantial performance bond to fund reclamation if the LMC abandons the project?

Tribal Resources

Page 46: With respect to Tribal Access the draft EIS states, "Access [would be] most reduced during construction and maintenance periods, during the winter season, and the areas adjacent to the proposed buildings." And "During non-winter seasons and within the proposed ski terrain (both gladed and traditional), access would remain similar to existing conditions as users would be able to continue to use the area." What are the "existing conditions"? Is this true? Is LMC amenable to or will it be required to allow Tribal members access to the land within the project area other than in winter? To non-tribal members?

Page 47: "Decrease of resources offset by the abundance of habitat throughout the SNF." This statement assumes the quality and quantity of habitat and resources are uniform across the SNF. The Draft EIS offers no data to support this. Also, it assumes that the resources and habitat throughout the SNF are equally accessible to Tribal members i.e. that distance from a Tribal member's home is not a barrier to use.

?Page 148: "The addition of ski trails and associated infrastructure within the proposed SUP area for each action alternative would represent irretrievable effects to Tribal resources through forest fragmentation and other resource impacts; however, this commitment of Tribal resources would not be irreversible because facilities could be removed and, in time, the forest could be reclaimed and revegetated."

This is just one example of many where, "would not be irreversible because facilities could be removed and, in time, the forest could be reclaimed and revegetated" is used in the Draft EIS. I'm unsure what to make of it. What is the meaning of reclaimed and revegetated?

Please explain what this phrase means in each instance it is used. The implication seems to be that someday the forest, in this case, could be made whole, the effects undone. If so, the EIS needs to provide some evidence that this is possible, examples of where this has been successfully accomplished for specific resources on the SNF after similar impacts. "Could be" is inappropriate in the context of an EIS, particularly when there are no specifics as to who, how, when. My own experience and evidence all across the SNF and beyond suggests this concept is simplistic, at best, and otherwise misleading. Areas might be reclaimed and revegetated in the sense of some plants grow there again e.g. a gravel pit, but this is not a "forest" or "habitat" or any of the other natural features to which the phrase is applied in the Draft EIS, their loss is irreversible. Reclaiming and revegetating disturbed areas does not reverse the loss of the natural community of life, "the resources" that were destroyed.

Invasives

The Draft EIS appropriately identifies "invasives" and their accompanying impacts. However, from the Pre-construction and construction PDC to the PDC for the development and implementation of an invasive weed management plan for the existing ski area and proposed project areas, the measures and mitigations to address these impacts are similar to those applied in many other development projects on the SNF, where they have been unsuccessful-gravel mining, mining exploration and road projects for example. Where on the SNF have these measures succeeded on a project of this scale? Why would the outcome be different in this case? Given the complexity of who and what and the time span involved in implementing them, the EIS needs to describe the impacts of invasives and the limitations of the measures and mitigations to address them.

Snowmaking

The Draft EIS states: "Snomax would be continued to be used as a snowmaking additive; however, it is not anticipated that this use would contribute to any impacts beyond current conditions."

What are the "current conditions"? Have the current impacts been studied here? What are the current impacts? If unknown, this should be stated. Inappropriate to dismiss the impacts because they are unknown. All the more reason to be cautious about increasing this "additive" in the environment. Will there be monitoring of this in the environment? If the ongoing studies referred to reveal impacts, how will the SNF become aware of them and how will they be addressed within the SUP?

Climate Change

"Lutsen Mountains would be anticipated to continue to operate in the foreseeable future." The EIS needs to define "foreseeable future".

Why is the term "incremental" used in this context? It seems to imply small, as if small doesn't matter. But climate change is the accumulation of small-compared to the total emissions-over a long period of time.

Overall, the climate change aspect of the Draft EIS is deeply flawed. Although it recognizes both Action Alternatives would result in irretrievable contributions to climate change and air quality, the impacts of the proposal are dismissed e.g. "likely be imperceptible at the project scale and indistinguishable from other independent trends", "Emissions and corresponding impacts would likely be negligible at the global scale of climate change", "the loss of carbon sequestration capacity resulting from vegetation removal could be reversed in the long term if vegetation were allowed to regrow, and measures could be put into place to reduce vehicular and operational emissions that might impact air quality and visibility."
The Draft EIS not only misses the basic point that climate change is the result of many small, relative to total emissions, but further minimizes and insults the reader with pie-in-the-sky references to the what "might be" in the future, "these emissions are not considered irreversible due to offsetting and mitigation that could possibly occur in the future. The loss of carbon sequestration capacity resulting from vegetation removal could be reversed in the long term if vegetation were allowed to regrow, and measures could be put into place to reduce vehicular and operational emissions that might impact air quality and visibility." This kind of thinking and approach is head-in-the-sand, assure no end to global warming and unacceptable from a federal agency.
I urge you to reject Alternatives 2 and 3. This project is not in the public interest. If the SUP is granted and the project proceeds, LMC may or may not succeed ,but the many and varied negative impacts of the proposal to the land, waters and their inhabitants identified in the DEIS will be realized.

Sincerely,

Chel Anderson