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Comments: [External Email]Lutsen Mountain Ski Area Expansion Project

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Lutsen Mountain Expansion DEIS - Public Comment

The plant communities that reside in the proposed expansion area include old growth sugar maple forests and upland cedar forests - which are becoming more rare along the north shore, threatened by logging, heavy deer browse that inhibits sapling growth and forest regeneration, and a lack of understanding of their importance in our interconnected ecosystems. Not only do old growth communities provide large enough trees to support cavities for martins and other tree dwelling species, but tracts of land that have not been severely altered in hundreds of years contain ground cover species such as club mosses, rare shrubs and orchids that disappear when logged or cleared. The design of "glades" is troublesome because it would eliminate much of the function of the old growth forest ecosystem, removing the forest's ability to naturally regenerate in an already human impacted landscape, while on the other side creating preferred habitat for white tail deer, of which are negatively impacting forest quality for recreational activities and forest function as well as timber products.

In addition to the negative impacts to the plant communities, the Poplar RIver and its watershed must also be considered. Having once worked on what was referred to as the "mega-slump", a steep, eroding bank on the east side of the Poplar River, I understood that the increased water during snowmelt, directly resulting from artificial snow production and lack of tree cover was causing the river to become incised and unstable within its channel. This instability caused massive landslides, pulling entire trees down the slope. If the river cannot currently handle the runoff from the ski resort as an otherwise stable watershed, how will it be impacted by an even larger area of unnatural snow that also lacks tree cover and contributes to higher spring flood events?

Regardless of the project and its impacts, a private company should not be allowed to physically alter land that does not belong to them, but is managed by a federal, public entity and currently allows access to anyone willing to get there. Public land should not be held in the hands of a private company, nor should it be restricted to only those who can afford to do so.

I am a northern Minnesotan who currently lives in Duluth. I am a trained and working plant ecologist. My family (2 kids) recreates in northern Minnesota, specifically on SNF land due to its accessibility. We also prefer these tracts of land that have been preserved for their high quality, old growth examples of how our northern ecosystems function. So few of these examples still exist, and altering them to benefit a fraction of the population is unjust.

Thank you for taking public comments regarding this issue.

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