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Organization:
Title:
Comments: [External Email]"Lutsen Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project" - Opposition Statement

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Please accept this letter of opposition to the proposed Lutsen expansion.

I believe the expansion of 495 acres of neighboring public land would be an unwise decision causing a negative impact for the region.

The Lutsen area is already hindered by peak tourist traffic. At times Highway 61 is already at peak capacity for highway safety. The expansion would more than double the "comfortable carrying capacity" of Lutsen Mountains, from 2,850 visitors currently to 6,300 in the future.

It would mean creating more than 1,200 new parking spaces, or in excess of 10 acres of new non-pervious pavement or class 5 parking areas subject to erosion.

The loss of old-growth trees. The environmental review reports forests on Moose Mountain specifically contain undisturbed remnant examples of northern white cedar-dominated forests and mesic hardwood forests. Botanists who examined the site said some of the white cedar trees are more than 140 years old. They also found several rare lichens in the area. Once these trees and the lichens are lost we will never be able to bring them back.

The proposed project would also reroute 1.7 miles of the Superior Hiking Trail/North Country National Scenic Trail on Moose Mountain. This section of the superior hiking trail would be changed forever. The Superior Hiking trail near Lutsen is a draw for tourism. Rerouting the hiking trail may negatively impact the reason hikers come to the Lutsen area.

Proponents claim that local business need the Mountains Ski Area Expansion Project for survival. However, the Lutsen area already is a vibrant region for tourism. Businesses always want more revenue but at what cost does the increased revenue become a detriment to the unique "Northwoods Experience" of the Lutsen area? Too much development may have a negative impact on why people come in the first place. And as we all know there is a dire shortage of workers and worker housing that would worsen with this project.

Lutsen Mountains claim the expansion would be necessary to compete with other national ski resorts. This is a bogus claim. No amount of expansion would make that much of a difference for skiers, like myself, to forgo a ski trip out West for a vacation at ski Lutsen Mountain due to an expansion. And they are a regional, not a national resort.

I believe the ultimate goal of the Lutsen Mountain owners will be to ultimately sell the resort at the detriment of cutting down old growth forests, increasing the traffic to the area and negatively impacting the environment. This issue is not merely the cutting of nearly 500 acres of forest, some of which contains old growth trees, but one of long-term sustainability issues involving infrastructure, housing for employee expansion, landscape erosion, expansion of fossil fuel-dependency and traffic congestion.

Additionally, the additional water resources that would be required out of Lake sSuperior to make the added artificial snow (which Lutsen refers to as "farming snow" in reference to the stockpiles they generate to ensure skiing long into April) on ton additional pavements - and the thin, fragile soil structure is not being considered thoroughly.

Another issue is that this expansion becomes yet one more piece of human infrastructure prioritized in an increasingly fire-prone forest. We were all witness to the new reality of climate change in Cook County last summer.

This expansion is not simply wrong-headed; it is irreversibly harmful to a forest and ecosystem in desperate need of protection. The Tofte forest management plan is much more aligned with serving the needs of the local region than this localized, self-interested business venture being marketed as a win to the community.

Respectfully,

Stefan Helgeson
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Thank you,

Stefan
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Principal

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