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First name: Eleanor

Last name: Oman

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Cathy Tighe

3031 Tongass Ave.

Ketchikan, AK 99901

Re: Ward Lake Recreation Area Improvements Master Plan Ideas

Ketchikan Daily News article 1/20/2022

Dear Mrs. Tighe,

There is an opportunity to use the Ward Creek Trail for a greater purpose. The trail was conceived and funded by a grass roots organization to meet a need for Cruise Ship passengers to have a lovely trail to be able to walk and enjoy the Tongass National Forest, but not disturb local townsfolk on our favorite trails. This was a brand-new trail, with no local following, that would be put to use for our out-of-town guests to immerse themselves in the Forest and take away a greater appreciation for nature in SE Alaska. Over the 20+ years that the trail has been in existence, I have seen very few outfitter-guided groups of hikers, and the trail has become a beloved favorite of many Ketchikan outdoors enthusiasts who do not want to share it with our summer visitors.

A special bus parking lot was constructed well away from the Ward Lake Day Use area, so locals could enjoy the summer days in peace and without diesel exhaust ruining their outdoor experience. The trail was designed and constructed wide enough so that two people can walk abreast and small groups would be comfortable with their guide. The subbase was designed to eventually support asphalt pavement, in anticipation of improved accessibility. The Landscape Architect who located the trail spent time making sure that all along the trail one can either see or hear Ward Creek.

I suggest that the Ward Creek Trail, from Ward Lake Day Use to the Bus Parking Lot, be open and available to outfitter-guides for the enjoyment and wilderness education by out-of-town visitors, including those on Cruise Ships. It would be a great outing for families, especially with so many arriving on the Disney ship. It would be a beautiful and inexpensive shore excursion for those on small budgets. Local outfitter-guide companies could employ locals; there is money to be made by all. The Forest Service would have a small income from the outfitter-guide fees.

I have always thought that S.A.I.L. could sponsor a trip for guests in wheelchairs or other mobility devices. S.A.I.L. might be able to apply for a grant to purchase a van that can carry 6 - 8 wheelchairs, their passengers, and a few family members. How cool would that be? People who would not otherwise have an opportunity to be immersed in the Forest would have a chance. If the wheelchairs are not power, there are always high school kids who would love a summer job helping others enjoy the out of doors. Maybe there are high school kids who are in wheelchairs themselves and would love a job where they could shine. Money can be made by S.A.I.L. and the high school kids. People who would not otherwise have an opportunity to be immersed in the Forest would have a chance.

Please consider an aggressive program to promote the use of the Ward Creek Trail for outfitter-guides. Your public relations staff can help with market research among the Cruise Lines to find out the potential interest. They can also develop promotional materials, make contacts, and hold meetings to generate the interest that I know is there, both among local outfitter-guides to provide the service, and Cruise Lines to provide the customers.

All of us local residents know that Cruise Ships come in the morning and leave in the afternoon. Daylight is long in the summers. There is plenty of time in the early morning and evenings to have the trail to ourselves. Everyone needs to learn to share more. This is just a one mile stretch of one trail. And the Forest Service should seek every opportunity to reach travelers from all over the world and invite them to learn about and enjoy the Tongass National Forest.

Thank you for your invitation to comment on the Ward Lake Recreation Area 20-year master plan. Thanks to your staff for starting this daunting task.