

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/2/2022 4:57:36 AM

First name: Aaron

Last name: Ostby

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I would encourage the USFS to prioritize improvements of the Ward Lake Recreation Area based on current use and need, with an emphasis on repairing existing infrastructure before addressing new recreational development.

The highest priority should be given to repairs of the existing trail system. Most of the trails need some degree of repair, with some needing substantial investment. Before anything else is done, deficiencies in the current trail system should be addressed, with an emphasis on making the trails more sustainable in our rainforest environment.

Second, deficiencies in other existing infrastructure should be addressed, with the highest priority given to high use areas and areas of historic value. Specifically, I am thinking of the covered picnic areas, which are extremely popular and show their high use by their condition.

Once all the current deferred maintenance needs are addressed, then other recreational needs should be met. I would look first to where the highest use is and then to where there are outdoor recreational deficiencies in our community. These are my suggestions on where and what kind of new development should happen:

\*Day use picnic area: This is a well-loved and well used area. Often there are not enough shelters to meet demand. I would encourage building another shelter, but it should match the design and style of the others.

\*Campground: With Clover Pass no longer having an RV campground and Settlers Cove unable to expand its campsites due to its small size. There is a need for the development of larger RV sites in Ketchikan. If there is any reconfiguring of the campground planned some larger or pull-thru sites should be included. Utilities are probably unrealistic and not within the character of the campground but a few electrical hook-ups might be considered if not too cost prohibitive. Saxman Seaport may help address this need in the coming years. Due to our wet environment, I would encourage building raised tent platforms in some of your sites. These are relatively low cost to build and increase the useability and popularity of tent sites a lot. There could also be a premium charged for these sites.

\*Drive-up or accessible cabins: There is high demand for easily accessible public use cabins. Even if a second cabin is built by the State at Settlers cove it will not meet current demand. There should be at least one cabin built in the campground. A short distance hike in cabin would also be popular. Where the tent platform is at the end of the Connell Lake trail would be an ideal location. These cabins should be built with material from the Tongass and hopefully if built, the wood will be sourced from local mills.

\*Connell Lake access: The water access to Connell Lake could be improved allowing for the launching of small boats and easier access for kayakers and canoers. There should also be a restroom installed at the Trailhead.

\*Areas for outdoor interpretation: The Ecosystem of the Ward Lake Recreation Area offers a lot of opportunities for outreach and education. The Forest Service also has a lot of talented and knowledgeable experts in many fields. It would be great to see more regular community outreach and education done by staff and it would be amazing if there was a space where this could be done. Like an outdoor amphitheater or some kind of covered presentation space.

Though I would like to see an investment in existing and new facilities, I do have a concern that the FS may not have appropriate staffing to properly maintain additional trails and other recreational assets. My feeling is that

current staffing is probably not adequate to deal with what we have now. Any management plan that includes more development, should also be addressing how any new development will be maintained and how staffing needs will be met. One possible way to help staff is with volunteer support. I think that having a dedicated volunteer housing at the campground is a great idea. Having housing available for seasonal volunteers will increase your available volunteer applicants. There will be more and better individuals to choose from and they can help support your staff in meeting their maintenance obligations.

I am in agreement with some of the respondents, that the current commercial use of the Ward Lake Recreation Area should not be expanded upon, and that the current commercial tour activity level is acceptable. I do not agree that commercial use should be prohibited all together and I have not heard a compelling argument to support the complete prohibition on commercial activity. In fact, I have heard a lot of people state that there is too much commercial tourism at Ward Lake, yet I cannot recall once ever running into a tour group there. The reality is that this is a multi-use recreation area, and some commercial activity should be allowed. For better or worse access to the Tongass is an important part of our monolithic tourism economy. This is the 'real' Alaska that I would want our visitors to see and cherish as we do. Fortunately we, or I should say, the managing government entities that represent us, have some control over how this is done on public land. As new trails and recreational areas are developed, I would encourage the FS to think about ways to do it that allow tourism access without negatively impacting other users. This could possibly be done by allowing more commercial use in newly developed areas while preventing or keeping just traditional use in other older areas of Ward Lake.

Thank you for allowing public input in the development of your management plans,  
Aaron Ostby