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Organization:

Title:

Comments: May 8, 2022

US Forest Service

8510 Mendenhall Loop Road

Juneau, AK 99801

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a forty-year resident of Juneau and I worked as a fish biologist for 26 years and also worked as a ranger at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor center for three years as a ranger during tourist season.

I am submitting comments for the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (March 2022) version.

I am unable to support any alternative except the No Action alternative.
for many reasons. The most important in my decision is total number of visitors coming to the glacier. Limiting total visitors is essential to any changes proposed.

In my experience, most cruise ship visitors come by bus and are only at the glacier visitor center for 45-60 minutes. Almost all have purchased multi-experience tours that limit their visit to the glacier. That is not something controlled by the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA).

Essential services for visitors with short visit time have been hampered for over twenty years by lack of bathroom facilities. Unless a tourist books a hiking or walking tour, none would use any of the trail enhancement proposals. It is not feasible to have safe bear viewing in the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) if food is even more readily available than it is today. Many bus tour companies give out snacks as people get off the buses. It is not essential to have more food at the glacier. I know that the rangers can provide emergency food to diabetics or other special uses, none needs to be sold on site.

The Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) includes essential breeding, migration, and year-around habitat for numerous wildlife species, many of which are sensitive to habitat disturbance and unlimited human access. The Visitor Center represents a valuable resource for educating the public about its unique natural setting, dynamic processes, and natural, historic, and cultural resources. I am concerned that over-development will jeopardize long-term sustainability of the very resources that attract visitors and local users.

Alternatives 1-4 each contain elements that would irreversibly alter the habitat for wildlife and the unique natural experience for visitors. Thus, I prefer the No Action alternative.

I am happy to be able to add my comments & concerns to the Forest Service about these proposals.

Special Concerns:

*New trail development, wildlife viewing and bear safety

For several reasons, I have concerns about the Lakeshore Trail and Loop through the Dredge Lakes Unit. At 8 to 12 feet wide, the trail would more appropriately be called a road. All versions of this trail destroy vast amounts of wetlands, riparian areas, and deciduous habitat, all important to local birds and birdwatchers.

Bear safety has still not been fully addressed for the proposed Lakeshore Trail and Loop through the Dredge Lakes Unit. An increase in hardened trails in the area will effectively reduce essential refuge habitat for bears and other wildlife in the MGRA.

*Food service

Also related to safety regarding bears and other wildlife, there are issues with the proposal of food service at the Welcome Center. Food service is counter to the wise management now in effect where food consumption is discouraged near the Visitor Center. This is for bear safety.

*Glacier access development for motorized watercraft

Nothing should be used on the lake besides human or electric powered boats. Climate change is reducing our glacier very quickly already. We do not need to add any more local effects.

*Protection of ground-nesting seabirds and shorebirds

I am a lifetime birder and have followed many decreases in birds across the world. We do not need to reduce habitat for nesting birds that are already in decline.

Flat areas near the glacier need to be available for Arctic Terns to move into as natural flooding and plant succession renders current nesting zones unsuitable. New trails, buildings and uncontrolled foot traffic could make it difficult to maintain suitable undisturbed nesting areas for Arctic Terns near the glacier face.

*Facilities and updates

The most important need for visitor comfort and enjoyment are more restrooms.

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Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Brenda Wright