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Title:

Comments: Comments on Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area Visitor Improvements Project

May 8, 2022

I have been a resident of Juneau, Alaska for the past 31 years. The Mendenhall Glacier area is one of my favorite places to spend time hiking, skiing, birdwatching, bear viewing, kayaking on the lake, and sitting on the shores of Mendenhall Lake enjoying the wild landscape. I come here to watch spring happen and smell the sticky sweetness of new cottonwood buds. I come in the summer to feel the mist of Nugget Falls on my face. I come in the Fall to watch the colors of the leaves changing and I come in the winter to ski and walk along the shore. I love this place. My soul is nourished by the beauty, the stillness, the wildness of this place. I can understand why tourists also love to come here and experience the uniqueness of a glacier in a beautiful wild setting.

Because the Mendenhall Glacier area is so important to me, the changes the Forest Service is proposing has me very concerned. Plans for boats, docks, large visitor centers, infrastructure near the glacier will ruin the wild feeling this place now has and is the reason that so many people want to come here and experience it. Please deeply listen and pay attention to the comments you are receiving from the people of Juneau. The residents understand what a unique and special place the Mendenhall Glacier area is and how quickly it could all be destroyed with an overambitious improvement project.

I submit these comments with a heartfelt concern for the Mendenhall Glacier area, one of our planet's remaining nearly untouched wonders.

Boats

I strongly object to the use of motorized boats on Mendenhall Lake. Motorized boats should continue to be outlawed. Boats running back and forth to the glacier will ruin the quiet and scenic viewshed. I strongly oppose motorized boats and the infrastructure associated with them, such as docks, maintenance facilities, equipment and fuel storage as they negatively affect other users and the natural environment. Motorized boats create wakes that can be dangerous to kayakers. Flipping a kayak in the frigid waters of Mendenhall Lake can be deadly. Fuel spills damage shorelines, fish, and birds. The exhaust from motorized boats pollutes the air, destroying the opportunity of users who want to smell the natural world, undisturbed by pollution. Exhaust from motorized boats also impacts people, like myself, who have asthma and cannot tolerate hydrocarbon exhaust. Even if the boats were electric, I still oppose them because they ruin the viewshed of a wild and scenic glacier, create wakes, and create some noise.

Buses

Move commercial buses away from the treasured view of the glacier that people see on arriving. I support reducing the impact of buses on the natural setting and on other users. I support re-locating bus drop-off and pick-ups to another site farther away, such as the current bus parking lot and add an electric circulator trolley to carry passengers between the lake and the parking lot. I also support requiring all transport permittees to use only electric buses. Do not fill ponds and wetlands for parking.

Buildings and Bathrooms

I strongly oppose building the Welcome Center in the proposed location that would obstruct views of the glacier and lake. The law requires alternatives to be presented, yet all four options show only this one large building dominating the viewshed. Other alternative sites and structure plans need to be offered before any decision is

made. The Welcome Center already has been completely designed with detailed floor plans. This shows government preference favoring only this design, location, and one architectural firm which has received significant financial reward while unlawfully providing only one alternative site and design.

The Welcome Center should be a place where people can use the bathroom, view movies about the glacier in a theater, purchase items in a gift shop, learn about the natural history of the area through visual displays, get dropped off and picked up from their bus. ALL of those things can be done in a building that does not have a view of the glacier or lake. A much better location for this is where the bus parking is currently located now. Reduce the congestion, move the building away from the lake. You can build a spacious building where the bus parking currently is without destroying the natural setting close to the lake and blocking views. You could put a cafe on the second story and have big nice views of the mountains, glacier, and lake. The cafe should be a sit down style with no take out allowed. Hot drinks sold in real mugs that stay in the cafe. Snacks sold on plates that stay in the cafe.

I strongly urge you to create some spaciousness for the improvements. Move the welcome center away from the lake. Please keep the vista open for everyone.

I strongly oppose any buildings (moveable pods or anything) near the glacier. It is dangerous to take people close to the glacier. I seriously cannot even believe the Forest Service is suggesting this as an option. Most tourists have no clue as to the dangers of falling ice or the hazards of walking on a glacier. AND buildings near the glacier destroy the wild and scenic nature of the glacier.

Bears

Give more consideration to bears and give them more room. Reduce the number and size of bridges and trails. Please give more consideration to how bears and people are interacting and give the bears the space they need.

Conclusion

Improvements can be made but they need to be sensible without blocking views and without destroying the qualities of wildness that we love and want to share with visitors.

Thank you for reading and considering my comments,
Sincerely,
Theresa Svancara