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Comments: MGRA Comments by Sean Eagan (5/9/2022)

Commercial Power Boats and Remote Visitor Center - This is not a good idea for the following reasons:

*Once you allow one commercial powered trip across the Mendenhall Lake there will be endless visitor/cruise ship industry pressure for more. Regardless of what the plan says, the USFS will cave to this public pressure.

*I am fundamentally opposed to allowing commercial power boats and disallowing private power boats. This is making Juneau locals second class citizens.

*Power boats on the lake will completely change the far side experience.

*The toilets at the far side are going to be a maintenance nightmare. There is no good option. Composting will not work (too cold for efficient microbial action). Porta-potties will fill every day and be stinky. Even putting sewer lines in to Montana Creek subdivision risks freezing the pipe and having spills.

*Boats on the lake will lead to rescues

Three Visitor Centers: If there are boats going across the lake everyone is going to want to travel to the glacier side. Having two large visitor centers on the close side and one small, non-plumbed visitor center on the far side makes no sense. If the boats are going (which I oppose) bite the bullet, admit the view is compromised and build a full visitor center on the far side and downsize the proposed new building at the current bus drop off.

Three safe different experiences: Visitors will self-select and make it less crowded if the USFS provides three different safe experiences.

1)Get off the bus and stroll on the raised boardwalks; see the view; listen to a ranger talk; buy a souvenir, go back to town.

2)Take one of two, 2-mile loops where visitors can pretend they are in wilderness. Nugget Falls is a given. Provide a similar loop-trail to Skaters' cabin. I support the new lakeside trail. I always take my visitors on what is already the Nugget Falls Loop. Out along the lake looking at the glacier is the best.

3)A more aggressive 4-hour hike to the glacier (don't allow boats across). Make this easier than it currently is, even if ADA is not possible over that rock outcrop. I'd put the trail mostly near the water or with little lake view spurs so people can go part way, find a bench, and maybe turn back. Cruise ship busses that could drop people at Skater's cabin would be nice and shorten the walk a little. In this 4-hour walk-only scenario, a tiny remote warming center might work.

120 bus trips a day: This is too many, but if you are going this route:

1)Cap the round-trips with fossil fuel bus trips at 50 right now.

2)Lower that cap by 5 buses every 5 years. Let the industry figure out other power methods for their buses or move fewer people.

3)I dislike centralizing profits, but one system which left downtown docks every 10 minutes all morning, and then left the MGRA about every 15 minutes all afternoon would give visitors freedom to choose the above experiences.

4)Regulating the rate of people inflow is key. 15 buses in a single hour will make for a poor experience. There should be a limit of incoming buses in a single hour.

5)I vote for a Skater's cabin stop and potentially an Auk Bay stop. That would help local businesses and provide some great lunch options. Perhaps every other bus would be the direct back to town versus scenic Auk Bay loop.

6)Obviously shoulder season and perhaps Saturday buses would be less frequent.

Food at MGRA- visitors would enjoy; however, it will create these problems:

*People will not keep the food inside and all manner of inappropriate wildlife problems will increase from bear interactions, to aggressive squirrels, to ants, to aggressive jays and crows.

*Wrappers will be everywhere including floating in the lake.

*Food options will significantly lengthen people's stay and make it more crowded.

*The concessionaire should be required to pick up trash a certain amount of hours a day as part of the food services contract.

*Consider ceramic plates, glass glasses, and no paper napkins. These all suggest the food stays inside. Put the food in a less desirable, subterranean location so only really hungry people find it.

Dredge Lake trails:

*These viewless, wooded trails will never become super popular.

*I support more ski trails. A total of 10k of groomed ski trails would be great.

Of the alternatives I prefer #4, but as stated above there are parts of #2 and #3 such as the Lake side trail that I do think are wise.

The management boundaries in alt #4 are the wisest.

The route for Lakeshore trail in Alt #3 is a nice mix of giving people views and keeping part of the Lakeshore for a quieter experience. I think you could make the mile closest to the buses 14 feet wide, and then narrow it down once it leaves the lakeshore. Many people will turn back at that point.

New Visitor Welcome Center: This huge rectangular building seems like a halfway point between a big box store and a small mall. I don't see a need to replicate lower 48 experiences in Alaska. People come visit Mendenhall Glacier because they want something different. Please scale it back and make it as low profile on the landscape as possible. If there is going to be eating consider putting it in a subterranean level. If you're going to build the new building, the roof should be covered with solar panels. It should be a LEED certified platinum building and ideally carbon neutral.

The remote pod visitor center will never last. It will be overwhelmed by visitors and then the USFS will build larger more permanent buildings. It is naïve to say you will stick with small buildings long-term.

I like the parking in Alts 3 and 4 as slightly more habitat is left in place. Seven to eight bus drop off spots is too many. We don't want 350-400 people all arriving at once. Five to six buses offloading/on loading spots is plenty. One single system where everybody can get on any bus is most efficient.

Thank you for all your work on this plan. The city's choice to build so many cruise ship berths, puts all other visitor organization in a tough spot between serving the masses and protecting the "less trampled" nature for which South East Alaska is famous.