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Title:

Comments: It is clear to everyone in Western Montana that there is an ever-increasing number of people who are recreating on our National Forests and other public lands - and many more would like to. Our favorite places are being discovered. Some spots are downright crowded at times and some of us are slob at times. Resources - natural, financial, and human - to address this increasing use, are limited. It's a bit of dilemma.

The proposed major expansion of Holland Lake Lodge on the Flathead National Forest in the upper Swan Valley forces us to confront that dilemma. How can we best address the ever-increasing demand for outdoor recreation in beautiful settings while maintaining the characteristics that everyone loves?

The upper Swan is an incredibly beautiful (especially in October) forested valley bounded on both sides by majestic, and often unmercifully steep, mountain ranges protected as Wilderness. After a long period of intensive logging last century, trees grew back, abandoned roads faded into the ground or alder thickets. Some big old P Pine and Larch remain (Gus!). People who live in the Seeley-Swan year-round or part-time seem to have lives that are intimately tied to the land and waters. They seem to cherish their small community and neighbors. For just about everybody, the Seeley-Swan is about steep mountains, forest, wildlife, and big beautiful lakes. You can't beat this place for views!

But now, one of North America's largest corporate ski area developers, POWDR, Inc. (Mt. Bachelor, Copper Mountain, Powderbird Helicopter Skiing, etc.) wants to help the Flathead National Forest "enhance access" for outdoor recreation by replacing the existing modest 50-guest Lodge with something three-times larger, tripling guest capacity, and extending operations into winter months. They propose to construct 32 new buildings on 15 acres of National Forest land, including a 13,000 square foot two-story metal roof rectangular box for lodging, a 3,000 square foot restaurant, ten 650 square foot cabins, 16 smaller cabins, three parking lots, and assorted other infrastructure. The largest buildings will be as close as 20 feet to the lakeshore, disrupting the awesome scenery of Holland Lake. It's unclear whether outfitted skiing or other pay-to-play "adventure lifestyle" activities are part of the deal. All of this is proposed to be on National Forest System land owned by the public.

This presents the Forest Service with a choice about how it is going to deal with the dilemma over the ever-increasing demand for recreation on our public lands in the upper Swan Valley. Should it permit development of a high-priced, high-amenity resort on National Forest lands, or should it emphasize providing more basic, "rustic" campgrounds for tents and RVs with picnic tables, hand pumped well-water, and fire rings? It can't do both because, to protect grizzly bears and other wide-ranging wildlife, the Forest Plan limits expansion of "developed overnight recreation sites" in the upper Swan Valley to only one site once every ten years. So, if the Forest Service allows POWDR, Inc. to expand the physical size and guest capacity of a pricey resort it

will not be able to increase campground opportunities for people who can't afford or don't want to pay several hundred dollars a night for high-amenity resort accommodations.

What's in the best interest of the public: a big high-priced lakeshore resort on public land that will defile those amazing Holland Lake views, or more tent and RV spots with picnic tables not too far from the lake that cost \$20/night? The answer is obvious and hopefully still imbedded in the culture of the Forest Service and Montana.

"Where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question shall always be answered from the standpoint of the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run." Gifford Pinchot

I'll have more comments in a few days...