

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/3/2022 12:51:49 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: October 2nd , 2022

To: Kurt Steel - Flathead Forest Supervisor

Curt Dowling - Swan Lake District Ranger

Michele Mavor - Project Leader.

RE: Comments concerning the Holland Lake Lodge proposed sale to the POWDR Company.

Thank you for holding a local community Question & Answer session on September 8th, 2022.

The number of local residents in attendance reflected to me the heartfelt commitment, resolve and passion demonstrating their desire to gain solid information so they can make informed decisions in the preservation of this beautiful historical site.

While there are some positive aspects to this proposal, such as an interest in restoring and maintaining existing historical buildings, providing a restaurant which would also be open to the local population, providing local job opportunities including housing and an opportunity for young families with children to spend time in a very precious wilderness area, there are a few grave concerns that I would like to address and request further information about.

A number of individuals have already provided comments and I would like to express my support of them and not duplicate or repeat all their points. In particular, Luke Lamar's and Arlene Montgomery's submittals concerning the wildlife and their critical habitat in the Swan Valley, as well as Steve Lamar's comments from an historical perspective.

1. Insufficient comment time in understanding and assessing the impact of the Holland Lake proposed expansion.

The Forest Service failed to give sufficient notice to the public. For a potentially drastic change to our community. We needed more time to review the detailed documents and proposed plans as this transaction has been ongoing for a minimum of 8-9 months. I do appreciate the comment period recently being extended until October 7th, 2022.

2. The necessity for an Environmental Impact Study.

POWDR is proposing to purchase and substantially increase a resort destination in the "Crown of the Continent", a critical and irreplaceable sensitive wildlife corridor ranging from Canada to Yellowstone and beyond where grizzlies, wolverines, lynx, wolf, and countless of other wildlife and fauna currently resides thanks to years of management, reintroduction and careful connectivity to allow these wild creatures to survive and roam freely in this pristine forest while the lake itself currently host resident loons and bull trout.

What impact will your proposed development have on their natural paths, the continued increase of human activities with increased garbage (based on the past two years reality of visitors)?

In addition, building by the shoreline, cutting down a substantial number of trees and increasing the waste management ponds and then spraying the sewage onto the land does not seem to be an inconsequential impact.

With the increased visitors staying and utilizing the area, technology demands, and increased use of motorized vehicles and boats are inevitable.

What impact will this have on Holland Lake's existing loon nesting and bull trout presence?  
Do we understand the saturation point when adding lake activities versus the irreversible damage?

These are just a few reasons why it is prudent and necessary to thoroughly conduct and evaluate an Environmental Impact study, not only for the present proposal but for future expansion restrictions. Please carefully consider Swan Valley's critical location and role and the impact on one of the last intact eco systems in the Lower 48.

Is this where we should encourage large corporations to come in and expand the human footprint?

2. What are the future plans for the Holland Lake site over time?

POWDR is a large corporation which has continually expanded since they were founded in 1994, the latest expansion being into Canada in 2019. They have thousands of employees with revenues in the millions focusing on Adventure Lifestyles and currently own 11 major mountain resorts, 5 Woodward Action Sports locations with 59 parks, including Powderbird (1700 Heli-skiing runs/yr) and SunCountry (Water sports providing 3793 river runs/yr ) throughout the United States and Canada. Wouldn't it be deemed more appropriate to make such an investment in an area where commercialization has been planned and adapted for businesses that are for profit and ultimate growth expansion. The environmental impact would be greatly reduced.

It would be beneficial not only to the existing structures at Holland Lake but to visitors who want to experience the historically significant of the lodge to preserve it and reduce the current proposal's footprint by half, limiting the growth opportunities, thus keeping the feel of the wilderness and the quint and unique atmosphere with minimal disturbance to existing wildlife and lake.

Purchasing and investing in the Holland Lake Historical Site in order to expand the Wilderness Experience for families is an investment and a major commitment. It is my experience that a well-run company always has a projected return on that investment as well as a long-term growth plan.

Question: What is POWDR's future long-term vision in expanding the Holland Lake Lodge enterprise?

I cannot imagine that the Holland Lake Lodge area will stay as described by your initial implementation on the 15 acres as there is also an ability to lease additional Forest Service land for planned expansions in the lease contract.

An example of POWDR's growth is the expansion at Copper Mountains between 2017-2022, which recently have added a new 4 story hotel with and additional 127 rooms, "The Sky Chutes Landing" a 2 apartment building providing 22 units for 34 bedrooms, and planned for 2023 a new Mid Mountain 25,000 sq.ft lodge. This is what companies like POWDR plan for their future growth and increased revenues.

A second example can be seen in Eldora, Colorado, a small community of 352 people (as of 2020) outside Boulder, Colorado whose life drastically changed when POWDR came into town and expanded the ski resort. The local residences of Eldora are feeling the full impact of what a large corporation has made on their lives and attempting to adapt to the demands on the surrounding area due to tourist and recreational options offered that are either new to the area or in the past been extremely limited.

What would an expansion plan look like being introduced into our largely intact Swan Valley? Especially in this location which borders the Bob Marshall Wilderness and is a critical wildlife corridor in the Crown of the Continent?

It seems reasonable, and necessary, that the Forest Service consider limiting the expansion capability for this lease based on the critical Holland Lake location.

3. Shoreline Protection zone of only 20 ft?

The proposed modifications impact along the shoreline seems substantial with tree removal, lawn implementation and new structures erected. Any activity in the vicinity of any water features (creeks & lakes) require you to stay away a required number of feet.

Question: Is this expansion following the same rules as the current landowners around the lake for tree removal and shore protection? If not, why not?

4. Impact of the future increased traffic on wildlife and people along both Hwy 83 and the Holland Lake road.

The proposed resort will bring in hundreds of additional people to the area, and with the potential expansion opportunity they currently have in the contract, several hundreds more would travel these roads in the future.

Q: Have we studied and understood the number of wildlife that today, daily, die on this stretch of the highway from Hwy 200 Clearwater Junction to Swan Lake? Not to mention the human casualties we continue to experience as a result of collisions with wildlife.

Do we have a plan for how to mitigate these deaths and avoid future increases in an area where we want these endangered species to live and all animals to reside and move through?

We cannot stop progress or people from moving in, but we can be intentional and thoughtful about how to manage the pace and size of our growing areas. Wildlife corridors, overpasses.. etc. require money and time to implement. Let's have a comprehensive plan which manages growth along with collision prevention techniques. The Holland Lake proposal, if it was to be approved, needs to have severe constraints in their ability to expand their business footprint in a delicate area like Holland Lake.

If that was a constraint in the future lease, would POWDR still be interested in purchasing the buildings and only lease the 15 acres?

Ideally forming a committee of concerned parties (POWDR, representative, forest service (who act as stewards of the "peoples "land, local residence who are versed in the history and wildlife of the area, could met, and discuss, proposals, concerns, possible alternative, improvements, or acceptance to current proposal. This would not only reduce substantially the mistrust but provide for one point of reference instead of a constantly changing allegations based upon rumors and innuendos. If all parties concerned can realize the value and importance of the past we can move forward based upon mistakes and successes and mutually accept growth to the valley with minimal impact to the land and consequently the wildlife.

Thank you for reviewing and answering these concerns.

We humans always have the time to do it over (rework our mistakes) vs taking the time to do it right the first time. When it comes to these types of decisions, once it on decided on and implemented, it is over. There is no going back. Please consider all aspects of this decision carefully as it will impact our world, wildlife and humans alike, forever.

We all want everyone to experience nature and the wild, as John Muir said:

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." John Muir, Our National Parks 1903

We have an opportunity to do it right, let's make sure we take the time to get it right in this part of the world!

Thank you, Helene Michael  
Seeley -Swan resident