

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/7/2022 6:52:36 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Supervisor Steele,

I was a District Resource Assistant and a Fisheries Biologist on the Swan Lake Ranger District in the late 80s/early 90s and I am very familiar with the Holland Lake Lodge (HLL) and surrounding environment. As Resource Assistant, I administered special use permits including those for HLL and outfitter-guide operations in the Swan Valley. I have a very good sense of what is at stake with this expansion proposal.

I am firmly opposed to the expansion because it will most definitely change the nature of the recreational experience in the immediate area as well as the character of the larger Swan Valley community. The increased visitor use and commercialization of outdoor activities will diminish the solitude of the entire lake environment and inevitably displace less-tolerant wildlife from the area. Also of concern would be the increase in nutrient loading to the Swan River watershed from the sewage generated by a larger population (visitors and workers) living seasonally and year-round in the basin.

Holland Lake is a very special place that offers visitors an opportunity to immerse themselves in its wildness and quiet beauty at the edge of wilderness. It is not the place to provide enhanced lodging, dining and adventuring for the wealthy while enlarging the human footprint and presence on the landscape. Converting HLL to a year-round facility will by itself create a significantly greater human impact on the surrounding environment.

There is only one reason that POWDR is interested in improving and expanding the HLL complex: to profit from the growing appeal of Montana's natural beauty to an ever-expanding market of affluent recreationists. But there must be limits to the exploitation of public lands for private profit, especially when so many other other esthetic and amenity values are placed at risk. The Forest Service's primary responsibility is to protect the integrity of the resources it manages in public trust. The Service most certainly DOES NOT have a responsibility to ensure or provide for the "economic viability" of the privately-owned and operated HLL. The special use permit carries no guarantee of income or profit from the facility. If the current permit holder is unable to make an acceptable profit from the operation, he should sell the property and transfer the special use permit.

It is clear from the public response to this proposal that a thorough environmental analysis is needed. If it is determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is warranted, it would be understandable that the Forest Service does not have the staffing and expertise to conduct it. In that case, POWDR should be required to hire a Forest Service-approved consultant to complete an EIS. Taxpayers should not have to foot the cost of analyzing this proposal to expand for-profit facilities and operations at Holland Lake.

Respectfully,
Michael Enk
(USDA retired)