

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/7/2022 11:49:17 AM

First name: Jill

Last name: Richardson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello,

I am a PhD candidate in sociology at UW-Madison and I did my dissertation research on the human dimensions of wildlife in the Blackfoot watershed in Montana, including the popular recreation area around Seeley Lake, just south of Holland Lake. My research focused on grizzly bears, wolves, and elk in that area. I conducted participant observation and interviews with community members who live, work, and recreate in that part of the state. As you know, loss of habitat and the ability to obtain human sources of food threatens wildlife species like grizzly bears and wolves. During my research, I repeatedly heard about people up near lakes like Holland Lake intentionally feeding wildlife, which can be fatal to bears. (As they say, a fed bear is a dead bear.) I also observed my own roommates (2 women from Montana who still live there) going camping in that area with 2 guns and no bear spray as their bear protection. I interviewed a luxury guest ranch operator who refused to get an electric fence to protect people and wildlife despite having 4 mountain lions near her tourists because the aesthetics of an electric fence clashed with the luxury tourism experience. The solutions available instead were killing carnivores and hoping tourist didn't get mauled. Based on this, I don't believe increased tourism and development will be good for grizzly bears and other wildlife.

The people I spoke to during my research repeatedly emphasized that they worked to keep development out and wished to continue doing so in order to preserve their way of life. In interviews, people angrily described other development efforts in the area. I don't recall the name of the place, but on the other side of Missoula, toward the Bitterroot or in the Bitterroot, there's a place where someone tried to put in a ski slope (illegally?) and destroyed a bunch of forest in doing so. It was outside of my geographic research area so my memory is a bit fuzzy on the specifics, but I recall the anger about the development and environmental destruction clearly because it was longwinded and intense.

Right now my research is focused around studying environmental social movements in Montana. That's how the Holland Lake expansion came onto my radar. I'm tracking two movements, conservation and preservation. The preservationists - who opposed USFS's approach to management since Hetch Hetchy, are 100% opposed to the expansion. The conservation groups, who tend to be more aligned with USFS' style of land management, are being characteristically more measured and nuanced but also appear generally skeptical. However, in their comments and reactions on social media, their members are expressing stronger opinions, both about the process and the outcome. So far the comments have been focused on the decision making process:

"The community of Condon wasn't happy that the meeting was going to be held in Seeley, so they added an additional meeting in Condon."

"What a great way for them to exclude the vast majority of Montana public land users by having this meeting on a Tuesday at lunch time. Pretty much everybody that I know that would be interested in going has to work on a Tuesday. An interested person would pretty much have to take the entire day off to attend this lunch meeting."

"I just commented.

I didn't take a position on the project but I said that it's not right to try to push this through as a categorical exclusion and that a full NEPA analysis should be done.

A developer that planned to bring forward an environmentally compatible project would be excited to prove it with the EA results."

However, group members have reacted to posts about the Holland Lake lodge expansion in conservation groups with sad and angry emojis too.

The group I follow most neglected in debates like these are Native Americans. I haven't yet heard their perspective on the Holland Lake expansion because they don't have lively Facebook discussions like the other movements I follow. Sometimes it can be hard to discover their position on issues like this, but it's important to seek out their opinions and to listen when they choose to speak. I urge you to seek out their opinions and respect them. This was their land since time immemorial and their opinions, above all others, deserve to be respected.

In short, I oppose the proposed expansion and also urge you to listen to the opinions of the people who live in the rural area around the lake and Native American tribes, especially Blackfeet Nation. Decisions like this affect their way of life more than it affects anyone else's, and they have a right to be heard.