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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Greetings:

Thank you for listening to my following comments on the supplemental draft environmental impact statement for the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Facility Improvements Project.

I appreciate you listening to and incorporating the comments on the earlier version of this draft statement and for proposing new alternatives. First off, I would like to challenge the need for and advisability of some of the suggested, so-called "improvements." I do not think it is wise to simply provide for as many people as the cruise industry brings to Juneau, no matter the diminution of the quality of experience that follows.

The reason for this project is stated on page S-4, but to understand the possible actual result the reviewer must consider effects of several of the alternatives. Once those are examined, it seems likely that the intention is to "accommodate projected future visitor use to provide ... opportunities for all visitors to enjoy the recreation area, ... to meet the demand of the visitor industry." Emphasis added. In the statement of purpose on page S-4, lip service is given to "protecting the unique characteristics and outstanding beauty of the area" and to emphasizing "the area's outstanding scenery and wildlife resources." Yet many of the choices contained within some of the alternatives make clear the danger that accommodating all future visitors - no matter how many - could be prioritized over guarding the "outstanding beauty," "scenery," and "wildlife" of the area. In short, the proposal appears to decrease the value of the experience and to damage the area itself, shortchanging future visitors while cramming them in.

Please instead protect the quality of the experience for both visitors and locals by capping visitor numbers in order to maintain high value experiences for all.

Please categorically reject motorboats on the lake, no matter which alternative they appear in, and also reject the construction of new docks. However, if motorized boats are allowed in future, they absolutely need to be required to be electrified rather than operating on fossil fuels. This will be important for both visitor experience quality and for climate impacts.

Please reject expanded parking lots that would bury wetlands. Wetlands are critical habitat and support the wildlife that makes the area worth visiting. A excellent approach is the proposal that, as put in Laurie Craig's February 3, 2023, piece in the Juneau Empire, would have tour buses load and unload "in an improved bus lot, build a welcome center there, and create an electric circulator shuttle to quietly and cleanly move guests closer to the front."

Also, please follow the suggestion in alternative 6 to locate the new welcome center in the current bus parking area. While a welcome center may be a useful addition to the area, it should not be sited smack in the middle of one of the best views, and should be designed so that it fits into rather than looms over and distracts from the area.

It is important that you limit wide, paved new trails, which would decrease the wilderness feeling of the the area. Especially, again as stated by Laure Craig in her Empire piece, it is critically important with respect to Steep Creek to "limit platforms or trails that [could] surround the mouth of the creek and [could] force wild bears to become encircled by humans." Bears are one of the important wildlife attractions of the area that will be around long after the glacier retreats, and they must be protected.

Further, please do not allow any food or beverages to be served in the welcome center or elsewhere; habituation to human food can only lead to trouble for and with bears, one of the area's assets of great value to visitors and residents alike.

Finally, I appreciate your efforts to make the facilities better for the area and the world by providing for approaches to heating that do not rely on fossil fuels.

Thank you.

Megan