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Comments: 2/19/2023

To: District Ranger, Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest

From: Frankie Pillifant

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Re: SDEIS, Mendenhall Glacier Visitors Facility Improvements Project comments.

I submitted comments during the DEIS period, and those remain relevant. With the addition of three more alternatives it seems necessary to provide additional comments. Please consider and include my comments as part of the record for the Mendenhall Glacier Visitors Facility Improvement Project SDEIS :

Thank you to the USFS for this undertaking and for providing the opportunity for commenting and the transparency of processing the volume of comments. No matter which alternative or mix of alternatives is adopted to proceed forward, I applaud the efforts on the development of the DEIS and the SDEIS.

My comments have elements from multiple alternatives.

Overall, I do not support motorized commercial watercraft on Mendenhall Lake, or motorized snow vehicles except for Nordic trail grooming. I do not support authorizing motorized traffic or any commercial ventures on Mendenhall Lake. With the high numbers of summer tourist traffic around the visitors center, the lake offers peace and solace to the local community for non-motorized boaters and paddlers. If motorized commercial activity is allowed I'm concerned that noise from the snow vehicles, the summer watercraft and onboard announcements will carry across the water and distract from the local ambiance of the area.

I understand from conversations with planners that you are using data collected only from the summer tourist visitor numbers to support improvements on the visitor center area. Consider that improving winter amenities is of utmost importance as the existing trails are at winter use capacity. I support the following:

Work with the Juneau Nordic Ski Club to identify which new trails to build and accommodate cross country skiing. New trails snow coverage is best when tree canopies are open enough to capture snow and accommodate ski grooming equipment. There are many types of grooming equipment available now, please talk with the JNSC about what's possible.

There are already many 'folk' trails on the west side area created by walkers and bikers. Some of these could be easily widened to around 8-10 feet to accommodate snow grooming equipment, at least for setting a classic track. (Reference the Richter Trail, a classic only route, at the Hillside nordic ski area in Anchorage).

Construct the Lake Shore Trail, with a pedestrian bridge over the Mendenhall River, connecting with the campground. There are also many 'folk' trails already established in this zone that could be improved for winter recreation, providing that it accommodates ski grooming equipment. I support the inner routing to leave the birds and the ambiance along the actual shore in a quiet and peaceful manner.

The proposed trails on the west side of the lake should be constructed and wide enough for ski grooming equipment. Having a continuous ski trail from the GVC through the campground and to the west side of the lake

would be a benefit to the community by addressing the existing winter trail capacity issues and enhancing winter outdoor opportunities for residents and visitors.

Connectivity of the MGRA trail system from the east glacier side to west glacier to Montana Creek is important to the community and especially important for winter recreation, as cross country skiing, snowshoeing and fat biking has a high number of local users. This is an opportunity for long term trail planning to connect the three trail systems (east glacier, west glacier and Montana Creek). For the winter activities, the potential is a world class cross country trail system that would also support other non-motorized activities mentioned above.

The Dredge Lake perimeter trail (added in Alternative 6) and the Tolch Rock Spur Trail are of special interest to skiers and winter users due to their connectivity of the three trail systems. I encourage the inclusion of those trails into the final plan.

Contracting with a professional Nordic ski trail designer would be prudent to ensure that the trails are suitable for skiing and other sports users.

I support the construction of public use cabins, but new cabins will bring user conflicts for the groomed trails (review the access activity of cabin users at Eagle Beach State Park). Users hauling overnight supplies between car and cabin across groomed ski trails will further negatively impact the grooming efforts. Locate those cabins close to the existing and expanded west side parking or along the west side road.

Electric vehicle chargers on west and east side parking, for private and commercial buses, should be installed, to encourage transition away from fossil fuels.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Supplemental Draft EIS.