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Comments: Dear Acting Forest Supervisor Sherman,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) supplemental draft environmental impact statement (EIS). I applaud your agency for deciding to supplement the EIS based on public comments on the draft EIS. The new project components that focus on reducing lake-side infrastructure, traffic, and emissions are welcome additions. However, none of the action alternatives, as outlined in the supplemental draft EIS, are protective of the MGRA ecosystem, now and into the future. I urge you to select the no-action alternative, or suite of projects that most limit the human impacts on the MGRA.

I live in Juneau and have used the MGRA year-round since 1994 for various purposes including kayaking, hiking, wildlife viewing, birding, natural quiet, and photography. I use all areas of the planning area, from West Glacier trail, through the Dredge Lakes area, to the Nugget Falls. With my kayak, I am fortunate to access the glacier and quietly explore other parts of the lake. The only time I avoid some parts of the MGRA, notably the visitor center area, is during the summer tourist season, when the area suffers from excessive crowding, traffic, wildlife harassment, and loss of area's inherent, natural values, including natural quiet.

I provided detailed comments on the draft EIS. Here I focus on the following topics:

1. Parking lot expansion, near-lake construction. None of the action alternatives protect the near-lake areas from construction and increased traffic. All configurations still involve filling all or part of the ZigZag pond, and intruding on the Kettle Pond. None of the alternatives consider an option that would eliminate the parking lot nearest to the lake, making that zone quiet, pedestrian only space. I urge you to select a suite of projects that minimizes new construction, traffic & parking (except ADA) near the lake. That includes preventing filling of the salmon-supporting Zig-Zag Pond and construction near/affecting the Kettle Pond.

2. Welcome Center & Commercial Lot. I support project components that place the Welcome Center at the Commercial Lot, concentrate all commercial traffic there, and utilize electric shuttles to deliver cruise ship visitors closer to the lake/Visitor Center. Consistent with #1 above, the shuttles should deliver/pick-up passengers to/from the second parking lot, not the lot closest to the lake. Improved pedestrian access (side walk) should be provided for those who prefer to walk instead of taking the shuttle. Non-commercial parking should be at the second parking lot, with overflow at Commercial Lot. It appears none of the alternatives consider restricting days when commercial bus traffic is allowed at MGRA. Bus-free days, especially weekends, would lessen the overall impact of tourists and offer local people and wildlife predictable breaks from large crowds.

3. Boat docks, related facilities, remote visitor area, and motorized traffic on the lake. I object to all the components of the action alternatives that would open the lake for commercial, motorized traffic. While I appreciate that the new alternatives only consider electric boats, any motorized traffic on the lake will significantly affect natural values and experiences at MRGA. The docks, related facilities, boats, and the remote glacier visitor area will spread and increase human impact on the MRGA, and reduce the area that protects wildlife from anthropogenic activities. Forest Service did not contemplate any alternatives that would increase MRGA's ability to support salmon, bears, terns, and other critters that depend on the MRGA. If you decide to allow traffic on the lake, the final EIS and record of decision should limit the size of the boats (canoes?) and significantly restrict the days and hours when lake traffic is allowed leaving some days, including all weekends, completely traffic free. This would lessen the overall impact from the boats and offer local people and wildlife predictable breaks from on-lake disturbances.

4. Trails. Any trail improvements in the Dredge Lakes area should be constrained by the needs of bears and other species that depend on the area; it's well documented that trails displace wildlife and by increasing the network of trails and enabling more people into the area, we reduce the area's ability to support species other than ours. If any trails are paved, please select materials that are not toxic to plants and the aquatic environment (no asphalt). I support alternatives that place any new trails inland, and is most protective of the shoreline and other wildlife habitats.

5. Visitor capacity. All action alternatives are still premised on endless and unlimited growth in Juneau's tourism. This plan does not contemplate a possibility that Juneau would come to its senses and decide to limit or cap the number of cruise ships to protect our community. I believe Juneau has already exceeded the limit for healthy cruise ship tourism. Planning for and building infrastructure to enable endless tourism growth is neither just or sustainable for the people and animals who call MGRA or the broader Juneau area home. Rather than planning for ever-increasing and unlimited volume of visitors, I urge the Forest Service to do its part in managing the area for all of MGRA's users and values, focusing on protecting the integrity of MGRA.

6. Overall comments. Most the project components are still geared toward converting the still-natural-ish areas of the MGRA to artificial playground for tourists. The action alternatives still place mass-tourism-industry's interests first and local users' and wildlife's interests last. I see nothing that would identify core wildlife areas and permanently plan to protect the integrity of those areas, including in the face of rapidly advancing climate change. All the action alternatives continue to propose unprecedented adverse changes to the MGRA that would reduce the area's value to wildlife, local people, and non-commercial users. Like with so many other overly loved places around the world, we've allowed visitor numbers to grow to a point at which we threaten the very place, the Mendenhall Lake ecosystem, and the very experiences that people seek from a natural place. This is a sad state and the action alternatives are doing little to nothing to address it. I expected the Forest Service to focus on finding ways to reduce the impacts of people and traffic on the natural values of the MGRA. As I wrote in my draft EIS comments, the focus of the MGRA "improvement" plan should be on improving and sustaining the needs of those who were here first, the first peoples, first animals, and first plants. The focus should be on increasing the Mendenhall area's resilience to combat the effects of climate change. Focus should be on improving quality experiences for everyone, including future generations. Any plan for MGRA should be based on the carrying capacity of the Mendenhall Glacier area ecosystem. While the MGRA plans might look nice on paper, we can't forget that in practice they will amount to construction activities, destruction of natural habitats, alteration of sound, light, and smell landscapes, impediments to bear and other wildlife movement, loss of connection, loss of resilience, business as usual. Can't we envision something beyond cars and busses and boats? Can't we envision something less than growth? Something that lessens anthropogenic impacts rather than the other way around? Where are the alternatives that chart a different future for us?

Thank you for considering my comments.

Iris Korhonen-Penn