

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/20/2023 9:17:28 PM

First name: Salmon

Last name: Thompson

Organization: yoknes

Title:

Comments: I want to start by saying that I appreciate more alternatives being brought forth for the Mendenhall Glacier Project even if I do not agree with all the ideas. I like the idea of improvements to the West Glacier Trail system, it is a highly used area, and having a designated path to get to the face of the glacier instead of the current system where the trail splits and people can take two different directions is smart. It also seems like a good area to add in a trail for skiers as it does not impose too greatly on an area that is already being used, and it would presumably mainly just parallel the trail already over there. Having a second trail in the West Glacier area for skiing seems like a much better idea than ruining a pristine lake shore to create a ski trail over there. It is a much better and seems to be a much more economical option (than the lake shore trail) for an additional ski trail.

Adding public use cabins and a backpacker area to the West Glacier campground also seems like a good idea. Locals can get good use out of the cabins in the off season, and having a nice spot for people to be able to throw up a tent is a plus. I would hope that the changes to the campground would not involve additional parking inside the campground, as the campground is closed during the winter and the parking could not be used then, which is when it seems to be the busiest in terms of parking there. Additional parking outside the campground from expanding the parking lot across from Skaters' Cabin, or expanding the Tolch trailhead parking lot would be useful though.

Moving over to the East side of the project, I think the additional parking lots for the Dredge Lakes trailhead, Powerline trailhead, and Crystal Lakes trailhead are a good idea. It will be nice for people to not have to park on the side of the road, and have a place where they can safely get in and out of their vehicles to access the trails. I would hope that these parking lots would stay plowed in the winter, as those trails are still used then and would give people a nice point to start from and a safer place than parking on the side of the road in the winter.

I am really disappointed to see more alternatives for the boats on the lake. Boats on the lake moving people back and forth to the glacier is a horrible idea. Yes the area is hard to get to, that is not a reason to add boats and ruin the whole lake. This is a rugged and mountainous area, that is what makes it so picturesque and beautiful. Sometimes people can not always get to where they want to, that is okay. I get that "people want to touch the ice," but there are still ways for people to touch the ice if they really want to, without creating an ugly mess at a beautiful area. There are lots of important nesting sites over near the glacier face, bringing a thousand plus people over there daily means that some people are going to wander and disturb/ruin these nesting sites. It would also create a lot of trash strewn around that area, even if there were trash cans put over there. I have been to Angkor Wat, summit of Kilimanjaro, Mayan temples, the Acropolis and other monumental sites, and I have found where there are a lot of people, there is always trash. It has also been brought up that people have limited time to spend at the glacier recreation area, which means that people would not have time to take a boat ride across the lake, explore, and then take a boat ride back. I asked a Ranger about this, and it was mentioned that bus schedules would have to change. This just means even more congestion at the site, as people will be there for longer amounts of time. There was no mention if the buses could even accommodate this request. The environmental impact, and the impact to the gorgeous vistas of the Glacier area would be far too great to ever make it worth it to have boats running tourists across all day every day just so they can get a bit closer to the ice. As the ice continues to recede, what would happen when it gets to the point where even if tourists had more time at the recreation area, it is still not even enough to hike to the glacier after they take a boat to the other side? It seems a lot of money and time will have been wasted, in something that would just be temporary.

I think Alternative 1 should be used for the lake shore trail and dredge lakes area. There is no need for a trail along the lake shore through that area, or inland there. One of the comments by rangers I have heard a few times is that tourists do not have a lot of extra time at the glacier recreation area. So why would we build a trail

that takes people to where they can no longer see the face of the glacier? Tourists will not want to use a trail that they cannot see the glacier face from. As a local I would have no interest in using this path for walking, or for skiing in the winter when it is covered in snow. This seems like a large waste of money that is just for pandering to some people at the ski club. Also, do people really think that tourists will walk from the visitor center to skater's cabin? Tourists do not have time to walk that far, so why would we waste even more money building a bridge over the river there? Why does it seem that the Forest Service places no value in leaving an area natural simply for wildlife to use? The Dredge Lakes area already has quite a bit of human activity, there should be an area left alone for the wildlife that is not just surrounded by trails in a pseudo-fence. This trail would wrap around that whole side of the lake, what about the bears and animals that live in that area? With the new alternatives there is talk of moving the trail in some spots away from the lake shore to give room to wildlife; you are still creating a large man made line that wraps very close to the whole lake shore, and it does not give that much room to the wildlife. Wildlife need room to roam. Having only tiny designated areas for wildlife to use is not acceptable, we should be trying to stay out of their way as much as possible, not trying to shoehorn them into small little areas. They were here first and deserve respect and their own space, we already take up so much of their habitat as it is. This lake shore trail would cramp bears even more and lead to more contentious bear/human encounters. There are a lot of bears living in that dredge lakes area. I have walked the moraine ecology and dredge lakes trails quite often over the last 8 years, and I am constantly seeing bears there. We need to make sure they still have areas over there to get away from people. This also applies to the other trails in the dredge lake areas; there has been talk about making some of the footpaths back there into official trails. People created these footpaths because they wanted to get away from the tourists and people that are already on the "official" trails. If we make the footpaths into official trails, then people will just create more footpaths again. All this would further impact the animals that live over there. And make the area a huge mess of trails everywhere. Lots of local people walk their dogs through this area. It would be nice if this area could stay relatively untouched and left as an area that was predominantly used by locals and wildlife. The impact from opening these trails up through advertising and possible tours would be a large increase over the current impact created from the use of these trails by locals. The trails should be kept the way they are over there, and no more trails added. Please do not add what would basically be a road on the lake shore or through that area. Alaska is beautiful because it is rugged and full of nature. Let's embrace that and let areas stay that way, and not just pave big trails through beautiful areas that are not needed whatsoever. This to me is the worst idea of all the planned projects.

As far as the visitor center area and expanded parking goes, I think the welcome and visitor centers should stay at the front of the complex. This will let everything be in one place, which will be simpler for tourists and save them some time. People want to see the area, not be spending time shuttling back and forth between parking lots. Having a drop off area up front, for both buses and cars, with expanded car parking behind that seems like the best idea. The drop off area would still be used in the winter, and the expanded parking could help take up some of the cars that would normally park on the side of the road in the winter. The bus lot should stay as a bus lot, with possibly some dedicated parking spots for people who want to access the Moraine Ecology trail area from the trailhead that starts in the parking lot. Having a place for buses to be nearby, but without a lot of people walking all over is a smart plan. We all know that tourists do some really silly things sometimes, and not mixing them into where the buses park is a good idea. Also, the bridge to keep people away from bear encounters near the photoloop trail is an idea that I like, keeping wildlife and people separate without impinging on the wildlife should always be an extremely high goal.

With the possible changes to the boardwalks and trails around the bear viewing areas, I would hope that whatever is chosen has the least impact on the fish and animals. There is no reason to put even more stress on the wildlife. ZigZag pond should remain as is, and not get filled in. There should be no boat dock at the face of steep creek, and boardwalks should be at the sides of areas, not crossing over ponds.

I get that the ideas for changing how steep creek goes under the road seem like a good idea. But I have seen no plans for how these adaptations can be done in such a short amount of time between the fish leaving the creek in the spring and when the salmon come back in the summer. How is this construction supposed to take

place this fast? Either with a bridge or an arched culvert? This construction will need to happen when there are people visiting the area, which will slow down construction, bad weather could slow it. How can we guarantee that this will not significantly impact the fish in the area? I have asked this and just been told it is something that management will figure out. Deciding to proceed with a plan before knowing how you are going to actually implement it is a recipe for disaster. Please come up with a reasonable way of completing this construction without impacting the fish runs and present it to people then. Do not just say we will figure it out later, when it will be too late for people to object.

Overall I think the project has some good ideas, but also some very poor ones. I think that more planning and information gathering needs to be done by the Forest Service to inform the public how some of these projects will be made feasible. I hope that there will be more open houses to inform the public how the plans are going and what stage the planning is in, along with more comment periods for people to let their input be heard. If there is any part of the project that I hope does happen it would be improvements to the West Glacier Trail system, and the part of the project that I most hope does not take place is the lake shore trail.