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Title:

Comments: My husband and I have lived in Juneau for more than 10 years and utilize the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area and Dredge Lakes area on a regular basis throughout all seasons. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on proposed changes to these areas as we care very much about them. I am glad to see more alternatives presented and another round of commenting brought forth. I will be reiterating some of my same comments from the previous comment period, as my thoughts have not changed much in light of the newly proposed Alternatives 5, 6, & 7. I will aim to address any changes brought forth by the new alternatives as well.

Parking and Access Expansion:

I like the idea of expanding parking and creating separate spaces for commercial vs. private vehicles. I think this makes a lot of sense, and would make things more streamlined and straightforward for everyone involved. Of the options proposed, I originally preferred the parking changes proposed in Alternative 4 because I don't want to see disturbance to ZigZag Pond. Though when looking over the comparison chart for the various alternatives (including the latest alternatives 5, 6, & 7), it appears that every alternative (save for the "do nothing" alternative) fills in some portion of ZigZag pond; it's just a matter of how much. Is there truly no way to upgrade parking that would leave ZigZag pond untouched? I would like to see an alternative which finds a solution to this as I know many people care about ZigZag pond. I know there are fish inhabiting ZigZag Pond and it seems unnecessary to create a bridge over or completely (or even partially) pave over ZigZag Pond if there's another way to achieve the same goal without doing so. I would like the commercial bus staging area to continue with its current use. In regards to how the new parking upgrades are designed, I would like to see that private vehicles also be allowed to utilize the commercial vehicle turnaround spot for drop-offs. I think that would be an important allowance, especially for persons with mobility issues, since the private lot would then be further away from the new Welcome Center. So in that case, private vehicles would be allowed to "drive-thru" the commercial vehicle area, and drop-off in front of the Welcome Center, then go park in the private vehicle lot. I also think locals should have parking privileges in the commercial lot during winter months when there are no tour buses going there/utilizing the area. So in essence, the commercial lot would still be open for local use in the "off" season (non-tourist season).

Welcome Center Complex:

Although I'm not a huge fan of replacing the current Pavilion, I can understand the appeal of adding a Welcome Center to the area, and I feel like the proposed location of the Welcome Center at the Pavilion site makes the most sense. I can't really imagine where else a new Welcome Center would go and be as easily accessible or useful. And while we love the current Pavilion there, I can definitely see the appeal of having an indoor viewing space, similar to the current Visitor Center, but allowing for more people to spread out (between the Visitor Center and new Welcome Center). However, will this proposed new Welcome Center be open to locals in the wintertime? As a local who frequently visits the Glacier Rec Area in the winter, it would be great to have the Welcome Center open in the winter as a warming area. I would be much more supportive of the new Welcome Center plan overall if it will be available for local use in the wintertime. As for the new alternatives (5, 6, & 7), I would prefer the proposed observation deck over Kettle Pond (vs. the proposed curved elevated walkway). I believe the curved elevated walkway would get congested with people trying to get an unobstructed view of the glacier, which would in turn obstruct others' view from the plaza area. I am not sure that the plaza area needs terraced seating, as is proposed in one of the new alternatives, since many people would not use this when it's wet and rainy, which we know is Juneau's weather most of the time. I do not think the new Welcome Center should be placed in the bus staging lot. This seems like a complete waste. Tourists already have limited time to spend at the Glacier Recreation Area. I can't imagine they would want to spend any portion of their limited time in a building in a parking lot. Besides, do we really want to mix large groups of people with commercial vehicles?

This to me sounds like it will get congested and complicated quickly, not to mention possible safety concerns. This is not a smart plan. The new Welcome Center should not be located in the bus staging lot. I have concerns about the proposed café inside the new Welcome Center as well. One of the Forest Service representatives during one of the public webinars mentioned that there's often confusion surrounding exactly where you can and cannot eat within the Recreation Area, and that the café inside the new Welcome Center would provide a more obvious space for people to get food and sit and eat said food. I can get behind this. However, how will you keep people from taking the food and drinks To-Go? Because I can very easily envision people who have limited time at the Recreation Area wanting to go in, get a snack or a coffee or whatever, and take it with them on the trail out to Nugget Falls. Since I know you don't want food and drinks being consumed on that trail, I think this is a very important consideration in your proposed plan. It will be especially difficult to "police" people's food and drink consumption outside if they choose not to eat inside the Welcome Center. I believe this may already be an issue as it is, and now you'll be possibly adding to the issue by selling food and drinks on site, which people will undoubtedly try to consume on the trails. Unless you have a solid strategy plan in place for mitigating this issue, I do not think the café is a good idea. Someone during the most recent webinar asked about possible odors emanating from said café, which would in all likelihood be enticing to bears in the area. I understand the Forest Service currently takes precautions to mitigate food around bears, including how they store their trash, etc. But I can't imagine much could be done to curb odors which may come from food cooking within the new Welcome Center. What will be your plan to address this issue if/when it comes up? If you do go through with the café, will it be open and operated in the wintertime? Because again, I think if you're going to make such massive changes to this area and tear down the Pavilion, I really think you should keep the locals in mind and ensure that they can get use out of these things all year round, not JUST during the tourist season.

Visitor Center Improvements:

I am in support of the Visitor Center Improvements. I think especially if you're going to build a new Welcome Center, it makes sense to change the use of the existing Visitor Center accordingly. I'd also like to see improvements made to the path(s) leading to the Visitor Center. It's a good plan.

Glacier Spur Road Trailheads:

I am in support of the Glacier Spur Road Trailheads. I think these parking areas should remain small; 20-car capacity seems too much in my opinion, but I think 10-12 would be perfect. These areas are primarily utilized by locals, all year round, and so with this change, I'd like to see that these parking areas would be maintained in the wintertime (i.e., they would be plowed of snow so they could continue being used throughout winter). Maintaining them in the winter will be safer for everyone (not only those using the trails). If they're not plowed, then people will just continue to park along the side of the road in the wintertime instead, which feels like it would defeat the purpose of having parking lots there. If we're already adding parking to trailheads, it might be nice to also add a few designated spots inside the commercial bus staging lot which would be specifically for the Moraine Ecology trailhead there.

Lakeshore Trail and Dredge Lakes Multi-Use Trails:

I am vehemently opposed to the proposed Lakeshore Trail and changes to the Dredge Lakes Multi-Use Trails. I would choose Alternative 1, the No Action plan for these two sections. I'm not sure why the Dredge Lakes Area got brought into the proposed changes to the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, but I feel exceptionally strongly that the Dredge Lakes area, including the Lakeshore area, should be left alone. We walk the Dredge Lakes main trails and back trails (so both the formalized and not formalized trails) as well as the Lakeshore multiple times a week throughout the entire year. Please leave this area for locals to enjoy and escape the crowds of the Glacier Recreation Area. This is an area that is extremely heavily used by bears. If you formalize the multi-use trails, more people will use them and more bears will be displaced. Same with the lakeshore trail. If you construct some giant trail along the lakeshore, whether it's fully along the lakeshore, only partially along the lakeshore and partially in the woods, or fully set back from the lakeshore in the woods, the bears' habitat and territory in this area will be squeezed. Especially if you create a full outer loop trail around the entire area, which will completely box them in. I especially do not wish to see a bridge from the Lakeshore over to the campground

area. What plans are in place to mitigate human-bear conflict on the proposed bridge from the lakeshore to the campground? I'm sure it is inevitable that bears will utilize that bridge as well. Again, these trails WILL bring more people, which I understand is maybe your hope or the point of these particular proposed changes, however, this will also increase human-bear conflict to a potentially significant degree. I don't think it's fair to the bears for them to be displaced in this manner. These animals were here long before us and we already encroach on their territory enough as it is. We should be preserving habitat for them to minimize conflicts and allow the wildlife to continue to thrive in these areas. We walk our dogs in these areas and it could not be confirmed during the public open houses nor during the public webinars whether dog use would be restricted on these trails. I believe dog use WILL ultimately be restricted if these proposed changes were to come to fruition, and as a long-time local utilizing this area regularly throughout the entire year, I would very much appreciate mine (and others) use of these trails to not change simply because you want to accommodate tourists.

It is my understanding that part of the reason the lakeshore trail is proposed as being so large is at the request of the Nordic Ski Club who wishes to expand their ski trails and has offered to groom these trails in the wintertime. However, again, I do not think it would be fair to displace the bears with such a change, especially considering many people already utilize the Dredge Lakes area for skiing, regardless of the fact that it is not kept groomed. Plus, there are several groomed ski trails in the area already, AND even more ski trails being proposed at the West side with the latest alternatives. When will enough be enough where ski trails are concerned? How long would construction of the lakeshore trail and bridge even take? Years, at best, in all likelihood. We all know construction projects are wrought with delays. What impact would this length and amount of construction along the lakeshore cause? And how long would it take wildlife to recover and move back into the area after such construction? Where will the wildlife go in the meantime, when construction is taking place? Have any of these questions been considered or examined? Add in the fact that you can really only see the glacier face from a small section of the lakeshore, and if part of the reasoning behind this proposed lakeshore trail is for tourists to spread out along the recreation area, let's bear in mind that tourists: 1. aren't going to have enough time to be utilizing such a long trail in the first place, and 2. they're not likely going to want to venture far past where you can view the glacier. Further, as the glacier continues to recede, you'll see less and less of it from the lakeshore regardless. As a local, this type of excessively large, ugly, paved, city-like lakeshore path would deter me from wanting to utilize this area, an area that I currently use on a frequent basis year-round. This path would be such an eyesore to an otherwise beautiful and incredibly special area. It should not be our goal to industrialize everything. We should strive to leave areas untouched. That is what people love most about Alaska. Let us find value in that.

I understand why some people, including locals, may wish to have some of those Dredge Lakes back trails formalized and better maintained; however, the main reason I utilize those trails is BECAUSE they are not maintained. This means there are far fewer people on these trails as a result and the people who really want to get out in nature and enjoy the quiet peacefulness and beauty of the forest will do so regardless. This is why we love those trails. They are quiet and allow us a reprieve from the crowds of other trails. If you were to formalize these trails, drawing more people to them, in all likelihood there would be other foot paths created as a result. There are plenty of formalized trails people could be choosing, but people are clearly utilizing these non-formalized trails as they are for a reason. If you make all the other changes proposed, please leave the Dredge Lakes and Lakeshore areas alone and leave them as they currently are.

Public Use Cabins:

I am in support of the Public Use Cabins at the campground. I think this will enhance the area for locals and tourists alike. Any additional parking for this area should remain outside the campground to also accommodate local winter use, which is when the campground is closed to vehicles and also when parking in that area tends to be fullest, with cars parking all alongside the street as there is not enough parking spaces available during that time. I would also hope this additional parking would be maintained (plowed) in winter of course. I like the latest proposal of new footpaths for the newly proposed cabins as well. It makes sense to have separate walking trails in the campground for people to get to and from the cabins in winter, so as not to disturb the groomed ski paths there.

Photo Point Loop & Nugget Falls Trail Expansion:

I'm not a big fan of the Nugget Falls trail expansion plan, though I see the value in creating a loop trail rather than an out-and-back trail, especially during tourist season. My concern however is the nesting terns in the area along the shore which is where part of the new loop would be. This is already an issue as it is. If you add a trail along the shore there, it will only increase issues and conflict with the nesting terns as the amount of people using this area will exponentially increase. Current preventative measures in place for this issue do not seem adequate as it stands now. Unless you have a solid strategy plan in place to address such an increase in this issue, I cannot support this proposed change. As for the latest changes proposed for the Photo Point Loop, I think it makes more sense to construct the extension to the existing photo point trail around the west edge of the peninsula, rather than through the middle of the peninsula, and I would prefer to not have access from Nugget Falls trail decommissioned for this.

Steep Creek Habitat Restoration & Enhancement:

I am in support of the proposed Habitat Restoration & Enhancement at Steep Creek. However, I've brought up many times at public houses, and in my previous formal comments, that the window for implementing these restorations and enhancements is VERY short as far as when the weather is good enough to allow construction starting to the time the fish are coming up the stream. I have significant concerns that the fish may be disturbed in this process due to your short construction window. It feels as though the Forest Service thinks they can just figure that out when the time comes, but as stated earlier, we all know construction projects are wrought with delays. How will we ensure those delays or other unforeseen circumstances are not to the detriment of the fish we are trying to enhance this area for in the first place? I would like to see a more formal strategy plan in place for making this happen in a feasible manner without negatively impacting the fish.

Steep Creek Trail Expansion:

I am in support of the Steep Creek Trail Expansion. My preference would be that which is proposed in Alternative 4, because it seems to have the least impact environmentally and on wildlife in the area, particularly the bears. I would prefer the number of fish viewing overlooks to remain small, as in Alternative 4. I like the idea of a wildlife underpass, but do not think this underpass should be combined with pedestrian crossing. I think pedestrian crossing on or above the road would make more sense. Again, I have concerns with construction of such things negatively impacting the fish in Steep Creek, as I mentioned previously, and I think those possible issues need to be very heavily considered before moving forward with any plans.

Boat Docks & Related Support Facilities:

I am extremely disappointed to see boats continue to be included in the latest alternatives. Especially considering how in the most recent webinar, it was stated that roughly 5% or less of commenters during the previous comment period were in support of boats. So if that few are in support of boats on the lake, why is the Forest Service continuing to push this option in the latest alternatives? It seems clear to me that the majority do not wish for boats on the lake, and yet variations of this plan are still being pushed regardless. I am strongly opposed to the proposed Boat Docks and Related Support Facilities. I have multiple concerns with this plan. I think there are safety concerns first and foremost: conflicts between these commercial boats and recreational lake users (such as kayakers, paddleboarders, etc.) and the current commercial kayak tours. Then, while many Forest Service employees seem to believe that these boats would be for local use as well, there can be absolutely no guarantee of that based on the fact that there is currently no management plan in place. Will the Forest Service require whoever operates the boats to set aside a certain number of boat ride tickets to locals only? How will that be enforced? And even if you could guarantee that portion of it, there's no guarantee that the company operating the boats would charge a price conducive to local use. Furthermore, if you install a boat dock over at the West Glacier parking area, other people are going to be using that whether you like it or not. Not to mention the amount of construction and wildlife displacement that would need to take place if you went forward with the plan for one of the docks along the lakeshore. I do not think this proposed change is in the best interest of anyone truly. Adding boats hosting a bunch of people on the lake will also absolutely ruin people's viewing of the glacier from afar (whether that's at the Visitor Center, the new Welcome Center, or the Photo Viewpoint, or Nugget

Falls). Not only that, but not everyone will get a chance to take the boats. I know one of the reasonings behind the boat tours that was brought up is because not everyone has time to hike to the glacier via the West Glacier Trail nor does everyone have money to take a helicopter tour up on the icefield. Well with your limited capacity boat tours, they will not be able to accommodate everyone who wants that experience, and as it stands right now, cruise ship tourists do not have enough time allotted at the Glacier Rec Area to make the trip by boat to the glacier and back. It should also be considered that at some point the glacier will have receded far enough that regardless of whether or not tourists have increased time at the glacier, there will still come a time where they simply can't have enough time to make this kind of trip possible. It feels hard to justify investing such a large amount of time, effort, and money into something that will become essentially obsolete in the future anyways.

Remote Glacier Visitor Area:

As I am strongly opposed to the above section regarding the boats, I am also strongly opposed to the proposed Remote Glacier Visitor Area. Yes, the glacier is receding and it's upsetting, and people want to still be able to see or get close to the glacier. However, where else in the world, what other National Park or other similar type of recreational area goes to such great lengths and costs to build structures around an ever-changing environment? Where else do you not have to hike to get to see something spectacular? Not every cool place in the world is going to be easy to access, and maybe they shouldn't be if we want to preserve these areas as best as possible. If you bring people up near the glacier as this proposed change would do, you are inevitably inviting a huge amount of litter to the area. We have climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro and the amount of trash literally everywhere along the mountain was absolutely disgusting. There ARE places to put your trash, OR you should really just carry it out yourself, but people will simply not always do this. There will be litter, whether intentionally or unintentionally. How do you plan to maintain adequate cleanup of that area? Furthermore, how do you plan to adequately staff all these additional areas (the Welcome Center and café, the remote Glacier Visitor Area, etc.)? I am concerned for the environmental impact that bringing so many people out near the glacier will have on the area. Also, again, here is another change that will NOT benefit locals in any way, shape, or form. The pods won't be left there over the winter for people to use as a warming shelter when they hike out to the ice caves. You're proposing an accessible trail in this area, which will in all likelihood lead to use that is restricted to ONLY those trails because of safety and liability concerns (this is not something locals want - we want to be able to explore the area freely as we always have). Locals care about the glacier on a different level. We live here and value the glacier as part of our local culture. We respect the area and take care of it. I'm sorry, but I simply can't envision tourists doing the same. Please do not add a remote visitor area at the glacier. Let's preserve what we still have left of the glacier, and keep that area wild and pristine, not packed full of tourists.

West Glacier Unit Trails:

I am in support of the proposed improvements to the West Glacier Unit Trails. I think these changes will greatly benefit locals and tourists alike, and will make the hiking area safer for everyone overall. However, here again I have concerns about the birds in the area, particularly on the spur trail. I would hope that the improvements to that trail would mean a more clear path to the glacier that would steer people away from the nesting birds as much as possible. As for adding ski trails to the area, I think this is a better location to do that than the lakeshore. I think it makes more sense economically too, as these trails wouldn't be paved or raised like the lakeshore trail is proposed to be.

To conclude my comments, I'd like to say that I think the Forest Service has indeed put in a lot of time and effort in designing these proposed projects, and for the most part seem to be taking comments into serious consideration, which is much appreciated. My hope is that the Forest Service will really take a hard look at the statistics of support and opposition for each of these proposed changes when making their final decisions. I am most in support of and think the most needed changes are for the parking expansion at the Glacier Recreation Area and Glacier Spur Road trailheads, additions at the Mendenhall campground, and West Glacier trails improvements. I am most in opposition of adding boats on the lake, formalizing the Dredge Lakes trails, and creating the lakeshore trail/bridge to Skater's cabin. My greatest hope would be for the Dredge Lakes area, including the lakeshore to remain untouched by this project. Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.