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First name: Jacole

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Mr Botello,

I am writing this letter today on behalf of the generations of Montanans who cherish and appreciate the true value of our public land at Holland Lake. Not only is this area rich in Indigenous history, it is a space where many go to find peace and solitude while connecting with nature. In order to continue to provide the public with quality experiences on our own public land, we need to be aware of what the new owners of the Lodge could potentially seek to do. It is your duty to oversee this Special Use Permit and the details and responsibilities it encompasses.

Unfortunately, you have yet to provide enough information to the public for us to even understand what these new buyers intend to do and the changes they intend to make. We need you to have them define what they mean by "Providing a range of recreation opportunities in forest settings consistent with visitor expectations." This language is much too vague and leaves many things up for interpretation that should be clearly explained in the Operating Plan and approved by the SUP.

It seems inappropriate to use a categorical exclusion to provide them with a 20 year special use permit while avoiding all of the necessary procedures that should be required on your part (such as an EIS or an EA) for this process to accurately follow Forest Service Policy. With all of the valid controversy surrounding the first attempt to expand Holland Lake Lodge, I feel it is your duty to pay very close attention to the scope of changes to our public land at the Lodge and the connected actions that could happen with this plan's extreme lack of details. This, combined with the permit holder's proven inability to follow clear Forest Service guidelines and your agency's history of not enforcing these guidelines, is a recipe for disaster. A categorical exclusion is not appropriate in this situation.

With all of the major concerns surrounding the current state of Holland Lake Lodge, such as the wastewater treatment system and potential expansion or reconstruction (as mentioned in the operating plan), it is necessary for you to carefully and thoughtfully approve the activities allowed to be monitored on this piece of public land. Especially since so much has been overlooked and allowed (by default) in the past. The cumulative impacts of these changes (which are inevitable with this type of open-ended plan) need to be acknowledged and addressed.

As someone who enjoys camping in the Bay Loop and hiking to the waterfall with my young children, I feel a strong responsibility to make sure my kids and grandkids are able to enjoy the same solitude and true Montana experience we have been able to. This peace has been especially appreciated since the lodge scaled back operations a few years ago. I cringe when thinking of what Holland Lake Lodge would be like right now had the public not found out about the POWDR/ FNF collusion and fought back. Kurt Steele allowed corruption to infiltrate his work and his choices caused staff members to say and do things they likely did not ethically agree with. Flathead National Forest should be ashamed of the way their own staff worked alongside developers to create and push a plan that was completely against the best interest of the community, the land, the species, and the general public. I'm urging you to do it right this time. Work for the public and do what's best for the Forest, not the developer/buyer/permit holder.

With today's news of Ranger Dowling's relocation, I am concerned that there is simply not enough local oversight to move forward with any changes at Holland Lake Lodge until his replacement is thoroughly trained and brought up to speed with everything that has transpired over the past 3 years. Time should be spent addressing the many deficiencies and non-compliance issues with the current permit before passing all of these problems on to the new owner. Just because Holland Lake Lodge has sold does not mean they should not have to clean up the messes they are responsible for (both literally and figuratively) and get in compliance with the terms of their SUP.

The list of issues that should first be addressed is lengthy and time consuming. But if you couldn't enforce the permit before, and you're still not enforcing it now- even with intense public pressure- then how can the public ever trust that you will enforce it in the future? Make it right first. Then move on to the next. When the current facilities under permit were sold, there was no guarantee the new owner would be allowed to operate under the terms and conditions of the original permit. Once the issue is resolved through NEPA and special use regulations, the new owner should then be allowed to operate the facilities- not before. Especially since the current facilities are not in safe operating condition and are not compliant with state water quality regulations.

Mr. Jacobsen has stated publicly that the current Lodge is not economically viable and he will need to expand the Lodge in order to double revenue. We should not have to adapt to changes he needs to make in order to turn a profit. He purchased something for more money than it is worth and now the public is expected to be okay with the future potential expansions he would need in order to make the profit he wants to make? How is that in the "best interest of the public?"

The Flathead National Forest should withhold any proposal to authorize a special use permit for Holland Lake Lodge until it has in place a reliable, functioning wastewater treatment system that will prevent potential contamination of area wells and protect the pristine water quality of Holland Lake and Creek.

In addition, I feel it is your duty to fully evaluate and disclose to the public the combined effects of the proposed authorization of a 20-year special use permit, reconstruction of the wastewater system, and potential expansion of the Lodge and restaurant.

Mr Botello, when I met you at the Big Fork office with our Save Holland Lake group when you first took over, you seemed genuinely interested in listening to our concerns and fixing the damage done by Kurt Steele. I believed you when you said that things will be handled differently this time, so I was disappointed by the lack of transparency with this current public comment period. The process has been rushed, the necessary information has not been provided, and you're continuing to overlook many valid concerns that have been directly brought to your attention. I remain hopeful that you will keep your word and do right by Holland Lake, not just the Lodge and owners/buyers.

I encourage you to listen to the members of the public who grasp the full picture of this ordeal. Please pay close attention to the letters from David Roberts, Jim Morrison, Keith Hammer, Mark Carpenter, etc. It may be easier to stay in the dark about certain facts, but the more you are willing to listen to, the easier it will be for you to appropriately navigate this very important situation. All we want is what is best for Holland Lake. And we hope that you do too.

Thank you for your time.