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Organization:

Title:

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Thank you for giving the opportunity for public comments. I recognize that this is a special right of being a citizen of the United States and participation in this process is essential for our democracy.

I would like to address a few items pertaining to the Mission Ridge Ski and Board Resort expansion proposal.

Wildlife Habitat & Water: As a bow hunter and wildlife photographer, I am concerned that the expansion will add more pressure on the deer and elk that use Mission Ridge/Wenatchee Mountain/Stemilt Basin. There will be the direct displacement coming from the added homes, roads, etc. and then the displacement from the increased year-round human recreation in the area. I've attached two studies that show how even non-motorized recreation can have a deleterious impact on elk. I've observed deer and elk using the high country of these parcels year-round. In the summer, the entire high country of Mission Ridge, including the current ski area and proposed expansion, are used by cow elk for calving during the late spring-summer. Surprisingly I've even found deer and elk above the 5,000-foot elevation line, in the middle of winter (observed over multiple seasons). Mostly these are bachelor groups of bull elk and mule deer that stay high till the snow gets chest-deep for them. Where will they go when their core area turns into condos? Aside from our larger wildlife that will be affected, I am also concerned for the smaller species such as the Pacific tree frog, that use the creeks, springs, and seasonal melt ponds for breeding in the project area. Unlike the deer and elk who will be displaced, the smaller creatures cannot migrate away from disturbance. This project will not make these headwater in the area more abundant, cleaner, or colder which is what many species need.

Stemilt Basin Increased Use:

We can't ignore that some of the lands adjacent to this project will have more human use in the coming years. The animals that use this high country habitat to seek shelter and for the cool summer temps on this steep, north-facing, aspect will have even fewer options if this expansion continues.

Fire Danger/Mitigation: As a resident of Squilchuck Road for five years, I lived through the anticipation, every summer, of evacuation due to forest fire concerns in late summer. Adding hundreds of new homes and the associated traffic will only add to the congestion of egress during a fire emergency not to mention stress the community resources needed to protect other homes and structures in the area. Additional development at the top of a mountain, with one egress, seems unwise.

Recreation: A project like this does represent or add value to the diverse recreation community of the Wenatchee Valley, it caters to one form of recreation: ticket-buying skiers and Nordic users. As a local white, middle-classed man who cannot afford the lift prices/season pass offerings of the ski area, I imagine that if this form of recreation is cost-prohibitive to me than how about for our low-income families? By choosing this one form of recreation, we would be compromising the area for other low/no costs forms of recreation. A project like this will not grow the diversity of user groups on our public lands, serving instead the well-to-do (often white folks) who have many more recreation options in the region from Steven's Pass, to Echo Ridge, to Leavenworth ski trails and more.

Community Needs and Values: Our community does need more housing, but affordable housing closer to where people work, not condos. Our community could use more protected recreation areas, but low cost, low barriers to entry (not requiring ski equipment, etc.).

Access/Special Use Permit: In the years that I have hiked, run, ski toured, and hunted around Mission Ridge I have been denied access by Mission Ridge staff to the main access road that cuts through the property numerous times. I was always given different reasons for why I can't be up there, "on the resort property." In the winter the public access restriction is much worse and only recently addressed with having a strict uphill ski policy that effectively states: we don't want you recreating here. It seems that the decades of stewarding this public land under their special use permit, the resort has forgotten that the land they have built their business on is still public land... Aside from the unique and temporary circumstances of forest fires, avalanche control, etc., restricting the public in most circumstances, as the resort has been doing, is at odds with the special use permit they are operating under (please see section F. under the special use permit). While these past practices are not within the scope of this project expansion comments, they do provide a background on the management practices of the resort which seeks to control more public lands adjacent to the special use permit area. How can we be assured that resort will respect the public's right to access these public lands?

The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The negatives of this expansion do not outweigh the benefits in serving the public's current or future needs. This expansion project, on public lands, will not add to the health or diversity of this landscape. It appears to serve the short-term economic "wants" of the Mission Ridge Ski and Board Resort at the expense to water quality, diverse recreation, and wildlife down the road. I am asking that you refuse this project as it is not consistent with the goals of your agency.