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Title:

Comments: I am entering my opinion-editorial (below these comments) as a comment to the proposed expansion of Holland Lake Lodge.

I oppose this project and expansion because it is not in the public interest, was proposed with virtually no public knowledge and input (a secretive process between the current lodge owner, the big ski company POWDR and top Forest Service officials), and will irreparably harm the area's values, ecosystem, fish, water, wildlife (threatened and endangered species), and is proposed for our public land -- the land that we Americans own and cherish.

The natural aesthetic values of this area are nearly incomparable and largely undiminished. Those values and their diminishment should be studied and analyzed too.

These natural values -- what some might call spiritual -- hold great value to those who live and work here, for those who visit here, and for those Americans who own this public land on which the lodge sits. Instead of creating a "soulful experience", as the developers assert, such a large development -- an expansion that would at least triple the size of the current development and what some term "industrial tourism" -- would significantly diminish the quiet, natural and spiritual experience that visitors to this public land experience today.

These values are part of our natural and cultural heritage and would be squandered in the development of such a proposal.

This simply is not in the public's interest, and would greatly deteriorate the historic, aesthetic, natural, and spiritual values of this area and should be considered and analyzed, just as you would consider and analyze the biological and scientific impacts. Doing so would result in a determination that this project simply is not in the public interest and should be rejected by the U.S. Forest Service.

Please ensure that all records of this project are made public so owners of this land -- Americans -- can see what decisions have been made and what actions have been taken without our knowledge to date. You should analyze the process of this proposal so that we -- the public -- know how this project came to be with no public input.

Thank you for your consideration, and my opinion-editorial is enclosed for the record below:

Bill Lombardi

In autumn, that mournful season that stifles the lighthearted sounds of summer, larch turn golden and, against the green of Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine, light up the Seeley-Swan Valley like a votive-filled cathedral in Rome.

It's something to behold as you stand in awe of the magic wand of nature, whose invisible hand has crafted an infrastructure that rapacious men and women want to market and sell to a public hungry for natural experiences touted on Instagram and by Hollywood.

In the Seeley-Swan, at Holland Lake, we're seeing a docudrama (like that TV show Yellowstone) play out with the U.S. Forest Service and Utah-based ski giant POWDR proposing to triple the size of the quaint Holland Lake Lodge - on public land - and turn it into a "soulful" experience for visitors to an area that's the crown jewel of the

largely undeveloped valley.

To stand at Holland Falls is to imagine what this landscape once was: wild, undeveloped and nestled in between the Swan Mountains and Bob Marshall Wilderness to the east and the craggy peaks of the Mission Mountains to the west. For those in the valley, it's where the sun crests one mountain range and sets behind another. It includes a wildlife corridor that's largely untrammled by humans and allows visitors to drive between Glacier and Yellowstone national parks.

It's also the land of the Pend d'Oreille, Salish, Kootenai and Blackfeet, who lived here before interlopers swooped in.

But what's occurring here is emblematic of what's happening these days to Montana, where hucksters see a raw diamond like Holland Lake and want to cut facets in it to sell to visitors who crave a real natural experience.

Yes, Montana's being discovered - again. But in this instance the Forest Service's Flathead representatives stumbled out of the gate in announcing this huge development, which needs a special-use permit to operate on public land. The Forest Service lost the public's trust because of an obscure and confusing public scoping process and a failure to be transparent when this project was hatched.

After mulling POWDR's proposal since April, forest officials released project details September 1, quoted the developers, and said they'd accept comments until September 21. Forest officials held a meeting September 8 in Condon, where attendees panned the process.

Thousands of howls of protest from people across the country prompted Forest Supervisor Kurt Steele to extend the comment period to October 7 and schedule a meeting in Seeley Lake on October 4. In a press release, Steele took no responsibility for a "lot of confusion" about his intention to use a "categorical exclusion" (CEs are used for minor projects), condescendingly insinuating, to some, at least, that we don't understand the arcana of Forest Service bureaucracy.

All that Montanans and Americans, who own the public land, are asking is that the Service be transparent so we know the rules and can comment on substantive issues, such as what a large project and extensive human impact will have on the area's character, threatened and endangered species, water and air quality, and traffic.

It's not difficult.

I'll leave substantive issues to experts, who'll point out the flaws with this proposal for a lake that doesn't need a ski developer - an "adventure lifestyle company that inspires every human being with cool experiences in awesome places" - to create a "soulful experience."

If I want such an experience, I'll hike to Holland Falls or walk among the grove of giant larch that soar like cathedral spires near Seeley Lake. Those places are free, open to all and shared by us.

This vanishing Montana - it's worth fighting for.

Bill Lombardi lives in Seeley Lake, MT.

<https://www.facebook.com/savehollandlake>

Photo by Amy Keinath

