A site visit was held on Friday, April 22, 2016. The site visit began at 13:10 at the base steps to the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and ended at 15:25 at Skaters Cabin. A summary of the site visit as well as questions asked and answers provided during the site visit. The following personnel attended:

US Forest Service: Eric Ouderkirk and John Neary

Vendors:
- Atelier, ps – Alex Shkerich
- Jensen Yorba Lott – Wayne Jensen
- MRV Architects – Corey Wall, Paul Voelckers
- Corvus Design, Chris Mertl
- McDowell Group, Dan Lesh, Susan Bell

**13:10 Base of steps to MGVC**
A brief summary of the operations at the MGVC.
- In the summer typically have 6,000 visitors per day and a total of approximately 550,000.
- The focus of the effort we are currently undertaking is outside of the Visitor Center Building.
- There will be a new fee system in place this year, which has increased the number of areas on the site that are now fee based.

Q: **Will Photopoint Trail be part of the fee area?**
Yes, but it is limited to the Photopoint. The Nugget Falls Trail will remain free.

Q: **How is the fee to be collected?**
Will be able to purchase a pass at the Alaska Geographic Bookstore and there will be vending machines placed in the parking lot.

Q: **How is fee to be enforced?**
Eighty percent of summer visitors come with tour operators who provide the pass. The other 20% will be randomly checked by Law Enforcement Officers.

Q: **Will fees cause an adjustment of number of visitors?**
We expect that use will follow the same increase that is being predicted for Juneau.

Q: **Is there a time limit placed on visitors?**
No. Tour operators set the limit for their clients. Some visitors are here only five to ten minutes, long enough to take a photo, or look at the Glacier. Others are here as much as three to four hours. Typically visits are about an hour to two hours.
Q: Does the Forest Service provide any transportation to the site?
No. Visitors either arrive in personal transport or with a permitted outfitter/guide. There are 19 tour operators with permits to bring people to the site.

Q: Does the Forest Service expect transportation to the site to change?
That is one area we are asking the contractor to consider and provide ideas to us.

Q: Mondays are very busy at the site, do you expect to change the carrying capacity?
Carrying capacity has been part of many discussions about the MGVC, and we would expect it to continue to be. There is information about this topic on the website provided at the solicitation.

Q: Has there been pushback on the carrying capacity?
Yes, there were three objections filed on the most recent look at carrying capacity. Those documents, the resolution and the analysis are all on the website.

Q: How does the MGRA plan relate to the MGVC plan?
We expect that the broad based MGRA Conceptual Development will inform the smaller geographic area of the MGVC Unit of the MGRA. The Forest Service is looking to the contractor to challenge us in our thinking about how we provide visitor experience and that may include delivering experiences in the broader MGRA. This will be an important part of listening to the public.

Q: Was increasing the carrying capacity in the update mentioned?
It was brought forward by the tour operators. It was analyzed as a part of the plan, and a decision was made to allow increases on trails and the lake but not in the core area until facilities are upgraded or planning completed.

Q: Does the Forest Service offer tours?
No. There are interpreters stationed throughout the site at various locations where they provide information.

Q: When do you charge a fee?
From May to September. It is five-dollars per day or a seasonal pass that costs $15 and allows the pass holder and one guest access. Interagency passes are also accepted.

13:30 - Pavilion Near Parking Lot.
• Ten percent of the MGVC budget comes from appropriated dollars and 90% comes from fees paid by visitors. With the revised fee structure the Forest Service will be able to put more funds into the site.
• There is a monitor for the fish cam and beaver cam located inside the pavilion.
Q: Can the Forest Service concession the site?
The Forest Service has tools to allow for concessions. The Tongass NF is not that familiar with those, but that is an option.

Q: In the past there have been impacts from beavers, is that still true?
In years past there have been dams that impacted fish passage, but that was removed. We do have lodge still on the site, and it has a camera inside. This is an example of the increasing digital presence on the site.

Q: Are there other habitat issues?
We are concerned about the salmon habitat here. The run at this site is small, but it is seen by many people. So, how to preserve and protect that habitat is important.

Q: What trails are open to commercial use? What kind of demand is there?
In the Visitor Center Unit, the East Glacier Trail, Trail of Time, and Moraine Ecology Trail are most popular. Nugget Falls trail and Powerline Trail are also open. Guides are the only users allowed on the back side of the Steep Creek Trail during heavy bear activity, because they have training for bear encounters and are accountable for their actions.

On the west side of Mendenhall Lake there are permits for West Glacier Trail, Mendenhall Lake surface, Mendenhall Rivers and the ice caves.

During the most recent prospectus bid offering there were three-and a half times as many requests as allowed at the Visitor Center and one-and-one-half times on the west side. All of this results in creating a complex balance between commercial use and use by residents/locals. The site is viewed by users as a national park, as well as, a local park.

Q: Is the Mendenhall Glacier stable?
Not really. Between 1997-2009 it retreated on average 158 feet/year, and in 2005-2009, 173 feet/year. We are seeing both a thinning and narrowing of the glacier.

Q: Is there an answer to when it will be gone?
No, the University Alaska Fairbanks estimates 90 years. We do not have a definitive answer.

Q: How deep is the Mendenhall Lake?
It is 319 feet deep at the deepest point.
13:50 - Steep Creek Viewing Platform
• This platform was built as part of a salmon viewing trail.

Q: Are bears used to this?
Yes, the bears are habituated to the structure and people. The bears are uncomfortable with the people, so sows often use the area as a way to protect their cubs.

Q: Are there accessibility issues?
The site works, but there can be challenges with crowds limiting mobility.

Q: What are the most common complaints?
Most are about the lack of restrooms. There are also complaints about the lack of food. Many visitors are anticipating that like many national parks there will be a cafe.

Q: Does the Visitor Center have a land use designation?
The area (MGRA) can be considered as whole when thinking about land use. There is a 1996 management plan. During a review about four years ago it was examined and brought to light a large number of issues, so the most recent effort was focused on the carry capacity.

Q: Has the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) been involved in the planning effort?
CBJ has a permit to store snow in the bus parking lot. Electrification of a transit system has brought out more discussions between CBJ and the Forest Service. In our current mode of operating, partnerships are of interest.

14:10 - Middle Parking Lot Viewing Platform
• There is an issue with fine sediments in the creek. It is thought that the sediments are coming from the road culvert.

Q: Is replacing the culvert an option in the plan?
It could be. That would require a joint effort between the Forest Service and the State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF).

Q: I recall fish crossing the road at one point; should that be considered?
Adult fish do make it through the culvert but spawning gravels don't make it down. Habitat improvement should be part of what is being considered. It is part of the Forest Service mission.

Q: Are there two spots in the parking lot for buses to pick-up?
Yes, the permit for each operator specifies which one they are to use. Again, there are 19 operators with permits.

Q: How is waste (human) handled?
There are the restrooms in the building and near the kiosk. We are also using porta-potties until we find a longer term solution.
Q: *What services are present?*
There is water, sewer and electric. There were issues with sewer freezing in the winter. There is not a fiber optic line, so the Visitor Center area is data limited.

There are a number of things happening at the Visitor Center to improve our energy use. We have an advanced meter and the site is part of a program called net zero. We are working with a contractor looking at obtaining a LEED certification. We are also looking at what system changes are needed to get to zero impact.

Q: *Is the lift station with CBJ a bottleneck?*
We have found that if we keep the station cleaned out we have not had a problem.

Q: *Does the old hyrdo power plant still exist?*
No. In the late 1960s the turbines were removed.

Q: *What type of interpretation do you provide?*
We provide some on natural history, but not as much on cultural history. This is a relatively new site, so that could be an option in the future.

Q: *Do you have a youth education program?*
Yes, some. We did have an employee that outreached to schools, but that program ended. Currently, we are in a partnership with Discovery Southeast and looking at expanding it. Getting youth playing out here will increase the sense of local ownership.

14:30 Bus Parking Lot
- Traffic speed can be an issue here. In the summer rubber speed bumps are installed to reduce vehicle speed and it seems to help.
- There was an intelligent traffic system installed, however there were issues with operations and it has been removed.

Q: *Are passengers let off here (bus parking lot)?*
Most are let off at the Visitor Center, but Cycle Alaska uses the bus parking lot (they have 5,500 clients); Gatineau Guiding also uses this lot; and, there is new bicycle tour permittee that will be using it.

Q: *Are model airplanes allowed? (Pointing at radio controlled plane that is flying overhead)*
Yes. They are permitted under a permit.

Q: *Have there been issues with drones?*
A few. Some related to flying when there are crowds and some related to disturbing wildlife.
Q: *Is there an electric vehicle charging station?*
Yes – near the entrance to the bus parking lot. It is for use by a permittee that has purchased electric tour buses. They are planning their trips around having enough time to recharge the vehicle. We have kept the infrastructure for it minimal until we have a better idea of our plans.

**14:45 Depart MGVC**

**15:00 Reconvene at Skaters Cabin**
This is located on the western side of the MGRA. As you traveled you may have noticed some of the trailheads that provide access into the MGRA.

Future improvements currently being developed include a bike path from here (Skaters Cabin) to the West Glacier parking lot. There are also new vault toilets - with six stalls - planned at the West Glacier Parking Lot. These are part of the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP).

Q: *What outfitter use do you have on this side?*
There are bicycle tours, Mendenhall Lake tours, Mendenhall River tours and use of the West Glacier Trail.

Q: *Was there a dock proposed at/near Skaters Cabin?*
There was consideration of use of electric boats, but that decision has been deferred.

**15:25 Tour Concluded**