

Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) 2015 Prospectus

Frequently Asked Questions

Post-Prospectus Updates to Q&A begin on page 6.

Q. Why do I need a permit to operate on National Forest System lands?

A. A special-use authorization (permit) is a legal document which allows for occupancy, use, rights or privileges on National Forest System Lands. The authorization is granted for a specific use of the land for a specific period of time. When are they needed?

1. If you need to occupy, use or build on NFS lands for personal or business purposes, whether the duration is temporary or long term.

2. If there is a fee being charged or if income is derived from the use.

3. If an activity on NFS lands involves individuals or organizations with 75 more participants/spectators.

Q. How does this bid prospectus fit with the management plan that was out for public comment last winter?

A. The Decision Notice signed by Forest Supervisor, Earl Stewart, on July 6, 2015 approved Alternative 2 of the 2014 MGRA Management Plan Revision that increased commercial allocation on trails and Mendenhall Lake to meet the public demand for these opportunities while protecting the MGRA's natural resources. The decision on electric boat use was deferred at that time. The commercial allocation for the Visitor Center Unit did not change, but distribution changes allowed for more guided tours on trails. The allocation of service days for outfitting and guiding increased in the Recreation Area by 18,456 service days (about a 21% increase).

Q. Will this result in more people visiting the MGRA?

A. We do expect to have more guides and more guided visitors around the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, but the number of clients being just transported to the Visitor center (not guided) will be slightly reduced from current numbers. This was purposeful. Our greatest challenges with lost, injured and misinformed/misbehaving guests are those who don't come with a guide. Guides help disperse guests away from busy places, keep them on the proper parts of the trail or lake surface, safe and cared-for.

Q. What specific trails will see changes?

A. We expect to have new or expanded guide companies launch their trips from either the West Glacier Trail, Tolch Rock Trail or the beach on the western shore of Mendenhall lake, resulting in additional visitors on these trails (and on the lake surface). On the east side, we expect more guided trips beginning at the bus parking lot and using the Moraine Ecology Trail and Trail of Time, as well as the East Glacier Trail and Powerline Trail. Those increases will be most noticeable during times when cruise ships are in port.

Q. Won't this crowd the trails?

A. The Forest Service will monitor the number of encounters on trails and the lake surface to insure we are complying with our plan. Most trails are managed to keep the number of encounters with other groups to less than 20 per day during 80% of the season. There are exceptions to this such as the Nugget Falls trail, Photo point

trail and the Steep Creek trail where there are no limits, but all others have limits. We also expect our guide companies to protect resources, operate sustainably and minimize their impact upon other hikers/paddlers, in fact, our prospectus criteria provide incentives for those who do so.

Q. Will there be more crowding at the Visitor Center?

A. The decision to allow more guided use of trails was purposefully made in order to disperse guests away from the more crowded core of the Visitor Center. We expect to see a slight decrease in bus traffic in the east side parking lots since we've decreased the number of clients who are just transported.

Q. Will this mean more money for the Forest Service, for the Visitor Center?

A. Yes, more clients will result in more fees paid by the businesses for their permit and from the \$5 site fee.

Q. How will guides be trained?

A. The prospectus criteria allow companies to identify their training practices and experience in offering guided trips. This should allow the Forest Service to identify companies that invest in training. In addition, the Forest Service offers transporters and guides training every spring in specific aspects of using the Visitor Center Unit.

Q. Company "A" has people who just want to be transported and people who want to be guided. Trails to be hiked are dependent on the group's interest. How should they apply in the prospectus?

A. The company would want to apply for a combination of 'transport only' days AND days on the specific trails they want to guide their clients. Realize that each trail has a capacity limit and guide companies should request no more than that amount.

Q. What do you mean by guiding? I just want to walk around with my clients.

A. If you want to leave your vehicle and accompany your clients, you're considered to be guiding and should apply for that service accordingly. The formal definition in the prospectus is: Guiding – Providing services or assistance (such as supervision, protection, education, training, packing, touring, subsistence, transporting people, or interpretation) for profit or gain to individuals or groups on National Forest System lands. The term "guide" includes the permit holder's employees and agents.

Q. My company wants to drive our clients to the glacier and then guide them around the grounds. What criteria do I have to answer?

A. You would answer the criteria for both Transporting and Guiding. The criteria are divided as follows:

- Transporting only – This would be for companies that just want to drive clients to MGRA and drop them off. No staff members leave the vehicles with the clients.
- Guiding only – You are transported to MGRA by another permitted transport company, but once onsite your company guides clients around the grounds and specific trails (this is a rare situation in the MGRA).
- Transporting AND guiding – Your company drives your clients to MGRA and then also proposes to guide them around the grounds and/or on specific trails listed in the prospectus.

Q. Is a SF-299 form (Standard Form 299: Application for Transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands) required to be submitted with my bid package?

A. No, you don't need to submit a SF-299 application with the prospectus materials. The information typically collected on that form is included on other required documents to be submitted with your bid package.

Q. I heard that the fees are increasing at MGVC beginning in 2016. Does that apply to me?

A. YES, if you are bringing any clients to the Visitor Center Unit of the Recreation Area, it applies to you! All operators in the Visitor Center Unit will be charged the Recreation Site Fee in addition to the Alaska Region Flat Fee (Service Day permit fee) beginning in 2016. So for every client you bring to the visitor center unit (either transported or guided) you'll be billed the Alaska Region Permit Flat Fee (service day fee) of approximately \$1.63/service day AND the Recreation Site Fee (amenity fee) for the Visitor Center Unit of \$5.00/person **for a TOTAL of approximately \$6.63/person**. Again this applies to ALL operators that work in the Visitor Center Unit (current and future permit holders). See pages 10-11 in the prospectus for full details.

Q. How are fees billed and how are amounts estimated?

A. See Part C. Fees on pages 10-11 in the prospectus document.

Per FSH 2709.11, Chp. 30, 37.22 establishes collecting Outfitter and Guide fees under the following timelines:

- Based on authorized use and pre-season estimates, a total estimated fee for the year will be calculated prior to the operating season.
- Due dates for all payments will be established prior to the start of the operating season.
- The fees will be collected from the holder as follows –
 - a. Collect the total annual estimated fee in advance when it is less than \$500.
 - b. Collect half of the total annual estimated fee in advance and the remainder by mid-season when the total is equal to or greater than \$500, but less than \$2,500.
 - c. Collect one-third of the total annual estimated fee in advance and the remainder in two equal payments by mid-season when the total is \$2,500 or more.

Q. Under Part C. Fees on pages 10-11 in the prospectus document it states, "Permittees will also need to provide their clients with a receipt or proof of payment of this site fee." What will our company be expected to provide clients?

A. This is a requirement for all permittees within the Visitor Center Unit beginning in 2016. Additional discussion/meetings with permit holders will occur over the winter (in person and/or teleconference) to address acceptable methods for this receipt or proof of payment.

Q. Are the permit fees & site fees paid at MGVC subject to the City & Borough of Juneau sales tax?

A. City tax regulations are not administered by the federal government/Forest Service, but likely not. This is a federal fee and there probably is not tax on a federal fee. You'll need to check with the City & Borough of Juneau to find out for sure.

Q. How do you expect this prospectus to help you achieve your goals for the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area and Visitor Center?

A. The Visitor Center has several challenges related to increasing popularity and inadequate facilities. This prospectus reflects our desire to choose capable commercial partners who will help us move toward a more sustainable, less congested visitor experience that better serves our guests.

Q. What if we are awarded a specific number of service days, but don't use all of them during our first year of operation?

A. Permits go through a five-year review process which adjusts authorization levels based upon highest use during a five year period. Appendix C– Sample Special Use Permit, attached to the prospectus, explains this process:

N. FAILURE TO EXERCISE AUTHORIZED PRIVILEGES. During the 5th year of operation and upon termination, the authorized officer shall review actual use and adjust the allocation of use to match the highest amount of actual use in 1 calendar year during the first 5 years of operation, plus 25 percent of that amount for holders with up to 1,000 service days or the equivalent in quotas or 15 percent of that amount for holders with more than 1,000 service days or the equivalent in quotas, provided that:

1. The combination of the highest amount of actual use in 1 calendar year and the additional 25 or 15 percent of use not exceed the amount of use allocated when the permit was issued; and
2. To ensure that 5 years of use are available for review as a basis for making the allocation adjustment, the authorized officer may adjust the review period to include a previous or an additional year of use based on a finding that extraordinary circumstances prevented a season of operation.

Q. Can our company partner or subcontract with another company?

A. It depends. Permits can be issued to individuals, businesses, LLCs, etc. but typically the company bringing the clients to the site is responsible for signing in, paying the fees and more. If you are contemplating a partnership of some sort, please contact us in advance of your application.

Q. Do I really have a chance to compete for a permit if I'm only a small company?

A. Yes, all companies interested in offering services over the next 5 years in the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area are welcome to apply since the bid application process and selection criteria apply to small and large businesses. The next opportunity to apply for a permit will likely not be until 2020. Is it worth your time to develop a competitive bid application and pay the cost recovery fees affiliated with the prospectus process (see prospectus pg. 10)? Also, if awarded service days in the prospectus, can you adhere to permit requirements, fees and use reporting for the duration of your permit?

Q. What if my company is willing to bring clients to the recreation area outside of "peak" hours of visitation? Does that give me a better chance to be awarded service days?

A. The prospectus criteria were not designed to offer incentives for "off-peak" tours and it is impossible for the Forest Service to award service days during just "off-peak" periods. Permits also do not authorize specific times of day, rather, they are valid for any time that the recreation area is open (6am to midnight). However, if you intend to target individual travelers at off-peak times it is worth mentioning in your operating plan since this might be an underserved niche.

Q. If selected, could my company be issued less than the minimum amount of service days requested?

A. No, not without additional conversation. On the Bid Application Cover Page you have a place to request the maximum amount of service days requested and a minimum amount. If successful, you wouldn't be awarded less than the minimum amount unless we discussed it with you in advance.

Q. If my company has a current permit with the Forest Service, how will that relate to these service days offered in the prospectus?

A. See B. Post-Selection on page 12-13 in the prospectus document.

Successful bidders will be issued special use permits as follows:

- Applicants with existing special use permits on the TNF will receive a permit amendment or be issued a new 5-year priority use permit.
- Applicants who are not currently authorized to provide outfitter, guide, or transporter services on the TNF will be issued 2-year *transitional* priority use permits. Satisfactory performance at the completion of the initial 2-year period may result in an extension to complete the 5 years. Issuance of priority use permits is at the sole discretion of the authorized officer.

Q. Can we meet with staff from the Forest Service prior to submitting our bid application package?

A. Yes, but we do not want to review your package materials in advance. We are happy to answer questions and provide feedback but need to keep the selection process unbiased. Therefore, we will not look over or review your application materials prior to their submission. You are welcome to make an appointment, send email or call with questions prior to the application period deadline.

Q. Do I need to submit one year of financial data or three years? The criteria & form are somewhat unclear.

A. For this prospectus, we are only requiring the most recent fiscal year financial statement (be it on our form, or via your CPA – either is fine). For background: the Forest Service issues many different kinds of prospectuses. It is common for the agency to ask for additional years' financial data when a prospectus involves construction of facilities that will occupy National Forest lands – like a lodge or ski area, for example. The Mendenhall Prospectus does not entail construction or long-term occupation of public lands. For this reason, we believe that one year's financial statement will suffice.

Q. A few criteria evaluation statements say “evidence the policy has been shared with employees” do we need to pull signed documents out of everyone's personnel files?

A. No, methods to provide evidence for criteria evaluation standards may include sign-in sheets from staff meetings, samples of company policies that have signature lines for staff to sign and document review, etc.

Post Prospectus Updates to Q&A:

Q. How many companies applied in the prospectus?

A. Nineteen bid packages were received during the 60-day application period requesting a total of 639,738 service days throughout MGRA even though only 238,732 service days were available. One package was dropped from consideration because the cost recovery agreement was not fully executed by the applicant, a requirement for consideration. In the Visitor Center Unit alone, the requested use by transporters (535,360) was 3½ times the available capacity (157,179). The pool of service days available in the Visitor Center Unit was exclusively due to expiring permits. The overall capacity of the Visitor Center Unit was not increased in the 2014 Management Plan Revision due to concerns about crowding in that area.

Q. Why were there criteria in the prospectus about sustainability and climate change?

A. The Forest Service Manual states that a prospectus shall specify the criteria to be used in selecting a successful applicant but does not specify or limit the criteria to be included. The objective of the criteria is to evaluate and select an applicant whose proposal will best serve the public need. Criteria categories in the MGRA Prospectus included: Business Model, Guest Experience, Workplace Practices, Operations, Energy, and Resource/Community Protection. Energy criteria coincide with the future of the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, and its proximity to a receding glacier, focusing on climate change and sustainable operations. The Forest Service is committed to efficiently using energy and reducing consumption of resources as directed by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and Executive Order (EO) 13693, Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade, to reduce agency direct greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by at least 40 percent in ten years.

Q. What was the selection methodology used to determine award levels in the prospectus?

A. Several factors contributed to the final allocation decisions in the prospectus. The District Ranger took into account bid package degree of completion, quality of responses to selection criteria, past performance, types of services provided, etc.

Q. Why was the application period held over the summer tourism season?

A. While this prospectus offering was conducted over the summer tourist season, the agency did consult with businesses involved in the Juneau Economic Development Council's Visitor Products Cluster Working Group prior to the prospectus release. The majority of companies participating in the Visitor Products Cluster preferred to respond during the summer instead of waiting until winter in order to utilize awarded service days during the 2016 season. In addition, Staff Officers and Special Use staff spoke with a variety of local operators (both large and small companies) in the months leading up to the prospectus (contacts in the field, on the phone, etc.) that desired to have a prospectus sooner rather than later. The only request was that the months of April and May be avoided due to seasonal operation start up. The application period was also 60 days instead of the required minimum 30 days in order to give companies more time to prepare their bid packages.

Q. Can we provide input into the type and design of the facilities within the Visitor Center Unit?

A. Planning for changes to facilities in the Visitor Center Unit (Master Planning) will begin during winter 2015/2016. The goal of the master planning effort is to accommodate projected numbers of visitors, improve traffic flow, and reduce congestion. Facility developments could result in increased visitor capacity in the area, but the focus is on protecting resources and improving the experience of visitors and residents.

Q. When is the next opportunity for businesses to apply for commercial use within the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area?

A. Facility master planning efforts may result in developments that would allow for commercial allocations to be reconsidered in the future. Until those improvements are made, capacity set in the 2014 MGRA Management Plan Revision is all that can be authorized. The next Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area prospectus, planned for 2020, will have at least three times the number of service days available for distribution as all permits are set to expire in the area at that time.