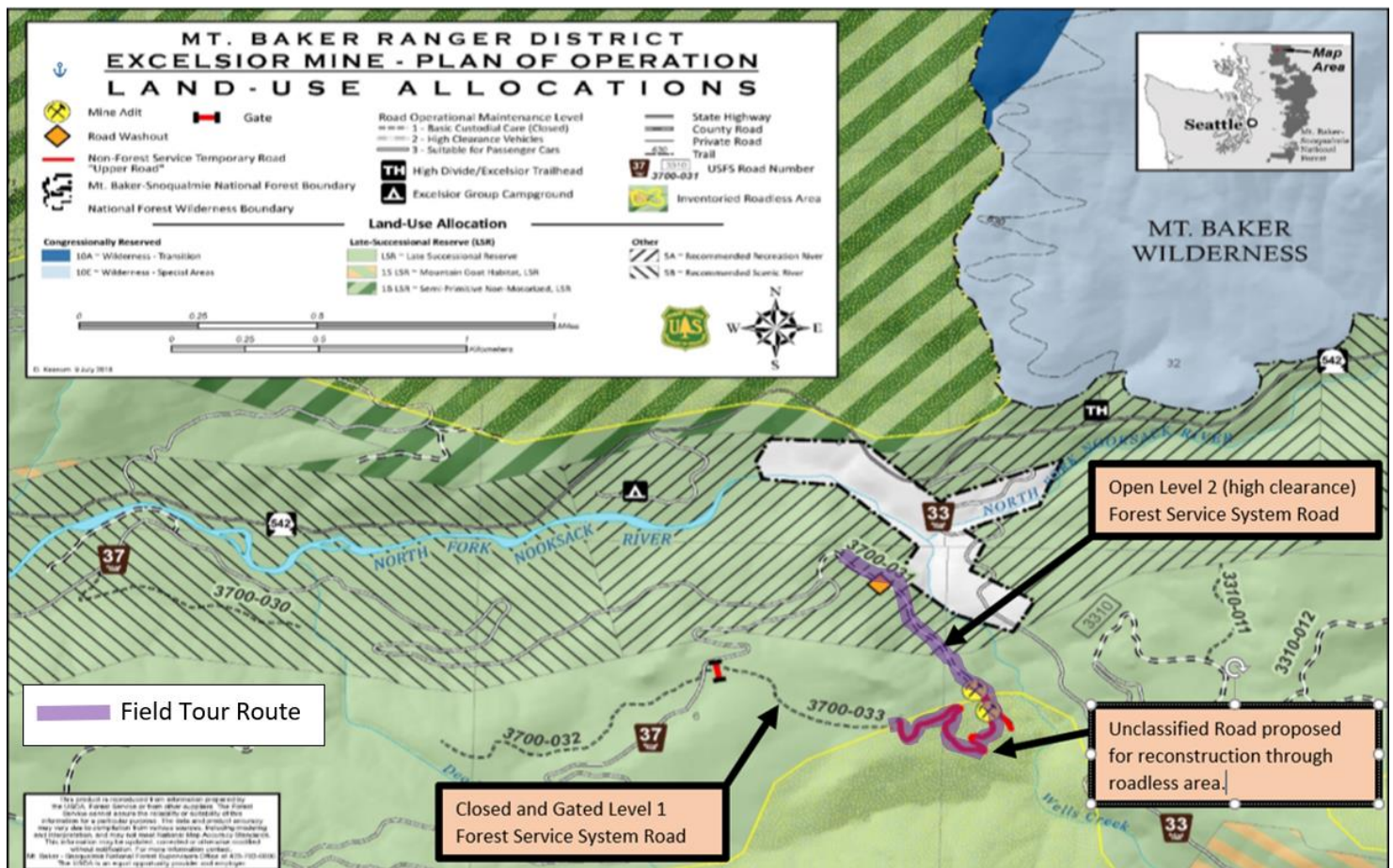




Notes

10:00 am Met at Glacier Ranger Station and carpooled up FS 3700 road.

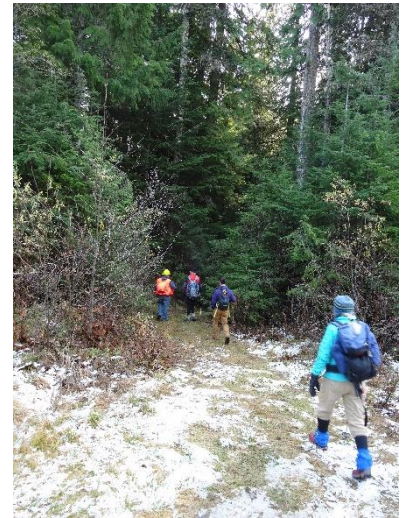
10:30 am Parked at end of FS RD 3700-033. This Forest Service system road appropriately dead ends at the boundary to the Mt. Baker North Inventoried Roadless Area at an old rock quarry site that has not been used for decades. According to the EA this road is a level 1 (closed/storage) maintenance level road and is gated to restrict public access. However, upon driving the road there was no gate at the junction of FS Road 3700.

10:35 am Discussed history of the Excelsior Mine. Mike Town shared a wealth of information on the history of mining at this site, much of it from two books entitled, "Dreams of Gold: History of the Mt. Baker Mining District" and "Discovering Washington's Historic Mines." Todd Griffin added additional information based on his knowledge. The main period of production for the Excelsior Mine was in early 1900's and the last mining activity was in 1917. A 4-story mill was built on the property and both arsenic and mercury were used in the extraction process. The predominate mineralization is silver. Several major international mining companies leased the claims for several years in the 1960's through the 1980's. This includes exploration drilling by ASARCO in the 1960's and US Borax in the 1970's. Homestake mines also leased the claims. None of these companies found enough economic incentive to patent the claims.

An open pit mine was proposed in the 1970's. Spotted Owls were found on the claim and formally documented in 1984. In 1992 the mine company attempted to patent the mine. After legal action, a federal IBLA judge in 2008 denied the patent request: "The evidence suggests that there is not sufficient valuable mineral deposits that could be mined for a profit"

10:45 am Hiked the unclassified "Upper Road" which immediately enters the Mt Baker North Inventoried Roadless Area into an impressive old growth forest stand. The Upper Road (dirt, no gravel) runs about ½ a mile ending at the mine portal and is very steep, extremely narrow and poorly constructed. Within the first ¼ mile the road descends at a slope in excess of 25% straight down the hill. This raised serious questions as to the cost and aquatic impacts of constructing a road that would sustain vehicle traffic for up to 10 years. The Forest Service Geologist confirmed that the road had never been a Forest Service system road and pre-dates any recent agency road inventory in the last few decades. It is reasonable to assume that the current road network dates back to the 1970's when exploratory drilling was occurring on the site.

There was obvious evidence of recent clearing and maintenance of the unclassified road. The Forest Service geologists confirmed that the miner was caught improving the road in 2012 in order to gain jeep access to the site without any authorization. He was told to stop any additional activities. Flagging was evident at parts of the road which the Forest Service Geologist confirmed was from Forest Service engineering and fisheries specialists marking water bar locations and other potential construction features.



Start of Upper Road at roadless area boundary



Old Growth forest habitat in roadless area

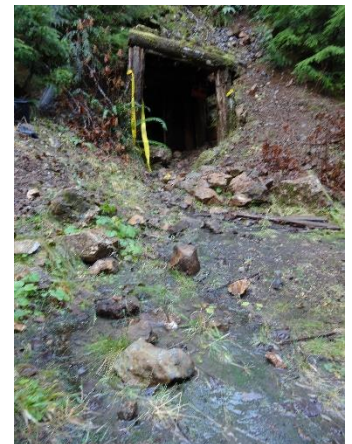


Steep poorly engineered unclassified Upper Road

We discussed what minimum engineering and aquatic standards would be applied to the road if it was allowed to be reconstructed further as part of the pending EA. It seemed clear that it would not be required to meet the Forest Service standards of an ML1 or ML2 road but would be held to some lower not well articulated standard. This raised serious concerns about impacts to the watershed due to the steep slope, insufficient engineering of the road and location of spotted owl and murrelet habitat as well as proximity to Wells Creek down slope.

There were a handful of spur roads that led off in different directions from the identified route. There was an obvious difference as to the state of these other spurs which represent what the current road would have looked like if not for the unauthorized brushing and clearing that took place recently. These spur roads are unpassable and in places hardly recognizable as a road after decades of revegetation.

We also discussed concerns that if the road reconstruction was allowed to move forward and be in place for the next decade, there would be an additional obligation by the Forest Service to enforce and deal with related issues to this road network above and beyond the mining related activity. There was evidence of some unauthorized ATV use on the route that had been illegally cleared by the miners. This will no doubt become a significant issue for enforcement as a non-designated route. Additionally, concerns about trash, shooting and other unauthorized or dangerous activities will require additional attention by the Forest Service. For example, we learned that last year a 20-year-old male died near a rock outcropping related to the recently cleared Upper Road system when he fell in a crevice exploring with friends at night.



Excelsior Mine portal on boundary of roadless area

11:30 am

We followed the unclassified route to the mine portal which is located on the border of the inventoried roadless area. The caution tape had been removed suggesting that members of the public had been accessing the mine recreationally. On our way out we came across two young men who were clearly headed to check out the mine portal.

11:45 am

We left the mine portal via FS Road 3700-031. The section closest to the mine portal is akin to a trail, having been decommissioned in the early 1990's. At the site of where the Forest Service removed a log stringer bridge the road is not recognizable for a 500-foot stretch. The last ¼ mile of the road is passable by passenger vehicle.



FS RD 3700-031 closest to the mine portal resembles a trail



FS RD 3700-031 at washout site (500 ft)

We discussed the concern that the agency dismissed an alternative that would have analyzed repairing the FS RD 3700-031 and restoring the original access to the mine portal on a Forest Service system road completely outside of the inventoried roadless area. It was also revealed that the miner in question is not looking to do any drilling or significant work that would necessitate vehicle access. Instead he intends to identify and hand pick individual rocks to be sold and processed off site. As a result, a much more limited road reconstruction could be possible across the 500-foot wash out area.

12:15 pm Arrived at FS RD 3700 junction and returned to cars.