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First name: Peter

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: hello,

I am a geologist and a mountaineer (backpacking, technical rock, technical ice, ski mountaineering, mountain biking). I was on an SCA trail crew in Big Beaver Creek, North Cascades NP in 1972, backpacked for most of 10 weeks in the North Cascades in the summer of 1974, spent three months as an SCA assistant in the Hoh Ranger District, Olympic NP in 1975, and lived in Seattle from 1981 to 1988 as a grad student and postdoc at UW, with lots of weekends & longer trips in the N Cascades. I am now a professor at Columbia University. I still return to the North Cascades for both geological field work and recreation. For example, I've been there every year since 2021.

I am concerned about access to the proposed cabin on the west side of North Twin Sister, and more generally about public access to the Twin Sisters. When I tried to access the Twin Sisters last summer (2023) for geological field work, I was stymied by impassible USFS roads on the southeast, and by locked gates on the access roads to the south and west. I was particularly eager to use the road that starts at the bridge across the Middle Fork of the Nooksack River, but this has a locked gate with threatening signs, no phone number, and very limited contact information for the owner.

If they build a cabin just inside the National Forest on North Twin Sister, is Baker Mountain Guides going to have exclusive legal use of this private road? Will hikers and climbers be able to legally access the Twin Sisters using this road? Will they have to pay Baker Mountain Guides for access, even if they don't plan to use the proposed cabin? If so, it seems to me to be inappropriate to allow a private company to charge taxpayers for access to public land.

More generally, I hope that Mt Baker National Forest personnel will take this opportunity to clarify, publicize, and - if necessary - improve regulations and agreements covering access to the Twin Sisters via the extensive road network west and south of the mountains. Based on the presence of about ten parked vehicles at the bridge on a Saturday last summer, it seemed apparent to me that lots of people are illegally using these roads, on foot, bicycle, and probably motorized bikes of various types. I can certainly understand why they do this. Meanwhile, there is almost no information online about how to access the Twin Sisters legally.

I am not sure, but I guess that both the American Alpine Club and the Sierra Club have experience with negotiating access agreements that allow people to use private roads to reach public lands for recreation, while relieving the owners of legal liability, and I think it could be valuable to involve them in this instance. I will contact them about this.

Until these issues are clarified and addressed, I oppose allowing Baker Mountain Guides, or any other commercial entity, to construct a seasonal-use cabin on North Twin Sister.

Sincerely,

Peter B. Kelemen