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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Opposition to the Temporary Winter Shelters Proposal

Dear Mt. Baker District Ranger and Stakeholders,

I am writing to express my deep concerns and opposition to the Temporary Winter Shelters project as currently proposed for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The recent public meeting and subsequent revelations about the scope and execution of this project have deepened my reservations about its viability and the transparency of its planning process.

Firstly, it has come to light that Aspire Adventure Running's involvement extends far beyond the single shelter at Heliotrope Trailhead, with plans for additional structures at Grouse Ridge and Artist Point. These sites may not only feature glamping-style amenities but also promote activities that significantly increase the human footprint in these sensitive areas. The fact that these extensive plans were not adequately disclosed in the initial proposal documents or discussed transparently with the public is highly concerning. This lack of openness undermines trust and suggests a disregard for genuine community feedback.

Moreover, Baker Mountain Guides (BMG) appears to have no concrete plan to allow public access to their proposed shelter, which suggests a commercialization of public lands with minimal public benefit. This is exacerbated by their admission of not having considered public access seriously. Additionally, the arrangement to pay only 3% of their gross revenue as land use fee seems quite insignificant and raises questions about the fairness and equity of this financial setup.

The proposed activities by Aspire, including paid snowmobile shuttles and other high-impact recreational services, contradict the principle of spreading out visitor impact. Instead, these plans seem to concentrate activity and potentially exacerbate environmental degradation in already vulnerable areas. Concerns about the impact on local wildlife, particularly winter wolverine habitats, have not been satisfactorily addressed, which is unacceptable in a project of this environmental sensitivity.

The overall lack of detailed information about operational logistics, benefits to the public, and environmental safeguards speaks to a rushed and inadequately considered proposal. The Forest Service's apparent urgency in advancing this project without thorough public engagement and comprehensive planning is unsettling and not in the best interest of the forest or its users.

Given these issues, I urge you to reconsider moving forward with this proposal. It is crucial that any development on public lands is pursued transparently, with robust public input and a clear emphasis on environmental preservation and public benefit. As it stands, this project does not meet these criteria, and therefore, should be rejected.

Thank you for considering these concerns. I hope to see a revised approach that genuinely reflects the public interest and conservational values.

Sincerely,

Joseph Manning