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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am an avid backcountry user (for a regular person with a 9-5 job). I get out ~20 days a year as a backcountry skier, mostly in the Mount Baker Backcountry, and about once a season I use a snowmobile to access Washington Pass environs from Mazama. I also try to do a coveted "hut trip" about once a season, too.

I am NOT in favor of this project with my current understanding of the proposal. I would love to have local huts and I would also love to see more access points in northwest Washington, so it's hard to put the kibosh on momentum for backcountry-ski related infrastructure in my local area, but here's why I am opposed.

First, the overnight huts appear to be for guided clients only, so they would provide little to zero benefit to most of the general public. The way the proposal reads is that these guiding companies just want to make money on relatively accessible public land. I don't think that's a wrong thing to do, but I'm not in favor of guided only huts.

Second, two of the hut locations (Anderson-Watson and Heliotrope) are going to be setup right where snowmobiles go. Some of these snowmobilers go into places to ski, but most go in there just to ride their machine. Skiing in areas with lots of sledders is dangerous and horrible and stinky. They set off small slides and make big holes in the snow that are dangerous to backcountry skiers. Many snowmobilers also don't follow the rules of where they are and aren't supposed to go. I've seen their tracks in Grouse Creek at Heliotrope many times as well as up at WA Pass near Blue Lake, two areas that off-limits but right on the boundary of where they are allowed to go. I think backcountry ski huts should be set up in areas where sleds don't go, or else where there is very clear demarcation.

Third, backcountry ski terrain around Heliotrope can be complex for mid-winter, and will be hard for a variety of abilities to manage. Grouse creek commonly avalanches for example. The Twin Sisters and Anderson-Watson huts provide access to a much greater variety of terrain, however I have less personal experience in those areas. I think future huts should be accessible to a variety of skill levels throughout the winter.

The snowmobile warming hut is off Canyon Creek road is different than the overnights. And I am neutral about that proposal.

There is clearly a demand for backcountry winter huts around there, and there are few examples of for-profit huts in the PNW including the Rendezvous Huts, Fortune Peaks, and the Wallowas down in Oregon. My understanding is that these huts are used by both guides and regular people alike, and are not managed by guiding companies. I would be in favor of one of these models, or just a non-profit equivalent to put up some huts for the people like there are in Canada.