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Comments: The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has reviewed the scoping documents available for the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project. The intent of this letter is to voice our support for this project under our shared goal of improving aquatic habitat conditions and wildlife connectivity within the Gold Creek Connectivity Emphasis Area (CEA).

The Gold Creek CEA provides the best opportunity to link wilderness areas to the north and south of I-90. Wilderness areas are particularly important habitat for rare wide-ranging species that are sensitive to roads, such as wolverine, lynx, grizzly bear, gray wolf, and marten. This CEA also provides linkage for a large assemblage of more common high and low-mobility species, including mountain goat, deer, elk, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, fox, shrews, voles, snake, salamanders, frogs and mollusks.

The WSDOT and US Forest Service (USFS) have a long-standing partnership on the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project, which includes significant investments in Gold Creek and the surrounding landscape. The I-90 Project removed a substantial portion of the highway from the Gold Creek floodplain, reestablished and enhanced adjacent habitats, constructed two large wildlife undercrossings and preserved over 300 acres of habitat within headwaters of Gold Creek.

The Gold Creek Valley Restoration project aligns with the objectives of the I-90 Project, providing further benefits to the watershed and associated fish and wildlife species. Improving stream functions and reducing localized dewatering is especially critical for the threatened Keechelus Lake bull trout population, which spawns only in Gold Creek. It is my sincere hope that our efforts in the headwaters of the Yakima River will help protect this imperiled population and cascade throughout the basin and beyond.