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Organization:

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Comments: RE: US Forest Service Cle Elum Ranger District Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project

I write on behalf of the Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board (the Board). The Board was created by 21 county and city governments and the Yakama Nation to promote the recovery of at-risk fish and wildlife species in the Yakima Basin. One of our primary goals is to support recovery of steelhead and bull trout, so that these species can be removed from the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) threatened species list.

The remaining bull trout populations in the Upper Yakima are all at risk of extirpation, which threatens our ability to recover this federally listed species. In 2012, the Yakima Basin Fish & Wildlife Recovery Board brought local and regional partners together to complete the Yakima Bull Trout Action Plan (BTAP). This plan was updated in 2017 and identifies what actions need to be done to recover bull trout in the Yakima Basin. The BTAP identifies the restoration of habitat and flow in Gold Creek as one of the highest priority actions for bull trout in the Yakima Basin. For this reason, we are excited to see USFS proposal for the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project which will directly implement BTAP priority actions in Gold Creek. Board staff have actively participated in Gold Creek working groups, data collection and project design review, and commend the US Forest Service for its efforts to build a broad partnership focused on recovering bull trout and improving wildlife connectivity in the Gold Creek Valley. The Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project offers a unique opportunity to address the primary limiting factor for this at-risk bull trout population and builds upon extensive investments in wildlife connectivity in the Snoqualmie Pass/I-90 corridor.