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Thousands object to filling Gold Creek Pond. Here's why: they know their history.

Saving the near-extinct population of bull trout in Gold Creek is the selling point in the proposal from Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT) to "restore" Gold Creek Valley as a "bull trout enhancement." In this scenario, Gold Creek Pond is the "major contributor" to summertime dewatering of a mile of Gold Creek. It follows, according to KCT and their subcontractor, Natural Systems Design (NSD), that filling the Pond would re-water the creek, remove the barrier to spawning of bull trout, and recover the population of fish. This pitch supports a variety of individual agendas of agencies and non-profits. It is especially relevant to agricultural and political interests in the Yakima Valley that seek a bull trout enhancement to offset harms to fish from Reclamation's irrigation project at Kachess.

But KCT's pitch offers no path to re-water the creek to help bull trout. Mike Ericsson of NSD and William Meyer of WDFW have publicly declared that filling the Pond would not re-water the mile of dry creek and KCT acknowledges this point on their website. How do we know the Pond did not dry the creek and that filling the Pond will not restore the creek? The answer comes from direct observation of those who lived at creekside before 1978 when work began to construct the Pond. Here's what they say:

The creek dewatered consistently and extensively a least a decade before the Pond existed.

1968 "We relied on trips to the Creek with buckets in hand for our drinking and washing water supplies. But as the weather grew drier and hotter, we had to go farther and farther upstream to find water. Eventually, when summer turned to early fall, the rains returned, and the stream returned closer to home." -from chapter II, 1968, The Spirit of Ski Tur Valley, James Bennett, Xlibris Corporation. Note: Jim's cabin was located at RM 1.7. He also reported vehicles driving on the dry creek bed below RM 1.4 -- J.B.

1972 "Chuck and his original partners leased the lot in 1971 and built the foundation and sub-floor. When the partners backed out in 1972, Chuck asked Mike if we were interested. We started work on the sub floor that summer. It had been a record year for the snowpack, so we had to dig down to the sub floor in mid- June. I remember that in July, there was water in the creek, but by the end of August it had dried up. We always thought if there was no snowpack in the mountains it meant no water in the creek." --N.B.

1972 "My family had a lot in Ski Tur Valley from 1972 until 1995... With the exception of a few years (perhaps two or three in the last 20+ years) the water level during dry weather recedes to the point that the entire creek bed is dry (except for a few "Fishing holes" which may have a fish or two trapped in a shallow pond.) These fish usually don't last for more than a day or two. This dry bed situation can last for several days to several weeks. It kills virtually every living fish and frog etc. The "critters" take care of the cleanup. " -T.M.

1975 [ldquo]As you know the D. family has been a part of the Ski Tur Valley community since 1974. We have witnessed de-watering of Gold Creek in mid-late August on a regular yearly basis since our first summer in 1975. We would always attempt to rescue the bull trout from the shallow water potholes and take them upstream to no avail. The Creek would commonly de-water well past the trail head to Joe and Alaska Lakes, a good two or more miles upstream.[rdquo] --C.D.

Early to mid-1970s [ldquo]I was able to track down M.D. He concurred with me that indeed Gold Creek did consistently dewater in late summer in the early- mid 1970[rsquo]s.[rdquo] - C.D. reporting for M.D.

What then, is the cause of dewatering of multiple local creeks, including Gold Creek?

Gold Creek depends on snowpack for summertime flow. For decades, snowpack has been in free fall as a result of climate change. Local April snowpack dropped 21% between 1945 and 1978 when work to create the Pond was begun. We[rsquo]ve lost more than half the Gold Creek snowpack in the last 57 years and it is disappearing at a rate of at least 10% per decade. The long-term trend is accelerating in the wrong direction. History show us that the problem is not the Pond, it[rsquo]s the climate. Filling the Pond may satisfy many interests but there is neither evidence nor opinion that it will serve as a bull trout enhancement.

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