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RE: Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project

Forterra owns 250 acres in Gold Creek Valley, including almost one mile of the most degraded creek frontage. The property was purchased in 2009 with grant funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Section 6 program, specifically for the purpose of protecting endangered species habitat. Forterra is obligated by the USFWS grant contract to manage our property for the purposes of endangered species habitat.

Beyond obligation, restoration of Gold Creek aligns with Forterra's mission and the implementation of the Cascade Agenda. A robust community of fish biologists-led by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)-all agree that restoration actions are imperative to enabling the survival of bull trout in Gold Creek. While any significant restoration project will mean short-term disruption, action must be taken to deliver long-term ecological health for future generations. With pro-active restoration efforts, the valley can be home to a more balanced ecosystem with healthier soils, abundant native plants, a greater diversity of wildlife, and increased resiliency to face the impacts of a changing climate.

The significance and benefits of actions to restore the creek are broader than the boundaries of the Gold Creek Valley. Forterra has worked for decades with many partners to improve habitat connectivity across Interstate-90 for terrestrial and aquatic species. With the completion of the I-90 wildlife overcrossing a few miles from Gold Creek, and a plan to build fish passage at Keechelus Dam in the near future, the Gold Creek restoration project is just one of many efforts to improve habitat and restore connectivity throughout this critical ecosystem.

Forterra advances its mission in accordance with the guidance of knowledgeable scientists and experts. The Mid-Columbia Recovery Unit Implementation Plan for Bull Trout (USFWS 2015) specifically prioritizes the restoration of Gold Creek. The Plan emphasizes implementing restoration projects and reducing cumulative impacts from dewatering, foraging, migration, and overwintering of bull trout. Restoring Gold Creek would implement suggestions in the Plan for restoring natural stream, riparian, wetland, and floodplain processes and habitats that influence stream and watershed function and improve resiliency. The Plan also prioritizes improving riparian and instream habitats through land and water acquisitions in the Gold Creek area, which Forterra has contributed to through our conservation efforts in Gold Creek Valley.

Therefore, Forterra fully supports all efforts to restore riparian habitat and reduce the likelihood of creek dewatering within this system.

It's important to note that reduced snowpack due to climate change will almost certainly lead to reduced flows in Gold Creek. Unless action is taken, the number of days per year that Gold Creek is dewatered will likely increase to the point that bull trout become extinct in this system. Restoring Gold Creek to a functional stream with associated wetlands will not eliminate adverse effects to the ecosystem caused by climate change, but it will increase ecosystem resilience and give the bull trout population a chance to survive. The uncertainty caused by climate change demands that we take action; it does not excuse us from taking action.

Forterra is committed to the conservation and restoration of Gold Creek Valley that will contribute to sustainable populations of endangered species. The overall goals of the restoration project align with Forterra's mission and our foundational purpose for acquiring the Gold Creek property. Bull trout in the Yakima Basin face multiple threats to their survival, especially in the face of climate change. Thus, Forterra supports the goals of the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project and our partners in the effort to restore this stretch of bull trout habitat directly adjacent to our land.

Sincerely,

Michelle Connor
President and CEO
Forterra