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Comments: I am in support of large-scale restoration of Gold Creek and Gold Creek Pond. For thousands of years, fish and wildlife moved freely between the Yakima River, historic Keechelus Lake, and the Gold Creek watershed. This important connection for fish and wildlife was severely altered with the construction of Keechelus Reservoir and Interstate 90. The highway caused wildlife mortality due to vehicle collisions and the noise from the highway and ever-increasing recreation further displaced wildlife. The salmon and trout that once spawned in Gold Creek have been blocked and the remaining native fish continue to be impacted by the legacy of habitat degradation.

The I-90 Snoqualmie East project has greatly improved connectivity for fish and wildlife in the upper Yakima basin. Wildlife can now move more freely over or under I-90 and the removal of culverts that created fish passage barriers has allowed native fish to move between the tributaries for the first time in over a century. However, the Gold Creek watershed is still severely altered in the lower end of the valley.

If large scale restoration of lower Gold Creek and Gold Creek Pond is not implemented it will tarnish the success and legacy of the I-90 Snoqualmie East Project. Yes, this project will have improved connectivity for fish and wildlife, but it will stop short of addressing massive issues in the lower Gold Creek watershed that continue to impact the movement of fish and wildlife. These issues include the undersized bridge on forest service road 4832, disturbance from increasing recreation pressures, Gold Creek Pond that occupies 90% of the valley width where it occurs, and the increased extent and duration of dewatering events caused by Gold Creek Pond which has altered local hydrology and is causing the mortality of ESA threatened bull trout and impeding their annual spawning migration.

As someone who has hiked, hunted, and worked in this area for several years, I am in support of large-scale restoration of lower Gold Creek and Gold Creek Pond. I encourage decision-makers to be bold in their restoration efforts to restore natural processes, hydrology, and connectivity of this landscape to benefit wildlife and native fish, especially the critically impaired Gold Creek Bull Trout Population. Large-scale habitat degradation calls for equally large-scale restoration efforts.