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Comments: These are comments on the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project #57415.

In-stream Project. In the area of Gold Creek near the STVMA cabins, in the last few years, the river bed has continued to widen, taking out trees on both sides. This occurs at high water flows, and it has been happening for decades ever since logging in the area took out the big trees that lined the river. In the past 20 years of coming to the valley, I have personally witnessed trees being eroded out of the banks. As a result, the river bed has become unnaturally wide in places. The in-stream restoration project would stabilize the river width, narrowing it and lessening the erosion and stream migration that keeps widening the creek bed. The proposed in-stream project would cause the river to take out fewer trees, and this is one reason I am supportive of the project.

The riverbed is getting so wide that some areas have started to re-vegetate naturally, a gratifying development, but one which can be wiped out in the next big flood. The restoration project should encourage permanent vegetation in areas around the in-stream installations. Re-establishing vegetation next to the river would restore the riverbed to a more modest width, and add riparian areas benefiting the river, the fish, the birds, and frogs, and other inhabitants of riparian areas along the river. Shade can help keep the water cool in the coming years of warming summers. I support extensive planting of shrubs and trees and other stabilizing native plants to stabilize and enhance the in-stream project.

In terms of water temperature, I have taken temperature readings of isolated pools in the river bed during a fish survey in which we identified dozens of bull trout fry. Colder temperatures, which especially benefit bull trout and other salmon species, exist in some deeper pools, we observed, with apparent deep connections to ground water. The in-stream project should be designed to include deeper pools which can serve as cold water refuge for fish, with plantings nearby to shade the river from heat during hot summer days, and to stabilize the banks.

The in-stream project would begin to re establish a bio-diverse, complex, and fish-friendly (and other animal-friendly) river system near Gold Creek Pond, and up river past the cabins. Although the installation process itself may be disruptive in the short term, in the long term the project would heal the environment.

Heli's Pond. Heli's Pond is presently connected to Gold Creek by its outlet and channel bounded by a berm that STVMA installed decades ago. The connection of pond-to-river is important because during high water, flood waters from Heli's Pond are diverted away from the cabins toward the river.

Heli's Pond appears to be slowly filling in from the inlet on the north end. That natural process will likely continue over the coming decades. Regardless of whether Heli's Pond itself turns into a wetlands slowly and naturally, or by design, its connection to the river must be retained, or even enhanced, to prevent flooding of STVMA.

Gold Creek Pond. I support the restoration project of Gold Creek Pond because it will 1) add biodiversity; 2) enhance lower water temperatures which are good for fish; 3) potentially connect the pond and wetlands to Gold Creek; 4) establish a riparian habitat that is currently lacking because the steep walls of the pond prevent a natural riparian zone; and 5) provide for public viewing and enjoyment.

Of the three options, my first preference is option C, then B, then A. Option C connects the river directly to the ponds, which would keep temperatures cooler, place fish migration directly through the ponds (thus removing a dead-end for fish that currently migrate into the pond). Under option C, the trails would allow for observing the river flow into the pond, which, with seasonal changes and dynamic fluctuations, would be interesting, beautiful, and ever changing.

I wonder whether option C might restrict the migration of large animals down the river. I have personally observed elk and deer migrate down the river bed near the cabins on their way, presumably, to less snowy winter grounds past the I-90 bridges. So, option C should perhaps include a migration route around the river diversion up against the hillside, but within the river bed, to discourage migrating animals from entering the pond areas. For the benefit of option C especially, but for any option, the Gold Creek Ridge area west of Gold Creek Pond should be preserved, preferably with an environmental easement prohibiting development.

Option A has the smallest pond. This option might be improved with more many small ponds, perhaps. Option

B retains larger ponds and may provide for more interesting walkways than are available for option A, at least as portrayed on the drawings.

All three options include lots of wetlands, and provide excellent habitat for native vegetation and wildlife. I think the public would enjoy the natural area with paths that meander in and among the ponds and wetlands, with views of the river and native plantings. While the current pond offers vistas of the mountains reflected in the distance, so too would these three design options offer vistas of the same mountains, but in the context of wetlands and ponds.

Frontage Road Bridge. This bridge brings the public to the beautiful Gold Creek valley. It is damaged, and needs to be replaced to ensure that the public continues to visit the area, as well as allowing migrating animals to pass under it rather than over it.

I appreciate the work that has gone into these designs, and the work of the fish biologists, ecologists, botanists and other scientists. Thank you also for the opportunity to comment. I support the restoration projects above, taking into account these ideas and others offered by experts, concerned citizens, and the public.