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First name: Doug

Last name: MacDonald

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Scoping comment: Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project

This scoping comment on the Gold Creek Project is written from a long personal experience and perspective (see below) on Gold Creek and this Project.

The message in this scoping comment is very simple: It is critically important that this project, in every iteration and through every proposed action and each alternative analysis prepared for NEPA and SEPA review, be focused on the restoration and future protection/ enhancement of overall ecosystem health/hydrologic function of the Gold Creek watershed.

This is an imperative built on more than two decades of commitment and investment by the efforts of partners too numerous to individually name in ecosystem recovery and protection (hydrology and habitat) for the Gold Creek watershed in its own right and as an important component of the larger Yakima Basin. This has in particular been an investment in species protection of course for bull trout, and beyond bull trout for fish species including sockeye, chinook, chum and steelhead, and beyond fish for innumerable species of amphibians and even beyond all that, for small and large mammal species inhabiting a broad migratory range in the central Cascades for which Gold Creek provides unique wildlife connectivity value. Public investment includes (and goes beyond) millions of dollars in the I-90 Gold Creek Crossing Structure in which I personally, as Secretary of Transportation from 2001-2007 then and thereafter have played a role as public manager and advocate - a role complimentary to dozens of others before, during and after that time including the state legislature, transportation agency workers, consultants and contractors, and hard-working visionaries at the Forest Service, the Yakama Nation, Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, the Federal Highway Administration, citizen-based conservation and land stewardship organizations, academic researchers, citizen on-site volunteers and innumerable advocates for ecosystem protection and habitat connectivity in our state and around the country.

The unifying foundation of all that work is a singular commitment to the transformation of Gold Creek basin to ecologically restored and resilient habitat and hydrologic functionality.

Please make every possible effort to ensure that this beacon continues to guide the current project throughout the scoping process. This is how both to protect and to advance all the work done by so many to date, and the very substantial investment - tens and tens of millions and millions of dollars of public and partnered private funding - already made toward this goal.