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Comments: Over the years, this high-elevation area has invested heavily in wildlife and habitat connectivity. Restoring the habitat functions and processes in this valley makes meaningful efforts to repair and mitigate past management activities that negatively impact the ecosystem.
Restoring large wood, with intact root wads if possible, to add complexity to the stream will help recover habitat for fish and wildlife and create climate-resilient refugia for bull trout.
Partially filling the pond will restore the hydrologic and natural groundwater processes impacted over 50 years ago when the gravel pit was used to serve the I-90 freeway. Restoration is needed to address the creek's dewatering and to restore wetland processes that fish and wildlife at Snoqualmie Pass depend upon.
Maintaining access to the boat launch is important to the public, but driving illegally into the reservoir and damaging sensitive fish populations and stream habitats is not allowed and illegal activity needs to stop. The public can still access these areas for recreation, with a little extra effort to walk to these recreational opportunities on foot.
While recreational opportunities at Gold Creek Pond will be limited during the restoration project, the same type of recreational access will be available after the environmental habitat restoration has been completed.
Communicating to the public about other nearby outdoor opportunities would be beneficial. Areas such as Lake Easton State Park, Cle Elum Lake, and Lake Kachess could all possibly absorb additional recreation, as could the multiple access points to the Palouse to Cascades Trail. It would be beneficial to share these opportunities more broadly with the public as viable alternatives while this important project moves forward to address past damages to the environment.
Furthermore, science and research show that recreation can be detrimental to wildlife use in an area. In important wildlife corridors like Gold Creek, we need to ensure that human recreation is carefully managed. Millions of tax dollars have been invested to create permeability for wildlife north and south under the I-90 freeway.
We support this project moving forward and thank the USFS for the opportunity to provide public comment.