

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/2/2024 1:22:56 AM

First name: Erik

Last name: Hedberg

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To the USFS,

Thank you for the thorough work on this EA and overview of the project.

As a property owner in the Gold Creek valley, I would like to voice some comments/concerns on the project.

1. I am glad to see full access will still be allowed for cabin owners. This place is very special to all of us, and we cherish our time spent in the valley. Although "development in Gold Creek Valley" has been painted in a negative light, as cabin owners in the valley - we all care deeply about the natural ecosystem and long term health of the valley. There is a reason we all have chosen to invest in spending time there and I hope we can help collaborate to preserve its natural beauty.

2. The location of the second gate and workflow for the gate are a concern. As we have spent many days in all seasons driving in and out of Gold Creek Valley, I have observed that the majority of visitors don't know what pass they need, even though it is very clearly marked everywhere. I've also watched many low clearance cars get stuck in the snow and very bad potholes. In short, most people who come to visit the pond are NOT PREPARED and don't know what they need or what they are getting into, (even though it's not actually that extreme). I often have people ask ME if THEIR shoes are going to be ok to walk out to the pond... so my concern is that adding the second gate is going to cause a huge cluster/traffic jams at the entrance to the road. I would propose a workflow that forces people to know they need a pass before they get to the gate, and buy the pass somewhere else than at the gate itself. If not, I expect people to roll up with no pass, and then spend a bunch of time fiddling to pay, causing huge delays in the busy summer months. Winter is another story, but mostly because people aren't prepared to drive in the snow and get stuck blocking the road.

Also, if the second proposed gate is electronic, what happens if it breaks/power is out? Do we get a backup manual key as property owners?

3. Winter access - Even though the area will technically be closed, I would expect no change in snow tourist traffic to the pond unless someone is there enforcing it. I spent a lot of time in the valley this winter and it's unfortunate to say, but there is a very low level of respect for the area among visitors. The amount of garbage that gets left at the trailhead, on the road, and at the pond is disgusting. People bag up dog poop and just leave it on the road like it will somehow disappear. There are no maintained garbage cans and no one is around to threaten a fine for littering, so they just continue to do it. I ask them to stop but I'm not a state/gov official so they don't care what I say. In general, people love the pond because it is beautiful but the majority don't actually know how to respect nature or the posted rules. So I would expect them not to respect the closures either unless someone is there to enforce it. I'd also add that issuing fines could be a revenue generator to help better maintain the road and facilities.

4. Garbage/maintenance - Continued from above, with the restoration project, could we use this as an opportunity to better support the amount of trash left by visitors with upgraded facilities and garbage pickup? I'd also expect the road to get a lot of construction traffic, so it would seem wise to upgrade the road and make it more resilient long term. Perhaps connect the pavement to the pond parking lot? I never understood why the parking lot was paved but not the road in. I've watched multiple cars get serious damage the past couple years from the potholes. This seems counterintuitive for an ADA accessible trailhead and the ADA vehicles that bring those people in. (They usually aren't high clearance off road ready).

5. Updates for higher traffic - In the EA it sounds like the USFS hopes to decrease the amount of visitors with this project. However, I don't think the public demand for visiting this area is going to change. The pond has become a very popular destination. I didn't see anything about better accommodating the growing number of visitors, especially in winter. I'd love to see safer parking, it is dangerous in winter when people park into the road and cars are trying to pass each other on ice with pedestrians walking around. A majority of the visitors aren't experienced driving on snow. If the road is already getting modified + new gate, why not increase the size of the turnaround and bump the shoulders out wider so there is more room to plow and park. It's currently pretty unsafe and just waiting for something bad to happen.

6. Water usage - While left pretty vague in the EA, I have heard in discussion with our neighbors that it's been mentioned our private water system is a contributor in drawing water away from the creek. I disagree, and if it's going to be listed as a part of the problem... I would like to see this proved with hydrology data, and to see it in comparison to the other factors.

We are all on septic systems, so any water we use goes right back into the ground, lower in the valley. In fact, it actually goes back into the ground closer to the creek than it would naturally. All of our septic drainfields are down lower in the valley than the natural spring that is way up the hill in a boggy cedar forest. In addition, once our tank is full, which it fills up quick and generally stays full - the system reverts to allowing the spring water to overflow naturally into the ground. So in theory, we are actually just trapping water, and piping extra water closer to the creek rather than it seeping into the ground and slowly being absorbed into the forest. I don't think much of that water would even make it to the creek naturally. It's quite a long way, and a lot of dense forest. The other creeks on that hillside run much bigger than the one from the spring. In conclusion, I think it is unfair to say our water system is contributing to the problem of the creek de-watering without actually looking at the whole picture and publishing hydrology data that proves so.

7. The fish - I love fish and I am an advocate for fish conservation projects of all types. I know a lot about bull trout from time spent chasing their migrations and catch and release fishing for them in Canada. I am fully in support of this project from the standpoint of protecting the fish. However, I have heard rumblings from people I will keep anonymous that this project could be part of a larger scheme to benefit big ag/other industry downstream by protecting an endangered species in exchange for less rigid water use restrictions. My public comment here is that I hope this project is actually good in nature and there isn't a larger, behind the scenes motive that is driving it - to tick a box for alternative financial benefit. On paper, this project has a massive budget to save a tiny population of fish that, (yes are endangered), but not economic drivers like salmon. I sincerely hope that fish/natural area restoration is actually the only motive. If it is not, the public deserves to know otherwise.

Thank you again for the detailed overview of this project, and for keeping the property owners in the valley involved in the discussion. I know this is no small feat, and a lot of work for all parties involved. This is a special part of the world with wonderful flora and fauna. I hope we can work together to support a healthy and thriving Gold Creek Valley for our kids and grandkids to appreciate, no matter how much disgusting dog/human poop and garbage disrespectful visitors keep leaving on and around the road to the pond.

Sincerely,

Erik Hedberg