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Scott Robinson, Interim District Ranger

Cle Elum Ranger District

803 W. 2nd Street

Cle Elum, WA 98922

Re: Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project Draft Environmental Assessment

District Ranger Robinson,

I am reaching out on behalf of the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust to provide comments on the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project Draft Environmental Assessment. The Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust is the coordinating entity for the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area that runs between Seattle and Central Washington and encompasses spectacular natural lands and communities, from urban areas to farms and forests and federally-designated wilderness with world-class recreation.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for community partners to express their perspectives and support.

The Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust convenes and leads a broad coalition of conservation groups, community leaders, local governments, agencies, and businesses. We work to conserve and enhance the landscape from Seattle to Central Washington, to engage people as stewards of these lands and waters, and to support our partners in these endeavors. We were early participants in the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Technical Advisory Council and have conducted invasive species monitoring and control, recreational infrastructure maintenance, interpretive signage, and volunteer engagement in the Gold Creek Pond recreational complex for more than 20 years. In that time, we have worked closely with partners from the US Forest Service (USFS), Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and local nonprofits like the Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT), Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group (MCFEG) and the Yakama-Klickitat Fisheries Project (YKFP). We fully support the purpose and goals of the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project to improve the hydrology of Gold Creek Pond and recover habitat and conditions for ESA listed anadromous fish species.

As a nonprofit dedicated to engaging people in stewardship and ensuring sustainable access to the land, we value the Gold Creek complex not just for its habitat features and ability to build on the watershed restoration successes of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, but also for its unique position within the Greenway landscape. Located adjacent to the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Scenic Byway on this segment of Interstate-90, boasting a large parking area and an ADA-accessible trail, it is an understandably well known and much loved site. The extended closure of Gold Creek Pond for the suite of restoration and establishment activities will necessarily displace that activity to other locations within the I-90 corridor. We therefore request that USFS consider some potential mitigation activities in addition to those outlined in the Draft Environmental Assessment:

*Collaborate with WSDOT, WDFW, and the community of Easton to improve the neglected paths and play-area at Easton Ponds; located just off exit 71 of I-90, the ponds are borrow pits akin to Gold Creek Pond, with similar flat terrain and shaded riparian walking trails. The site has been without maintenance funding or attention for many years, and now wants for landscaping, road grading, and replacement of a footbridge, but it could easily provide many of the four-season features and amenities that make Gold Creek Pond so attractive to I-90 travelers.

*Collaborate with the Snoqualmie Ranger District and Washington State Parks on the proposed Denny Creek Sno-Park expansion, which would establish 175 new parking spots and provide access to less challenging terrain for families seeking winter snow-play opportunities.

*Partner with organizations like the Greenway, the East Cascades Recreation Partnership, Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce, Central Cascades Winter Recreation Council and others to distribute closure announcements, project maps, recommendations of alternate recreation sites, and restoration updates to the public.

The Greenway Trust stands ready to partner with the USFS, KCT, and others to re-establish recreational amenities at Gold Creek Pond when the time is right. In the meantime, I hope that you will consider our suggestions of how we might release some of the pressure this will place on other sites within the I-90 corridor.

Thank you for your time, thoughtfulness, and commitment to restoring the all-important natural processes at the heart of the Greenway landscape.