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Comments: The Central Cascades Recreation Association has concerns about the access and use of existing facilities for recreation as outlined in the GCVR Project Draft EA and the Jacobs Recreation and Scenic Resources Report (JRASRR), January 2024.

Our main concern is the duration of closure and how this will impact public use and enjoyment of these Public Lands. We would like to point out that all the project areas are located within a very narrow strip of land extending not more than 1.5 miles on either side of I-90. Within this narrow strip of land are the only access points (SnoParks) for all winter recreation that occurs with the 15 mile length of I-90 between Snoqualmie Pass and Easton. In addition, the vast majority of all winter recreation occurs within this very narrow ribbon of land that is influenced by the congestion, noise, and fumes generated by the daily traffic on the only major transportation route across the Cascades. Winter recreation is constrained by the lack of enough parking at these SnoParks for the number of users seeking to experience the winter environment at Snoqualmie Pass.

The Gold Creek SnoPark on NF 4832 is the only facility in the corridor that visitors may use for parking with just a standard seasonal permit. The GC SnoPark, the parking lot for visitors going to Gold Creek Pond, is the number one winter use area in the State. The GC SnoPark fills to capacity on most weekends, on Holidays, and some weekdays from December 1st to March 31st and continues to the end of the snow season. The number of vehicles from 8am to dark on a single day can exceed 1,000 as people come for a few hours and leave, allowing others to take their place. According to the Washington State Winter Program over 90% of all SnoPark Permits sold statewide for non-motorized recreation are purchased by residents who live within 1-2 hours of Snoqualmie Pass.

The use of the Snowmobile road (NF 4832) is not an option for non-motorized recreation. Visitors to the National Forest who are seeking peaceful, quiet, clean air, and want to avoid motorized vehicles are not going to want to "share" the route. The Forest Service would need to prohibit motorized vehicles on this route if it was to be designated as a mitigation route for Gold Creek Pond closure.

Closing the Gold Creek Valley to recreation for 5-7 years (and up to 10 years) is not an option. We believe the plan must be modified to reflect the traditional use of the area for recreation. There are no alternative sites proposed in the GCVRP draft EA that would mitigate the loss of this resource. All the SnoParks within the I-90 Corridor are already filled to capacity by 8:30 am. Users have adapted their use patterns by not visiting on weekends or by arriving in the afternoons just to be able to get a legal and safe parking spot. Closing off the Gold Creek Valley will result in users impacting the Summit Ski Areas, the Alpental, Summit, and Hyak residential neighborhoods, and the I-90 maintenance yards, the on and off ramps, and the shoulders of the freeway creating a major liability and safety concern for all the stakeholders in the Pass region.

If the project is to require complete closure of the Gold Creek Pond for even a short period the Forest Service must provide mitigation plans to manage the impacts to users and the community at Snoqualmie Pass. "Go someplace else" is not a mitigation plan because someplace else is already overly impacted. New recreation areas with similar attributes must be provided to be considered a mitigation. These areas should be available before any restrictions are in place.

We have reviewed the projects that have been completed to date by the Kittitas Conservation Trust (KCT) and we did not find any extensive closures of public land for Restoration Projects. The Box Creek/Kachess Campground Project construction closure was limited to the construction phase of the project only, as an example of a project completed without impacting the public visitors. If the GCVRP is so different from these past

projects we believe the public and Pass Community must be involved in the process of deciding the construction schedule and timeline. The I-90 expansion project was studied, designed with multiple options, reviewed, and built with community involvement. This plan is not inclusive and ignores the residents of the pass and the users of the Gold Creek Valley. We oppose the plan on these grounds.

We would like to see a full EIS completed so that the many questions about the Gold Creek Pond project can proceed without completely closing the Gold Creek Valley for 5-7 years. We believe there should be options developed and mitigation plans devised before the Draft EA is final.

- *Staging area for construction materials?
- *Source of the fill material for the ponds?
- *The environmental review for the location of the sourcing of the fill material?
- *The impact including the CO2 generated by the transportation of the fill material?
- *Truck traffic will use what roadways to haul materials and how will the gravel dust, the rubber tire dust, and the petroleum leaks be contained and disposed of?
- *The schedule of the construction to avoid impact to wildlife and fish migration?
- *How will the pond filling be managed to avoid killing the fish, amphibians, that live in the pond?
- *Why is the drainage pipe that feeds the pond not being removed or redirected to the Creek?
- *What is the source of the trees that will be used for the in stream woody structures?
- *Will these trees be replaced or will this result in new areas that have less tree canopy cover?
- *How will the helicopters be serviced for fueling and where will this happen (spill precautions)?
- *Will you coordinate with the local fire department during the air operations to ensure staffing is available to cover the normal operations in addition to these new exposures?

In summary, there are many questions and concerns regarding the Draft EA analysis, the design of the project, and the unclear schedule and implementation which need to be clarified and resolved prior to project approval.

Thank you for your considerations.