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Comments: Gold Creek Valley Restoration Project

Jay Kisman, Acting Cle Elum District ranger of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

As I suggested in the earlier comment period, the Gold Creek Restoration Project as written does not consider the human environment of Gold Creek and surrounding upper Yakima River Valley. It excludes larger ecological considerations specifically: recreation, local community usage and economic impact. The report limits recreation to the Gold Creek Valley and Pond area. Project impacts in the 1-90 corridor of /Snoqualmie Pass were not given consideration.

The modified Draft Decision Notice on keeping ponds, roads and trails open is vague and leaves discretion within the Forest Service and implementing partners, who are not identified.

With a project this long, without complete funding, the modifications do not have flexibility for unanticipated events.

ADA paved trails and facilities closed during construction would not comply with ADA law.

The Recreation and Scenic Report does not offer new facilities but lists existing ones. These existing Forest Service facilities need to remain open or new ones built to standards of the existing buildings and trails.

NEPA requires the Forest Service to look at the effects on people, places, and resources. Businesses, housing, new development and recreation outside the Pond - these effects were not examined.

Kittitas County is THE recreation area for the population of the Puget Sound lowlands. The focus for a project of this size and duration of 5-10 years must include consideration of construction disruption on the Pass area recreation. There is no discussion about where the recreation users will go - all Pass recreation locations are already overcrowded.

"Potentially Affected Environment" (p.15) needs to include the human use of the area for recreation. Resource extraction was mentioned as a result of human impact; positive human contributions to the environment were not noted (pp.16-17).

The years of planning for Gold Creek restoration never reached out to various recreation groups involving walking, hiking, botany, birding, winter sports, hang gliding, orienteering, bicycling and other activities in the Gold Creek Valley area.

Non-profit conservation groups, agencies, and others contacted (pp.12-13) do not include recreation focused individuals or groups.

The 12/13/2018 charrette was a focus group on biology of restoration. Any comments on recreation were specific to the Pond area only.

There is a long history of recreation on Snoqualmie Pass with generations of accumulated knowledge on public recreation use. This knowledge was lacking in the planning process.

There was no mention of active sports, family snow play, the need for more parking and ADA facilities in committee reports, project literature, or references (pp.38-39).

The co-leads of the project and the conservation organizations did not have specialist knowledge of recreation. The project specialists (p.21) and the interdisciplinary team (p.29) were not listed.

The Cle Elum Ranger District push for habitat is district wide but has NOT included recreation planning for the

increasing population in the district who uses the area for various types of recreation described above.
The Gold Creek Project connects the habitat to the larger area but excluded recreation planning.

A SEPA report was mentioned (p.5) but is not included in the Gold Creek Valley Restoration Report.

While Gold Creek is closed, there needs to be coordination with DNR and State Parks on recreation expansion rather than only using existing facilities.

Environmental Justice (p.27) uses only Kittitas County as it's metric ; this doesn't reflect the large number of people who come from the surrounding areas to live, work, run businesses and recreate there.

Scoping began in 3/13/2020 for 30 days, which was prior to the 9/2020 change in 1978 CEQ regulations, page 28. Comments and objections have also occurred in 2024.

That was a large 4 year gap to continue using 1978 regulations.

A full EIS is needed on the project.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments above.

Frank Harris