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Comments:

The Gold Creek Restoration Project aims to restore a section of Gold Creek that de-waters during the summer months by enhancing the stream channel and filling in a large portion of Gold Creek Pond, a former gravel pit created during the original construction of I-90. Under the project plan, Gold Creek Pond would be restored to a forest wetland. The plan also includes a 10-year closure of the valley to the public and all recreational activities, with the exception of access for Gold Creek residents to their properties.

Recently, the USFS added the closure of the Lake Keechelus boat ramp to the project, including restrictions on vehicle access once the lake level drops below the lower boat ramp. This is currently planned as a seasonal closure to protect the exposed lower reach of Gold Creek's streambed from vehicles during low water levels.

Recently Fire Chief Wiseman interviewed with King 5 news in Seattle, while the Fire District appreciates King 5 News' reporting, we feel that some of our concerns were not fully addressed in the interview. The Fire District supports efforts to improve and protect the environment; however, we are deeply concerned that the USFS has not provided any mitigation measures to address the significant impacts this project will have on the residents of Snoqualmie Pass and the general public's recreational use.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of recreational opportunities in our small but popular area. Closures like those planned for the Lake Keechelus boat launch and Gold Creek will only compound existing problems by pushing and concentrating recreational activities into other already overcrowded areas. While we understand the need to protect natural resources, we believe there are alternatives to responsible recreation without resorting to complete closures. Unfortunately, the USFS offices in the Cle Elum Ranger District and Wenatchee have refused to meet with us to discuss these alternatives.

Our greatest concern with the Gold Creek Restoration Project is the proposed filling of Gold Creek Pond and Heli Pond. These are the only viable water sources for firefighting in the Gold Creek Valley, and their removal would force us to truck water from distant locations, causing significant delays in response times for both structural and wildland fires. This situation is particularly troubling given the valley's remote location, limited firefighting water sources, and the fact that there is only one route for ingress and egress, both for firefighting efforts and evacuations. The Fire District is the primary firefighting agency for private property in Gold Creek Valley.

Additionally, the residents of Gold Creek Valley have recently been informed by the Washington State Department of Health that their domestic water source has exceeded its capacity, preventing new structures from being built on undeveloped lots. This issue, while separate from the Gold Creek Project, further complicates any efforts to develop additional water resources for firefighting, making the ponds in Gold Creek a critical asset.

While we understand the intent of the Gold Creek Restoration Project and support the protection of endangered species such as the Bull Trout, we are troubled by the USFS's position, as stated in the King 5 News story, that the restoration of Bull Trout habitat is a higher priority than public safety. The USFS also suggested that water cistern systems could be installed in Gold Creek Valley for firefighting purposes, yet they, along with their project partners-the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Yakama Nation-have refused to discuss viable alternatives or options to reduce the impact on public safety.

When asked about including mitigation plans for community impacts, the Forest Service stated that this was not their focus. According to the USFS Project Manager, "The purpose of this project is bull trout and really only bull trout. So, we're not focused on solving all the recreation problems; we're going to mitigate so that we have a

better recreational facility than we have today." Given that Gold Creek is one of the most popular winter recreation sites in the Cascades, we are extremely concerned about the impact a 10-year closure of Gold Creek will have on our local community, other recreational sites, and safety with regard to emergency response.

As of today the USFS has not met with the Fire District to discuss concerns related to the safety of Firefighters, Citizens and members of the public.