February 24, 2021

Kelly Lawrence
Forest Supervisor
Olympic National Forest
1835 Black Lake Blvd SW
Olympia, WA 98512

RE: Support for H to Z Retained Receipts to be Applied to FS RD 2900 Aquatic Restoration Project

Dear Supervisor Lawrence:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations focused on supporting restoration efforts on the Olympic National Forest (ONF) and the broader Olympic Peninsula, we are writing to convey our support for the WCRRI #20-1278: Sitkum Forest Service Road 2900 Milepost 16.1 Culvert Replacement project. We believe this is the highest priority project to receive the receipts from the H to Z thinning stewardship sale, conducted jointly by Olympic Forest Collaborative (OFC) and ONF.

Our organizations work together and in collaboration with the Forest to identify and implement priority aquatic restoration projects on the Olympic National Forest that connect critical areas of biodiversity in forests and rivers on the Olympic Peninsula. Restoring aquatic connectivity and protecting water quality supports productive ecosystems, and benefits ecosystem function by allowing fish and aquatic organisms to move freely during seasonal migrations or for dispersal to new habitats.

The project proposed for funding with the retained receipts would replace a deteriorating and undersized culvert at Milepost 16.1 on the Forest Service 2900 Road. As one of the last remaining essential projects to finish in the ONF's Sitkum Watershed Restoration Action Plan, the project is ‘shovel-ready’ - the NEPA and cultural resource review is complete, and the designs and contract package are ready for bid. It is also listed as a high priority project with the North Pacific Coast Lead Entity (NPCLE).

Mass wasting events negatively affect water quality and fish habitat downstream, jeopardize the significant investment in restoration of aquatic connectivity and improving water quality throughout the basin, and would close the road for an indeterminate amount of time. The WRIA 20 Limiting Factors Report states “mass wasting is a major limiting factor throughout the Calawah Watershed,
particularly in the Sitkum River.”¹ If allowed to fail, the road fill and channel would deliver large volumes of sediment to the Sitkum River, with adverse impacts extending more than ten miles downstream to the confluence with the Calawah River. In addition to presenting a significant mass-wasting hazard, the existing culvert is a bottleneck to aquatic connectivity, does not allow normal transport of wood and sediment, and lacks capacity at flood flows. By reducing the likelihood of road-related mass wasting and debris torrents, completion of this project would contribute to the health of the Calawah watershed and its fish habitat.

This is the last of five deteriorating culverts, designed with SRFB project #17-1103: Sitkum FS Road 2900 Stream Crossing Designs, still needing funding to complete. The approximately $200,000 available from retained receipts will provide a significant portion of the funding needed to implement the $474,000 project. Project partners are confident that they can acquire the remaining funds needed to fully implement the project, and completion of this project is supported by multiple partnering organizations active on NPCLE, including the Quileute Tribe, local governments, NGOs and citizens. A separate letter of support from the Clallam Conservation District, the project sponsor, is attached.

We look forward to your support of this collaborative request, and thank you for your interest, enthusiasm, contributions and commitment to working with the local lead entities, tribes, the Olympic Forest Collaborative, and other organizations to carry out forest and aquatic restoration priorities on the Olympic Peninsula.

Sincerely,

Matt Comisky
Co-Chair
Olympic Forest Collaborative

Frank Geyer
Natural Resources Director
Quileute Tribe

Luke Kelly
Olympic Peninsula Restoration Project Manager
Trout Unlimited

Jessica Helsley
Director, Washington Program
Wild Salmon Center

Mike Rohde
Acting Executive Director and Project Manager
Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition

Mara Zimmerman
Executive Director
Coast Salmon Partnership and Foundation