

Merced Wild and Scenic River Revised Comprehensive Management Plan
Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Yosemite National Park

Lead Agency: National Park Service

ABSTRACT

This document is the *Final Merced Wild and Scenic River Revised Comprehensive Management Plan and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS). It is intended to correct the deficiencies in the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (Merced River Plan/FEIS) released in June 2000. In August 2000, the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2) of the Merced River Plan/FEIS was approved and signed in a Record of Decision (subsequently revised in November 2000). The Record of Decision established the Merced River Plan as the official document for guiding future management of the main stem and South Fork of the Merced Wild and Scenic River within its 81 miles in Yosemite National Park and the El Portal Administrative Site.

In response to the October 27, 2003, opinion of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, this Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses two deficiencies identified by the Court: (1) the revised plan must implement a user capacity program that presents specific measurable limits on use, and (2) the revised plan must reassess the river corridor boundary in the El Portal Administrative Site based on the location of Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The programmatic guidance identified herein would revise and supplement the Merced River Plan/FEIS and the park's 1980 *General Management Plan*. This supplemental environmental impact statement represents National Park Service compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, as well as parallel compliance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and National Historic Preservation Act.

The Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS identifies and analyzes four alternatives: Alternative 1—the No Action Alternative; Alternative 2—Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) Program with Interim Facility Limits (preferred); Alternative 3—VERP Program with Segment Limits; and Alternative 4—VERP Program with Management Zone Limits.

The No Action Alternative represents a baseline against which to compare the three action alternatives. Under Alternative 1, the Merced River Plan—as signed in the 2000 Record of Decision (and subsequent revision)—would continue to guide management in the river corridor. Application of its management elements (boundaries, classifications, Outstandingly Remarkable Values, management zoning, River Protection Overlay, Section 7 determination process) would continue as presented in the plan. However, implementation of the VERP framework would not be in place since specific indicators and standards had not been developed at the time of the Court's ruling. The National Park Service would continue to manage user capacity under existing programs and policies, including the existing Wilderness Trailhead Quota System and other specific limits identified in Yosemite National Park policies and plans. Alternative 1 would implement the narrow corridor boundary for El Portal as presented in the selected alternative of the June 2000 Merced River Plan/FEIS (100-year floodplain or River Protection Overlay [whichever is greater] plus adjacent wetlands).

Alternative 2 (preferred) would include all of the elements of the No Action Alternative, with the addition of implementing the VERP user capacity component, along with interim limits on some

park facilities; the river boundary in the El Portal segment would be redrawn to extend to a quarter-mile on either side of the river. Alternative 3 would also include all of the elements from the No Action Alternative, in addition to a VERP user capacity component (as described in Chapter II), plus a maximum daily limit for each river segment, a maximum annual visitation limit of 5.32 million, and a daily limit on the number of day hikers to Half Dome; the river boundary in the El Portal segment would have a quarter-mile boundary. Alternative 4 would contain the elements of the No Action Alternative in addition to a VERP user capacity component (as described in Chapter II), plus limits for each river management zone and an annual maximum visitation limit of 3.27 million; the river boundary in the El Portal segment would be drawn according to the location of Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Appendix F of the Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS contains the National Park Service's analysis of and responses to public comments submitted on the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS. All public comment letters (as well as testimony from public hearings) can be viewed on the park's web site at www.nps.gov/yose/planning/mrp/revision/comments. Additionally, those aspects of the plan that changed from Draft to Final are summarized in the pages immediately following this Abstract.

This planning document has been made available to numerous public libraries throughout California. It can also be viewed online at www.nps.gov/yose/planning. To request a printed copy or CD ROM, phone 209/379-1365; email the planning office at YOSE_Planning@nps.gov; send a fax to 209/379-1294; or contact the park by mail at Yosemite Planning Office, ATTN: Final Revised Merced River Plan, P.O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389.