



NEPA and the Merced River Plan



What is the National Environmental Policy Act?

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) is landmark environmental protection legislation that requires all Federal agencies to consider the potential impacts of proposed actions on the natural environment, historic landscape, and human environment. These potential impacts are documented through in-depth studies that inform the decision-making process. This approach requires managing agencies to consider environmental values alongside technical and economic considerations. Doing so results in informed—and ultimately improved—decision making.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

An environmental impact statement is a detailed study of present conditions along with a broad range of possible alternative management strategies. An environmental impact statement is the most detailed type of documentation under NEPA. Public review of a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is a key step to ensuring that the action proposed is thoroughly assessed. The EIS process promotes informed decision making based on detailed scientific information and public involvement.

Why does the Merced River Plan need an Environmental Impact Statement?

The Merced River Plan is a highly complex and controversial federal action, therefore the park must study and disclose any potential impacts through development of an EIS. The plan will guide the National Park Service's management of the 81 miles of the Merced and South Fork Merced River within Yosemite National Park for the next 15–20 years. The river encompasses designated Wilderness as well as more developed areas in Wawona, El Portal and Yosemite Valley. The complexity of the plan and the potential for environmental impacts triggered the need for a detailed analysis found in an environmental impact statement.

Why does there need to be a range of alternatives?

NEPA requires that federal agencies develop a range of alternatives to meet project and management goals. The advantage of having a wide range of alternatives is to provide a comparison of positive and negative outcomes from all reasonable actions that could be undertaken. Multiple alternatives allow for the public's views to be addressed and analyzed in the draft environmental impact statement to determine the environmental consequences of proposed actions. The EIS must include relevant alternatives for comparative analysis. Alternative 1 is the "No Action" alternative; this describes the existing conditions and serves as a baseline of comparison for the other alternatives. The Draft Merced River Plan includes a no-action alternative and five action alternatives (Alternatives 2–6). All alternatives must be both reasonable and feasible to implement.

What is a preferred alternative?

A preferred alternative is the alternative the NPS believes would best fulfill its statutory mission and responsibilities, based on the NEPA analysis and a separate value analysis. The preferred alternative is identified at the time of the draft environmental impact statement, and selected upon adopted of the final environmental impact statement.

Does the public have a role in the NEPA process?

The public is encouraged to participate in the NEPA process by commenting on draft plan and engaging with park staff. In this way, NEPA embodies the democratic ideal that people have a right to participate and contribute in the formation of laws and policies. At least two opportunities for public comment are included during preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, one at the beginning of the process to determine the scope of a plan, and another mid-way through the process, to allow opportunity for comment on the agency's draft document. During formation of the Merced River Plan, many more opportunities to contribute to the plan's development were provided, including open houses, workshops, workbooks, and public meetings on the draft alternative concepts.

Find Out More

If you're interested in learning more about the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, you can download the entire document at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp-deis.htm. For those that have the time, reading the entire document will convey the fullest understanding of the plan. For those interested in an overview of the Merced River Plan, park staff suggest you begin with:

- Summary Guide for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan/ DEIS
- These sections of Chapter 8: Alternatives:
 - o Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6
 - o Overview section of Alternatives 2-6 (includes map series for each alternative)
 - o Full narrative for Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative)

Tell Us What You Think

Comment on this draft environmental impact statement by visiting the Merced River Plan Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/mrp_deis. Electronic comment submittal through PEPC saves resources and allows for direct entry to the NPS comment analysis system. Comments can also be submitted by email to yose_planning@nps.gov or by U.S. mail at the following address:

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