



*"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness."
- John Muir*

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 33

August 2008

"Our critical road repair along the Merced River was substantially completed before Memorial Day, Tunnel View Rehabilitation is underway, and an exciting new plan for Tenaya Lake is about to commence."

Dear Yosemite Friends,



We are having a great summer in the park. Our critical road repair along the Merced River was substantially completed before Memorial Day, Tunnel View Rehabilitation is underway, and an exciting new plan for Tenaya Lake is about to commence. The Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Plan is focusing on Tuolumne Meadows this summer while visitors have access to the meadow—read about

how to stay involved on page 4.

Since the last newsletter in October 2007, the National Park Service has received a ruling in favor of the plaintiffs on the appeal for the 2005 Merced Wild and Scenic River Plan. This ruling has had many implications for Wild and Scenic River planning processes. Park managers have taken time to study and analyze the ruling in detail to determine what is now required in a Wild and Scenic River plan. We believe the ruling implies that the National Park Service will have to address the new Merced River Plan with much more site-specific planning than was previously understood to be required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In order to do that, we need to expand the scope of the new plan currently underway—which requires court approval. Stay tuned for updates on these issues and see related articles on page 2-3.

We also highlight some national initiatives in this issue. Through the Centennial Initiative, Yosemite received \$4.97 million for four projects in 2008, and the "Do Your Part Parks" program—an online tool for national park visitors to pledge to reduce their carbon footprint—recently kicked off. You'll find more details on page 6.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Park Superintendent

Planning in the Park

Plans with environmental impact statements (EIS) underway include:

- Tuolumne River and Tuolumne Meadows Plan/EIS
- New Merced River Plan/EIS
- Environmental Education Campus/EIS

Upcoming Document Reviews & Comment Periods

Tenaya Lake Area Plan:

Public scoping period on the EA is anticipated in late summer 2008. See article on page 5.

Parkwide Telecommunications Upgrade:

Public scoping period on the EA is anticipated in fall 2008. See article on page 7.

Tioga Road Trailheads:

Public scoping period on the EA is anticipated later this year. See article on page 5.

Environmental Education Campus EIS:

Public comment period on the Draft EIS is anticipated in winter 2008-2009 with a final EIS anticipated in fall 2009. See article on page 7.

High-Elevation Aquatic Resources Management

Plan: The public scoping comment period for the environmental assessment (EA) occurred from June 23 - July 25, 2008. The public comment period on the EA is anticipated in summer 2009.

Project & Plan Updates

East Yosemite Valley Utilities Improvement:

Replacement and repair of deteriorated sewer lines is ongoing.

Hetch Hetchy Communications System Upgrade

Project: Public review and comment period on the EA/Initial Study occurred from October 2-November 2, 2007. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed in April 2008.

Parkwide Invasive Plant Management Plan:

Public review and comment period on the EA occurred from June 13 -July 13, 2008. Public comments are now being analyzed.

Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections of

El Portal Road: After substantial repairs, the road was opened to 2-way traffic. A minor repair of the electrical system that runs beneath the road is now being planned for the near future.

Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation:

Public review and comment period on the EA occurred from October 3, 2007-November 2, 2007. A FONSI was signed in December 2007. Construction is underway with project completion anticipated in October 2008.

Vogelsang Backcountry Utilities Improvement

Project: The public scoping comment period for the EA occurred from January 15 -February 13, 2008. Public comments are now being analyzed.

Check online for more information about plans and projects at:

www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm

Litigation Update

The National Park Service (NPS) completed the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (MRP/EIS) in August 2000, and, shortly after, the Merced River Plan entered a lengthy litigation process. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that two deficiencies must be corrected—an improper drawing of the boundary in El Portal, and a failure to adequately address user capacity. The NPS believed these deficiencies were corrected in a revised MRP/EIS that was released in 2005.

The NPS was challenged by two local citizens groups, Friends of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposans for the Environment and Responsible Government, and the U.S. District Court declared the revised plan invalid in July 2006. The NPS appealed this decision, and, at the same time, commenced a new court-mandated planning process for the Merced River (see page 3 for more info on the new Merced River planning process). The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals returned a decision on March 27, 2008 in favor of the plaintiffs finding that “...*the 2005 Revised Plan does not describe an actual level of visitor use that will not adversely impact the Merced’s Outstanding Remarkable Values (“ORVs”).*”

IMPLICATIONS: The NPS has examined the court ruling to understand the implications this has on both the Merced and Tuolumne River Plans.

The NPS believes that a Wild and Scenic River plan now requires a greater level of specificity than was previously thought to be necessary. The quantity, mixture, kinds, and amounts of recreation and other public use must be evaluated against any adverse impact on the resource values of the river area, and the plan must “*deal with or discuss the maximum number of people that can be received*” in the river corridor. Detailed site planning is necessary to fulfill this requirement.

Additionally, it was previously assumed that facilities within the river corridor at the time of Wild and Scenic designation were considered consistent with a Wild and Scenic River. However, the court ruled that “*There is no authority for a presumption that holding facility levels to those in existence in 1987, when the Merced was designated under the WSRA, is protective of ORVs...*” This finding indicates that all existing facilities within the river corridor should be evaluated against whether they protect, enhance or degrade the ORVs.

The ultimate implication is that the scope of the Merced River Plan will be broadened to accommodate more site-specific planning (see page 3). Site specific planning for the Tuolumne Meadows Plan is already underway, so the Tuolumne River Plan will proceed as planned.

For more information and to read the court’s decisions, visit www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/litigation.htm



MERCED RIVER PLAN UPDATE



Last year the National Park Service (NPS) launched a public scoping period for the new Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan (MRP) to comply with a July, 2006 U.S. District Court order (*see page 2*).

WORK TO DATE. The first public workshop was held on October 6, 2007, to discuss the range of public scoping concerns and what those mean for the creation of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs). A second public workshop was held on March 7, 2008, to review the draft ORV Report and to start drafting desired conditions statements that will be used in the development of management prescriptions. More information about the public meetings can be found at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrpworkshops.htm

Subject matter experts, agency and elected officials, and tribal representatives were also convened to help craft the ORVs, and to define boundaries and classifications for the Merced River Plan.

A NEW DIRECTION. The ruling on the 2005 Merced River Plan in March 2008 (*see page 2*) implies that the new MRP must include detailed site planning. The court ruled that the NPS must determine specific numeric capacities and examine all existing facilities and uses in relation to whether they protect and enhance the ORVs. Site-specific planning is necessary to look at these issues in detail and determine numeric capacities or maximum number of people.

Based on the court's decision, the park also must evaluate the long-existing wilderness trailhead quota system and other numeric limits

in place at the time of Wild and Scenic River designation in the Merced River corridor.

Therefore, the new MRP will study site-specific planning for all of Yosemite Valley and the El Portal Administrative Site, as well as for NPS lands in Wawona.

This means that the NPS will be planning for all areas formerly addressed by the 2000 Yosemite Valley Plan, including the transportation elements. The refocused new MRP process will begin with a new public scoping period to allow comments on this more detailed, site-specific examination.

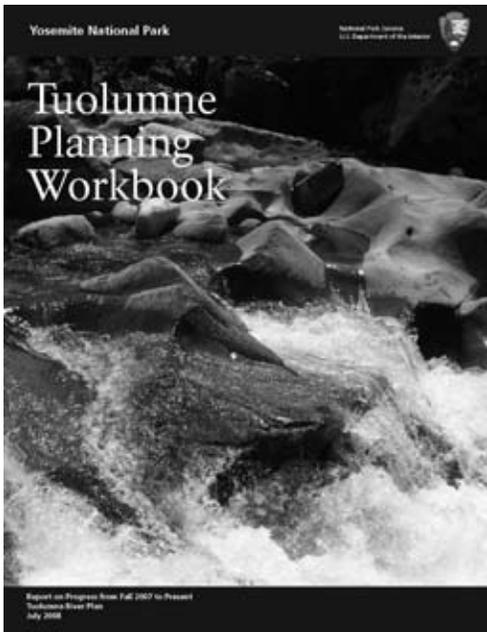
The new schedule anticipates an additional 2 years of effort over the original 3 year timeline. The expanded scope and schedule must be approved by the U.S. District Court before moving forward. More information on the plan and the Draft ORV report can be found at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/newmrp.htm

HERE'S WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT:

- Site-specific planning
- Specific numeric capacities
- Transcend river boundary to include all river-related visitor use areas (Yosemite Valley, Wawona, El Portal)
- Extended schedule
- New scoping period

TUOLUMNE RIVER PLAN: Comment on Early Alternatives

The NPS needs YOU to weigh in on early alternatives for the Tuolumne River Plan.



Each Alternative Tells a Story

By law, the NPS must evaluate a range of possible management strategies, known as alternatives. The Tuolumne River Plan explores five alternatives, each one telling a different story for how to manage the Tuolumne River—including Tuolumne Meadows and Glen Aulin—to protect their Outstandingly Remarkable Values. These strategies grew directly from the range of tribal, public, and staff comments collected in summer 2006 and 2007. There may be ideas you love and some you may not. But each alternative was created with a thorough examination of scientific data and careful consideration of the laws and policies that guide the park.

As part of a multi-faceted public involvement process, the Tuolumne River Plan team has released the 2008 Tuolumne Planning Workbook for review and comment through September 15. The purpose of the workbook is to provide an update on the Tuolumne River Plan process and give the public and park staff an opportunity to review and comment on early alternative concepts.

The 2008 edition builds on the work presented in the 2007 workbook and was developed in response to the nearly 300 mail-back comment forms, letters, faxes, and emails received last summer.

The latest workbook contains the following:

- An update on the planning process, including how the Merced River Plan litigation affects this planning effort
- Changes as a result of public comments on the 2007 workbook's preliminary alternative concepts
- The latest range of draft management alternatives for the Tuolumne River, including the NPS preferred alternative
- Early alternative site plan concepts for Tuolumne Meadows
- A mail-back comment form

Public input received on the 2008 workbook will be accepted through **September 15** and will be considered in the preparation of the Draft Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft Tuolumne River Plan/EIS), scheduled for release in summer 2009.

Copies of the Tuolumne Planning Workbook are available upon request and will be distributed throughout Tuolumne Meadows at the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge, the grill, the Tuolumne Meadows Visitor Center, and at Parsons Lodge.

To receive a copy, email a request to Yose_Planning@nps.gov, leave a phone message with contact information at 209-379-1365, fax a request to 209-379-1294, or send contact information by mail to Superintendent, Attn: Tuolumne Workbook, PO Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389. An online version can be viewed on the park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/2008wrkbk.htm.

USER-CAPACITY EXPLORATION



Last February the National Park Service held a symposium on user capacity at Yosemite National Park. The symposium was widely attended—more than 150 people from around the country participated in the event representing various agencies, universities and interest groups. Of special note were the more than 50 local stakeholders and members of the general public. Feedback from the symposium has been positive and results have informed park efforts to address user capacity in both the Tuolumne River Plan and the new Merced River Plan.

Since the symposium, Yosemite staff joined symposium experts to develop fundamental principles for addressing user capacity during the International Symposium for Society and Resource Management (ISSRM) held on June 11-14, 2008, at the University of Vermont. The group worked to identify common themes among user capacity approaches and target the differences needing resolution. The session was successful in continuing the dialogue among key thinkers on the user capacity subject and moving toward reconciliation of divergent views.

The park's approach to user capacity is even more fundamentally changed based upon guidance articulated in the recent 9th Circuit Court ruling on the Merced River Plan (*see page 2*). For more information on what the park is doing to address user capacity, including a summary of the Yosemite User Capacity Symposium, please visit www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/ucmp.htm

Understanding Park Visitation

Park staff are collaborating with social science researchers to conduct studies to better understand park visitation and use.

- **Transportation and attraction sites:** Complemented by studies about visitor perceptions related to crowding and congestion, studies have been conducted to examine visitor use patterns. This has allowed park management to model what visitor arrivals at entrance stations will mean in terms of traffic patterns and the number of people at attraction sites such as Yosemite Falls. This information will help park managers anticipate conditions before they occur on the ground, and predict what effect various planning alternatives might mean for traffic/visitor patterns.
- **On the trail:** Half Dome Cables Trail studies this summer will allow the NPS to better understand people's experience on the trail as well as develop a connection between the number of people using the trail and the amount of time spent on the cables.
- **Winter visitation:** Survey research of park-wide visitation was conducted in February 2008 to understand winter visitation. Visitor groups were systematically surveyed at the Arch Rock, Big Oak Flat, and South entrances. The results are anticipated in the late autumn 2008. Comparison of winter visitation with the summer visitation from the survey conducted in 2005 (www.psu.uidaho.edu/vsp.profile.htm?ID=0192) may provide some interesting comparisons.

Tioga Road Trailheads

The National Park Service and the Yosemite Fund have initiated a project to address circulation, accessibility, parking, viewing, food storage, wayfinding, and interpretive opportunities at existing trailheads along the Tioga Road corridor. This project will include the development of design standards and changes at selected trailheads. It is anticipated that this project will require an environmental assessment. The project is now in internal scoping and is expected to move into public scoping later this year. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm

Tenaya Lake Area Plan

Tenaya Lake is a magnificent High Sierra lake surrounded by granite domes, lodgepole forests, and Yosemite's vast wilderness. Tenaya is the largest lake in Yosemite's front-country. Because of its remarkable scenic qualities, its inviting blue water, and its proximity to Tioga Road, Tenaya Lake is one of the most popular destinations for summer visitors in Yosemite. Issues associated with visitor use, visitor safety, and resource impacts have been occurring for decades. The Tenaya Lake Area Plan will provide for a formal, public analysis of these long-standing issues. Actions considered in the plan may include ecological restoration, picnic area improvements, trailhead and parking improvements, comfort stations, and trails. Public scoping for the environmental assessment will begin late summer 2008. This project is possible due to a generous grant from The Yosemite Fund.



Tenaya Lake

Do Your Part for Climate-Friendly Parks



The National Park Service (NPS), in cooperation with the National Park Conservation Association and the Environmental Protection Agency, has developed a new website, www.doyourpartparks.org, which empowers national park visitors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help national parks become leaders in combating global warming. The simple,

3-step process allows you to create a personal profile that will be linked to your carbon footprint and the park of your choice—Yosemite is one of 15 parks currently participating in the project. To calculate your carbon footprint, enter basic information about your household's energy usage and pledge to reduce your carbon footprint. Explore the website and learn more about climate change and other information about what you can do to help. Our collective effort will help protect Yosemite's glaciers, plants, wildlife and air.

What is Yosemite National Park doing to “go green?”

- **Alternative fuel vehicles:** The NPS purchased 18 hybrid electric-diesel shuttle buses in 2005 to replace the pre-existing fleet of 1986 diesel buses. Additionally, alternative fuel and hybrid vehicles are gradually replacing current park service vehicles, and the park uses 100% re-refined oil as lubricant in over 750 vehicles and pieces of equipment.
- **Energy management:** A ground source heat pump in the Curry Village employee housing utilizes the near-constant temperature of the earth for heating and cooling of the buildings. Also, solar panels have been installed atop the El Portal Administration Complex, park housing and the El Portal wastewater treatment facility.
- **Minimizing pollutants:** Canola-based bar oil is used for chain saws and winch cables in order to minimize pollutants, and all of the park's hydraulic fluid is also canola-based.
- **Composting facility:** Yosemite partnered with Mariposa County and park concessioner DNC to build a composting facility in Mariposa to extend the life of the landfill from 7 to 15+ years.

Park partners have also been instrumental in “greening the park.” For more information about sustainable operations in the park, visit online at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/factsheets.htm



Solar array in El Portal



Hybrid shuttles in the park

Centennial Challenge Update

On April 24, 2008 the first Centennial Challenge projects and programs were unveiled by Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. The Challenge, announced in 2007, created a federal fund program that matches philanthropic contributions made for the benefit of national parks in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. Yosemite National Park received \$4.97 million in 2008 from both nonprofit partners and the NPS matching funds, which will be used for four projects:

- **Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation:** This iconic overlook, originally constructed in 1932, offers a panoramic view of Yosemite Valley. Yosemite National Park and The Yosemite Fund is collaborating to rehabilitate historic rock work, restore the historic view, reduce safety hazards, and make the site wheelchair accessible.
- **Junior Ranger Center at the Nature Center at Happy Isles:** In partnership with The Yosemite Fund, the Nature Center at Happy Isles will serve as a base for expanded Junior Ranger programs in Yosemite.
- **Connect Underserved Youth to Parks:** This partnership project includes funding for Yosemite National Park, Olympic National Park and Golden Gate National Recreation Area from Yosemite National Institutes (YNI). The program provides scholarships for diverse, low-income students to visit these parks for wilderness expeditions and hands-on science and environmental education activities, as well as funding to evaluate the program's success.
- **Discovering New Species in Yosemite:** This project, with matching funds from The Yosemite Fund, is part of the National All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventories (ATBI). This will provide basic species inventories of critical and endemic cave and rock-face lichens.

The park also received operational funding for 104 additional seasonal rangers in 2008 as part of the Centennial Initiative. For more

information, visit www.nps.gov/2016

Environmental Education Campus

The National Park Service (NPS) has been hard at work planning for an Environmental Education Campus with park partner, Yosemite Institute. The current environmental education campus at Crane Flat serves both the park and Yosemite Institute by fulfilling their shared mission to promote visitor understanding, stewardship, and appreciation of diverse park environments. Each year the campus serves approximately 13,000 ethnically and socio-economically diverse students between the ages of 7 and 18, providing educational adventures and inspiring personal connections to the natural world. The campus at Crane Flat has served as an educational facility since 1971; However, it is comprised of older buildings and structures that have been assembled over time and were not originally designed for educational purposes.

A plan to create a better, more efficient, accessible, and environmentally-friendly campus was initiated in 2002. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is currently underway and has included substantial public input and environmental analysis. Alternatives include a No-Action Alternative, a new campus built at the existing site, or a new campus at Henness Ridge (near Chinquapin). A draft EIS is expected to be available for public comment this winter (2008/2009), with a final EIS anticipated in fall 2009. To see draft design concepts, ask questions, or provide input, visit on-line at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/eecampus.htm, or attend one of our upcoming monthly open houses in Yosemite Valley.

INTERPRETING YOSEMITE

Interpretation is what the NPS does to create meaningful connections for visitors. In short, rangers “interpret” the landscape, environment, history, culture, and experiences of the park so that the public can understand the park’s importance and orient themselves in the park.

The Comprehensive Interpretive Planning (CIP) process is the basic planning component for interpretation. The CIP will help Yosemite to decide what their interpretive objectives are, who their audiences are, and what mix of media and personal services to use. The product is not just the plan, but also defines an interpretive operation that achieves management goals, provides appropriate services for our visitors, and promotes high quality visitor experiences.

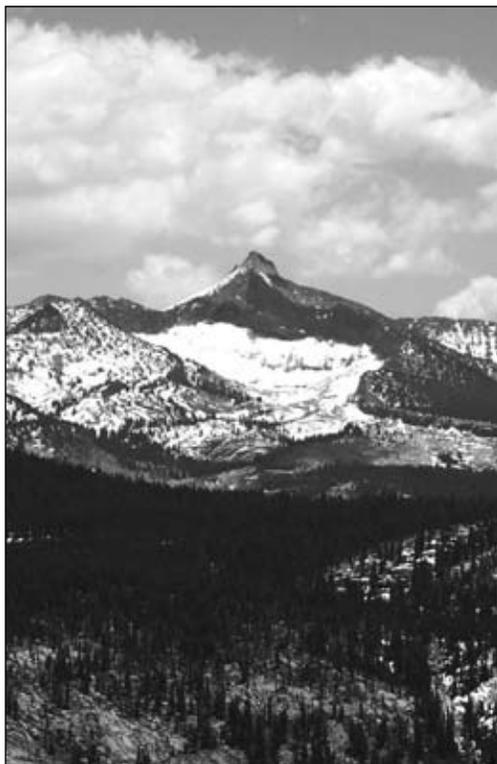
Two full-day public workshops were held in spring 2008 to solicit input for what should be considered for interpretive themes, audiences, and methods for engaging audiences. These foundational workshops guide the development of the plan and set direction for interpretive programming. The plan is scheduled to be completed in late December 2008.

This planning process has been made possible through the generous support of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. For more information, visit online at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/cip.htm

Parkwide Telecommunications Upgrade

The NPS is considering a project to upgrade park-wide telecommunications. The current system has evolved over the course of a half century, and does not provide the speed and capacity needed for today’s telecommunications uses, which include telephone, computer LAN, security video, fire and security alarms, automated traffic and utility data, and mobile radio. A new system would make it possible for park staff to greatly improve efficiency in the protection of park resources and in the delivery of services to the public, including critical law enforcement, firefighting, and emergency medical response. New cell phone antennas for personal cell phone coverage will not be analyzed within this plan. Public scoping on the environmental assessment will begin in fall 2008.

Sign up for the Yosemite
Electronic Newsletter by emailing
Yose_planning@nps.gov



STAY INVOLVED!

Copies of planning documents are available on the park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm. You can also subscribe to the electronic newsletter by emailing Yose_planning@nps.gov—this e-newsletter announces when new documents are available. Please help the National Park Service economize by accessing documents online when possible. If you would like to receive a copy of planning documents for review, please check the boxes that apply. If you have already requested one of these documents, you do not need to submit another request.

- Environmental Education Campus EIS CD Hard Copy
- High-Elevation Aquatic Resources Management Plan EA CD Hard Copy
- Tuolumne Planning Workbook, July 2008 CD Hard Copy
- Tenaya Lake Area Plan EA CD Hard Copy
- Tioga Road Trailheads EA CD Hard Copy
- Parkwide Telecommunications Upgrade EA CD Hard Copy

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