



Visitor Experience and Resource Protection Monitoring Program 2005 Annual Monitoring Report Summary

This was the second year of Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) monitoring program development and implementation for the Merced Wild and Scenic River. Indicators and standards were improved upon from 2004; field monitoring and data collection was repeated; two workshops were held to evaluate and refine monitoring protocols and program administration; and quarterly reports were provided to inform the public of the program's progress.

Results from indicator monitoring in 2005 are as follows:

- **Water Quality:** Preliminary results suggest excellent water quality along both the Main Stem and South Fork of the Merced River. Data collection will continue and standards will be established once a sufficient sample size has been obtained.
- **Number of Social Trails:** Social trails were re-documented at three wetland area sample sites and an increase in the number of social trails was reported at one road-side pull-out. Due to methodological concerns, monitoring of this indicator will be suspended in 2006. Instead, social trail impacts will be addressed using the length of social trails protocol.
- **Length of Social Trails:** Repeated social trail mapping in 2005 revealed an overall increase in the length of trails in Cooks and El Capitan meadows. Funding is being sought for restoration work in El Capitan meadow. Additional monitoring and validation of impacts will be conducted for Cooks meadow. Monitoring of this indicator will continue in 2006 with modifications to the protocol toward making measurement more efficient and cost-effective.
- **Wildlife Exposure to Human Food:** The Ahwahnee and Curry Village parking areas and the Camp 4 and Housekeeping Camp areas reported below standard compliance rates with food storage regulations in 2005. Monitoring of this indicator will continue in 2006 with refinements.
- **Riverbank Erosion:** Data collection in 2005 established a baseline for riverbank erosion conditions. An index was developed representing overall riverbank condition. This information has been incorporated into a map which will be used to identify key areas for monitoring in 2006.
- **Ethnobotany:** This was a pilot indicator in 2005 integrating natural and cultural resource values in the Merced River corridor. Both scientific and practitioner assessments of traditionally gathered plant resources were conducted. Development of this indicator is expected to continue in 2006.
- **Wilderness Encounters:** The remoteness of Wilderness has made it difficult to obtain a sufficient sample size from which to draw accurate conclusions regarding encounter rates. Nevertheless, 2005 data suggest relatively low encounter rates overall with more frequent encounters in the trailed wilderness segments versus the un-trailed. Monitoring of this indicator will continue in 2006 with refinements.
- **People At One Time along the River:** Monitoring in 2005 produced a baseline of river use data at selected sites. These sites represent low, medium and high use areas of the river. A diversity of activities was observed and use fluctuated throughout the course of the day. Monitoring of this indicator will continue in 2006.
- **Parking Availability:** The day-use parking area filled to capacity a significant number of days each month throughout the peak summer season of 2005. Significant improvements to this indicator are likely in 2006.
- **Facilities Availability:** Monitoring in 2005 suggests that visitors are able to find an open picnic table the vast majority of time at selected day use and outdoor eating facilities sampled. Monitoring of this indicator variable is expected in 2006 with refinements.