

Yosemite Valley Campers Coalition (YVCC)

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**COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW AND IMPROVED
MERCED RIVER PLAN(MRP) 09/10/2004**

The 9th Circuit Appeals Court ruled that the MRP was invalid. Specific problem areas requiring more attention were 1) user capacity, and 2) boundaries at El Portal. Though the Court remanded the Plan back to the District Court to remedy the deficiencies, they made it clear that “they did not otherwise uphold the CMP.” Thus, a “revision” is a gross misrepresentation of reality by the NPS in an attempt to continue its commercialization of Yosemite Valley at the expense of historical and traditional campground areas in the valley and camping sites in the Valley.

The new and improved MRP must truly put not only the protection of the river corridor FIRST, but also protection of the natural resources Valley-wide. And we Campers do just that. And, please do not use the actions of a few bad/inexperienced campers and/or lack of NPS supervision to negate the proper stewardship of Yosemite Valley’s resources. We have come a long way, NPS and Campers, from the 1960’s; that “out of control” time in history is behind us and Campers should not be shackled with that history nor pay an extra price for that time.

Any adverse impacts that campers may have on the Merced River are restored in the nine (9) non-camping months. The fact that campers are self-contained, in and of themselves, greatly eliminates all of the following activities that result in resource destruction:

- ◆ Clear cutting to make way for hard-sided lodging
- ◆ Clear cutting to widen and create new roads
- ◆ Blacktopping widened and new roads and parking lots
- ◆ More vendors in and out of the Valley to provide goods and services to support upscale hard sided lodging, restaurants and to maintain facilities
- ◆ More employees in and out of the Valley to provide goods and services to support facilities, their guests
- ◆ More housing and support facilities for employees
- ◆ More parking for employees

- ◆ Rafting concessions, which point load the river banks (campers bring their own, are dispersed, and are irregular users

Other critical camping issues include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Re-open ALL campgrounds closed after the '97 Flood, restore the original historical campsites, including "Group Campground" on Tenaya Creek as it will disperse impacts on the environment while preventing the "compression" of campers
- ◆ Curtail all specific amenities for RV's; implement length limitation to 23 feet
- ◆ Make and maintain campsites and adjoining facilities such as hose bibs, drinking fountains, restrooms ADA compliant
- ◆ River Floating: From the standpoint of visitor experience, reference is made to the NPS 1980 General Management Plan (GMP) paragraphs (s) on Page 22 defining the visitor experience: "Park Experience -- Enjoying the special attributes of Yosemite. The human need for physical and mental activities congruent with the park's primary purpose-- activities that can be appropriately enjoyed at Yosemite; programs for doing, thinking, dreaming, and being in relationship to Yosemite's resources."

"Provide only for those types and levels of programs and activities that enhance visitor understanding and enjoyment of park resources...The visitor experience will consist of opportunities for educational and park-related recreational pursuits such as walking and hiking, backpacking, and Merced River floating."

Both of these paragraphs remind tens of thousands of campers of what we feel at Yosemite. The greatest enjoyable, tranquil, breathtaking, scenic view of the Valley is absorbed while floating down the Merced River, no question about it!

However, the NPS has allowed the concessionaire to co-opt those activities and commercialize/ mass produce them for profit. By commercializing and mass-producing (as in rentals), the NPS has destroyed the very qualities (thinking, dreaming, and being in relationship to Yosemite's resources) that made them special in the first place. By Campers bringing our own tube or raft and floating down the Merced, we are enjoying one of the lowest impact ways to experience Yosemite Valley in summer. Often, we enjoy this activity as one floater in one floatation device versus the concession multiple use rafter that cycles in mass both in and out of the riverbanks. The NPS just looks the other way at the daily mass concession floating events that have caused the problems. Our stand - let people bring their own equipment; they will self-select their participation based on whether they want to go through the hassle. There is no need for a rental facility, a place for hundreds of rentals to enter the river - all at the same location, a pick up location with a big diesel bus and box truck, etc.

Other critical issues:

- ◆ All Park bathrooms ADA compliant
- ◆ Provide a detailed accounting of public funds: specific income sources(including the "Gate Surcharge") and expenditure cost centers (including where the Gate Surcharges have been spent) to justify and ensure proper oversight of tax revenues
- ◆ Eliminate diesel buses, equipment, trash trucks, and maintenance vehicles in the Valley
- ◆ Upgrade and maintain facilities for campers such as more water hose bibs in campgrounds with waste water drains to sanitary sewer, cold water showers at restrooms with waste water drains to sanitary sewer, scrub and sanitize the restroom floors, concrete pave around the restrooms for trip/risk reduction as well as ADA compliance, hooks and shelves in the restrooms in a user-friendly manner, etc.
- ◆ Bridges and Campsites qualify for and need to become National Historical Register Landmarks
- ◆ Concession profits need to be secondary to resource protection
- ◆ Historically and currently, Campers are disenfranchised and ignored. Direct notification for any planning events, dating back to the 1980 GMP (General Management Plan), although practical and feasible, have never been done
- ◆ Re-visit the entire issue of Land Use Zoning in light of the ORV's, Carrying Capacity, and Land Use Management in the context of Yosemite Valley
- ◆ Scoping locations have been narrowly selected; they should have included: San Diego, Orange County, Los Angeles, San Juaquin Valley, Sacramento, and other areas

From Nation's Restaurant News, January 27, 1997

Jeremy M. Jacobs: Delaware North's Intrepid Captain Loves "The Thrill of the Deal", by Paul King

*"In 1993, Delaware North landed a 15 – year contract to manage food and lodging at America's oldest national park. The government and Delaware North negotiated a deal that gives the concessionaire a little more freedom in the park in exchange for a higher percentage of revenue being returned to the park. Under the new contract as much as 20 percent of revenue Delaware North derives will go to the government. However, much of that money will be funneled directly back to the park to improve facilities. "We see this as a win-win situation," Jacobs says. **"It is an opportunity for us to 'exploit' the natural assets of the park in a way that actually complements the park, instead of harming it."***

"Yosemite should be a nature center, not a profit center." (Environmental icon, David Brower)

At the Subcommittee Hearing held in the Park on April 20, 2003, Paul Minault of The Access Fund provided an excellent analysis on the value of camping as a resource-focused activity:

National Park Service management policy is to *"encourage visitor activities that foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, park resources and values, or will promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to park resources."*

Management Policy 2001-8.2 Visitor Use (emphasis added). In our comments to the Valley Plan, we listed the ways in which camping enhances the visitor experience, furthers park values, and promotes the enjoyment of Yosemite National Park through a direct association with park resources.

- ◆ First, we pointed out that camping is a form of recreation, unlike lodging in developed accommodations, which is a form of leisure.
- ◆ Second, camping promotes a closer relationship to park resources than any other form of overnight accommodation.
- ◆ Third, camping distances the visitor from the commercial values of comfort and convenience and the expression of social status through consumption that pervade American society. Camping brings the visitor closer to nature, the simple necessities of daily life, and the way people lived in the past.
- ◆ Fourth, camping is democratic. In campgrounds, social distinctions account for little, and camping has the potential to bring people together in shared appreciation of their natural surroundings in a manner that reduces social barriers. Unfortunately, the lodging picture in Yosemite preserves the social distinctions of the greater society, rather than leveling them, which we believe should be a goal of the parks.
- ◆ Fifth, camping is inherently communal. Campers have an enhanced opportunity to associate with other people, develop new relationships, and broaden their social horizons. Unfortunately, the Valley Plan largely ignored these values, with the result that camping suffered the loss of 300 campsites in the Valley. Instead, the park now emphasizes exclusive and expensive lodging over traditional camping accommodations that are more in line with NPS management policies.

We feel the most critical issue at this juncture is to open scoping to reflect the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals interpretation and then bring all the stakeholders into the planning, decision-making, implementing, and ongoing monitoring of the NEW and IMPROVED Merced River Plan. Yosemite Valley Campers Coalition awaits an invitation.