

Yosemite Valley Campers Coalition (YVCC)
c/o Brian H. Ouzounian, Co-Founder

www.yosemitevalleycampers.org

email: brian.oci@sbcglobal.net

March 3, 2008

Michael Tollefson
Superintendent
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

Hand Delivered
March 7, 2008
@ ORV workshop

Re: Your letter dated January 31, 2008 / Campground Petitions

Dear Mr. Tollefson:

This responds to your letter dated January 31, 2008, concerning your receipt of the 1520 petitions to return the flood damaged campgrounds to their pre-flood conditions. First, I want to thank you for finally acknowledging that you have received the petitions and recognizing the time and energy invested to accomplish such a product. I would have preferred to hand them directly to you at the October "Planner for a Day" workshop for the New Merced River Plan; however your absence made that impossible. Regarding the message in your letter, I have several comments.

As to the petitions not being timely for the Federal Register's "*Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Merced River Plan*":

- 1.0** I request that you issue a "Supplement" to the Federal Register with a footnote on timing.
- 2.0** I request that you include the petitions into the record for the New Merced River plan, any addendum or revision to a New Yosemite Valley Plan, Utilities Plan, Loop Road improvement Plan, and any other plan that the Park has on its planning desk and in those that may arise in the future.
- 3.0** I request that you advise the planning staff to make family camping in Yosemite Valley a priority in the current planning process, keeping it in the forefront of the discussions and possibly expanding it into a workshop all itself. This issue is at the forefront of public interest and remains a central issue to the access and activities of the visitor experience.

4.0 I request that prior to issuing any new or revised plans (of any character), staff draw the current comments from the website/petition to capture the latest comments as we are near 1100 presently and the quantity of signers and comments are growing daily. Formal submittal is not necessary and if it is required, such action will only be perceived by the camping public as disingenuous to the cause (family camping in Yosemite Valley).

5.0 The petition can be easily viewed at www.yosemitevalleycampers.org

Regarding your quote in italics and the Draft ORV, this letter is being handed to you at the March 7, 2008, ORV workshop. I was only invited at the last minute due to my members contacting me about the workshop. I am attending to assure that the "cause" of family camping in Yosemite Valley is fully and properly addressed. This will be done at great personal expense, once again, by me, as the cause keeps getting dropped from Park Planners' reports, plans and documents on a routine basis. For instance, it was the Park's responsibility back in the late 70's to include the petitions which we and the public produced in the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP). The blatant and willful neglect of soliciting the opinions of the camping public grossly misguided the planning effort from that document forward. Subsequent to that document, campers have been disenfranchised and marginalized. It is believed that this act was intentional to get skewed results.

As I have been active in this endeavor for about 28 years, there can be no excuse for the omission of the value of family camping in every YNPS document and plan. Yet, the documents themselves speak to the lack of priority by YNPS management and Planning Staff. Every superintendent for the past 28 years has made some excuse for the disenfranchisement and marginalization of family camping in Yosemite Valley. Excuses like "you missed the deadline" only highlight the ineptness or punitive directives of Park Management, including your term as Superintendent. Your letter is glaring on this point. Using a weighted factor, camping is not only one of the many exemplary experiences in the Park, it is the leading and most sought after activity. The NPS has the reservation data and the expressions of grief over the shortage of campgrounds by the camping public heard by YNPS employees on a constant day-by-day, year-by-year basis. To miss or deny the public demand for family camping is like saying you don't see the sun!

I am sure you are correct about the opportunities available in the ORV Workshop. However, you cannot deny that I and my coalition have had multiple appearances and communications with Planning Staff and yourself to express the cause. This event, the ORV workshop for the New Merced River Plan, is redundant unless you provide the public with real representation of the central activity of family camping. It is quite clear that the NPS has been sued and is mandated to re-visit one plan out of the many that it failed to properly execute. It is hoped that you will finally wake up and sound serious about recognition of this cause. What has been

produced in reports and official plans have used zoning to purge family camping from Yosemite Valley. Most of us are not skilled enough to dissect the plans and interpret what they mean to our cause; however, when we rely upon experts to interpret them or finally get the opportunity to ask direct questions outside of a court reporter's hot seat, we find that our park planners have done us in, so to speak, and have failed to take action.

One example of this was at the Mariposa Scoping Hearing in 2004 for the revised Merced River Plan. When I asked Mike Reynolds, the moderator, to have an open discussion since there were only 9 speakers for the record (the last being Shelly Abajian from US Senator Dianne Feinstein's Office), he denied it. When I privately asked what was the destiny of North Pines Campground, he could not answer the question and deferred it to his wife (who had a different last name I later learned). She immediately turned to a pull out from the Plan and said "It is going to be removed and go green to restoration!" This is a case in-point; this ... after 24 years of pitching the cause to Planning Staff and Management.

As you have attached a letter from yourself to me dated September 27, 2007, I would like to respond to it also. This writer has several issues with the words "not currently park management's intention to remove this campground.

First, are you saying that you will rescind the Record of Decision for the Valley Plan as it was destined for removal within that plan?

Secondly, by what revelation did you change your mind from the previous (Valley) plan to remove it?

Thirdly, what is to prevent you from changing your mind at a later date and say this only to stall our efforts in raising public awareness to the Valley Plan, removing North Pines that is currently being implemented?

Fourthly, the statement "*without removing camping entirely from the area*" means that you will remove some campsites, which begs the question of "how many do you plan to remove?" If you remove all but one, then you can say you are truthful to the statement. You have not said "none will be removed." You still leave the false impression of accommodation and reserve the rights of discretionary removal under the Valley Plan.

Lastly, you have installed split rail fences to prohibit access to the Merced River without public notice and without a public process, whereby discrediting your statement "*There is no desire to compromise recreational value of the campground (North Pines) to the visitor.*" It is believed that this fence did more damage than good as augers drilled and destroyed root structures to trees on the river bank. Also, it forces concentration of river bank access to certain entry points vs. spreading out the public access along the banks. It is the natural erosion process that has changed the

vegetation on the banks, not the campers. The NPS has all but eliminated the riverside campgrounds and purged a majority of campsites in the campground.

Concerning the results of the 9th Circuit Court's decision, we do not regard this as a legitimate excuse to disenfranchise and marginalize family camping in Yosemite Valley. Your statement is a continuation of roadblocks to thwart the obvious and is consistent with each superintendent for the past three decades. We expect more from the caretakers of our Yosemite. As citizens and taxpayers, we expect that our Park will be returned to its pre-flood condition using the funds that Congress gave to you for the repair of the flood damages. To do contrary only convicts the YNPS of a crime against the people and corrupts the NPS in its mission as set forth by Frederick Law Olmstead in the commissioning of the Park in 1864 under President Abraham Lincoln: you have multiple copies of this statement on the office shelf.

Just about the time this letter was being composed, two most alarming events have come to my attention.

First, you and the YNPS sent to the 9th Circuit Court an inaccurate summary statement/letter about the October 6th Workshop. It gave the perception of an event much bigger and grander than the truth ... that only 12 individuals attended. The actual discourse and contempt for the mission was not represented in the summary/letter. Mike, I and others were used via the October 6th event. We were unaware that you were going to use this event to pat yourself on the back in front of the court. Knowing that you have to report to the court in intervals, this was certainly a façade due to the lack of "reviewing the range of public scoping comments" on the schedule, since there was no other public involvement during the last quarter. Your other workshops in August and December of 2007 were by invitation only and closed to the public. The October 6th topic is not even on the court-approved schedule and it appears to have just been added as a busywork exercise while the two public workshops that should have been held are way behind schedule. Attendees were promised a copy of the charts, minutes, and Linda Dahl's PowerPoint presentation by the end of October - none of which has happened. Minutes were supposedly prepared on October 18th but were not approved until February 4th (how accurate is recollection 4 months later; and if you want to get really picky, at the bottom of each page of the minutes, it says October 6, **2008**), were suppose to be posted on February 4 but didn't show up online until weeks later; no charts or PowerPoint were ever made available. A follow-on meeting was promised in January, which never happened. It is obvious from the way this workshop was handled that public involvement is not a priority.

Looking back on the event, I and others felt like something was strange at the workshop but we could not put our finger on it. We were feeling used at the time when Jen Nersesian started to take pictures of us, which we stopped; then as the presentation continued and onto the breakout groups it all did not add up. Now that I have reviewed the inaccurate accounting/minutes, it all makes sense.....you used us to impress the court. You used my

presence and that of others, including Supervisor Thornton as pawns to glorify or justify your do diligence mandated by the court, without telling us the destiny of the event and the minutes. You knew we would object if we knew your motive. I liken it to a deposition without representation. Have you no shame?

Second, the article in the Sacramento Bee (pasted below), regarding you seeking federal funds for kids. It is quite clear that you seek, as a mock champion of the do good, \$1.5MM in funds on the backs of the poor and underprivileged. Will you develop more family-friendly Yosemite Valley auto-based campsites with this money? Will you improve the Valley campground restrooms? Will you provide showers for the Valley auto-based campers and control waste water with your new utilities improvement? I know you will not. To the contrary, you will continue to cut out family friendly auto-based Valley campsites and develop fixed roof facilities in partnering with the concessionaire, all while trying to figure out how to bus visitors around. Once you wet the appetite of these young excited youths at the Yosemite Institute, they will grow up panting to go back to Yosemite and they will want to camp or have no other means except to camp. The sad result is that they will not be able to get a Valley drive-in campsite nor a reservation. They will come to the realization that it is a place only for those with "means" to buy a room. They won't get to enjoy Yosemite under the moon and the stars; they will have to visit a virtual site online to get close to that feeling...like the ones at the Visitor's Center playing on a screen. It is quite obvious that you spend a lot of time getting money yet turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the camping public. A prime example of this is the \$170MM the YNPS acquired from Congress to repair the damage from the flood and the campsites/grounds that were never repaired; this, the protest message of our 1500 petitions.

I look forward to seeing my YNPS do the right thing and pay attention to the people's desire for access to campgrounds and sites and the Park Service's change in attitude toward family camping in Yosemite Valley. It doesn't take a law suit to do the right thing, Mr. Tollefson.

Best Regards,

Brian H. Ouzounian
Co-Founder
Yosemite Valley Campers Coalition

CC: US Senator Dianne Feinstein: Shelly Abajian
US Senator Barbara Boxer: Ameen Khan
US Representative George Radanovich: Sarah Dietrich / Darren Rose
Angela Caldera, Co-Founder YVCC
Eric Bailey: Los Angeles Times

Mike Gardner: San Diego Union Tribune
Mark Grossi: Fresno Bee
Chuck Squatriglia: San Francisco Chronicle
PBS-California Connected: Judy Muller / Rick Wilkerson

Pasted Article:

Yosemite competes to fund kids' visits

By Michael Doyle - mduoye@mcclatchydc.com

Published 12:00 am PST Thursday, February 28, 2008

WASHINGTON - Yosemite National Park could welcome more Central Valley schoolchildren if it's selected for an ambitious new park funding program.

By matching private donations and public dollars, Yosemite's nonprofit allies are proposing to offer thousands of scholarships so underprivileged kids can visit. First, though, Yosemite must out-compete other parks with compelling ideas of their own.

Interior Department officials are now culling through more than 200 applications for the new funding and expect to notify winners fairly soon. As it happens, Yosemite National Park superintendent Mike Tollefson is overseeing the selection process.

"Mike has the tough assignment," Brian Waidmann, chief of staff to Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne, said Wednesday.

The Yosemite proposal would match \$750,000 from the Yosemite National Institutes with an equal amount from the federal government.

The money would expand scholarships for schoolchildren to spend a week or so at Yosemite, Olympic National Park or the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

About one-third of the scholarships now available serve low-income Central Valley students, said Yosemite National Institutes vice president Jason Morris.

The Yosemite proposal is competing with diverse requests that range from a new \$8.4 million visitor center in the Santa Monica Mountains to a \$4.8 million restoration of the Redwood National Forest watershed.

Every proposal includes provisions for private matching funds.

But Tollefson and the other career park service managers who will be doling out grants totaling \$25 million aren't the only ones facing difficult choices. The Bush administration and key congressional Democrats differ on how to boost park funding.

By gathering Wednesday morning on Capitol Hill, Waidmann, national park advocates and tourism professionals hoped to persuade Congress to resolve the serious differences so more money can start flowing.

In anticipation of the National Park Service's 100th anniversary in 2016, the Bush administration proposed what it calls the "Centennial Initiative." Highlighted by Kempthorne in a Yosemite news conference last summer, the proposal calls for Congress to provide \$1 billion in additional park funding over 10 years.

The administration wants this federal money contingent on obtaining \$1 billion in private donations, for a total of \$2 billion in new park investments.

The \$25 million in park grants now under competition represents a down payment on the much larger matching grant program. Park advocates said Wednesday they hoped successful projects would spur Congress to provide more money.

The chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, West Virginia Democrat Nick Rahall, agrees more park funding is needed. Unlike the administration, though, Rahall's legislation does not require private matching donations. Lawmakers also have not figured out how to pay for the \$1 billion in federal funds.

End Article