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HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND
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PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

December 14, 2011

Don Neubacher
Superintendent
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

RE: Merced River Plan

Please find within this letter my comments regarding the Merced River planning process. As you are aware, Yosemite National Park is located within the district that I represent in the House of Representatives. As such, it is my responsibility to relay issues that are of importance to the residents of the communities within my district.

I understand the difficult task of balancing the uses of the park; however, given that so much of Yosemite is wilderness and basically "off-limits" to many visitors, I would encourage that visitor access, without unnecessary restrictions, be provided to as much of the park as possible. This includes addressing the issues surrounding the steady removal of parking availability to visitors. The continued removal of parking spaces inherently restricts access to the park for families that have planned a trip to the park for a day or to camp.

Yosemite Valley is seven square miles in a 1200 square mile National Park. I strongly suggest that the focus be on visitor management and not stray toward visitor exclusion. Eighteen thousand properly managed visitors can leave the area "unimpaired for future generations" as is directed in the NPS organic legislation.

It has been brought to my attention on multiple occasions that there has not been a sufficient effort by the National Park Service (NPS) to restore damaged campgrounds and parking areas after the 1997 flood. As the Merced River Plan aims to reduce traffic congestion, I would suggest that a focused effort on the restoration of campsites and parking areas would alleviate some concerns. Another issue presented to me is that the NPS has not followed through with the plan to loop Yosemite Valley's only exit road around Yosemite Lodge, which had been promised to eliminate the single biggest constriction on vehicle travel in the Valley and the genesis of traffic congestion. It seems untenable to consider dramatic restrictions on visitor access when identified management solutions are not being implemented.

A traffic plan may be necessary to consider in conjunction with the Merced River Plan as it could prove useful in addressing the challenges that the park faces. Through a traffic plan, Yosemite could solicit input from local communities, annual visitors, and interested groups to ensure that there is no unnecessary reduction in access to all forms of traffic that the park encounters on a daily basis.

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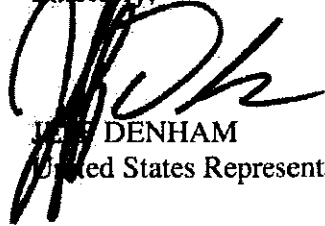
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Superintendent Don Neubacher
December 14, 2011
Page 2

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I hope they will be carefully regarded in development of the Merced River Plan and help minimize its impact on access to Yosemite National Park.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JD', is written over the printed name 'JEFF DENHAM'. The signature is stylized and somewhat obscured by the printed text below it.

JEFF DENHAM
United States Representative