



Yosemite National Park Meeting Minutes

Meeting Reference

Group/Committee/Etc.: Merced (and South Fork Merced) Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan, Environmental Impact Statement

Date of Meeting: Saturday, October 6, 2007; 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Purpose of Meeting: Reviewing the Range of Public Scoping Comments; Public Planning Workshop

Prepared By: Chris Geis, Administrative Assistant

Date: October 18, 2007

Meeting Participants

NPS Core Team:

Linda Dahl, Chief, Planning

Jen Nersesian, Management Assistant to Superintendent/ Branch Chief, Public Involvement & Outreach

Elexis Mayer, Project Manager, Planning

Jim Bacon, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Planning

Mark Husbands, Compliance Specialist, Environmental Planning and Compliance

Chris Geis, Administrative Assistant, Environmental Planning and Compliance

Attendees:

Jim Brohm

Lou Aceto

Jeanne Aceto

Fred Grote

Jim Tucker, Retired NPS

Ira Estin, Tour guide/Photographer

Dianne Fritz, Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

Mark Thornton, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

John Modin, El Dorado Hills Sierra Club member

George Whitmore, Sierra Club member

Greg Adair, Executive Director, Friends of Yosemite Valley

Brian Ouzonian, Chair, Yosemite Valley Campers Coalition

Meeting Agenda

Welcome and Workshop Objectives

Introductions

Planning in Yosemite and the National Park System (presentation)

Reviewing the Range of Public Comments (group exercise)

Report Out

Feedback

Meeting Minutes

Welcome and Workshop Objectives – Participants were welcomed to the first in a series of public planning workshops for the new Merced River Plan. The purpose of these workshops is to provide an opportunity for the public to be intimately engaged in developing the components of a comprehensive

management plan (CMP) for the Merced River with the National Park Service. The main goal for participation at the public planning workshops is for participants to be as objective as possible, a critical skill in creating a range of reasonable and feasible alternatives for any planning process.

Participants are expected to join the National Park Service at the “planning table” and work within the planning and legal framework to which the agency must adhere. All of the laws, executive orders, director’s orders and service-wide policies applicable to the National Park Service will be a critical component of the workshops. These workshops are *not* intended to serve as “stakeholder” or “special interest” meetings, nor are they an extension of the public scoping period.

Because the public planning workshops mirror and in most cases will precede, the steps the National Park Service will follow to create a new CMP, the first public planning workshop’s focus is to review the range of public scoping comments received during all three scoping periods (1999, 2004, and 2007) initiated for Merced River planning. As a reminder, during the 2007, public scoping period, the National Park Service noted that all previously submitted comments were already part of the official record for this third planning effort, and people need not submit the same scoping comments again. Because the public scoping period marks the beginning of an environmental impact statement process, it is the appropriate starting point for the public planning workshops.

Each participant was provided a Merced River Planning Workbook binder at the registration table. Contents included a section of law and policy containing Yosemite National Park’s designation legislation, the Wilderness Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Additionally, public scoping reports for each of the three scoping periods were provided and organized according to topic. The workbooks will be updated with new materials at each public planning workshop. Participants at the first workshop will be sent the new materials in advance of the next workshop, as well as be able to access it from the park’s web site. Additional binders will be prepared for the next workshop with contents from the first workshop and the updated materials.

Introductions – Participants noted above introduced themselves.

Planning in Yosemite and the National Park System – PowerPoint presentation by Linda Dahl, Chief of Planning for Yosemite National Park (forthcoming). In summary, the presentation covered the history of protective designations given to Yosemite National Park as well as, an overview of the National Park Service’s planning framework (i.e., the level/type of planning required for specific actions being contemplated). The focus of the presentation was on General Management Plans/River Management Plans.

The “Why, What, and How” model for planning was presented. The first question planners ask when embarking on a new process is “Why are we here?” To answer this question, it requires a look at the park purpose and significance (i.e., why the National Park created, and why does it stand apart from all other National Park units?) for General Management Plans. For River Management Plans, the “why” speaks to Outstandingly Remarkable Values, free-flowing conditions, and water quality. The next question planners ask is, “What are we trying to achieve and where?” The answers take the form of “desired conditions,” which identify resource and visitor experience conditions appropriate for certain locations. Both the “why” and “what” questions are answered in long-range plans such as General Management Plans and River Management Plans.

The third question, *not* asked during a general planning process, but rather in a site-specific implementation plan is, “How are we going to achieve the desired conditions?” The “how” could be a myriad of solutions contemplated in a plan that tiers from a broad guiding document.

A few participants objected to some of the pictures used to portray early uses in the park, including

camping in the meadows, because they felt it was not an accurate depiction of today's values and uses. As a result, the Chief of Planning agreed to revise the presentation.

Reviewing the Range of Public Scoping Comments Exercise – The majority of the workshop was spent in two groups exploring the range of public scoping comments from all three Merced River planning efforts. Because there are over 150 pages of comments contained in the three reports, asking the participants to work in two teams and then share their findings with the entire group was an effective way to collaborate. This is another goal of the workshops, to bring diverse groups together to accomplish a specific goal. Some participants elected to not participate in the exercise.

The two smaller groups focused on natural, cultural and physical resources; and visitor experience, recreation, and socioeconomics respectively. The objective for each group was to identify topics or issues that had a broad spectrum of opinion, and/or highlight issues that were identified by commentors including but not limited to:

- The need for invasive species management within the river corridor.
- Concern for wildlife and human interaction within the river corridor.
- One commenter noted that Mirror Lake should be a bird sanctuary.
- The noted conflicting opinions regarding how logjams within the river are good for aquatic habitat, and how they are conversely dangerous for rafting/floating.
- Water quality should be protected from road-related pollution in the river (i.e., engine oils).
- Human debris from fishing lures, wrecked autos, bottles, trash, and plastics should be removed.
- Historic bridges should be protected.
- Concern with regard to air quality impacts from prescribed burns and vehicle emissions.
- The need to separate RV and tent camping due to noise issues.
- Tensions noted between campfires and smoke issues; some commentors would accept limits to maximize the experience and others would limit smoke by eliminating fires.
- The need for better picnicking opportunities.
- The lack of availability of campsites.
- River rafting and the need to regulate commercial entities, and/or the desire to allow for family rafting opportunities.
- Negative perspectives on stock use and how it impacts hiking on the same trails.
- Difference of opinion about Housekeeping Camp regarding whether or not to retain or remove it.
- The desire to eliminate commercial bike rentals.
- Notation that visitor behavior is as important as visitor numbers.
- Comments about outside of valley activities affecting the river.
- Need for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility.

All participants were encouraged to spend some more time reading the comment reports to get the full range of issues and concerns presented. As the planning process proceeds, scoping comments will be reviewed at each stage of plan development. Scoping comments are always reviewed against the backdrop of law and policy, and the purpose of a plan to determine if and how they can be addressed.

Feedback – In an effort to learn from this public planning workshop and make improvements were warranted for the next, participants were asked to share any feedback on the workshop and content which included the following:

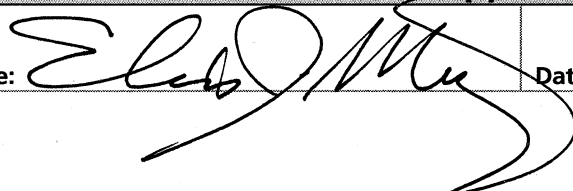
- The planning process should be presented in a diagram or handout.
- Because people are burned out on planning for the Merced River because this is the third attempt at a plan, the National Park Service needs to work hard at rekindling interest in the planning process.
- In general, for some, the biggest hurdle is the lack of trust felt towards the government.
- Some were concerned the management zoning and Outstandingly Remarkable Values were not

discussed.

- A suggestion to hold public planning workshops outside of the park and in multiple locations.
- A package containing 1500 signatures was presented to the National Park Service from the Yosemite Valley Campers Coalition to be included in the Administrative Record – however, not as part of the official scoping comments because the public scoping period ended in June 2007.
- Frustration was expressed about the National Park Service, changing actions called for in previous plans as well as the difficulty to follow decision making when staff come and go too.

Participants were thanked for feedback, and asked to let the staff know when they see something positive. The National Park Service thanked all the participants again and encouraged each person to bring one additional person to the next workshop; to be scheduled sometime in January 2008.

Participants were reminded that all the comment letters and other information about the Merced River planning process can be accessed on the park's web site. The meeting concluded around 1:00 p.m.

Approval	
Signature: 	Date: 2/4/08