

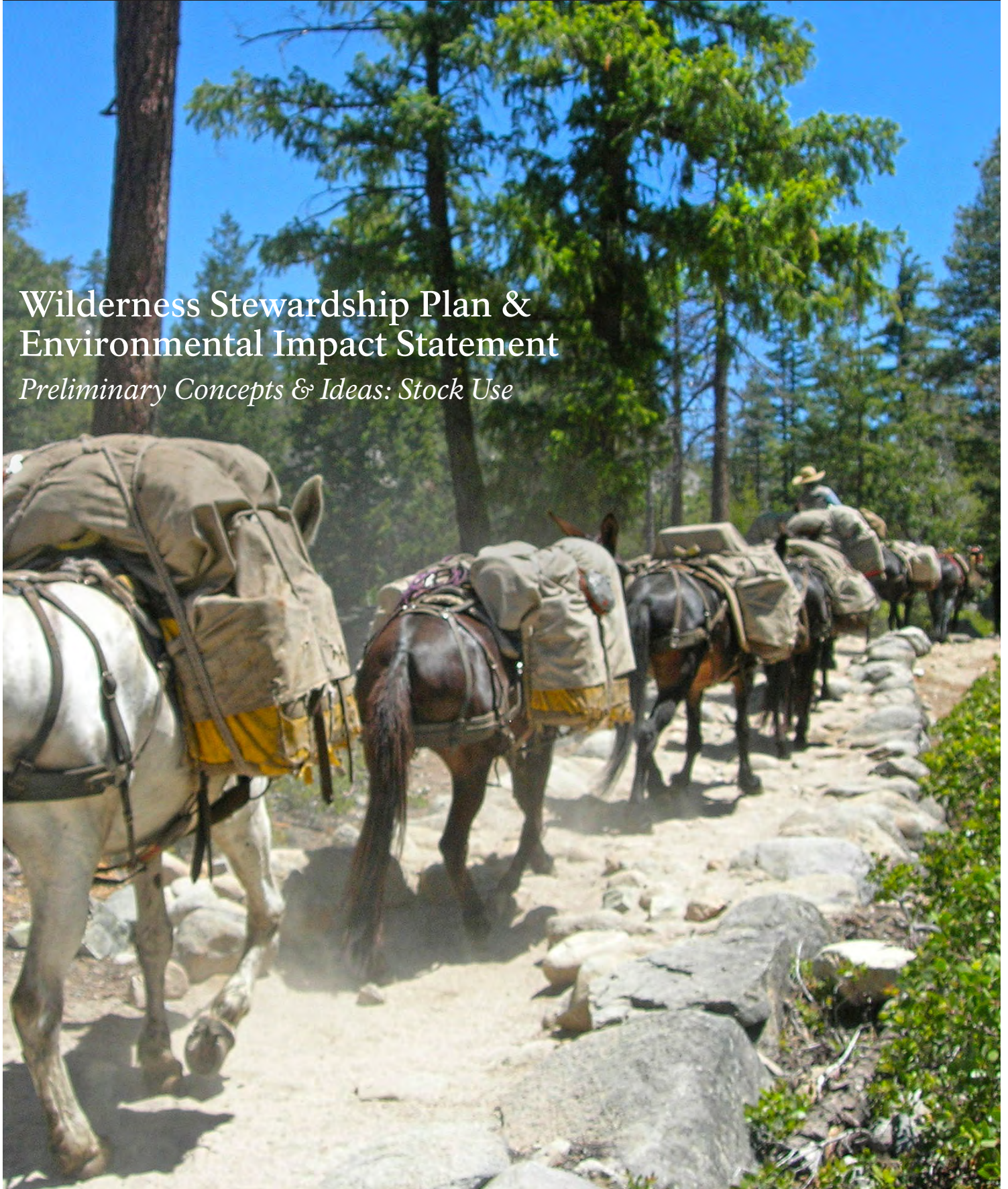
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yosemite National Park  
Summer 2016



# Wilderness Stewardship Plan & Environmental Impact Statement

*Preliminary Concepts & Ideas: Stock Use*



# Why is this plan being developed?

The purpose of this planning effort is to review the management direction in the 1989 Yosemite Wilderness Plan and update it as necessary to better align with contemporary use patterns and National Park Service policy.



When completed, the Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) will include a broad array of management strategies for addressing topics of interest, such as natural and cultural resource management, ecosystem restoration, and trail maintenance. Two additional areas to be addressed in the plan—visitor use and capacity and stock use—are very complex. Due to the high level of public interest in these two topics, Yosemite National Park will be hosting a series of workshops to discuss them in more detail. The purpose of these workshops is to describe the management challenges and some basic concepts for handling them. Feedback from the attendees will be used to finalize a complete range of alternatives to be included in the draft plan. This newsletter provides background information on the topic of stock use.

The use of stock for pack trips and personal travel is a unique and special way to experience Yosemite's wilderness. Stock use allows for the continued use and enjoyment of Yosemite's High Sierra Camps and aids park rangers in restoration efforts, trail maintenance activities, and law enforcement.

The 1989 Yosemite Wilderness Plan offers minimal guidance related to the amount and timing of stock use, as well as where it can occur. While it describes trails open and closed to stock use, it lacks the framework to help guide other activities conducted by stock users (e.g. grazing, camping, etc.). Existing stock regulations and operational guidelines require refinement to develop a management framework that addresses all activities and their potential impacts to cultural and natural resources.

One goal of the WSP is to provide a framework that would increase resource protection and consolidate stock management regulations into one document. Such a consolidated plan would provide guidance for private, commercial, and administrative stock use that addresses:

- Location, amount, and timing of stock use
- Desired conditions for trails and stock use camping areas
- Monitoring strategies for stock use areas, with specific attention given to meadows



# How do things currently work?

Stock users in Yosemite’s Wilderness fall into one of three categories: private, commercial, or administrative, and NPS policies are unique for each group. Private overnight users are required to obtain a permit for their trip while private day trip users are not. Commercial use in wilderness is limited by law to what is ‘appropriate and necessary’. All guides and concessioners therefore are subject to permitting through a Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) process, the basis of which (the Determination of Extent Necessary for Commercial Services) will be included as part of this plan. Group sizes are limited in order to protect resources from damage. Maximum group size is 15 people and 25 head of stock, except on approved cross-country routes, where the limit is 8 people and 12 head of stock.

The map on the following page illustrates stock access to the wilderness. Stock use is limited to a ¼ mile from any open trail in the wilderness. Within this area users may seek watering sites, rest or graze their animals, or make camp. Private users are permitted to camp anywhere within the trail corridor except within 1 mile from any road, 4 miles from any trailhead, and 100’ from lakes and streams. Commercial users are required to use the approved commercial stock camps.

Some trails technically are open but are not recommended for stock users due to steep, narrow, rocky, or otherwise dangerous conditions. Other closures occur on a case-by-case basis in order to protect resources and such closures will be indicated by signage. The Yosemite Superintendent’s Compendium is updated yearly and provides the most up-to-date and nuanced policy related to stock use. The 2016 Compendium can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/management/upload/compendium.pdf>

Administrative stock users are NPS employees and volunteers who use stock to access the wilderness for essential administrative functions. These include trail crews, ranger patrols, search and rescue teams, fire crews and resource management staff as well as independent researchers. Due to their essential functions, these users may travel as necessary on and off of trails to accomplish their duties.

All stock users are expected to follow basic stock handling guidelines, such as walking single-file on trails, avoiding sensitive resources, putting animals on a high-line rather than tying them to trees, scattering manure at camp sites and showing courtesy on the trail to other users.

## DISTRIBUTION OF STOCK USE NIGHTS\* (2012 - 2015)

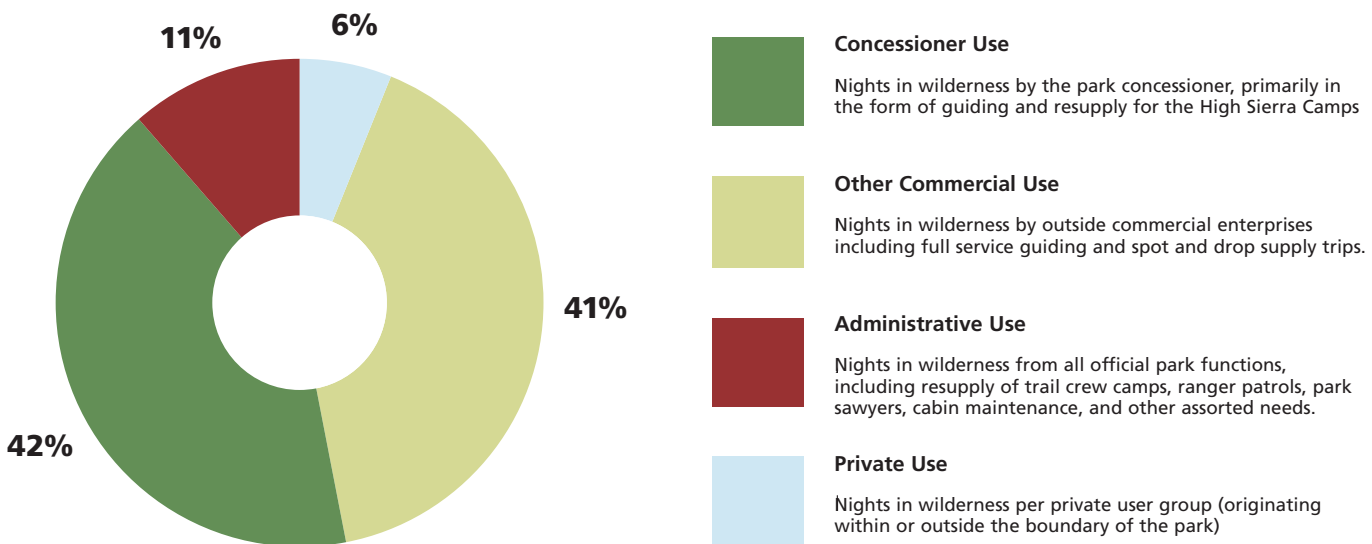


Diagram illustrating the breakdown of overnight stock use in the Yosemite Wilderness during the past four years

\*Use Night = one horse or mule per site per night

Data Source: NPS Yosemite Division of Visitor and Resource Protection, 2016



**Above: Stock access in Yosemite Wilderness.** Note that 1/4 mi. on either side of an open trail yields a 1/2 mi corridor centered on the trail. Private users are permitted to camp anywhere within this corridor except within 1 mi. from any road, 4 mi. from any trailhead, and 100' from lakes and streams. Other closed areas will be clearly signed. Illustrated are recommended sites that are well-situated for stock camping. The only wilderness trail currently closed to stock use is Gaylor Lakes Trail. Upper Yosemite Falls, Snow Creek, Four Mile, and the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne all are permitted but not recommended.



Above are images illustrating impacts from meadow grazing

## What kind of impacts can stock use have?

Stock use can cause lasting damage to many of the Park's resources including both fragile ecosystems and sensitive cultural sites. This is well-documented in the 1989 WSP. Historically, over-grazing by stock has caused damage to wet meadows that persists to this day – over a century later. Having learned from these past impacts, NPS now has a better understanding of stock carrying capacity and manages stock use to carefully balance access with resource protection.

Meadows occupy less than 1% of the Sierra Nevada landscape and less than 3% of Yosemite National Park. These ecosystems support several rare and federally-listed wildlife species as well as many rare and endemic plants. They also provide valuable ecosystem services like surface water quality

protection and groundwater recharge. Stock can selectively remove rare plant species through grazing and trampling, damage sensitive riparian habitats, reduce water quality, and they can impact hydrology by compacted soils and incised trails.

Some stock camps and routes are in known archaeological sites. Impacts to these sensitive and non-renewable resources can occur through trampling, creation and use of fire rings, and digging. Erosion from devegetation also can expose and displace artifacts.

The following three pages contain three different concepts designed to manage stock use and protect species, habitat, and water quality, and archaeological sites while improving visitor experience.



Above are images illustrating various BMPs

## What tools are available to manage use?

As an appendix to the WSP, a stock use monitoring framework will be established to provide data on site conditions over time. It also will implement an adaptive management strategy that will allow management techniques to evolve over time to adjust to new information or changes in natural and cultural resource conditions. A suite of monitoring metrics appropriate to wilderness already has been developed to inform future management areas that receive stock use. The following are best management practices that can be employed to better achieve park goals and guide when and how stock use may occur.

### *Best Management Practices (BMPs)*

BMPs include park-wide and site-specific recommendations that determine how stock may be used. BMPs may include things like stock handling practices (i.e., portable electric fencing, supplemental feed), changes to access routes, holding areas, camp locations, or application of opening dates and grazing capacities. The most effective strategies for the meadows of the Yosemite Wilderness are

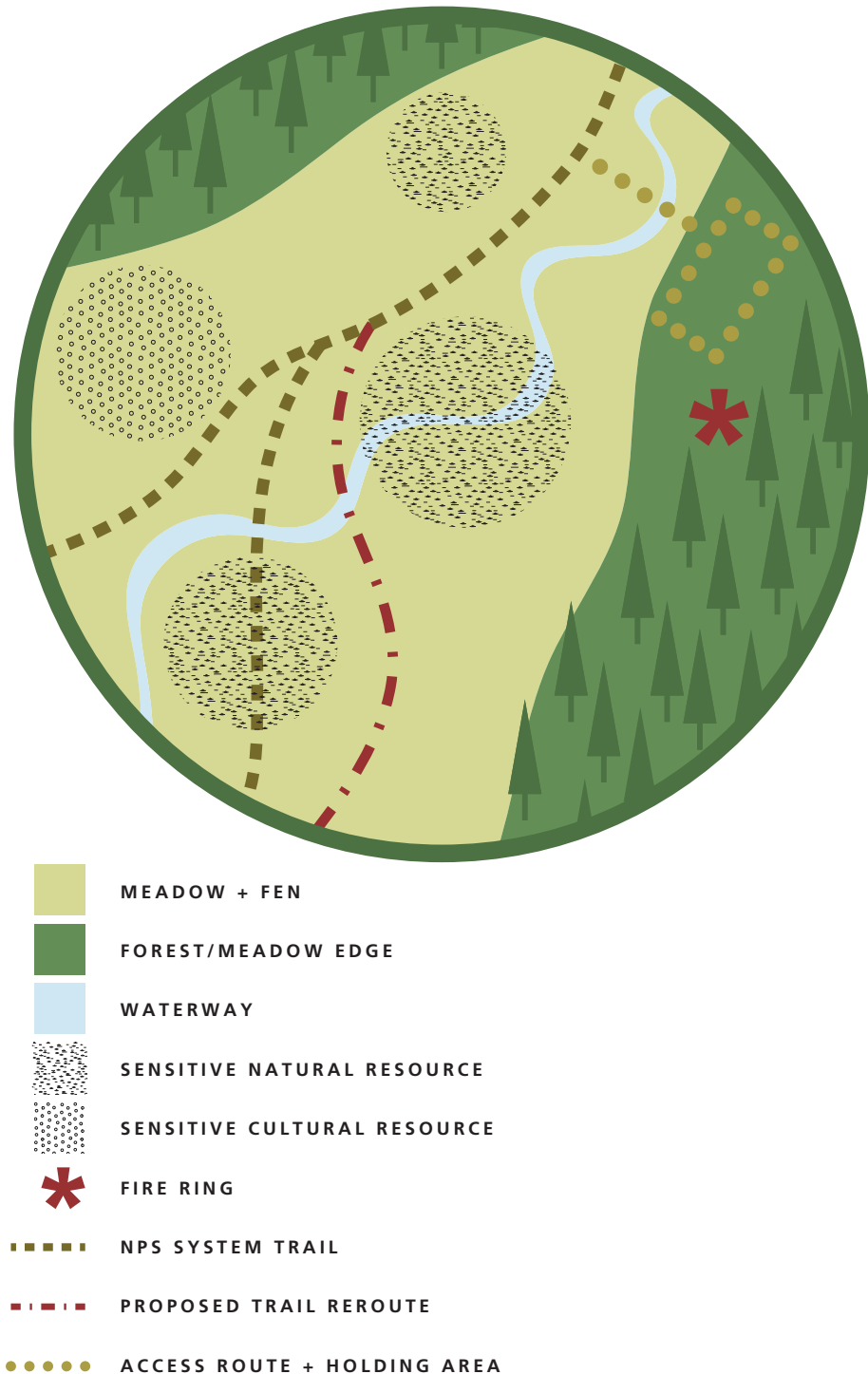
being developed through research and will be adaptable to changing conditions and use patterns. Grazing capacity determines how much grazing can occur at a given site, and aims to prevent overgrazing. By establishing site-specific capacities, all potential impacts will be minimized or avoided. In addition, temporary capacity reductions may be used to promote site recovery.

# How are management practices implemented?

Many BMPs for managing stock use can be visualized spatially. Below is a diagram that illustrates a hypothetical meadow site in wilderness. Running through the meadow and fens and alongside a stream is a NPS trail. This trail is open to both stock and backpackers.

Also in this meadow are many sensitive natural resources, in such forms as habitat

for endangered species, as well as a sensitive cultural resource, namely a prehistoric archeological site. To protect these areas, trails would be rerouted around sensitive resources, stock access routes and holding areas would specifically be designated to minimize impacts, and grazing capacity and grazing boundaries would be set to respect sensitive areas and promote site recovery.

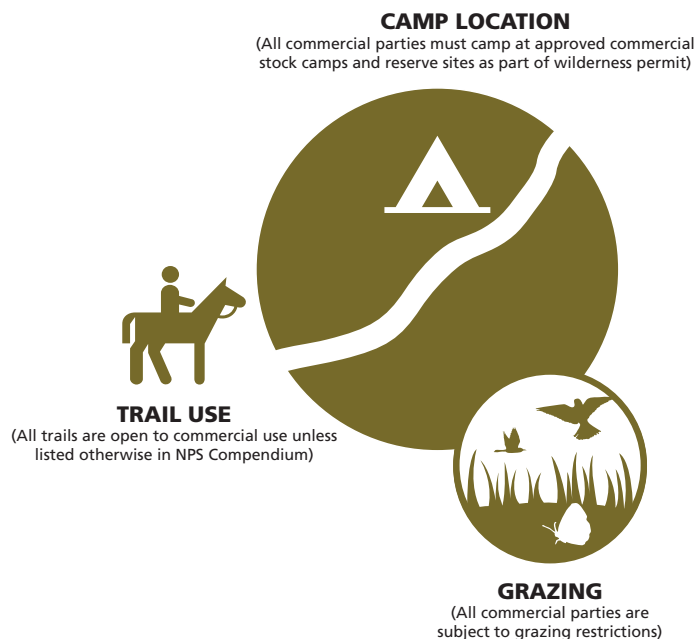


# What are the concepts for managing use?

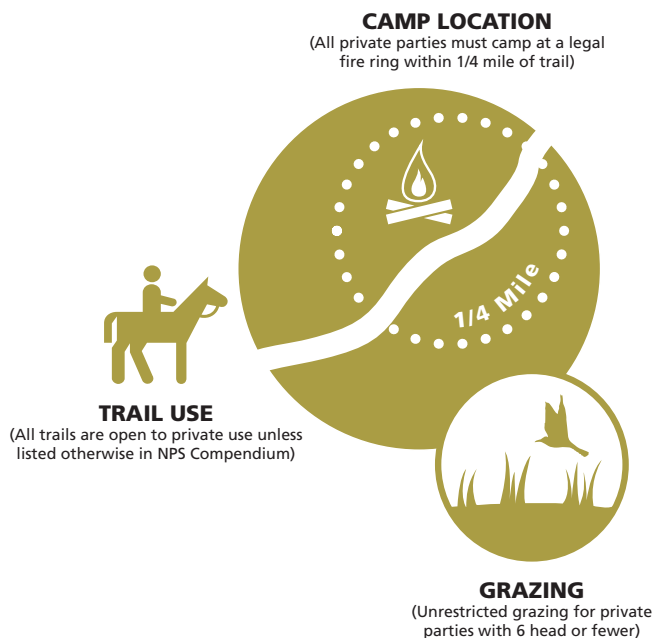
## Concept One

This concept would maximize freedom of stock users while also protecting resources. Commercial operators would be required to reserve an approved commercial stock camp (see map on page 6). Administrative users would use these sites whenever possible but may use any site as projects require. It will allow all private stock users to camp at any existing fire ring within ¼ mi. of a trail open to stock use (maintaining existing policy). Private users would not need to reserve their camp site. New limits on amount and timing of grazing would apply to all commercial and administrative users and only those private users with greater than 6 head of stock.

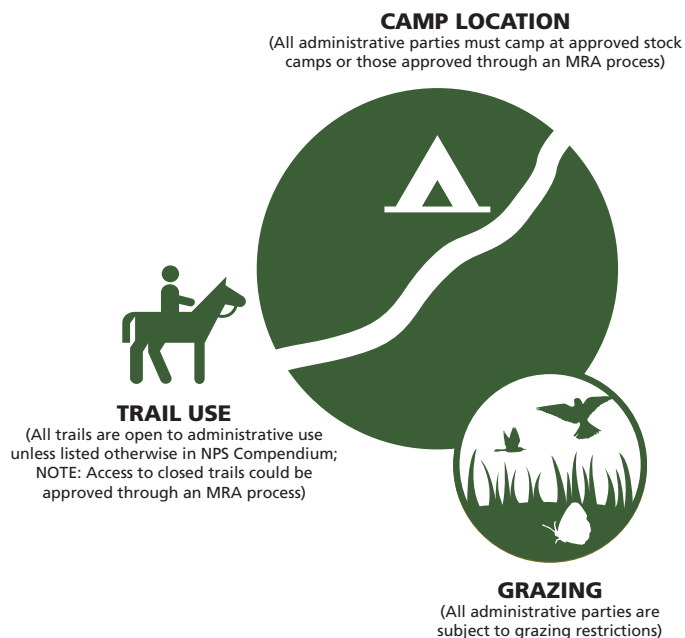
### COMMERCIAL USE



### PRIVATE USE



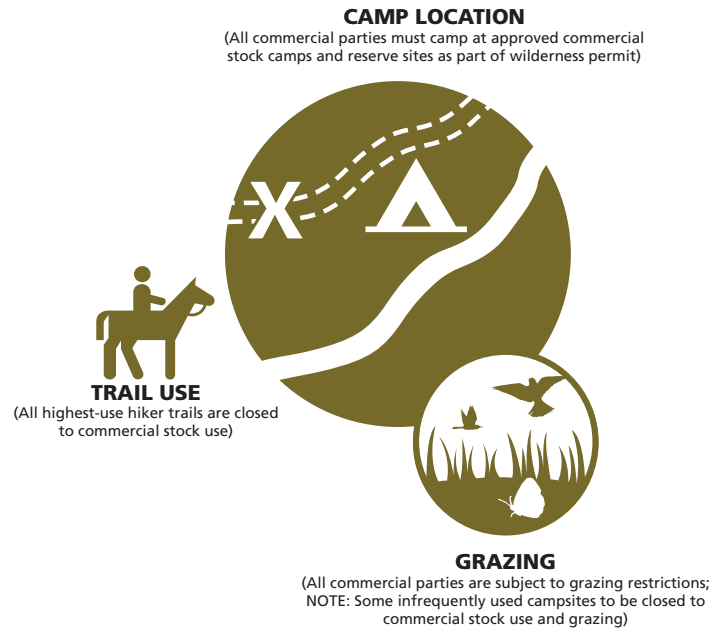
### ADMINISTRATIVE USE



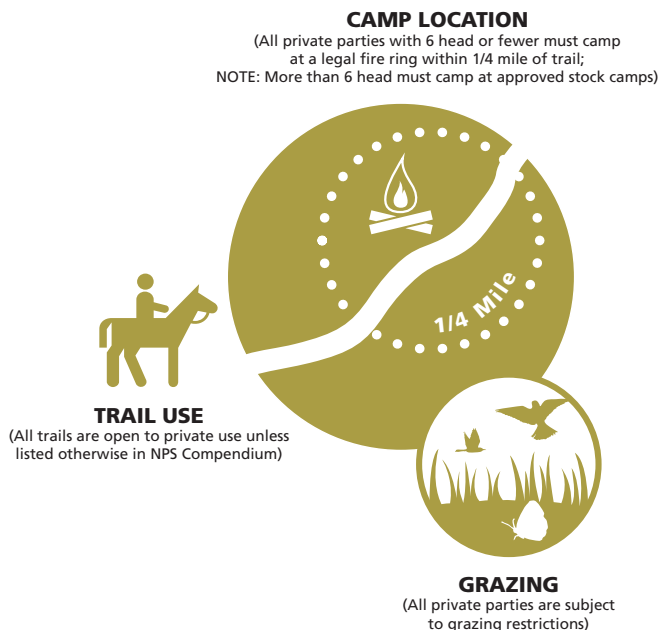
## Concept Two

This concept would balance freedom of stock use with greater protection of resources. Commercial operators and all private and commercial stock groups would be subject to new restrictions on amount and timing of grazing. Additionally, some infrequently used or particularly sensitive stock camps would be closed to commercial use or could remain open but would require groups to pack in all feed or graze their animals elsewhere. Private users with 6 or fewer head of stock would be allowed to camp at any existing fire ring within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mi. of the trail corridor. Private users with greater than 6 head would be required to reserve an approved stock camp.

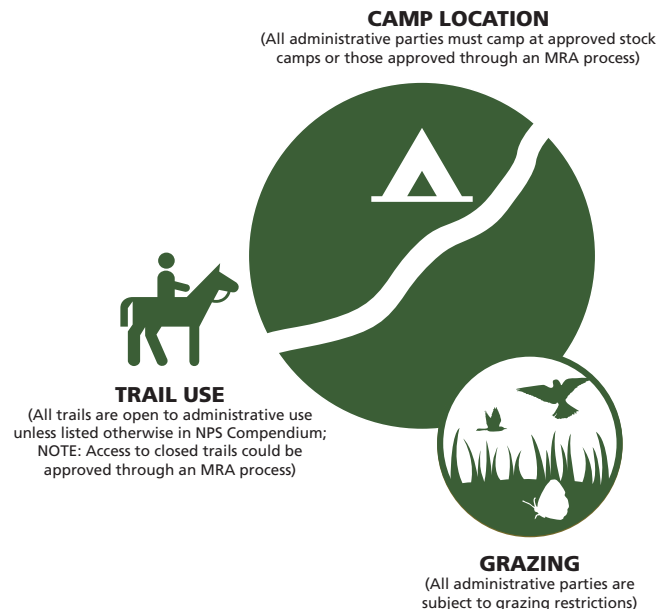
### COMMERCIAL USE



### PRIVATE USE



### ADMINISTRATIVE USE



## Concept Three

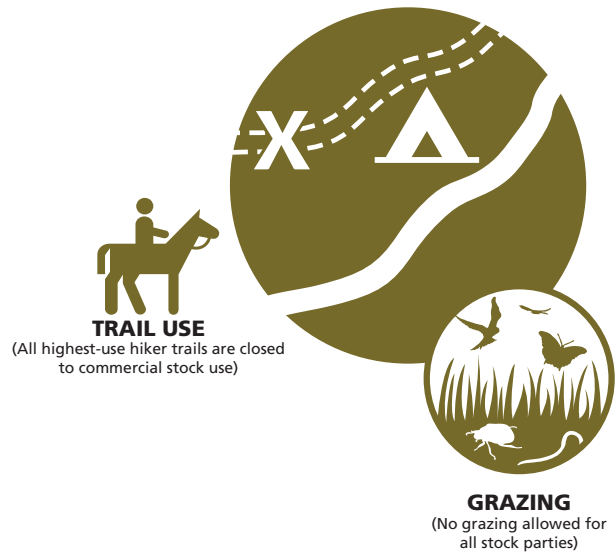
This concept would place the greatest restrictions on stock use in order to emphasize protection of resources. All users would be required to reserve an approved stock camp prior to their trip.

Grazing would be prohibited for all users and as such, all users would be required to pack in feed.

### COMMERCIAL USE

#### CAMP LOCATION

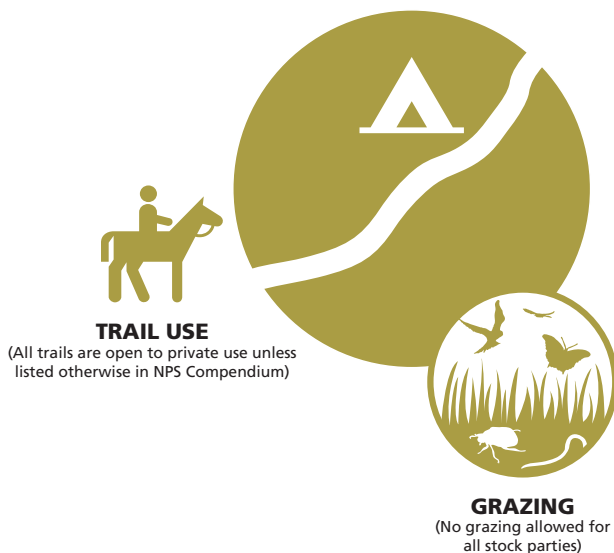
(All commercial parties must camp at approved commercial stock camps and reserve sites as part of wilderness permit)



### PRIVATE USE

#### CAMP LOCATION

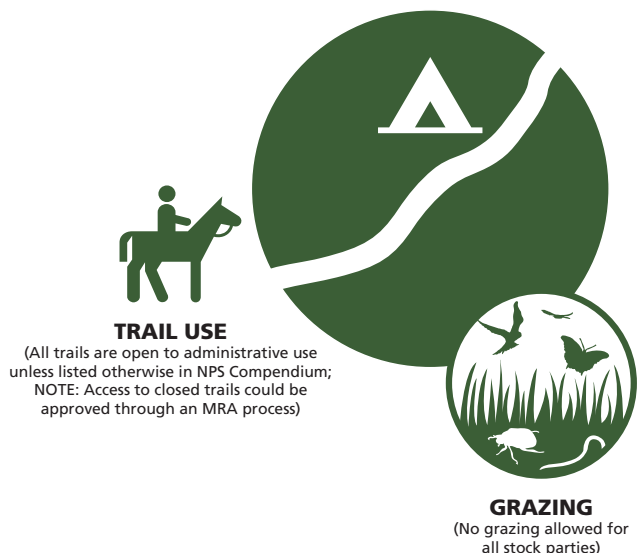
(All private parties must camp at approved stock camps and reserve sites as part of wilderness permit)

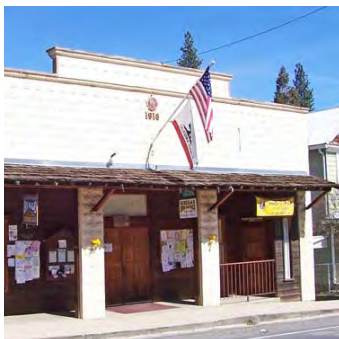


### ADMINISTRATIVE USE

#### CAMP LOCATION

(All administrative parties must camp at approved stock camps or those approved through an MRA process)





## How can you stay involved?

The National Park Service will be hosting a series of workshops and webinars to re-engage with the public and acquire feedback on the complex issues of Visitor Use and Capacity and Stock Use management. The following is a list of dates and places where workshops will be held.

For more on this, please go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yosewild>

- **Webinar #1 | Tuesday, August 9th | 12:00-1:00**
- **Groveland, CA | Groveland Community Hall | Wednesday, August 10th | 5:30-8:30**
- **Lee Vining, CA | Lee Vining Community Center | Thursday, August 11th | 5:30-8:30**
- **San Francisco, CA | Fort Mason, Bldg. C | Monday, August 15th | 5:30-8:30**
- **Oakhurst, CA | Oakhurst Branch Library | Thursday, August 18th | 5:30-8:30**
- **Webinar #2 | Monday, August 22nd | 6:00-7:00**

## What to do if you wish to give feedback:

We will be accepting feedback on the preliminary ideas and concepts for **Visitor Use and Capacity** and **Stock Use** through **September 30, 2016**. You may submit your feedback by mail or electronically through the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) web-based system.

For more on this, please go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yosewild>

Please consider the following questions when offering suggestions:

- Have we identified a sufficient range of concepts to address stock use?
- Have we omitted any key ideas related to stock use?
- What do you like about the basic concepts? How would you refine them?
- Are there specific elements that should be changed? How would you change them?



## What happens next?

- **Preliminary Ideas & Concepts - Current Public Engagement Opportunity**
- **Preparation of Draft Plan and EIS - Fall/Winter 2016**
- **Public review of Draft Plan and EIS - Spring 2017**
- **Analysis of public comment - Spring/Summer 2017**
- **Publish final plan, EIS, and record of decision - Winter 2017**