

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yosemite National Park
Summer 2016

A photograph of a dirt trail winding through a lush green meadow with scattered rocks. Two hikers with large backpacks are walking away from the camera. In the background, a dense forest of tall evergreen trees surrounds a prominent, rocky mountain peak under a cloudy sky.

Wilderness Stewardship Plan & Environmental Impact Statement

Preliminary Concepts & Ideas: An Overview

Dear Friends of Yosemite National Park,

The National Park Service (NPS) is currently in the process of updating the Yosemite Wilderness Stewardship Plan to address changing use patterns and to ensure the continued protection of the outstanding natural and cultural resources within the Yosemite Wilderness. Late this past winter we received more than 750 comments during the scoping period for the plan. We've reviewed the comments for suggestions on what needs to be changed, what should remain the same, and how to go about striking the right balance between protecting resources and providing access.

Some of the components we are addressing in this plan are very complex and involve a range of possible management choices. In light of the great deal of interest in these topics, we would like to re-engage with you on two areas that need further public dialogue: visitor use and capacity and stock use. In particular, we would like to hear your thoughts on some preliminary concepts for managing these two types of use and have prepared discussion materials to facilitate this interchange of ideas.

Please take a moment to read this newsletter, which provides an overview of the array of topics to be addressed in the plan and then turn to the supplemental newsletters which outline some basic concepts for addressing two of the more complex issues: visitor use and capacity and stock use. At this point, the approaches to these two issues that are outlined in the newsletters should be considered broad concepts and are provided to advance the discussion.

Throughout the month of August we will be conducting public workshops to offer additional information and to provide opportunities for deeper involvement in discussing potential management options for visitor use and stock use in the Yosemite Wilderness. A complete meeting schedule can be found at the end of this newsletter. Feedback can be provided in person at the meetings or via the planning website at <http://www.nps.gov/yose/getinvolved/wsp.htm> and will be most helpful to the wilderness planning effort if it is received by September 30, 2016.

Thank you for your interest, support and love for Yosemite National Park. We want to hear from you again and can use your help as we develop the plan for protecting the wilderness resource and ensuring that it remains accessible for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

After gathering feedback during this round of review, the NPS will further refine and develop a more robust set of alternatives to be included in the draft plan to be released early next year for formal public comment.

Sincerely,

Don L. Neubacher
Superintendent

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 resource management, ecosystem restoration, and trail maintenance. Due to the high level of public interest in visitor use and capacity and stock use, and due to the complexity of these topics, Yosemite National Park will be hosting a series of workshops to engage the public to focus on these topics. This is one of three newsletters that outlines the issues to be addressed in this planning process.

Workshop Topic #1:

Visitor Use & Capacity

Levels and patterns of visitor use have changed since the 1989 Wilderness Management Plan was developed. The stressors facing wilderness resources also have changed. New data and methods are available to better understand travel patterns and associated impacts to the wilderness. Additionally, new policy guidance will help to identify and evaluate indicators of wilderness character and to monitor and manage conditions before problems arise.

This update to the 1989 plan will provide a valuable baseline by which we can evaluate future impacts to wilderness character. It will identify the most effective and adaptable way to manage visitor use in the Yosemite Wilderness, and it will reassess the Park's capacity to set sustainable use quotas. These refinements will better achieve the National Park Service mission to provide a quality wilderness experience for the diversity of today's users, while protecting this special place in perpetuity.

Workshop Topic #2:

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.



What are the key issues to the WSP?

Visitor Use & Capacity

Our existing trailhead quota system has been in use since the early 1970s and it uses historical use patterns to predict where users are likely to go from any given trailhead. As such, it manages our zone capacities *indirectly*. Since use patterns have dramatically changed since this system was established, many destinations experience crowding while other remote areas are little used because the trailheads that serve them become full. We have developed a range of preliminary concepts and ideas to solve this problem by managing zone and destination quotas *directly*, which would improve access to most areas while reducing overcrowding at popular destinations.



Stock Use

The use of stock for pack trips in the wilderness is a unique and special way to experience Yosemite’s wilderness and it provides opportunities to many diverse users. However, the location, timing and amount of stock use can impact soils and vegetation as well as sensitive cultural sites. In particular, poorly timed stock grazing has significantly damaged some wet meadows. These meadows are home to rare and federally threatened species, so we need to reconsider stock use



policies to balance grazing access with our legal obligation to protect and restore these precious species and their habitat. Our preliminary concepts propose a range of methods to prevent conflicts between grazing access and resource protection.

Trail Management

Our extensive trail network has always been the means by which most users access and experience Yosemite’s wilderness. The majority of these trails were built in the historic era, and American Indians used many routes for thousands of years. Many of our trails have seen such an increase in use that damage to surrounding resources is becoming more apparent. As part of this planning effort, we will classify all trails to better reflect use levels and prioritize associated maintenance and resource protection.

Commercial Services

The Wilderness Act requires that the National Park Service evaluate the need for commercial services within wilderness. This plan will determine the appropriate amount of commercial services (such as guided hiking, climbing, and stock pack trips) to be authorized.

What did we hear from you?



With your valuable feedback, we’ve been able to identify the issues that are most important to you and formulate a range of policy concepts to address those issues. During the initial public scoping in early 2016, we received over 750 comments from individuals and organized groups representing a wide range of interests and perspectives. Public participation is extremely important to our work and the planning process. We thank you for your contribution.

The comments we received span the entire spectrum of policy options. Some were highly specific to particular places or issues while others were broad and far-reaching in scope. Viewed together, people generally agreed with the emphasis upon the four topics we identified prior to the initial public comment period. To review the full range of ideas and thoughts from the public, please review the Public Scoping Comment Summary Report provided here:

<http://parkplaninng.nps.gov/yosewild>

What other important topics are included?

Facilities In Wilderness

The facilities in Yosemite’s wilderness will also be considered as they are an important tool for preserving wilderness character while allowing for recreational and other uses. All facilities in designated Wilderness must be the minimum structures or installations needed to administer the area in a way that preserves wilderness character, rather than for convenience. Therefore, we must consider the present and future use of facilities in this planning process. Our process for evaluating the future use and maintenance of facilities is driven by legal framework, which will be described in the plan. As such we will consider facilities equally throughout the concepts brought forth by the WSP.

Facilities in Potential Wilderness Additions

Potential Wilderness Additions (PWAs), also considered, are managed similar to wilderness with the exception that they include ‘non-conforming uses’ that pre-date the legal designation of wilderness. Six PWAs include

commercial uses; the concessioner runs the five High Sierra Camps while a Park Partner runs the Ostrander Ski Hut. These PWA facilities serve dual purposes: they provide unique and valuable recreational services and they all contain historically significant structures and districts that help to tell the human story. Given such values, we will continue to support these popular facilities, making adjustments as needed to minimize impacts to designated wilderness.

Other Infrastructure & Activities

As part of this planning process, we will debut a new trail classification system that guides decision-making related to trails assessment, maintenance and use types. Signage and associated infrastructure will continue to constitute the minimum required to minimize impacts. These elements are not expected to change significantly and our preferred policy will be common throughout all concepts proposed by the WSP.





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 these two topics?**
- **Have we omitted any key ideas related to the topics of visitor use and 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**