

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

VISITOR ACCESS MANAGEMENT DRAFT PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Frequently Asked Questions

August 2024

Why is this plan needed?

The National Park Service is proud to welcome hundreds of millions of visitors to America's national parks every year. In our second century of protecting these special places, we continue to seek new ways to provide the best experiences possible. Reservation systems can help allow the greatest number of people to safely visit and enjoy parks while ensuring what makes that place special remains protected for generations to come.

Over the past decade, many parks have seen significant increases in visitation and crowding in popular areas, especially during peak seasons. In some parks, the level of demand is exceeding the capacity for which infrastructure was designed or is outpacing the National Park Service's ability to sustainably support visitation. This trend is resulting in the need to explore new strategies to protect natural and cultural resources and provide opportunities for safe and meaningful visitor experiences.

How did you come up with this plan?

The draft Plan/EA is the product of many years of studies, public comments, stakeholder input, and analysis. The plan has been informed by a number of scientific studies. We also gave a lot of weight to what people said they valued about the park and what management strategies we should consider, which we heard during the last two public comment periods. The planning team, which consists of NPS managers, scientists, and staff relied on this information to develop the draft plan and EA.

Why are you considering these specific actions?

The plan presents alternative actions and strategies that could be taken to protect park resources and provide high-quality visitor experiences. They reflect ideas and suggestions from the public to provide better visitor experiences and respond to existing issues associated with crowding and traffic congestion during peak visitation times. This is a draft plan; your feedback will help inform the final plan.

- Reservation systems can improve visitor experiences by reducing congestion and crowding, improving entrance and parking predictability, reducing delays and long lines, and spreading visitation to different areas, times, days, or seasons. These systems help the National Park Service provide a safe and meaningful park visit.
- Reservation systems protect parks so that people can enjoy them now and for generations to come. These tools are effective and commonplace in our everyday lives from movie theaters and restaurants to ski resorts and museums in the United States and around the world.

What kind of comments are you looking for?

We are particularly interested in any new information, questions, or ideas that will improve, augment, or challenge that information and ultimately strengthen the plan to support informed decision-making by the NPS.

So if I get enough people to send in a comment, you'll do what we want?

The public comment period is not a vote. What we are looking at is the substance of the comments, not necessarily the volume.

Why even pick a preferred at this point, doesn't that stifle public comment?

The purpose of identifying a preferred alternative is to let the public know which alternative we are leaning toward selecting at the time a draft plan and EA is released. We have identified a preferred alternative, so the public knows which direction we are headed and has many opportunities to comment on that direction. This is the final public comment period and the public's last chance to formally weigh in to help inform decision-making.

How did the pilot reservation systems inform this plan?

To gather additional information that would inform the visitor access management plan, park staff instituted a day-use peak hours reservation system pilot in 2024—this pilot tested a system during a time without pandemic restrictions or major construction. Modifications from the 2022 reservation system included weekend-only periods (Saturday, Sunday, and holiday Mondays) during the early and late peak seasons, afternoon entries, and an overall increase the number of reservations available. The park staff have been actively monitoring the summer 2024 pilot and incorporating lessons learned into this plan and supporting analysis.

When are you making a final decision? When would that decision be implemented?

Before making a decision about plans for summer 2025 the park staff will consider both the results of the summer 2024 pilot as well as public comment on the draft plan and EA (which ends on Sept 30). A plan for summer 2025 will be announced later this fall.