

Yosemite National Park  
**Merced River Plan**  
Outstandingly Remarkable Values Workshop  
**Fresno, CA**  
June 29, 2010

Notes from the question and answer session following a presentation of the *Merced River Comprehensive Management Plan Outstandingly Remarkable Values Report, June 2010*, by park staff. *Italic type* represents NPS responses to questions and comments.

One process missing from Geo/Hydro presentation is the actual process: the dynamic river and dynamic geology. *The ORV presentation is very much abbreviated; refer to text on pages 18-19 for more detail.*

The damage I see in Yosemite lies in the meadows (where there are no boardwalks) and at vista points where people are venturing off trail (if one exists). These facilities need to be properly maintained.

*Wooden walkways (boardwalks) are known by park staff to reduce damage to meadows. This is an example of the kind of feedback we need from these meetings.*

El Capitan and Yosemite Falls provide good examples of where facilities are working well. The path to Mirror Lake, on the right side, is in poor shape; puddles, braided trails and other problems need to be addressed. Plants need to be protected.

*Different meadows serve as different destinations, reflecting different needs or visitor uses. What would an effective boardwalk actually look like? How would it function?*

The Cook's Meadow boardwalk and Yosemite Falls trail loop has pockets and benches for people to sit and enjoy the view. They blend within the landscape so well and vegetation grows to conceal facilities from view or help them appear less obvious.

*Park staff is working on a scenic vista management plan that will address some of these issues. We need to receive this kind of feedback as that plan moves forward.*

What is Yosemite doing to engage those who have accessibility issues and get opinions about where improvements are needed in the park? *NPS has an accessibility coordinator on staff who is working to improve access to key location and facilities in parks, in cooperation with the park concessionaire who runs restaurants and hotels and other visitor service facilities. Ideas and specific suggestions are invited as part of this process.*

Boardwalks in meadows are good for protecting vegetation, but they present a visual intrusion. Have you considered boardwalks in sensitive areas while recognizing that people might want to walk in other locations that are meadow related? What has been the substance of your

internal discussion or deliberation? *The NPS staff discussions have been inconclusive. We've done much in study but have not formulated any definitive policy or recommendations at this time. Alternatives need to be developed and analyzed.*

*This is a good indication of one of the issues related to the WSRA. How do you analyze impacts and what measures will you take to protect values and resources? There are trade off's to be considered all the way along the plan development process.*

*(Seconded) NPS does not have a proposal to resolve the issue of social trails within meadows. Climbing community input is requested. Climbers would recognize boardwalks from El Capitan and other climbing locations as visually intrusive.*

*A wide variety of other resource management laws and ORV's will have to be considered as alternatives are developed through the planning process.*

*There are multiple technical solutions that may be considered as part of the alternatives development process, such as use of appropriate building materials and camouflage techniques.*

The ability of visitors to enjoy the park should not be hampered by too much development. On the other hand, there was better access provided to facilities in the past. You used to be able to take a wheelchair up the Vernal Fall trail, right to the bridge across the Merced River. But in the name of restoring nature, you have limited access to places (such as Vernal Fall) throughout the park.

*ADA establishes criteria and the park needs to think about access throughout all planning process, but this is the right time and place to be raising these points and bringing the issues forward as part of the planning process.*

*There have been plans and proposals to conduct trail repair in the park, but they cannot move forward until the Wild and Scenic River Plan is completed and adopted.*

Equestrian use and pack animal care must be considered; operational uses are equally important (as facility development and repair).

Why do your ORV's have to be "map-able?" *In order to lay out a plan with management goals, actions and objectives, we need to know what we are protecting and enhancing. We have several steps to take in addressing the human experience of Yosemite. The intangible visitor experiences are clearly important as expressed by others who are writing letters or participating in planning meetings.*

*Things that can be managed or manipulated are often the more tangible things. The intangible issues have become the focus in the fields of recreational management and social science. The psychological factors need to be considered.*

What are you going to do about the crud in parking lots and material storage that is evident within Yosemite Valley, and the impacts of employee housing that are degrading the ORV's, as they are defined? What are these features doing to water quality? *These issues are not exempt from the planning process and NPS will have an obligation to address these problems in the plan.*

Specific problems were detailed at Lost Arrow parking area, now concessionaire employee housing, and at west end of Yosemite Lodge (flood damage, opportunities for clean-up, temporary installation of concessionaire employee housing). Maybe the employee housing needs to go somewhere else so that visitors can see and enjoy the Yosemite Falls and other scenic resources.

The theater at the visitor center has a great film right now, but why don't you show views from the tops of the falls (Yosemite and Nevada) so that the view can be experienced in a virtual format for those who will never be able to get up there? Not enough information or education is provided regarding car parking and shuttle service. Most visitors leave the informational resources (provided at the entry gates) behind when they leave their cars behind.

*Education helps protect resources.*

*There is information but there are also information needs. The challenge is to think ahead and provide the information that people want or need. There are things that can be done to sort out information needs.*

Information kiosks could be provided around Yosemite Valley. However, the biggest operational problem that you have is parking and traffic congestion. Smog and bad air are some of the immediate consequences. There is too much auto circulation and traffic related to the need for parking throughout the park. Maybe you should provide a four-story underground parking structure, then people would be willing to park their cars and use the shuttle service.

*One of the options NPS is considering in an intelligent transportation system that will use traffic counters and electronic media to communicate with park visitors and groups, so that they can make decisions about where to go and how to avoid frustrations as they visit the park. Traffic issues need to be addressed as part of this plan.*

*Traffic regulation and congestion must be considered by park staff as part of the problem statement with a definition of the solutions that may be considered.*

*There are other parks and visitor destinations that have grappled with traffic issues and effectively limited automotive access by providing parking structures with shuttle systems. [Examples are Denali, Mt. Rushmore and Zion; and a (small mountain town) in Switzerland.]*

*The Zion experience is a remarkable contrast from days before shuttle service was provided.*

Gateway communities (Mariposa and Oakhurst) provide great opportunities to establish parking facilities and other visitor support services for the purpose of moving park visitors from parking facilities to the park.

If shuttles ran no less frequently than 5 minutes, people would be content to use them. The outlying towns and communities would be highly motivated to cooperate with this concept.

*Zion is more geographically limited and therefore more manageable than Yosemite, so NPS will have more work in repeating the success.*

Fresno County is currently undertaking a regional transit plan. Hopefully, the NPS is participating in that process.

NPS would need to provide more lockers and storage space if people cannot bring their cars with them.

*The intelligent transportation mechanisms would help people define their travel options based on the real-time information that is provided to them.*

*Park staff is funded to develop a Transportation Improvement Strategy Report and collaborate with regional transportation planners.*

Don't limit cars. It is difficult to have a picnic or bring other stuff into the park without one. The impacts of fire change scenic vistas and provide opportunities for logging, which might help Yosemite make money to support projects in the park. *The impacts of fire are not necessarily harmful to natural resources. NPS is actually permitting timber removal from resources burned in the Big Meadow Fire.*

Ashes and other debris from fire are natural, and you cannot clear cut. Fix potholes, repair trails and roads, clear paths from obstructions. Safety issues must be addressed. Is this part of the scope of this planning process? *Maintenance needs must be addressed, but the river plan will not be considering such detail at this level.*

Has anyone studied the river to determine whether there are any native fish in the Merced River? *The state used to stock the river, but has discontinued the practice (1990). Fish used to be found in Yosemite Valley all the way up to Vernal Fall. The interaction between the river and adjacent meadows is biologically complex, due to cycles of flooding and deposition of organic debris. A healthy river will provide a healthy fish habitat. Riparian zones and large woody debris are important components.*

Will NPS be resuming the practice of stocking fish in the river? *No; it is not possible to restore the native fish population because of the changes in fish populations from native species to non-native fish that were introduced in the past.*

Human food, ingestion by wildlife (bears) and defecation must have impacts on the soil, runoff and health of the river. Is NPS doing anything to study these issues? *No; NPS is monitoring water quality and specific bacteriological constituents on a regular basis.*

Recreational issues are varied and there are multiple opportunities and choices for park visitors. These options should be protected and possibly expanded to provide for more diverse activities and experiences for park visitors. All-or-nothing solutions will not be practical and there are incremental steps that can be taken to manage existing resources.

What will you do to protect bears and the public? What happened to the caution signs that were visible in the past? Flyers were posted in windows at the South Entrance. Brainstorming among staff is encouraged: if there was a law that said you cannot put bears down, what would you do? This has been an issue and there seems to be no progress made over the years. Just do it. Enforcement measures are inadequate.

*Bear issues cannot be addressed right now, but NPS is working to address these matters through other programs, in the long term. The NPS is putting a lot of resources into this effort and the bear protection program is evolving over time.*

Managers, planners and scientists like to deal with the things that can be quantified. Can this plan address what park managers have not been able to address: the visitor experience that is not easily quantified? Or will the visitor experience get shoved aside in this process because it is too difficult for park staff to deal with? *The Recreation ORV was intended to address visitor experience to a degree. It has been difficult to express the intangible experiences in much detail. The NPS will need more input from park visitors as this process evolves. Any help or refinement or added detail will be appreciated. Definition of ORV's has been helpful in getting us this far, but there are further inputs that will be essential as the plan, goals and objectives are identified.*

Planners should simply stand at Housekeeping Camp and watch how people interact with the river. There are millions of ways for people to enjoy Yosemite. There is something about the socialization that is unique to Yosemite and there is no right or wrong way to enjoy the park. Peoples memories are being expanded every day.

Superintendent's closing remarks: *Thinking about this planning effort, it is important to note that Yosemite cannot be all things to all people. We have competing values, some of which are apparent here in this room. We want to get things right this time. Please be patient and continue to work with us.*

The e-mail address for comments was reiterated as provided in the ORV report.