

Yosemite National Park  
**Merced River Plan**  
Outstandingly Remarkable Values Workshop  
**Yosemite Valley Visitor Center Auditorium - Open House**  
June 28, 2010 • 2:30 P.M. Session

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.

What happens to the comments we provide? Are comments available online? *They will be made available on the park's web site, specifically on the planning page: [www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp.htm). Public information is also made available through the planning, environment and public comment (PEPC) web site: [www.parkplanning.nps.gov](http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov).*

There is a desire to provide feedback to the public in response to the comments that are received.

Specific to the camping, cultural, and scenic ORV criteria, have comments and petitions generated during scoping related to these been reviewed and integrated into current report?

Is what we are undertaking here (how we are studying ORVs, etc.) setting standard for national policy or evaluation by NPS?

The 2 and 1/2 miles of river in Yosemite Valley should be studied differently regarding the Recreation ORV (importance of the camping experience, for example), Cultural ORV (heritage of camping as an historic use), and scenic (when camping or rafting). These are unique experiences that should be considered.

Explain the paradox of Camp 4 being listed on National Register of Historic Places, while the other campgrounds that existed at the same time (or earlier) were removed or closed, or are otherwise endangered.

Is it possible that the park would re-establish the campgrounds to conditions that existed before the 1997 flood, then list those campgrounds on the National Register?

Do people need to sue the NPS in order to have a campground listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or will the NPS come to its senses? This is not a desired form of action.

Frustration was expressed in seeing things being done or accomplished in the park, while the campgrounds are not restored. Multiple comments supported riverside camping in the Valley and frustrations over the loss of so many sites (approximately 300). These sites offer opportunities for visitors to day hike, backpack, and fully enjoy the park at the ground level, at minimal expense. People love camping because it is rustic and allows people to develop their

outdoor skills.

NPS should contact people in the campground reservations database from 1980, provide some form of letter, postcard, etc. to solicit their comments. Campers were left out of the 1980 planning process and should be engaged in this process.

When the Merced River Plan was started several years ago, there was direction from Congress to develop (or restore) camping in Yosemite Valley. It was alleged that the NPS felt that there wasn't enough direction or interest in the planning process, so the issue was dropped.

Camping has always been a big part of life, based upon my experience as a native Californian. The river has changed a lot over the years, up and down; side to side. American Indians camped along the river for thousands of years – why can't we?

We have a desire to incorporate camping as close to the river as possible (in it) for the 2 and 1/2 mile stretch of Yosemite Valley where campgrounds sit (including those that existed before the 1997 flood).

A range of alternatives is not apparent. Historic camp sites have been manipulated or removed without a public process. There are inconsistencies in NPS statements on this issue. The public struggles to express concerns in conformance of the NPS definition of alternatives and ranges and ORVs.

Here are some alternative options: accept campgrounds as they are and now exist; replace campgrounds as they existed before the flood; remove them all; or maximize campgrounds in the 2 and 1/2 mile reach of the river in Yosemite Valley.

I love Yosemite and have had many visits since 1976. I understand that camping is full and it is very hard to get reservations. On this visit, I have been sleeping in my car because I could not find a campsite. In 1997 there was a flood. What was the extent of the damage? Did people die? Why have campgrounds been closed and why were they not restored after the flood? Is there a law that influenced these decisions?

Explain how the NPS got 190 million dollars from Congress and did not fix the campgrounds.

Is the NPS stating that they will revisit the question of opening previously closed campgrounds? If so, I am glad to hear that.

The concept of re-opening camp sites refers to more than the Upper and Lower River campgrounds. Two-thirds of the Lower Pines campground was closed and group camping was eliminated.

NPS is failing to enforce the six-person-per-site limit. Quiet hours are not enforced. People are too close. Animal regulations are not enforced. Camping has changed as an experience. It is

not as quiet, pristine, or intimate.

I am not clamoring for campsites in Yosemite Valley, nor opposed. It would be foolish to have sites right up to the edge of the river or packed into the east end of the Valley. Historically, it is true that people have camped here in Yosemite Valley for thousands of years, but not in the same quantity of people as happens now. Do we want to experience the inversion layer of the 1960's, caused by smoke with so many campers and campfires clustered in one location? We need to look at the capacity of this Valley to accommodate the people that are coming here. If we are going to have more campgrounds need to take into context the number of people we are trying to satisfy. This means more utilities, space, dogs, people, water, sewer, etc. I tend to camp in spring and fall seasons to avoid summer. It is too busy and difficult to get a reservation. Areas of current campgrounds are denuded, void of vegetation. The 2 and 1/2 mile reach of eastern Yosemite Valley is the most heavily impacted area already. Do we want to add to this, to be even more crowded? This is not the Yosemite Valley I would want to visit. Let's not forget that camping is not just people camping with minimal equipment and tools. It includes caravanning, with lots of campfires, stuff, people, etc.

In regard to the wilderness areas adjacent to the Merced River, will there be a management strategy adopted that is unique and specific to the Wild and Scenic aspect for these areas? Or will it be all encompassing?

To what extent, or how far along in regard to day use limits, have we assessed potential limits? Is this on the table, for consideration? If so, to what extent? Do we have an idea as to levels of acceptance?

Camping can be a simple experience; a pad, sleeping bag, and pillow. People just need a small amount of space.

I am nervous about the concept of user capacity and studies that relate to this concept. The inversion layer and other problems of the past existed during a period of undefined camping. With time limitations on campfires and designated (or delineated) camping, the problems have been minimized.

Where will the user capacity considerations begin, at what point? I see an improvement today versus 1975, for example. How do you address the user capacity issues to suit existing conditions? Are you comparing conditions to the past, or present? There are different levels depending on what snapshot in time you reference.

I want kids and other people to learn life experiences from camping. We learn to simplify life and do without so many conveniences. I want the NPS to encourage primitive camping.

All of these (outstandingly remarkable) values seem interesting, but I hope we don't miss the fact that we have to have people here in the park in order to enjoy them. If we gate off (or limit access to) the whole park, these values might be protected but no one would be able to see

them (consider scenery, in particular). I hope we do not confuse management, or lack of it, for being able to supply Yosemite Valley with people to enjoy it.

I like the format of this meeting. Everyone gets to hear everyone's comments, as opposed to splintering off participants in small groups. It seems authentic and open, and the park staff is accessible. This was an opportunity to hear one another, exchange ideas, and talk with experts.

---

***Yosemite Valley Visitor Center Auditorium - Open House***

*June 28, 2010 • 5:30 P.M. Session*

Does the Wild and Scenic Rivers act designation include the headwaters, tributaries, wilderness areas? How far does it go below Yosemite Valley?

How much of our plan is involved with the other agencies that manage the sections of the Merced Wild and Scenic River, outside of Yosemite?

Were the ORVs based on the present conditions, or the future hopeful conditions, or the past conditions (pre- American Indian or European-American arrival)?

Some recreational opportunities are noted as ORV's. Climbing was specifically mentioned. How and why is this considered a recreational ORV?

Speaking as a climber, I don't see how this activity is river-related. Is it affected by the plan?

As a park volunteer, I worked on Lower Pines restoration and the river terrace. I received a lot of negative feedback while working in the field and felt as though there was no support among those using campgrounds. It is difficult to keep plants alive in damaged areas when receiving so much resistance.

Is there a part of this process that takes into account daily use as part of the guideline for the Merced River planning? Would this not affect our justification of the ORV's? The court did not like the park's prior approach to this task. Are we taking a different approach now? Which comes first, defining the ORV's or the user capacity and visitor use issues?

Things are all so inter-related, it is confusing to determine what plan trumps another plan (sound, air quality, ORVs, wilderness, etc.).

If the planning effort results in the removal of campgrounds, is there a mechanism to determine whether other (new) campgrounds will be built outside of the Valley or MRP scope?

The NPS must remember not only to protect, but to enhance river-related natural resources. The law requires us to do both.

The NPS should help re-direct the masses that come to visit the park. Sometimes people don't know where to go or how to access areas by the river. Perhaps this will make them less angry as they find the areas that are fenced off.