

Yosemite National Park
Merced River Plan
Outstandingly Remarkable Values Roundtable
Groveland Community Center
July 1, 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.

Clarification was sought on the scope of the planning effort: it will focus on natural resources and land use along one-quarter mile along either edge of the river (*one-half mile, total width*).

What are the NPS land management obligations outside park boundaries? (*None; each agency is responsible for lands within its jurisdiction.*)

You mentioned balance. Where does the visitor fit into this process? NPS will have different ways of protecting and enhancing resources. *There are multiple approaches that might resolve issues. Visitor capacity is another important factor (or factors) that are essential to the planning process. Visitor experience will remain just as important as the numbers that are used to evaluate capacity.*

In Groveland, there are opportunities to serve visitors while helping the gateway community through park-and-ride options or similar transportation facilities that will facilitate connections to the park.

You have good numbers that indicate broad access and activity from all gateway communities. You can develop transportation alternatives that promote optional bus travel, rather than mandatory use of bus lines. Use congestion pricing strategies.

You have so many tools available through new technologies that can make the park available to people every day. New media can help you deliver more interesting information to people. Consider GPS units, geo-tourism and other activities.

Use economic incentives to manage access to the park, such as lower prices at the gate, mid-week. The local communities can help promote opportunities at local hotels or combine resources to help the NPS.

Gateway communities will always be concerned about transportation and other issues of mutual concern, but there are other factors to consider: water, sensitivity of wilderness, education.

How do other Wild and Scenic Rivers compare to local situations and processes for the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers? *Everyone is waiting to see what happens at Yosemite. Zion has a Wild and Scenic River and similar management challenges.*

What are the criteria that apply to your process and how will they affect the plan in the end?

Regarding hotels and transportation resources: Groveland has a local airport. Hotels will pick-up travelers at this airport. But how can we get visitors from local hotels to Yosemite?

It makes sense to have people stop in the gateway communities if they cannot get into the park. Real-time information and smart transportation technologies would be helpful. Real-time sensing and GIS technologies can help the NPS manage access and traffic flow as cars approach the gates. Trigger points add up to a range of actions. Also, NPS can post a ranger in the gateway communities to provide information to hotel visitors and give them an orientation to the park.

Vehicle access to the Merced River is available via Greeley Hill. Find alternatives that give people other experiences through alternative access points.

Use the gateway communities to absorb impacts from peaks in tourism.

The NPS should consider use of control burns and impacts to local communities and the visitor experience, such as hanging smoke, poor visibility and economic disruptions.

Pg. 26 includes a long list of Yosemite National Park personnel, each making \$100,000 a year. How can we put these people to work more efficiently on a day-to-day basis? You have a lot of resources. You can use them better every day.

What happens to the comments that you collect at these meetings? They are not being shared with anybody, so you keep receiving the same or similar comments from one meeting to the next.

The best outstandingly remarkable value about Yosemite is being able to experience it. The controlled burn fires make it difficult for visitors to enjoy the park.

The Big Meadow Fire remains fresh in people's minds. Think about what these fires do to people in the gateway communities.

One problem with a 15-year (cyclical) planning process is that you never get around to implementation. Many good ideas have been raised time and again, but we are talking about the same ideas over and over. Why not feature or promote other, less-known parts of the park, such as Tuolumne Meadow and other places. Don't keep highlighting the impacted portions of the park. Use new media to develop on-line games to capture people's attention; i.e., Where's Shelton? (What is he doing today?)

Many ephemeral falls have been visible in the park this year. If they are not in the quarter-mile management zone, how will you protect these resources?

Underutilized portions of the park should be studied, considered or developed for better purposes (Crane Flat, Hetch Hetchy, an information kiosk before the Big Oak Flat entrance station).

Throughout the park, provide a shopping mall-style map: "you are here."

If you had a fully-interactive transportation system, you could start diverting people to other locations or destinations until the crowds thin.

Promote the positive. Use more signs and electronic media to explain what resources are available. Radio information is also useful. GPS links can help educate visitors who arrive by automobile. Partner with GPS companies, like Garmin.

Holiday schedule and peak visitation periods also need to be considered as factors when considering controlled burns.

Another ORV is all of the NPS people who are willing to be here.

What have the negative points been?

- *Lack of camping*
- *Differences of opinion within focus groups*

Think about dispersing campgrounds at places outside the valley (such as Hetch Hetchy or Crane Flat). The NPS and the public focus too much on Yosemite Valley and don't consider opportunities elsewhere in the park.

Park Service people should collaborate with companies like Trip Advisor and Expedia so that correct information is provided through new media.

Parking citations are numerous because of the lack of available parking spaces.

It's difficult for the visitor to navigate park attractions or know where they are in the park. The counterparts to the valley are the high points, like fire lookouts and Sentinel Dome. You can drive to many of these. You can promote visitor enjoyment elsewhere and disperse park visitors.

The web can help Yosemite campers understand current conditions and track visitor activity (or pressure) at places in the park. Use technology to help spread out visitors.

You must learn to understand the fear that humans have when they hear the phrase “wild and scenic.” People have concerns about how federal actions will affect access to and the use of the river and resources.

We need a simultaneous set of action items that can be implemented now, that don’t have to wait until a plan is completed.

Consider “Fast Trak” technologies to help people move more quickly through the gates.

A trails task force was created as part of the Gateway Partners. Use this group as an opportunity to expand efforts throughout gateways.