



Protect America's Climbing

April 30, 2013

Superintendent
Yosemite National Park
Attn: Merced River Plan Alternatives
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
Email: yose_planning@nps.gov

RE: Access Fund Comments to the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Yosemite Planning Team:

The Access Fund welcomes the opportunity to submit these comments to the National Park Service's (NPS) Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement ("Plan" or "Draft MRP"). We provide these comments to assist Yosemite National Park (YNP) planners in developing appropriate and effective alternatives for the MRP. These comments are provided in addition to MRP scoping comments we submitted in 2010,¹ our comments to the initial MRP Planning Workbook in 2011,² and comments we submitted to the MRP Preliminary Alternative Concepts Workbook in 2012,³ all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

The Access Fund appreciates the extensive work that Yosemite planners put into the various phases of this Draft MRP. While we have specific and significant suggestions to improve the Park's Preferred Alternative 5, we believe that much of the analysis and proposed actions in this Draft Plan are appropriate, much needed, and a dramatic improvement on past planning proposals for the Merced River corridor.

The Access Fund

The Access Fund is the national advocacy organization that keeps U.S. climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. Founded in 1991, the Access Fund supports and represents over 2.3 million climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing: rock, ice, mountaineering, and bouldering. Six core programs support the mission on national and local levels: Climbing Management Policy, Local Support & Mobilization, Stewardship & Conservation, Land Acquisition & Protection, Risk Management & Landowner Support, and Education. California is our largest member state and Access Fund members across the country regularly travel to Yosemite to climb at this world-class destination. The Access Fund has a long history of participation in Yosemite National Park management initiatives, and we welcome this additional opportunity to participate in the development of the MRP. To learn more, visit accessfund.org.

COMMENTS

The Access Fund supports the framework of the Preferred Alternative 5 with the specific modifications noted herein because this proposal provides a realistic framework for protecting river values while increasing camping opportunities in accordance with NPS policies. Alternative 5 is aligned with the management objective for recreation in the Plan and NPS policy in that it would bring more park visitors into close association with park resources by increasing camping 37% throughout the planning area for a total of 640 camping units. While other alternatives would increase camping more (while reducing lodging) those proposals would either increase or reduce day use and overnight capacity limits to unrealistic levels. Our comments propose site specific options for adding new camping and also make the case that camping deserves special status under both the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (“the Act”) and NPS management policies.

In general, we support Alternative 5 because it increases in camping, retains resource-based recreation opportunities in Yosemite Valley, proposes various needed river restoration actions and effective transportation improvements, and provides for adaptive planning of commercial services. However, we have suggestions in each of these areas that we believe will improve the Plan. For example, we encourage planners to authorize improvements to Camp 4 as set forth previously in the Lodge Redevelopment Plan EA, and to develop specific transit options for climbers. In particular, we support an even larger increase in camping opportunities to bring campsite totals closer to baseline, pre-1997 levels.⁴ These comments are limited to the Plan’s proposals for Yosemite Valley and provide specific examples of how Park planners can accomplish this camping increase.

I. CAMPING

Climbers have a unique and special relationship to camping in Yosemite Valley. Because the Valley is one of the premier climbing destinations in the world, climbers come here from around the globe to challenge themselves on its granite walls. The climbing possibilities are nearly limitless and the quality of the routes generally very high. Importantly, climbing Yosemite’s big walls requires special techniques and training that take some time to develop. Consequently, climbers often require long periods of climbing in the Valley (and may return far more often than other visitors) in order to prepare for world-class climbs like The Nose on El Capitan. Such extended trips to Yosemite require camping, and consequently climbers are perhaps uniquely experienced in the quality, quantity and diversity of Yosemite’s camping opportunities. This experience informs our comments here.

Camping as a Component of the Recreation ORV Deserves Special Status in the MRP

Camping deserves a special status in the Plan. Camping is a recreational activity and the only overnight component of the Recreation Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV). Conversely, lodging is not an activity but a form of leisure and is not part of the recreational ORV nor is it part of any ORV.⁵ The Plan should acknowledge the special role of camping as the sole overnight component of the Recreation ORV and give camping equal consideration to the day use component of the ORV, particularly regarding crowding, availability, and the allocation of overnight facilities in the Valley. While both lodging and campgrounds are considered major facilities under the 1982 Guidelines⁶ and subject to the analysis for such facilities, in the Valley developed campgrounds are an integral and inseparable part of camping. No dispersed camping is allowed in the Valley, so without campgrounds, there would be no camping and no

overnight component to the Recreation ORV. By contrast, without lodgings, there would still be day use recreation in the Valley. This special status for camping under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is not fully reflected in the Plan.

The Plan Requires a Policy Foundation and River Values Analysis for Camping

We believe the Plan should articulate a policy foundation for camping that clearly shows the importance of camping as the only overnight component of the Recreation ORV and the only form of overnight accommodation that directly serves river values and fulfills NPS policy mandates. This foundation must assure that camping will be restored from its current degraded condition and protected and enhanced, not only in the current Plan, but in subsequent versions of the Plan in future years. The goal should be to assure that, over time, camping will become the primary form of overnight accommodation in the Valley. Without such a policy foundation, camping will remain subject to the same forces that have marginalized campgrounds to the least desirable building sites in the Valley and reduced the number of campsites in the Valley to half what they were 30 years ago.⁷

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides the foundation for developing this foundation. The Act and its interpretive authorities require that river values be subjected to an exhaustive analytical process to ensure their protection and enhancement. Camping is the only form of overnight accommodation that fulfills directives in the Plan and NPS policies to bring visitors into a direct relationship with park resources.⁸ Unfortunately, the Plan treats the provision of campgrounds as essentially a facilities issue, in which campgrounds and lodgings serve river values equally. As a consequence, the Preferred Alternative proposes to restore only about half the 400 campsites lost since the Merced was designated a Wild and Scenic River.

The Draft MRP's lack of a river values-based analysis of camping has three significant consequences. First, it allows the Plan to ignore the fact that thousands of campers are turned away every year by the camping reservation system, while every effort is made to accommodate day users. Second, it allows the Plan to dodge the hard decisions necessary to restore lost campsites and rectify the camping-lodging imbalance in the Valley. Third, it leaves the Plan devoid of any clear policy direction for camping in future iterations of the Plan. This sets camping up for continued treatment as a minor facility issue, subservient to other interests that dominate land use decisions in the Valley. Only a thorough and rigorous river-values analysis of camping as the overnight component of the Recreation ORV can ensure the protection and enhancement of camping in the Plan and in future plans and thus comport with both the Act and NPS management policies. We therefore request the following:

- A recognition that camping enjoys a privileged status under the Act and NPS policies that favors the provision of camping over lodging in the Plan; and
- A recognition of camping as the overnight component of the Recreation ORV with an importance equal to the day use component, including an analysis of availability and crowding; and
- An analysis under the Act and interpretive authorities of how camping, now and in the future, can be restored, protected and enhanced in Yosemite Valley.

The Preferred Alternative Should Provide Additional Camping Opportunities

The Access Fund supports the direction reflected in Preferred Alternative 5 (“enhanced experiences and essential riverbank restoration”), which increases camping opportunities 37% from current conditions. We also support all the proposed additional camping-related actions in Alternative 5 or which are common to all alternatives. These are:

- Camp 4: Retain 35 existing walk-in campsites and the construct an additional 35 walk-in sites east of the existing parking facility;
- A “new” Upper River Campground: 30 walk-in sites;
- West of Backpackers Campground: 16 walk-in campsites;
- Upper Pines: 49 walk-in campsites, 2 group campsites, and 36 RV sites; and
- Eagle Creek: 40-drive-in and 2 group sites (but see our proposal below to change the drive-in sites to walk-ins and make them available on a first-come, first-served basis).

We believe that the MRP should increase camping even more by restoring as much camping as possible to sites that have already been disturbed such as the Rivers Campgrounds that were damaged in the 1997 flood. The Lower Rivers Campground, in particular, could be engineered with a minimal footprint for walk-in sites. These sites could be designed in a way that would not impair river values and with the recognition that they will again be flooded. Additional camping options not included in Alternative 5 that are both out of the floodplain and rock fall hazard line include proposals in Alternatives 4 and 6 for 40 walk-in sites at Lower River, 41 drive-in sites at Boys Town, 41 drive-in sites at the Concessioner Stables, and 2 group sites at Upper River. Alternative 3 also proposes removing Yosemite Lodge units from the flood plain that we believe offer the possibility of additional camping. We also believe new camping could be provided at “Kinneyville” east of the Ahwahnee Hotel, and at the Medial Moraine east of the Concessioners Stable. For more specifics regarding how Yosemite Planners could add more campsites within Alternative 5’s capacity limits, see the Appendix attached hereto A.



Proposed new camping at the former Lower Rivers Campground, “Kinneyville,” and The Moraine

To accommodate more camping locations and preserve camping opportunities, we also urge Park planners to consider more flexibility in the application of river setbacks and floodplain boundaries.⁹ Also, the use of more space-efficient group and walk-in campgrounds could increase density and provide more camping opportunities in the limited space available in the Valley between the 25-year floodplain and the rock fall hazard line boundaries. To keep Alternative 5’s overnight capacity at 7,729,¹⁰ Park planners could selectively phase out lodging where practicable at Housekeeping Camp, Camp Curry, and Yosemite Lodge as set forth in Alternatives 2, 3, and 4. Alternatively, the Park could consider slightly increasing the overnight capacity in Alternative 5.

Minimize Visual Impacts of West Valley Developments: Proposed Eagle Creek Campground and Overflow Parking

The Access Fund appreciates that Alternative 5 would expand camping opportunities in Yosemite Valley, and we understand the utility of establishing an overflow parking lot at the El Cap Crossover which is the last option for drivers to turn around during peak visitation (especially those arriving from the south on Highway 41). However, we are concerned by the proposals for new developments in the West Valley, a location which is currently undeveloped and represents one of the most iconic climbing viewsheds in the world.

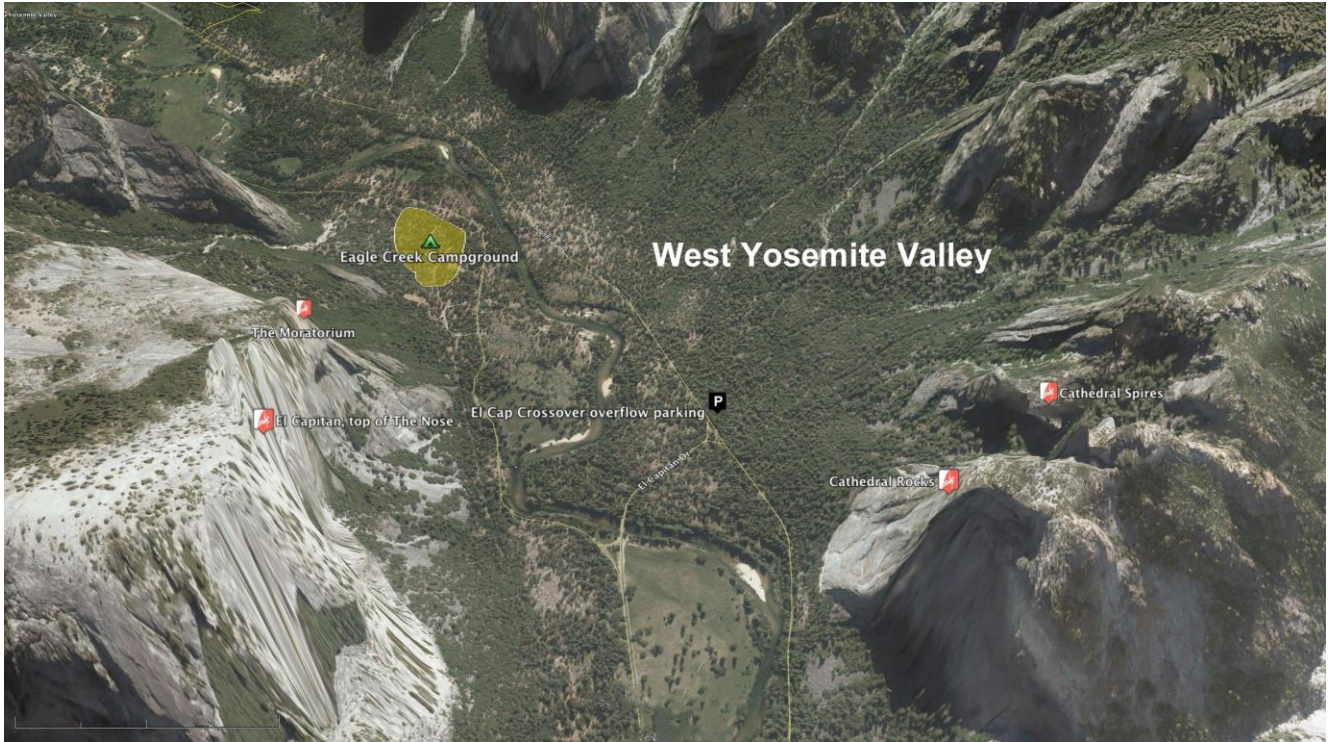


West Yosemite Valley is the last undeveloped part of Yosemite Valley

New proposed developments in Alternative 5, which include the Eagle Creek Campground near Manure Pile Buttress and a 100-car overflow parking lot near the El Cap Crossover, will have unique visual impacts on climbers who will see this infrastructure from above while climbing on El Capitan, the Moratorium, Manure Pile Buttress, and especially the Cathedral Rocks and Cathedral Spires, where the view of El Capitan is spectacular and world-class.



View of Eagle Creek Campground and Overflow Parking from above Cathedral Rocks



West Yosemite Valley view of Eagle Creek Campground and Overflow Parking

Both the proposed campground and parking lot could forever change this famous climbers' viewshed. If Park planners do elect to develop these sites, we urge you to minimize view impacts especially as seen from above. For example, planners could limit campsites at Eagle Creek to walk-in only to minimize pavement and hardscape, and limit campfire smoke by providing only 2-3 group fire-rings. Also, parking for the proposed El Cap Crossover overflow 100-car parking lot and for the Eagle Creek campground (if established as a walk-in campsite with concentrated parking) should be designed to ensure the preservation and restoration of as many trees as possible. If Yosemite planners decide to build Eagle Creek Campground, we support a first-come, first-served system for the Eagle Creek Campground, as with Camp 4, and retaining or relocating the small parking area on the north side of the road right at Eagle Creek that provides climbing access to the popular moderate routes at the base of the Lower Brother.¹¹

More Group and Walk-In Campgrounds Are Needed in the Valley

Group campgrounds offer a special type of camping experience because they bring people together in a recreational setting and foster a social experience that for many people is the heart and soul of camping. Group campers share music, stories, laughter, cooking, eating, companionship, and adventure. For many people, group camping is an important reason for parks to exist. Park plans like the MRP should acknowledge the special value of group camping and ensure that sufficient group campgrounds are available to accommodate this very special need. Group campgrounds are also far more space efficient than individual campgrounds, a critical consideration in planning for more camping in the Valley. Group sites that are vacant should be used as overflow camping for small parties and individuals willing to share campsites in the same way Camp 4 is used now. The Park Service has removed the 14 group campgrounds at Group Camp, and there are no group campgrounds in the Valley now. The Preferred

Alternative proposes to provide only four, two at Upper Pines and two at Eagle Creek.¹² We support the addition to the Preferred Alternative of two group sites at Upper River as proposed in Alternatives 4 and 6.¹³

The benefits of walk-in campgrounds should also be recognized in the Plan. Walk-in campgrounds are more space efficient than drive-in campgrounds, and adding more walk-ins would allow planners to in-fill inefficiently used space at existing and planned campgrounds. Walk-in campgrounds also provide a quieter and more natural experience than auto or RV sites and are aligned with NPS policy because walk-ins bring campers into closer association with park resources and reduce reliance on vehicles and infrastructure.¹⁴

II. RESTORATION¹⁵

We Support the Restoration of El Capitan Meadow Consistent with the Preservation of Its Traditional Use by Climbers and Others

For climbers, “El Cap Meadow” is one of the most remarkable locations in Yosemite Valley, and a common meeting place for climbers around the world. It provides superb close-up views of some the Valley’s most breath-taking formations, easy access to the river, and escape from the urbanized East Valley. The Access Fund supports the traditional use of the meadow by climbers and others, which serves as a key social venue and a common location to spend rest days observing climbers on the formations in the West Valley. Especially for climbers, who often spend a significant amount of time studying the features on El Capitan to ensure adequate familiarity with their intended climbs, time spent in El Cap Meadow is often the most memorable part of the Yosemite climbing experience, with countless photographs taken of aspiring (or successful) El Cap climbers.

The Access Fund supports the proposal in the Plan to fence the northern perimeter of El Cap Meadow to protect the restoration area, designating appropriate access points using minimal boardwalks and viewing platforms, and restoring informal trails in sensitive areas. We encourage planners to limit these developments (or phase them in gradually) to minimize their effects and limit new visual impacts from boardwalks and other infrastructure (especially from above). We also support selective removal of conifers that block views of El Capitan. It is critical that the MRP allow climbers their traditional, low impact use of the Meadow when implementing these important rehabilitation measures.

Repurpose Select Service Facilities

The Access Fund supports the reduction of duplicative facilities and services, with select buildings retained on-site but repurposed. These include the Yosemite Village Sports Shop, Convenience Shop, and Nature Shop; the Camp 6 Day-use Parking Area; and the Curry Village residence area. We support the removal of the facilities and services currently within the river corridor that have no park function or conflict with protecting and enhancing ORVs. These include: The Happy Isles Snack Stand, Yosemite Lodge Swimming Pool & Snack Stand, Ahwahnee Tennis Court and Former Golf Course, and some Housekeeping Camp units. We support the relocation of the following facilities and traditional commercial services to locations outside the river corridor but within Yosemite Valley including the Curry Village ice rink, bike stand, and raft stand. This accommodation of these traditional uses, which

have a direct connection to Park resources, would comport with court directives in the 2008 court decision on the Merced River Plan litigation.¹⁶

We are concerned about the proposed new employee housing at The Lodge that might negatively affect the proposed new camping at Camp 4. The Preferred Alternative 5 would, at Yosemite Lodge along Northside Drive, construct a new two-story building housing 54 employees. This new apartment building would be placed directly across the road from the proposed new 35-campsite expansion of Camp 4. Planners should consider moving this employee housing immediately to the west of the identical new employee building that is proposed east of the Lodge. The new Camp 4 camping next to Swan Slab promises to be some of the best in the Valley, and Park planners should avoid the potential impacts of placing this building immediately across the road.

III. TRANSPORTATION, PARKING, AND SOUNDSCAPE

The Access Fund supports proposals to improve the transportation system in the river corridor including the restoration of several roadside parking locations, providing a shuttle stop at Camp 4 and El Capitan Meadow, and depending on conditions, the possibility of an East Yosemite Valley day-use parking system. Planners should consider the viability of providing dedicated transportation for climbers from the campgrounds (especially Camp 4) down-valley to climbing locations at El Cap Meadow, but especially in the Lower Gorge at Cookie Cliff, Cascade Falls, and Arch Rock. The park could use 10-person vans for this purpose that would not require large turnaround locations; this would reduce traffic and parking congestions to popular climbing locations. We also think that any person arriving in the Valley by transit should be guaranteed a campsite upon arrival, without a reservation, to encourage transit use. If this ceases to be the rarity it is now, the Park can develop an alternative policy. The Access Fund also supports the following transportation and parking actions in Alternative 5 or which are common to all alternatives:

Transportation

- Public transit system between Fresno and Yosemite Valley;
- Road and intersection improvements to mitigate pedestrian-vehicle conflicts and improve traffic flow (especially at the Yosemite Falls intersection and the intersection of Northside Drive and Village Drive);
- Improved transit options that offer alternatives to private vehicle access to the river corridor;
- The use of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and related traffic and parking information to inform visitors of conditions on a real-time basis so that they can make informed decisions about the timing of their visit to the Valley. This should be made available online (and formatted for mobile devices) so that potential visitors can make planning decision before they reach the Park;
- Adding bicycle racks to Valley shuttle buses to promote multi-modal access; and
- Improved pedestrian connections and bike paths throughout the Valley.

Parking

- Constructing 41 additional parking spaces at Camp 4 at the old gas station site, and providing an additional 300 day-use parking spaces west of Yosemite Lodge. Park planners should ensure that

these new parking locations near Camp 4 are appropriately shielded with natural vegetation to mitigate negative affects on camping (especially noise and fumes from the tour buses which should not be allowed to idle their engines);

- Restore roadside parking locations where appropriate, mindful of the many climbing access points throughout the river corridor; and
- Consideration of an East Yosemite Valley day-use parking permit system, depending on conditions, after non-regulatory efforts have been unsuccessful.

Soundscape

Natural quiet is an important element of the Recreation ORV, and the Soundscape in the Merced River planning area should be protected and restored, especially in the West Valley where there is currently little infrastructure and fewer activities that impair the soundscape. However, there are a few glaring examples where the Park could make improvements to protect and enhance ORVs while also addressing longstanding concerns by climbers regarding noise. As with the West Valley viewshed, the soundscape in this area is a significant part of the climbing experience and should be protected and enhanced in the Plan. Climbers are uniquely impacted by noise in the West Valley and possibly by some proposals in Alternative 5. These include unmanaged motorcycle noise, potential garbage collection (especially if the Eagle Creek Campground is built; anyone who has bivouacked on a wall in the Valley above a campground knows that garbage collection is often the first thing they hear in the morning), noise from the wood yard just west of El Capitan along Northside Drive, RV generators in campgrounds, and megaphones used by the Green Dragon tour busses. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires the Plan to identify these noise sources as adverse effects to the Recreation ORV “with appropriate strategies detailed for their resolution.”¹⁷ The Plan presents a rare opportunity for the Park to comprehensively address these noise issues and bring them under management control

Motorcycles

The MRP proposes no management action to address extremely loud vehicle noise from motorcycles with altered mufflers. Motorcycles often roar through Yosemite Valley, with big groups on holiday weekends, and fill the road corridor with an inescapable loud noise that can be heard for miles into the wilderness. This noise not only exceeds NPS soundscape management standards and the requirements of the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, it also violates NPS regulations and the California Vehicle Code.¹⁸ Many climbing routes in Yosemite Valley are close to the highway, and climbers often find it impossible to hear each other’s climbing signals above the noise of vehicles. This is particularly true on Cathedral Rocks. Other parks have taken specific management action to protect Park soundscape,¹⁹ and to correct the problem in Yosemite Valley the MRP should propose the following.

- Encourage quiet and courteous motorcycle riding through education.
- Discourage use of modified exhausts on motorcycles that increase noise levels.
- Require groups of organized motorcycle riders to acquire a special use permit, and an application system for organized motorcycle riders should go through the appropriate NEPA analysis.
- Enforce 36 CFR 2.12(i) limiting vehicle noise to 60 decibels at 50 feet.
- Enforce 36 CFR 2.12(ii) prohibiting “unreasonable” noise, judged from the totality of circumstances.

- Issue “fix-it” tickets for modified mufflers, requiring documentation that a modified muffler has been replaced with a compliant one, as CHP officers do.

Wood Lot, Garbage Collection, the Green Dragon, and RV Generators

Additional noise pollution in the area includes chain sawing in the Wood Lot below El Capitan (which can be heard by climbers, especially from the West Face of El Capitan), and garbage collection trucks that blast into the Valley every morning serving as alarm clocks for climbers sleeping on El Capitan. The wood lot, evidently used solely for Valley residents’ use and with no other Park purpose, could be relocated perhaps to El Portal. Likewise, the Park should consider the timing of garbage collection and enforcing speed limits and vehicle noise restrictions. Also, the loudspeakers commonly used with the Green Dragon tour guides is too loud and should be eliminated by requiring all passengers to use headphones and/or limit the locations that the loudspeaker can be used, especially beneath El Capitan and the Cathedral Rocks where climbers easily hear this unwanted noise every day. Finally, the Park should prohibit the use of RV generators adjacent to tent campers from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. as campsite regulations currently allow.

IV. THE FINAL MRP SHOULD INCLUDE DETAILED CAMPGROUND IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to correcting the shortfall in camping opportunities in the Valley, the final MRP should incorporate the improvements to Camp 4 as set forth in Lodge Redevelopment Plan and Environmental Assessment, as well as improvements to Valley campgrounds generally. Camp 4 is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for "its significant association with the growth and development of rock climbing in the Yosemite Valley during the 'golden years' of pioneer mountaineering."²⁰

Improving the basic amenities and improving the quality of the camping experience²¹ at this historic campsite is the least Park planners could do to protect and enhance Camp 4 where climbers are forced into very dense and low-quality campsites.. The improvements we support include showers and updated bathrooms, fencing to encourage re-vegetation and limit loud bus noise, a wet weather cooking pavilion and communal fireplace, more separation from parking areas to reduce noise especially from buses, and a nearby location for a Yosemite Climbing Museum which is central to the history of Camp 4.²² The appendices to the Tuolumne River Plan included very detailed direction for the improvement of the main Tuolumne Meadows campground, and we believe similar direction needs to be provided for the improvement of all Valley campgrounds.

CONCLUSION

The Access Fund hopes these comments to the Draft Merced River Plan assist Yosemite planners in refining the Preferred Alternative for the Merced River Plan. Your decision will be critical to the future experiences of thousands of climbers who travel to this world-class area every year. The Merced River Plan provides an opportunity to appropriately reduce developed lodging accommodations in favor of campsites, protect and enhance the historic camping opportunities at Camp 4, improve traffic flow and congestion, and protect and enhance the many outstandingly remarkable river values associated with the Merced River. The Plan should also protect and enhance access to the hundreds of specific climbing areas that lie immediately outside of the planning area boundary. Thank you for considering the

importance of Yosemite to climbers worldwide and for your hard work on this extensive planning process.

If you have any questions or comments please contact me at 303-819-2969 or Jason@accessfund.org.

Sincerely,



Jason Keith
Access Fund Senior Policy Advisor

Cc: The Honorable Diane Feinstein, US Senate
The Honorable Barbara Boxer, US Senate
The Honorable Tom McClintock, US House of Representatives
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ACCESS FUND APPENDIX TO MERCED RIVER PLAN COMMENTS

I. HOW TO INCREASE CAMPING IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

This attachment presents a proposal for increasing the number of campsites in Yosemite Valley beyond the number in Preferred Alternative 5. This attachment also presents a policy rationale explaining why increasing camping is consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and NPS Management policies, and why it is appropriate to adjust the camping-lodging ratio in Yosemite Valley.

The Access Fund urges Yosemite planners to set as an ultimate goal the restoration of the baseline number of campsites in the Valley, which is 872 sites, and as a goal for this MRP the restoration of the

756 sites called for in the 1980 General Management Plan.²³ More campsites could be created at locations not considered in the Preferred Alternative, but were analyzed in Alternatives 2, 4, 6, and indirectly in Alternative 3.



New East Valley Campgrounds: Lower River, Kinneyville, Boys Town, and Moraine

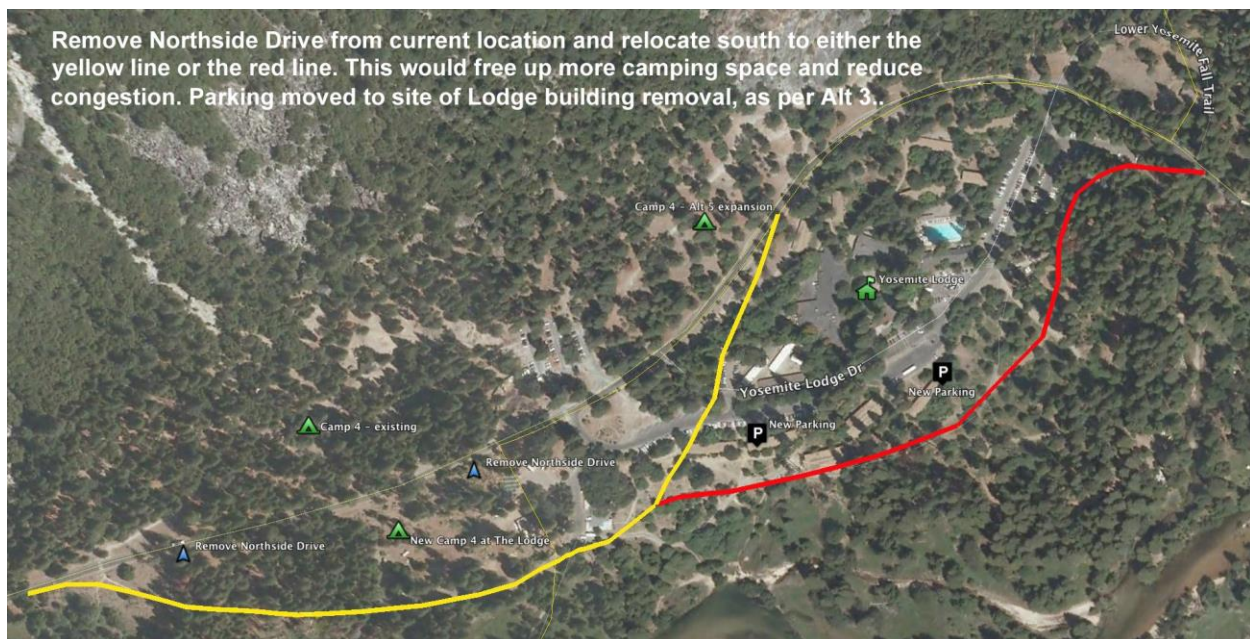
We also ask Yosemite planners to consider adding to the Preferred Alternative up to seven additional camping locations in the East Valley with a potential for 204 new individual sites and 2 new group sites. An equivalent reduction in lodging units would maintain, or at least approximate, the overnight capacity in Proposed Alternative 5.²⁴

Possible Locations for New Camping in Yosemite Valley

The following locations—all which lie out of the river setback and rock fall zone—are convenient or adjacent to existing roads and utility infrastructure, and could accommodate additional camping opportunities:

- **Lower River Campground:** 40 new walk-in sites (as proposed in Alternatives 4 and 6).
- **Upper River Campground:** 2 new group sites (as proposed in Alternatives 4 and 6).
- **Boys Town:** 40 walk-in sites (replacing existing guest accommodations as proposed in Alternative 4).
- **East of the Ahwahnee (“Kinneyville”):** 20 new walk-in sites.²⁵
- **The Medial Moraine:** east of the Concessionaire Stables: 30 new walk-in sites.²⁶
- **The Concessioner Stables:** 41 new drive-in sites (as proposed in Alternative 4).²⁷

- **Camp 4:** 35 new walk-in sites (linked to relocating proposed parking to a site proposed in Alternative 3 for removal of Yosemite Lodge buildings).²⁸



Provide more parking and reduce congestion at The Lodge by re-routing Northside Drive

Alternative Plans for Increasing Camping Units in Yosemite Valley

A combination of the five following elements could increase camping in Yosemite Valley at the specific locations noted above:

Plan A. Add up to 204 new individual and 2 new group campsites to the locations noted above. This could be balanced by reducing lodging at Yosemite Lodge, Camp Curry, and Housekeeping Camp within the parameters proposed in Alternatives 2, 3 and 4.

Plan B. Increase the overnight capacity of the Preferred Alternative as necessary to accommodate the new campsites, with no changes to lodging.

Plan C. Convert existing or proposed Valley drive-in campsites to walk-in campsites to increase the number of sites. Walk-in campsites are more space efficient (and more environmentally friendly) because autos are concentrated in a central parking lot, and less hardscape is required in the campground to accommodate vehicles. This format allows more campers to be accommodated in a given area (although hopefully not at the expense of a quality camping experience due to crowding and lack of screening as historically found at Camp 4.)

Plan D. Reconsider the overly rigid prohibitions on campsite use in the 100-foot river setback for existing campsites and the 150-foot river setback for new campsites²⁹ and the 100-year flood plain,³⁰ particularly for walk-in campsites with buildings and infrastructure located in uplands and where flood depths and velocities are minimal. The Rivers Campgrounds are particularly well suited to such consideration.

Plan E. Increase the overnight occupancy capacity assigned to Valley camping in the Draft MRP by taking two actions: 1) use actual campsite occupancy data instead of the maximum capacity of all family campsites to calculate overall Valley camping capacity, and 2) assign campsites reserved for administrative use to the employee lodging category. These two actions allow the addition of 184 individual and 4 group campsites without changing Preferred Alternative 5's maximum overnight visitor capacity for all campsites. These proposals are explained as follows:

Correct the Camping Capacity Formula

The MRP's overnight capacity formula for the Valley unfairly reduces access to the Valley for campers, as compared to lodgers and day users. In the Preferred Alternative, the MRP calculates the overnight capacity of the Valley for both lodging and camping. For calculating overall camping capacity in the Valley, the Plan uses the legal maximum capacity of six people per family campsite³¹ and multiplies this by the number of campsites.³² (This discussion does not concern Group campsites, which have a maximum capacity of 30 people, and for which the park has not provided actual occupancy data.)

However, the Draft MRP provides actual average occupancy numbers for campsites in several campgrounds. It states that average occupancy of campsites is 4.2 people at North Pines, 4.5 people at Upper Pines, and 4.66 people at Lower Pines.³³ If we say that average campsite occupancy in the Valley is 4.5 campers per site, and all sites are full, then there are actually 25% fewer campers (and 25% more camping capacity available) than the Plan indicates. That means there is room to add 25% more campsites without any need to change the overall campsite capacity allowance (i.e., campers' share of the total number of people allowed overnight in the Valley) in the Preferred Alternative. So 25% of the total 632 family campsites in the Preferred Alternative, or 158 campsites, could be added in the Valley without requiring any change in the overall overnight capacity assigned to Valley camping in Preferred Alternative 5.

There are two reasons to use average campsite occupancy data rather than the maximum capacity. Accuracy is the first, but far more important is fairness in the allocation of access to the Valley among different user groups. Actual car occupancy data is used for day users (2.9 people per car),³⁴ although the maximum capacity of most cars is 5 people. This means that day users are allowed into the Valley based on their actual occupancy of cars, while campers are allowed into the Valley based on the maximum capacity of their campsites, not their actual occupancy of campsites. So campers are subject to a capacity standard which reduces their collective access to the Valley by 25% as compared to the access allowed to day users.

Campers are also unfairly limited in number in relation to lodgers. For calculating lodging capacity, the Plan uses the "pillow count" (i.e., the number of normal places to sleep) for each lodging unit. The pillow count is essentially the commercially marketable or optimal capacity of a lodging unit, which in many cases will be less than its legal capacity. Many lodging facilities can legally accommodate more people than the pillow count by using cots, folding beds, and other measures, particularly for families or groups of close friends. For this reason, we believe the maximum capacity of most lodging units is greater than the pillow count, and that the pillow count more closely approximates the occupancy averages for campsites, not the maximum capacity of campsites. We therefore ask 1) that the average occupancy for campsites of 4.5 people be used for calculating overall campsite capacity in the Valley, not the legal maximum capacity of 6 people; and 2) that the number of family campsites in the Valley be

increased by 25%, or 158 campsites, to maintain the same overall overnight capacity for camping in the Preferred Alternative.

Designate Administrative Campsites as Employee Housing

For purposes of determining the total overnight capacity of all campsites, the Plan should assign administrative sites to the category of employee housing, not visitor accommodations. Occupants of administrative campsites, such as Yellow Pine, are essentially temporary (unpaid) employees during their stay, and the quantity of these sites is significant. There are currently 4 group and 25 individual sites in administrative use,³⁵ with a total capacity of 270 people, or 7% of the total overnight capacity of 4,032 visitors assigned to camping under the Preferred Alternative.³⁶ The Plan itself suggests this designation in regard to the 4 administrative group sites at Yellow Pine, which are noted as employee housing in the text of the Preferred Alternative.³⁷ We believe all administrative sites should be included in the employee accommodation category to provide a more accurate allocation of campsites to visitor accommodations.

II. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and National Park Service Policy Supports More Camping and Less Lodging in the Merced River Corridor

We believe that the MRP should begin to shift the camping-lodging ratio in the Valley to provide more camping opportunities. The Management Object for Recreation³⁸ in the Plan and NPS Management Policies for Visitor Use³⁹ both encourage activities such as camping that bring visitors into a direct relationship with park resources. Our proposal would accomplish these policies by adding 204 new individual and 2 group campsites to the 640 in the Preferred Alternative, bringing the total for the Valley to 846. This total is less than the Baseline of 872 sites but more than the General Management Plan's proposed 756 sites. If an equivalent reduction were made in lodging units, the total number of lodging units in the Preferred Alternative would decrease from 1,053 to 847. This would change the camping/lodging ratio in the Valley from the Proposed Alternative's 38% camping and 62% lodging to almost equal numbers of each. This is a move in the right direction, but still well short of the 60% camping to 40% lodging ratio we think the Preferred Alternative should achieve to realize the Recreation Management Objective for the Plan and to comply with NPS Management Policies for visitor use.⁴⁰

The Plan Should Analyze Camping as the Overnight Component of the Recreation ORV

The Act and its interpreting authorities require a river management plan to identify, define and comprehensively analyze each river value, and protect, enhance and improve these values to prevent adverse effects and degradation, establish management triggers for action before adverse effects or degradation occur, and establish a "positive trajectory" for any degraded value.⁴¹ The Plan provides this analysis extensively for the day use component of the Recreational ORV, focusing on transportation, parking and daytime use at Valley attractions.⁴² However, the analysis for camping is minimal, with only a brief mention in the Plan recognizing that camping is a component of the Recreation ORV.⁴³ Importantly, missing is recognition of camping's role as the sole overnight component of the Recreation ORV.

The MRP and the Draft Baseline Conditions Report ("Baseline Report") limit their analysis to the recitation of a few numbers and facts. The number of Valley campsites at the time of wild and scenic

river designation (1987) is shown as 872,⁴⁴ and the current number of Valley campsites (466) is noted in the Plan.⁴⁵ This is a loss of 47%, or nearly half the Valley's campsites. Of the 397 sites lost, 353 were removed by the Park Service following the 1997 flood, mostly in Upper and Lower River Campgrounds.⁴⁶ The Plan briefly notes camping's contribution to the overnight visitor capacity of the Valley⁴⁷ and its role as a part of the Valley's infrastructure.⁴⁸ The Preferred Alternative proposes to replace only about half the campsites lost since designation. Essentially, the MRP treats camping as a facilities issue, not as an important part of a major river value.

The Plan Should Recognize the Loss of Half the Valley's Campsites as Serious Degradation of the Overnight Component of the Recreational ORV

The Plan should give greater importance to the loss of Valley campsites as a significant problem. The Baseline Report characterizes the loss of half the Valley's campsites as a "Management Consideration."⁴⁹ This is the lowest category of threat to an ORV, one that applies where the value is currently in a "protected state"⁵⁰ and presents only a "localized area of impact" and "can be corrected with relatively simple actions."

Clearly, Valley campsites are not in a "protected state" since over 300 were removed from the Rivers campground with no NEPA compliance or public process, and the Plan has not recognized the policy reasons for according priority to camping over lodging in allocating space for overnight accommodations sufficient to replace these lost campsites. Second, campsite losses since 1987 are not a "localized" issue since such losses cover the entire length of the Valley portion of the river segment, which extends from Sentinel Beach to Nevada Falls.⁵¹ These losses include: 20 campsites at Muir Tree (below Sentinel Rock), three at Camp 4, 14 at the former Group Camp, and the rest at the Upper and Lower River and Upper, Lower and North Pines campgrounds. Given the significance of the Valley to the Recreational segment, camping losses should be characterized as segment-wide.⁵²

To address the loss of campsites, the Preferred Alternative proposes to raise the number of campsites to 640 (i.e., from 54% to 73% of the baseline 872 sites). Even Alternative 6, the Plan's most ambitious development scenario, can manage only 739 campsites in the Valley, and then only by removing all Yosemite Lodge units, an unrealistic proposal. It is unclear what benefit accrues to camping from designating the loss of campgrounds as a Management Consideration because the Plan chooses to ignore all Management Considerations except those related to transportation and day use visitation.⁵³

Since the loss of half the Valley's campsites is not just a local matter nor a simple matter to correct, and as a Management Consideration it received only modest consideration, it should be elevated to the next level, which is the Management Concern. This applies when a value is not currently protected, the concern reflects a segment-wide condition or a "downward trend" that is "able to be immediately addressed" when a triggering condition is reached.⁵⁴ As explained above, we believe campsites are not protected, that the loss of campsites is segment-wide, that campgrounds have been on a downward trend as to both numbers and conditions, that the loss of half the Valley's campsites should be a triggering condition, and that the loss can and should be immediately addressed in the Plan.⁵⁵ And for such an effort to be effective, it must embrace the policy considerations that support the expansion of camping, not simply view the provision of more camping as a facilities issue.

The Plan Should Analyze the Adverse Effects on Camping from Lodging and Other Major Facilities

Lodging and other major facilities clearly compete with campgrounds for the limited useable space and limited overnight capacity in Yosemite Valley. Under the Act and interpreting authorities, lodging and other major facilities are allowed in the river corridor if they are necessary to facilitate public use, cannot feasibly be located outside the river corridor, and have no adverse effect on river values.⁵⁶ Both lodging and campgrounds are major facilities under the 1982 Guidelines⁵⁷ and subject to this analysis. But there is an important difference between camping and lodging. In the Valley, developed campgrounds are an integral part of the camping experience; without campgrounds, there would be no camping and no overnight recreation. By contrast, without lodging there would still be day and overnight recreation.

The Draft MRP states that “[w]here it has been determined that development footprints, visitor use and/or administrative use are causing local effects to river values . . . this plan calls for removal, re-design, and/or relocation of those facilities.”⁵⁸ The Plan analyzes the adverse effects of lodging and other major facilities on ORVs, including Recreation in Chapter 7 Table 7-1. However, according to that table none of the Valley’s existing or proposed lodging or other major facilities has any adverse effect on the Recreational ORV, including camping.⁵⁹

This conclusion overlooks the fact that in the Plan, some of the alternatives propose camping at the site of existing lodging and other major facilities, indicating a direct competition between camping and lodging or other uses for those sites. Examples are: Yosemite Lodge (245 existing lodging units versus 104 campsites in Alternative 2),⁶⁰ Boys Town (98 hard-sided units versus 40 campsites in Alternative 4),⁶¹ the concessioner stables (the stables versus 41 campsites in Alternative 4),⁶² and the parking area west of Yosemite Lodge (parking versus 20 RV campsites in Alternative 6).⁶³

In addition, with the exception of the Ahwahnee and a few other structures protected by historic designations, many other major facilities in the Valley could, realistically, be replaced with campsites. Some of these replacements could occur in the same location (e.g., Boys Town, which the Plan proposes alternatively for hard-sided lodging or camping) while other replacements could be in different locations but would allow the overall overnight capacity to stay about the same (e.g., removing 4 buildings with 102 lodging units from the floodplain at Yosemite Lodge and constructing two new additional group campsites at Lower River and a new RV campsite west of the Lodge).

In sum, existing lodging facilities prevented campgrounds from being developed in the past, and both existing and new lodging facilities prevent new campgrounds from being developed now under the Plan and in the future. If there were no adverse effect then none of these use conflicts would exist and the creation of all the campgrounds that would restore baseline campsite numbers could proceed without impediment. Given these circumstances, Table 7-1 should be revised to reflect the reality that lodging and other facilities do have an adverse effect on camping. And the consequences of this conclusion should be reflected in the values analysis in the Plan in decisions made regarding the retention or provision of overnight accommodations in the Preferred Alternative.

¹ See the Access Fund's 2010 Scoping Comments on the Merced Wild and Scenic River Plan at <http://www.accessfund.org/atf/cf/%7B1F5726D5-6646-4050-AA6E-C275DF6CA8E3%7D/Access%20Fund%20Scoping%20Comments%20to%20Merced%20WSR%20Plan.pdf>.

² See the Access Fund's 2011 Comments to the Merced Wild and Scenic River Planning Workbook at http://www.accessfund.org/atf/cf/%7B1F5726D5-6646-4050-AA6E-C275DF6CA8E3%7D/CA--Merced%20Wild%20and%20Scenic%20River%20Planning%20Comments_12.14.11.pdf .

³ See http://www.accessfund.org/atf/cf/{1F5726D5-6646-4050-AA6E-C275DF6CA8E3}/CA--Merced%20Wild%20and%20Scenic%20River%20Preliminary%20Alternative%20Comments_04.19.12.pdf.

⁴ See Baseline Report at Table 2.2-9, p. 2.2-28. The current 466 campsites is only 53% of the campsites existing at the time of designation, and the Preferred Alternative will restore only about half those lost, or 73% of the campsites existing at the time of designation. So the Preferred Alternative will still reflect a decrease of 232 campsites from the time of designation.

⁵ Draft MRP at p. 5-126 – 127 and p. ES-12. Under the Act, lodging facilities are allowed if they are necessary to facilitate public use, cannot feasibly be located outside the river corridor, and have no adverse effect on river values.

⁶ Wild and Scenic Rivers Act Guidelines for Eligibility, Classification and Management of River Areas, Section III. Federal Register, Volume 47 No. 173, September 7, 1982.

⁷ The baseline number of Valley campsites is 872, Draft Baseline Conditions Report (“Baseline Report” at pp. 2.2-23, 2.2-28, 2.2-39), and the current number of Valley campsites is 466. Draft MRP at p. 6-29.

⁸ The Plan should prioritize the forms of overnight accommodation that best fulfill these policy mandates. The priority would therefore be: first, back-packing and big wall (overnight) climbing, including the provision of adequate backpacker and climber base camps, followed in descending order of priority by walk-in campsites, drive-in tent campsites, tent cabins and rustic lodgings, RV camping (which may offer the amenities of a small home), mid-range lodgings, and luxury lodgings. The Plan's consideration of the allocation of various types of overnight accommodations in the Valley should recognize this hierarchy and begin undertaking the re-allocation of overnight facilities accordingly.

⁹ The setbacks should not be used to eliminate campsites unless doing so is truly necessary to protect the river from a practical standpoint, and not simply as an arbitrary application of an inflexible rule. Under the Preferred Alternative, imposing a 100-foot setback along the river will result in the loss of 34 existing campsites. See Draft MRP at p. 8-329. And a 150-foot setback is proposed for new campsites. See Draft MRP at 8-320. It's no accident that the setback only impacts campsites and the rustic lodging in Housekeeping. The park gave the good upland sites to the commercial lodgings and gave camping the leavings. We ask the park to compensate for this historical imbalance by not imposing these setbacks inflexibly.

¹⁰ Preferred Alternative 5 limits overnight capacity in Yosemite Valley to 7,729. See Draft MRP at p. 8-232.

¹¹ The Plan proposes to remove parking at Eagle Creek to restore a meadow. See Draft MRP at p. 8-69, map at p.8-61.

¹² See the Draft MRP at pp. 8-234-237 and pp. 8-243-251. The four administrative group campgrounds at Yellow Pine are available only for volunteers, and the Plan presents no information as to how often they are used or by how many people. They are not available for reservation and we do not think they should be included in the Valley's inventory of campgrounds in the Plan.

¹³ See Draft MRP at p. 8-190, map at 8-195.

¹⁴ For these reasons, we favor the development of the Eagle Creek Campground (if it is to be built) with walk-in and group sites, not drive-ins as proposed in the Plan.

¹⁵ The Draft MRP outlines (in Preferred Alternative 5 and actions common to all alternatives) several important and much-needed actions to restore, protect and enhance the many ORVs in the Merced River corridor. We support the following proposals:

- At Housekeeping Camp, restoration of the riparian zone and the relocation of 34 units out of the river bed and banks. We support removing even more Housekeeping units to balance capacity limits for additional camping opportunities.
- Relocation of the Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area northward to facilitate riparian restoration. This action will protect river values while eliminating a key problem spot for pedestrian-traffic congestion and conflicts.
- Redesign of the Curry Orchard parking lot to improve the surface and provide natural landscape buffers.
- Re-routing portions of the Valley Loop Trail to protect sensitive areas, including 780 feet in Bridalveil Meadow.
- Re-route of multiple use trails near Sugar Pine Bridge and the re-engineering of bridges to mitigate effects on free-flowing condition of the river.
- Replacing 350 feet of trail in Ahwahnee Meadow with boardwalk to protect wetlands.
- Document, monitor, protect, and enhance biological river values and meadow ecosystems to avoid adverse impacts and maintain water quality.
- Protect natural processes, such as overbank flooding and channel migration, to support biological river values, meadow and riparian communities.
- Protect and enhance the scenic resources of the river corridor through a Visual Resources Management Program.

¹⁶ In *Friends of Yosemite v. Kempthorne*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals said: "To illustrate the level of degradation already experienced ... we need look no further than the dozens of facilities and services operating within the river corridor ... "Although recreation is an ORV (outstanding remarkable value) that must be protected and enhanced ... to be included as an ORV, according to NPS itself, a value must be (1) river-related or river dependant, and (2) rare, unique, or exemplary in a regional or national context. "The multitude of facilities and services provided at the Merced (River) certainly do not meet the mandatory criteria for inclusion as an ORV. NPS does not explain how maintaining such a status quo in the interim would protect or enhance the river's unique values as required under the WRSA (Wild and Scenic Rivers Act)."

¹⁷ Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council, Wild and Scenic River Management Responsibilities, 12 (2002).

¹⁸ On this topic, see also the Access Fund's comments to the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Plan, at http://www.accessfund.org/atf/cf/{1F5726D5-6646-4050-AA6E-C275DF6CA8E3}/CA--Tuolumne%20Wild%20and%20Scenic%20River%20Comprehensive%20Management%20Plan%20Draft%20Environmental%20Impact%20Statement_03.18.13.pdf

¹⁹ See Zion National Park, Finding of No Significant Impact, Soundscape Management Plan 3-4 (2010).

²⁰ See NPS press release at <http://web.archive.org/web/20060616141436/http://www.nps.gov/yose/news/2003/camp0227.htm>.

²¹ The MRP should focus on improving the quality of the camping experience in all Valley campgrounds, which are characterized by crowded sites, antiquated restrooms, mixed RV and tent sites, lack of fencing and vegetation, widespread soil compaction and denuded areas, poorly defined tent sites, and crumbling roadways.

²² See Access Fund Comments to the Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment Environmental Assessment Concerning Camp 4 at http://www.accessfund.org/atf/cf/%7B1F5726D5-6646-4050-AA6E-C275DF6CA8E3%7D/CA--Yosemite%20Lodge_10.2.2003.pdf.

²³ Note that we are not asking for the restoration of the exact campsite locations lost in the 1997 flood (a concept dismissed in the Plan at p. 8-320), but rather for the replacement of the same number of campsites as the Baseline but in different locations.

²⁴ We reference the number of campsites and lodging units rather than occupants, because we believe this provides a better view of the policy decisions in the Plan and a more accurate camping/lodging ratio than the visitor capacity formula used in the Plan.

²⁵ This walk-in campground location would essentially be an extension of “West of Backpacker’s Camp” at the area east of the Ahwahnee Hotel (AKA “Kinneyville”), which is currently used as an equestrian riding course. Park staff have stated in public meetings that this site would be difficult to use following removal of the Sugar Pine Bridge, which now provides access to this area, and because it lacks utilities and has cultural resources. These are not insurmountable obstacles, only cost considerations. Access could be provided from the Ahwahnee Road or from North Pines, cultural resources could be protected with a layer of soil, and utilities could be extended as needed. No use is shown for this area in any of the alternatives. Given the severe shortage of space in the Valley available for camping, the potential use of this site as a walk-in campground, or for the relocation of other uses in order to allow camping to be sited elsewhere, should be considered in the final version of the Plan.

²⁶ Our Moraine Campground idea involves developing 30 new walk-in campsites along the base of the north side of the Medial Moraine (see map) just east of the Concessioners Stable and along the paved path towards Mirror Lake. If the road along the moraine between the stables and the Mirror Lake Road were reduced to a pathway, and the westbound bus rerouted around through Happy Isles to the stables, the area on either side of this foot-only path could become a linear walk-in campground with parking near the stables.

²⁷ This assumes that the Concessioner Stables is consolidated with the NPS stables as proposed in Alternative 2.

²⁸ This concept to further expand camping south from the existing Camp 4 across the existing Northside Drive requires relocating Northside Drive to one of two specific routes (see map), both which would work with site specific plans for Yosemite Lodge area already developed in the MRP’s planning alternatives. First, remove four Lodge buildings in the 100-year floodplain proposed for removal in Alternative 3 (see Draft MRP maps at pp. 8-23 and 8-185) and relocate the Preferred Alternative’s bus and day use parking to the area where these buildings were removed. Then, relocate Northside Drive southward following the southern edge of the area shown as the proposed Yosemite Lodge Parking Area, then reconnecting with the existing road alignment near the bottom edge of the map. Finally, remove the abandoned section of Northside Drive and expand the existing portion of Camp 4 southward towards the new road alignment, preserving some buffering space between the road and campground similar to what now exists. This would allow another 35 walk-in sites in this new area. Alternatively, as depicted on our map as alternative “B,” begin the reroute of Northside Drive immediately west of the Yosemite Creek Bridge and follow the southern boundary of the footprint of the four Lodge buildings slated for removal in Alternative 3. Both of these proposals could increase space for new walk-in camping while using existing roadways and decreasing auto-pedestrian congestion.

²⁹ Id. at 8-320.

³⁰ See Draft MRP, APPENDIX D, D-1.

³¹ See Draft MRP at 6-27.

³² In the Plan, the Valley’s camping capacity is 3,792 campers in the family campsites (632 sites x 6 people/site), plus 240 in group sites (8 group sites x 30 people/site), for a combined total of 4,032. For lodging capacity under Alternative 5, 326 people would be at the Ahwahnee, 928 at Housekeeping Camp (232 rooms x 4), 1,586 at Curry Village (453 rooms or cabins x 3.5), and 857 at Yosemite Lodge (245 rooms x 3.5), for a combined total of 3,697. Thus, the combined overnight capacity of Alternative 5 equals 7,729 people at one time: 4,032 campers plus 3,697 lodgers.

³³ Draft MRP at 9-818-19.

³⁴ Id. at 6-27.

³⁵ Draft MRP at 8-34.

³⁶ Id. at 8-250.

³⁷ Id. at 8-253.

³⁸ Draft MRP at 5-126.

³⁹ NPS Management Policies, Visitor Use, Section 8.2 (2006).

⁴⁰ Both these authorities encourage activities that bring visitors into a direct relationship to park resources. If this direction were followed in the provision of overnight accommodations in the Plan, the composition of camping and overnight lodging facilities in the Valley would appear as a pyramid (similar to the familiar “food pyramid”). The base would consist of walk-in camp sites (including base camps for backpackers and big wall climbers), which are the most primitive type of campground providing the closest relationship to park resources, and the remaining five progressively higher and narrower layers of the pyramid would consist of progressively more developed forms of overnight accommodations that provide progressively less relationship to park resources. These are drive-in tent sites, rustic lodging units, RV campsites (RV camping is placed above rustic lodging since it may offer the amenities of a small home), mid-range lodging units, and finally luxury lodging units. If the pyramid had a classic shape with a base twice as wide as the height, made of six layers, the base layer (walk-ins) would be 31% of the total overnight accommodations, the tent sites 25%, the rustic lodging 19%, the RV sites 14%, the mid-range lodging 8%, and the luxury lodging 3%. If you include RV camping with the other two camping categories, as the MRP does, then the ratio would be 70% camping and 30% lodging. Adjusting this to accommodate current realities in the Valley, we believe a 60% camping and 40% lodging ratio is acceptable and achievable and could be implemented in the Preferred Alternative without substantially changing the overall number of overnight accommodation units.

⁴¹ Plan p. 5-5-6.

⁴² Plan pp. 5-126-35.

⁴³ Plan p. 5-126-27.

⁴⁴ Baseline Report pp. 2-2-23, 2.2-28, and 2-2-39.

⁴⁵ Plan p. 6-29.

⁴⁶ Baseline Report p. 2-2-23, 2-2-39.

⁴⁷ Plan p. 6-27.

⁴⁸ Plan p. 6-29.

⁴⁹ Baseline Report p. 2-2-44.

⁵⁰ Plan p. 8-7.

⁵¹ See Draft MRP at p. 3-3.

⁵² An example of a segment-wide condition is “informal trails fragmenting a meadow complex that dominates a river segment” (Plan p. 5-9), suggesting that an issue related to a feature that dominates a segment can be considered a segment-wide issue. We think the loss of campsites in the Valley meets this criterion.

⁵³ Plan p. 5-133-135. Management considerations are reviewed in Appendix K, but the loss of campsites in the Valley and the need for additional campsites is not considered in a comprehensive manner, or in relation to management objectives in the plan or in Park Service Management Policies, only in relation to particular locations where campsites exist or are proposed. In short, the provision of additional campsites is considered only as a facilities issue, not a policy concern with commensurate results in the Preferred Alternative.

⁵⁴ See Draft MRP at p. 5-9.

⁵⁵ The next level is Adverse Effect. This is a “substantial reduction in the condition of a river value in relation to baseline conditions as a result of public use, development, and/or administrative use.” The condition is segment-wide and requires “immediate attention.” (Plan p. 5-7.) The loss of half the Valley’s campsites certainly would seem to be a “substantial reduction.” And the main reason for the loss of campgrounds in the Valley is the Park Service’s administrative decision to remove the Rivers campgrounds following the 1997 flood (i.e., “administrative use”), while the inability to replace these campgrounds is primarily due to the presence of other major facilities (i.e., “development”). Since administrative use and development combined to cause and perpetuate the loss of these campgrounds, it could be argued that this loss falls within the definition of an Adverse Effect requiring immediate attention in the Plan. Therefore, there is some justification for arguing that even this higher level of concern could apply.

⁵⁶ Plan pp. 5-5, 8-5-10.

⁵⁷ Wild and Scenic Rivers Act Guidelines for Eligibility, Classification and Management of River Areas, Section III. Federal Register, Volume 47 No. 173, September 7, 1982.

⁵⁸ Draft MRP at p. 7-2.

⁵⁹ Table 7-1 has other imperfections. The list of facilities does not include the 245 existing units at Yosemite Lodge. Nor does it include the new Yosemite Falls viewing area, with its transit structure, bathrooms, paved walkway and bridge, all of which have more hardscape and infrastructure than Camp 4, which is listed.

⁶⁰ Draft MRP at p. 8-329.

⁶¹ Id. at 8-329.

⁶² Id. at 8-329.

⁶³ Id. at 8-329.