

Yosemite National Park

**Merced River Plan**

*Outstandingly Remarkable Values Roundtable*

**Wawona, CA**

June 18, 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.

- Do you know of specific locations or features that exemplify river values we may have missed?
- Do you have observations or knowledge of the conditions that relate to these river values?
- How can the NPS protect and enhance river values?

Process questions: does the condition assessment occur before you can define alternatives?

Change the slide in the NPS presentation regarding the extent of South Fork. It should read "through Wawona," not "to" Wawona.

What about the meadows of Wawona? *The golf course area was noted as an historic meadow. A large meadow extends uphill from the golf course, but there are none within a quarter mile from the river.*

Can man made structures be considered an ORV? Indian Bridge once existed in Wawona, midway between the Covered Bridge and Swinging Bridge.

What is the status of the tributaries? *Congress has the latitude to identify whether tributaries are or are not designated. There are special protections afforded to upstream tributaries under WSRA. NPS will have to manage them even though they were not specifically designated by Congress.*

Individual plant species are not identified within ORV's. *Slide presentation may have skipped past this, but the text of ORVs does identify specific species. NPS has other legal obligations to protect natural and cultural resources (Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, etc.).*

Link to ORV: designation of a resource is related to the ORV. Is there an obligation to focus on the covered bridge, for example? *The NPS will be looking to manage all similar resources in the river corridor. We will discuss Swinging Bridge with cultural resource staff and identify the needs for protection.*

Flat Rock is a specific location worth consideration. However, it is located on private property. *NPS does not have jurisdiction, but NPS has an obligation to coordinate and share information with land owners.*

There is another area similar to Flat Rock, same general area (above and below the Swinging Bridge), popular among visitors. Visitor impacts are obvious. Is this the opportunity to address a lack of toilets and trash accumulation?

The goal of Congress should be respected, but will the river-adjacent areas remain the same 100 years from now? *Mandate is to protect, improve or enhance the river and its resources over time. Must the natural processes prevail? Intent of the act is to let the river flow in its free-flowing condition.*

Dynamic situations present more of a challenge than static situations. The river has changed course in several locations. What will happen as the river changes course in the future? *The Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan will be a "living document" and may be updated over time.*

Will the Wawona diversion structure be addressed in the planning process? *Yes, because NPS will have to develop a plan that promotes free-flowing conditions. Setting essential resource and user capacities is an obligation under the law.*

How do you evaluate, with an ORV, people's effects versus nature's effects? *User capacity issues are being studied as part of the condition assessment process. Will you return to the management practices of Native Americans in burning forests to clear grasslands and meadows? NPS must look to the date of designation, 1987, and manage only the baseline conditions that were evident at that time.*

NPS must balance visitor enjoyment with obligations to manage natural and cultural resources.

If things change according to the MRP, would people have the option to tie into a government water supply? *The system is currently not adequate to provide service to the community. The river plan will not threaten or undermine existing private water supplies. Private ground water wells cannot be regulated or restricted by NPS.*

Much of Wawona is private property and there are constraints to issues such as water use and development. Capacity and water rights issues cannot be separated and will remain a land management factor with or without the MRP. *The community water distribution systems are taxed to the extent that water consumption cannot increase.* There is no room to develop wells on small lots. Water rights and law are complicated and water use issues will not be resolved through the MRP.

The quarter-mile river planning boundary overlaps properties that are owned by NPS, many that were previously developed, then demolished. Foundations and chimneys remain in some cases. *These will be cleared under an upcoming project that is currently funded.*

Road scrapings and wood debris are being stored in the NPS maintenance yard. This material may be used in meadow restoration. NPS must ensure that fill material used in restoration remains in place and does not wash into the river. What are the impacts to the river, including metals and oil residue that might have accumulated in source material? Weeds and invasive species are commonplace along the roadside.

NPS manages land along the river corridor, including some parcels in Section 35. As NPS looks at these values, land uses must be considered as part of the process. The community will want to monitor what is being considered and be part of the alternative development process.

Wawona Specific Plan is another vehicle for considering land use and there are opportunities to collaborate with NPS, to provide information that will be useful in the planning process.

Washburn Ditch is an historic diversion from the river to the hotel. This feature should be maintained. Also the Galen Clark property is located near the 7th green on the golf course. Both are important historic resources to the community.

Public restroom development and maintenance service is currently limited at Wawona. NPS should increase its capacity to provide better services beyond the stables area.

There is a little trail near the Swinging Bridge that should be protected and formalized. *NPS will be conducting community-based planning efforts in Wawona, Yosemite Valley and El Portal. This process will provide a forum for documenting specific assets like trails.*

Wawona Campground should be identified as an ORV, or in the alternative, the recreational activity of camping in Wawona. It is an historic asset.

You cannot have any kind of WSR plan without considering transportation. The issue dominates everything (parking, traffic congestion, shuttle bus). If you don't tie in a transportation plan as part of this process, nothing else can happen. People make their own parking lots if the facilities are not available. Reasonable alternatives must be provided.

*Transportation will be one component of the plan, but transportation issues will not drive the river planning process. A "Transportation Improvement Strategies Report" is being initiated by NPS as a parkwide effort, and proceeding on a parallel path.*

The purpose of the MRP is to address issues that are proximate to the river. So as you look at the impacts of vehicles and parking, you need to address the issues. Do you have to address these matters as part of your plan?

*NPS wants to move toward alternative development. This presents some difficulties; a “chicken or egg” scenario. The relationships between recreation and visitor impacts are primary considerations that influence all other factors. There are multiple options and alternatives that can influence the traffic issues, ranging from parking controls to limiting the number of visitors. NPS will be balancing all related issues that are the central issues of visitor impacts and resource management.*

The Wawona Store area is a big mess, especially during summer; a center of multiple activities. NPS should be developing guidelines that control nuisances at specific sites in this process.

Specific safety issues include traffic congestion and roadside parking along the river, near Chilnualna Falls.

Plants that used to be commonly found along the river are much less common now. There are isolated locations where these plants have survived. You can pick out ORVs by looking at these pockets of natural resources. Visitor impacts have led to losses in biodiversity (and health) of native species, over time.

Yosemite Valley, pre-1997: two beautiful campgrounds existed on the river. There is a perception that NPS used the flood as an excuse to close these campgrounds.

A walk along the river might be a good forum for discussion and communication about the ORVs and possibilities for community plan development.

Chilnualna Falls trailhead needs to be addressed. The parking area is not organized; too much roadside parking. Operational issues have an impact on river-related resources.

*This is a work in progress, so please tell us what we can improve as we move forward.*

Thank to NPS for practicing this presentation on this audience.

Tourists arrive here glazy-eyed and disoriented. They seek out Chilnualna Falls as a destination, but find that the scenery is not so immediately accessible as Yosemite Falls. People need an orientation, to be educated to the opportunities beyond the well-known destinations in the park. Use the internet and other media to engage people and help them arrive better prepared when they visit the park.

*User capacity experts will be helping NPS consider effective strategies.*

Weekend traffic controls (pass-through direction for those with decals) have been very helpful in reducing delays at the south entrance station and are much appreciated.

The south entrance station is a good location for a visitor center now that there are so many people entering the park on Wawona Road.