

# Merced Wild and Scenic River

## YOSEMITE'S MERCED RIVER DRAFT PLAN / EIS

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



### PROVIDING ACCESS AND PROTECTING RESOURCES

The Merced Wild and Scenic River, designated in 1987, includes 122 miles on the western side of the Sierra Nevada range in California.

The NPS manages 81 miles of the Merced Wild and Scenic River through



Golden-crowned kinglet

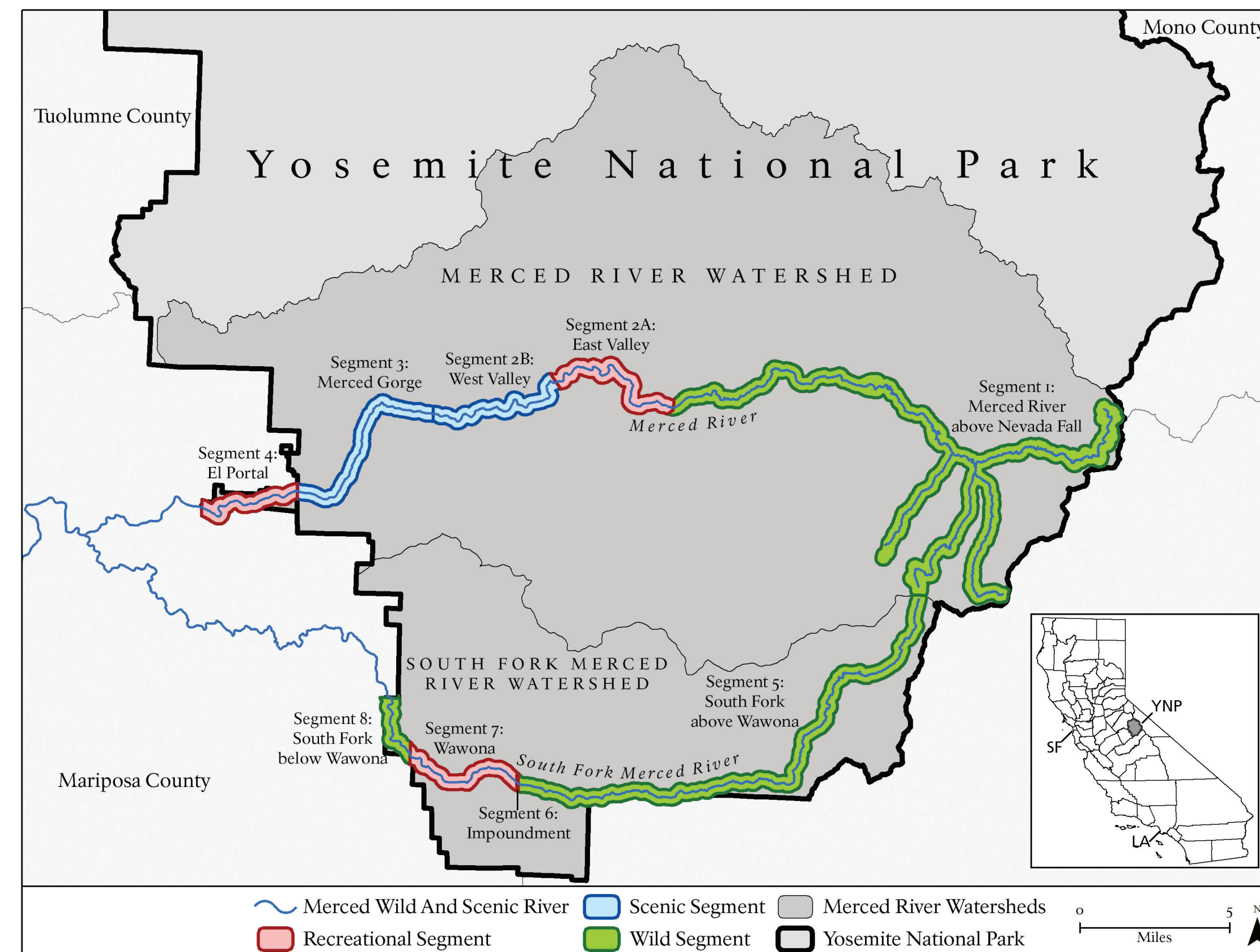
Yosemite National Park, including the headwaters and both the Merced River Main Stem and the South Fork Merced River.

The Merced River has been central to a dynamic natural and cultural landscape for tens of thousands of years and continues to shape the landscape today.

Ecological processes between the river and its floodplain support a wide elevational range of riparian and meadow communities, providing habitat for diverse plants and wildlife.

The river's cultural heritage includes American Indian traditions that continue to present day and the National Park Service history as one of the nation's first national parks.

Today, the Merced River attracts millions of Yosemite visitors who enjoy opportunities for recreation, education, reflection, and inspiration in the sublime beauty of the river corridor.



### SEGMENTS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

WSRA requires each segment of the river be classified as wild, scenic, or recreational based on the level of development present in the river corridor. The Merced Wild and Scenic River has eight segments representing the management areas established for the Merced River Plan: four recreational segments (Segments 2, 4, 6, 7), two wild segments (Segments 1 and 8), and one scenic segment (Segment 3).



Segment 5: The South Fork Merced River Above Wawona

### WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT REQUIREMENTS

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) requires comprehensive planning for Wild and Scenic Rivers to provide for protection and enhancement of a river's free-flowing condition, water quality, and the outstandingly remarkable values that made it worthy of designation in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

In accordance with WSRA, "the plan shall address resource protection, development of lands and facilities, user capacities, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purposes of this Act."

Specifically, the purpose of the plan, as defined by WSRA and its implementing guidance, is to:

- Establish the boundaries and segment classifications (as wild, scenic, or recreational) of the Merced Wild and Scenic River (see the Merced River Draft Plan's Chapter 3).
- Provide a clear process for protection of the river's free-flowing condition in keeping with WSRA Section 7 (see Chapter 4).
- Refine descriptions of the river's outstandingly remarkable values, document the conditions of river values, and identify management objectives for the river and specific actions that will be implemented to achieve these objectives. The plan commits the NPS to a program of ongoing studies and monitoring to ensure river values are protected and enhanced in perpetuity (see Chapter 5).
- Establish a user-capacity program addressing the kinds and amounts of public use that the river corridor can sustain while protecting and enhancing the river's outstandingly remarkable values (see Chapters 6 and 7).

### RIVER VALUES

WSRA describes river values to be protected with Wild and Scenic River designation:

*It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be preserved for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations." (WSRA, 1968, Section 1(b))*

Collectively, the river's free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values are referred to as "river values." Under the Merced River Draft Plan /EIS, protection and enhancement of river values is accomplished by a series of actions to address immediate concerns and long-term monitoring to ensure river values remain protected over time.

### FREE-FLOWING CONDITION

A river must be in a free-flowing state to be eligible for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. A free-flowing river, or section of a river, moves in a natural condition without impoundment, diversion, straightening, riprap, or other waterway modifications. Once a river is designated, the managing agency is required to preserve its free-flowing condition for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

### WATER QUALITY

WSRA mandates the protection of a designated river's water quality. The Merced River in Yosemite has exceptionally high water quality. All measured indicators are within NPS standards, which are considerably more protective than other federal or state standards. The Merced River Draft Plan / EIS addresses risks to water quality with a suite of actions examining potential impacts coupled with an ongoing monitoring program to ensure exceptional baseline water quality is sustained over time.



### OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES

ORVs are the truly exemplary characteristics of the river that make it worthy of inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. To be considered an ORV:

- A value must be river-related or river-dependent. This means the value must be located in the river or on its immediate shorelands; contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem; and/ or owe its location or existence to the presence of the river.
- A value must be rare, unique, or exemplary in a regional or national context. This means the value should be a conspicuous example from among a number of similar values that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary.

### Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Merced River

Biological	<b>Segments 1 and 5:</b> The Merced River sustains numerous small meadows and riparian habitat with high biological integrity.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> The meadows and riparian communities of Yosemite Valley comprise one of the largest mid-elevation meadow-riparian complexes in the Sierra Nevada.
Geologic / Hydrologic	<b>Segments 7 and 8:</b> Sierra sweet bay ( <i>Myrica hartwegii</i> ) is a rare plant found on river banks of the South Fork Merced River.
	<b>Segment 1:</b> The upper Merced River canyon is a textbook example of a glacially-carved canyon.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> The "Giant Staircase," which includes Vernal and Nevada falls, is one of the finest examples in the western United States of stair-step river morphology.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> The Merced River from Happy Isles to the west end of Yosemite Valley provides an outstanding example of a rare, mid-elevation alluvial river.
Cultural	<b>Segment 4:</b> The boulder bar in El Portal was created by changing river gradients, glacial history, and powerful floods. These elements have resulted in accumulation of extraordinarily large boulders, which are rare in such deposits.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> Yosemite Valley American Indian ethnographic resources include a linked landscape of specifically mapped traditional-use plant populations and as well as the ongoing traditional cultural practices that reflect the intricate continuing relationship between indigenous peoples of the Yosemite region and the Merced River in Yosemite Valley.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> The Yosemite Valley Archeological District is an unusually rich and linked landscape that contains dense concentrations of resources that represent thousands of years of human settlement.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> The Yosemite Valley Historic Resources represent a linked landscape of river-related or river-dependent, rare, unique or exemplary buildings and structures that bear witness to the historical significance of the river system.
	<b>Segment 4:</b> The El Portal Archeological District contains dense concentrations of resources that represent thousands of years of occupation and evidence of continuous, far-reaching traffic and trade. This segment includes some of the oldest deposits in the region and archeological remains of the Johnny Wilson Ranch, a regionally rare historic-era American Indian Homestead.
Scenic	<b>Segment 5:</b> This segment includes regionally rare archeological features representing indigenous settlement and use along the South Fork Merced River at archeological sites with rock ring features.
	<b>Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8:</b> The Wawona Archeological District encompasses numerous clusters of resources spanning thousands of years of occupation, including unusually rich evidence of continuous far-reaching traffic and trade. In Segment 7, remains of the U.S. Army Cavalry Camp A. E. Wood document the unique Yosemite legacy of the African-American Buffalo Soldiers and the strategic placement of their camp near the Merced River.
	<b>Segment 7:</b> The Wawona Historic Resources ORV includes one of the few covered bridges in the region and the National Historic Landmark Wawona Hotel complex. The Wawona Hotel complex is the largest existing Victorian hotel complex within the boundaries of a national park, and one of the few remaining in the United States with this high level of integrity.
Recreational	<b>Segment 1:</b> Visitors to this Wilderness segment experience exemplary views of serene montane lakes, pristine meadows, slickrock cascades, and High Sierra peaks.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> Visitors to Yosemite Valley experience views of some of the world's most iconic scenery, with the river and meadows forming a placid foreground to towering cliffs and waterfalls.
Scenic	<b>Segment 3:</b> The Merced River drops 2,000 feet over 14 miles, a continuous cascade under exemplary Sierra granite outcrops and domes.
	<b>Segments 5 and 8:</b> The South Fork Merced River passes through a vast area of exemplary and wild scenic beauty.
Recreational	<b>Segment 1:</b> Visitors to federally designated Wilderness in the corridor engage in a variety of river-related activities in an iconic High Sierra landscape, where opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, self-reliance, and solitude shape the experience.
	<b>Segment 2:</b> Visitors to Yosemite Valley enjoy a wide variety of river-related recreational activities in the Valley's extraordinary setting along the Merced River.

