

Alternative 4

YOSEMITE'S MERCED RIVER DRAFT PLAN / EIS

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



ALTERNATIVE 4: RESOURCE-BASED VISITOR EXPERIENCES AND TARGETED RIVERBANK RESTORATION

ALTERNATIVE 4 OVERVIEW

The guiding principles of Alternative 4 include restoration of portions of the floodplain and the riparian area within 150 feet of the river. This alternative focuses on providing only those commercial services and facilities that facilitate resource-based visitor experiences. It accommodates lower maximum visitor use levels than today, with large increases in overnight camping capacity and moderate decrease in the overnight lodging capacity.

Actions in Alternative 4 would:

- Restore 223 acres of meadow and riparian habitat.
- Significantly increase the campsite inventory in Yosemite Valley (+50%) and throughout the entire river corridor (+37%).
- Reduce the lodging inventory in Yosemite Valley (-20%) and throughout the entire river corridor (-20%).
- Reduce day-use parking for Yosemite Valley (-12%).
- Reduce commercial services.
- Make targeted changes to the traffic circulation pattern in Yosemite Valley to accommodate ecological restoration goals and reduce traffic congestion.
- Accommodate approximately 17,000 visitors per day in East Yosemite Valley.
- Continue to manage overnight use capacity through Wilderness permits, and reservation systems for lodging and camping.
- Manage day-use capacity for East Yosemite Valley through parking permits and a reservation system required during peak season (May through September).

PROTECT AND ENHANCE

Alternative 4 would protect and enhance river values through targeted ecological restoration focused on enhancing the habitat quality of the riparian zone and the hydrologic function of the river. It strives to balance the enhancement of these river values with minimal traffic circulation or infrastructure modifications.

RIVER VALUES

- Enhance hydrologic connectivity of meadows to the riparian floodplain through the removal of the segment of road that bisects Stoneman Meadow.
- Ecologically restore the area currently occupied by the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp, the portion of Housekeeping Camp that is within the ordinary high water mark of the river, and all campsites and associated infrastructure within 150 feet of the river.
- Enhance the free-flowing condition of the river by removing two historic bridges (Sugar Pine and Ahwahnee) within the bed and banks of the river that constrict flow during high-water events.



Sierra sweet bay

- Establish a valley oak recruitment area of 1 acre in El Portal.
- Enhance recreational values in Segment 1 that focus on solitude and self-reliant recreation through the removal of the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp and by expanding designated camping in the vicinity.
- Enhance recreational values in Segment 2 by improving visitor circulation and reducing crowding in Yosemite Valley at key attraction sites. Additionally, permits would be issued for both commercial and private boating on the river to enhance dispersed recreation along the river corridor.
- Cultural and scenic values would be protected and enhanced as described under "Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6." Alternative 4 would also relocate and rehabilitate Residence 1 (Superintendent's House) to the NPS housing area, and restore informal trails and black oak woodland near Cook's Meadow.



Water-quality measurements



The Gorge

USER CAPACITY, LAND USE, AND FACILITIES

Alternative 4 would focus on providing resource-based visitor experiences, increasing camping opportunities, and reducing commercial services, including lodging. Visitation to Yosemite Valley would be slightly lower than under existing conditions because overnight use would increase while day use decreased.

CAMPING

- The campsite inventory in Yosemite Valley would be increased (+50%), and it would be increased throughout the entire river corridor (+37%).
- All campsites and associated infrastructure within 150 feet of the river in Wawona and Yosemite Valley would be removed.
- Campsite losses would be offset with new campgrounds adjacent to the Upper Pines Campground; east of Camp 4; west of Backpackers Campground; west of Yosemite Lodge; at Boys Town; at the Concessioner Stables; and in the Upper and Lower Rivers area.
- The number of campsites in Yosemite Valley would increase to 701—a net gain of 235 sites—and the number of campsites available in the corridor would be 773.

LODGING

- In-park lodging availability would be reduced (-20%) as compared to existing conditions -- from 1,160 to 927 units.
- Management actions related to lodging would focus on removing lodging units from within the observed ordinary high-water mark at Housekeeping Camp and in Wilderness.
- All permanent infrastructure at the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp would be removed, allowing the area to be converted to designated Wilderness.
- Curry Village lodging would be retained except for the units removed from the Boys Town area, which would be re-developed as a new campground.
- No new hard-sided lodging would be constructed in any part of the river corridor.



Curry Village

Alternative 4: Camping Facilities

Existing Locations	Alt 1 (No Action)	Alt 4	Details
Backpackers	25 sites	0 sites	25 walk-in sites removed, of which 21 are within 150 feet of the river. 16 of these sites will be relocated west of Backpackers
Camp 4	35 sites	35 sites	No change to the National Historic Register site
Lower Pines	76 sites	61 sites	15 sites within 150 feet of the river removed
North Pines	86 sites	52 sites	34 sites within 150 feet of the river removed
Upper Pines	240 sites	238 sites	2 sites removed for cultural resource concerns
Yellow Pine Administrative	4 sites	4 sites	No changes to these group administrative sites
Wawona	99 sites	72 sites	27 sites removed within 150 feet of the river or in culturally sensitive areas
Total Existing Locations	565 sites	462 sites	
New Locations			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 4	Details
West of Backpackers	0 sites	16 sites	16 walk-in sites relocated from Backpackers to less sensitive area outside 100-year floodplain
East of Camp 4	0 sites	35 sites	35 walk-in sites constructed east of Camp 4
Upper Pines	0 sites	87 sites	36-site RV loop and a walk-in campground with 49 sites and 2 group sites constructed
Former Upper River	0 sites	32 sites	30 walk-in and 2 group sites constructed 150 feet from river in the former footprint of the Upper River Campground
Former Lower River	0 sites	40 sites	40 walk-in sites constructed 150 feet from river in the former footprint of the Lower River Campground
Yosemite Lodge	0 sites	20 sites	20 RV sites constructed west of Yosemite Lodge and adjacent to parking area
Boys Town	0 sites	40 sites	40 drive-in sites constructed
Concessioner Stables	0 sites	41 sites	Stables redeveloped as a campground with 41 drive-in sites
Total New Camping	0 sites	311 sites	
Total Camping in Corridor	565 sites	773 sites	

Alternative 4: Lodging Facilities

Wilderness	Alt 1 (No Action)	Alt 4	Details
Merced Lake High Sierra Camp	22 units (60 beds)	0 units	Lodging facility removed and area converted to designated Wilderness.
Yosemite Valley			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 4	Details
Ahwahnee Hotel	123 rooms	123 rooms	No change at the National Historic Landmark
Housekeeping Camp	266 tent cabins	100 tent cabins	Remove 166 units out of the observed high-water mark (bed and banks of the river)
Curry Village	400 units	355 units (290 tents and 65 hard-sided units)	* Retain 290 tents * Retain 47 hard-sided cabin-with-bath units * Retain 18 units at Stoneman House * At Boys Town, Southside Drive would be re-routed and re-developed as a 40-site campground.
Yosemite Lodge	245 rooms	245 rooms	No changes at this lodging facility
Wawona			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 4	Details
Wawona Hotel	104 rooms	104 rooms	No change at the National Historic Landmark
Total Lodging in Corridor	1,160 units	927 units	

* El Portal: Private accommodations exist but are not on NPS land; therefore, they are not listed here.

DAY-USE CAPACITY AND VISITOR ACCESS

- Day-use parking capacity in Yosemite Valley would be reduced (-12%) compared to current levels and would be managed and potentially restricted during peak-use season (May through September).
- A day-use parking permit system for East Yosemite Valley would be implemented during the peak-use season.
- The most significant changes to parking and circulation would take place in the vicinity of Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area, Yosemite Lodge, and El Portal.
- Day-use visitors would park at a re-designed Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area, with a total of 750 parking spaces, located at least 150 feet away from the river.
- A new Yosemite Lodge Day-use Parking Area with 150 spaces would be added west of the lodge.
- Overflow parking during times of peak visitation would be provided in El Portal at the Abbeville site (200 parking spaces).
- Total parking for East Yosemite Valley (including day, overnight, and administrative) would be approximately 4,800 spaces.
- Regional transit services would remain unchanged on the Highway 140 and Highway 120 East corridors. Service on the Highway 120 West corridor would increase to two round-trip runs per day. Four round-trip runs per day would be added to the Highway 41 corridor.
- All shuttle services within Yosemite Valley would maintain the same base service. Additionally, East Yosemite Valley shuttles would be optimized to reduce shuttle intervals to five minutes, and the West Yosemite Valley shuttle would be expanded to serve Bridalveil Fall and West Valley destinations during summer. Park shuttles from Wawona to Yosemite Valley would be discontinued in favor of regional transit additions along Highway 41.
- Private boating opportunities would be allowed in sections of Wilderness, Yosemite Valley, the Gorge, El Portal, and Wawona. Commercial boating would be available in Yosemite Valley.



EMPLOYEE HOUSING

- **Yosemite Village Area.** Lost Arrow: Replace temporary housing with permanent housing for 50 beds. Retain Ahwahnee Row and Tecoya employee housing.
- **Yosemite Lodge Area:** Remove concessioner housing at Highland Court and the Thousands Cabins. Construct two new concessioner housing areas for 104 employees and construct 78 employee parking spaces.
- **El Portal Area.** Rancheria Flat: To replace temporary housing removed from Yosemite Valley, construct eight dormitories with 12 employees each for a total of 96 beds. Abbeville and Trailer Village Housing: Remove or relocate 36 existing private residences. Continue to provide housing land use for 40 employees and volunteers at this location.
- **East of Yosemite Valley Area.** Concessioner Stables: Remove 25 employee beds.