

Alternative 5

YOSEMITE'S MERCED RIVER DRAFT PLAN / EIS

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



ALTERNATIVE 5 (PREFERRED): ENHANCED VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND ESSENTIAL RIVERBANK RESTORATION

ALTERNATIVE 5 OVERVIEW

The guiding principles of Alternative 5 would include restoring significant areas within 100 feet of the river and in meadow and riparian areas, maintaining daily visitation in Yosemite Valley to accommodate peak levels observed in recent years, reducing unnecessary facilities and services, and converting facilities from administrative use to public use where feasible.

Actions in Alternative 5 would:

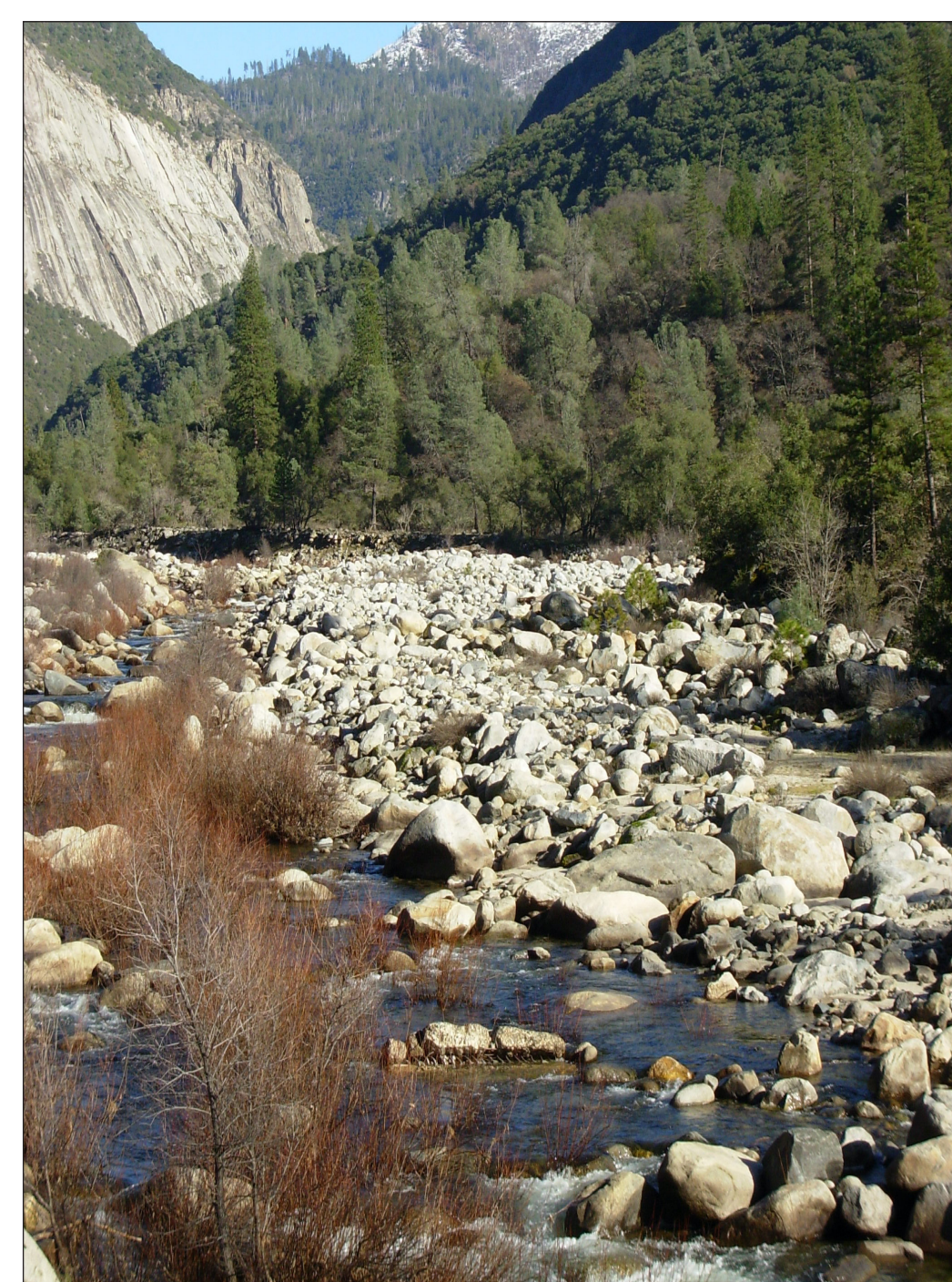
- Restore 203 acres of meadow and riparian habitat.
- Significantly increase the campsite inventory in Yosemite Valley (+37%) and throughout the entire river corridor (+28%).
- Minimally increase available lodging in Yosemite Valley (+2%) and throughout the entire river corridor (less than 1%).
- Increase day-use parking spaces in Yosemite Valley (+11%).
- Reduce commercial services.
- Make significant changes to the traffic circulation pattern in Yosemite Valley to accommodate ecological restoration goals and reduce traffic congestion.
- Accommodate approximately 19,900 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 intentional traffic diversions and monitoring during peak season (May through September).

PROTECT AND ENHANCE

Alternative 5 would protect and enhance river values through essential ecological restoration of riverbanks and riparian and meadow habitat. Targeted infrastructure within the bed and banks would be removed along with some development within 100 feet of the river to be ecologically restored.

RIVER VALUES

- Enhance hydrologic connectivity of meadows to the riparian floodplain through engineering and design treatments, such as installation of large box culverts and permeable subgrades to improve surface water flow.
- Ecologically restore the portion of Housekeeping Camp within the ordinary high-water mark of the river and all campsites and associated infrastructure within 100 feet of the river.
- Enhance the free-flowing condition of the river by removing one historic bridge (Sugar Pine Bridge) from the bed and banks that constricts flow during high-water events.
- Establish a one-acre valley oak recruitment area in El Portal.
- Enhance recreational values by dispersing lower levels of private recreational boating along the river through Yosemite Valley, by reducing traffic congestion and increasing shuttle and transit access to Valley destinations.
- Cultural and scenic values would be protected and enhanced as described under "Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6." Alternative 5 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.



Boulder Bar in El Portal

USER CAPACITY, LAND USE, AND FACILITIES

Alternative 5 would focus on providing an enhanced visitor experience while protecting river values. It would maintain a range of recreation opportunities and generally accommodate current peak-use levels. Proper infrastructure design in high-use areas would be incorporated to ensure the long-term protection of river values.

CAMPING

- The campsite inventory in the Merced Wild and Scenic River corridor would be increased (+28%). In Yosemite Valley, the campsite inventory would increase (+37%).
- All campsites within 100 feet of the river in Wawona and Yosemite Valley would be removed.
- Campsite losses would be offset with new campsites adjacent to Upper Pines Campground; east of the Camp 4 Campground; near Eagle Creek; west of Backpackers Campground; and in the former Upper River Campground area.
- The total campsites in Yosemite Valley would increase to 640—a net gain of 174 sites—and the number of campsites available in the corridor would be 726.

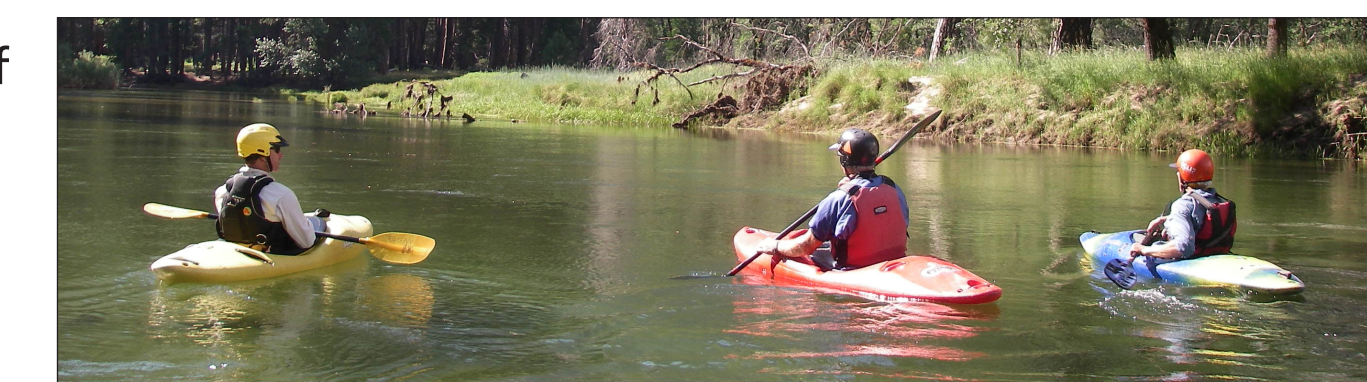


LODGING

- In-park lodging availability would be increased minimally (less than 1%) as compared to existing conditions—from 1,160 to 1,168 units.
- Management actions would focus on removing lodging from the ordinary high-water mark at Housekeeping Camp and slightly reducing lodging in Wilderness.
- The Merced Lake High Sierra Camp would be reduced from a 60-person capacity to a 42-person capacity.
- Tent cabins in the Boys Town area of Curry Village would be replaced with 98 hard-sided units available on a year-round basis.

DAY-USE CAPACITY AND VISITOR ACCESS

- Day-use parking capacity in Yosemite Valley would be expanded (+5%) to meet current peak-use levels. If day-use parking demand continues to increase in the future, additional proactive management actions would be implemented.
- The most significant changes to parking and circulation would take place in the vicinity of the Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area, at Yosemite Lodge, in the West Valley, and in El Portal.
- The Yosemite Village parking area would be re-designed with a total of 850 parking spaces, located at least 150 feet from the river.
- A new Yosemite Lodge Day-use Parking Area with 300 spaces would be constructed west of Yosemite Lodge.
- Overflow parking during times of peak visitation would be provided in West Yosemite Valley (100 parking spaces) and in El Portal at Abbeville (200 parking spaces).
- Total parking for East Yosemite Valley (including day, overnight, and administrative) would be approximately 5,300.
- Regional transit services would be increased on all corridors. Service on Highway 140 and Highway 41 corridors would increase to 12 round-trip runs per day on each route. Services on Highway 120 West corridor would increase to four round-trip runs per day. Two round-trip runs per day would be added to the Highway 120 East corridor.
- Shuttle services within Yosemite Valley would maintain the same base level. Additionally, the East Yosemite Valley and the Visitor Center Express shuttles would be optimized to reduce shuttle intervals to five minutes and seven minutes respectively. The West Yosemite Valley shuttle would be expanded to serve Bridalveil Fall.
- Private boating opportunities would be allowed in sections of Wilderness, Yosemite Valley, El Portal, and Wawona.



Alternative 5: Camping Facilities

Existing Locations	Alt 1 (No Action)	Alt 5	Details
Backpackers	25 sites	10 sites	15 walk-in sites within 100 feet of river relocated to less sensitive area outside the 100-year floodplain
Camp 4	35 sites	35 sites	No change to the National Historic Register site
Lower Pines	76 sites	71 sites	5 sites within 100 feet of the river removed
North Pines	86 sites	72 sites	14 sites within 100 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	86 sites	13 sites removed within 100 feet of the river or in culturally sensitive areas
Total Existing Locations	565 sites	516 sites	
New Locations			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 5	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	30 sites	30 walk-in sites constructed in the footprint of the former Upper River Campground outside of the 25-year floodplain
Eagle Creek	0 sites	42 sites	40 auto sites and 2 group campsites
Total New Camping	0 sites	210 sites	
Total Camping in Corridor	565 sites	726 sites	

Alternative 5: Lodging Facilities

Wilderness	Alt 1 (No Action)	Alt 5	Details
Merced Lake High Sierra Camp	22 units (60 beds)	11 units (42 beds)	18 beds removed from Wilderness lodging facility
Yosemite Valley			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 5	Details
Ahwahnee Hotel	123 rooms	123 rooms	No change at the National Historic Landmark
Housekeeping Camp	266 tent cabins	232 tent cabins	Remove 34 units out of the observed high-water mark (bed and banks of the river)
Curry Village	400 units	453 units (290 tents and 163 hard-sided units)	* Retain 290 tents * Retain 47 hard-sided cabin-with-bath units * Retain 18 units at Stoneman House * Construct 98 hard-sided units in Boys Town
Yosemite Lodge	245 rooms	245 rooms	No changes at this lodging facility
Wawona			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 5	Details
Wawona Hotel	104 rooms	104 rooms	No change at the National Historic Landmark
Total Lodging in Corridor	1,160 units	1,168 units	

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

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 seven dormitories with 12 employees each for a total of 84 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.