

Yosemite National Park

Merced Wild & Scenic River

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Protecting the Merced River's Health

The Merced River Plan (Plan) will improve the health and resiliency of the park and its ecosystems, while also enhancing the visitor experience. The Plan preserves and accommodates peak visitation at a level similar to recent years, approximately 20,100 people per day (18,710 people at one time) in East Yosemite Valley. Restoration of riparian, riverine, and meadow habitats will enhance the scenic quality of the river corridor, providing a more natural setting for reflection and inspiration.

Water Quality

The Merced River Plan will protect water quality by:

- Establishing a riparian buffer to filter runoff, reduce the magnitude and velocity of overland flow, trap sediment, and attenuate compounds such as nitrogen and phosphorous
- Moving the Yosemite Day-use Parking Area north at least 150 feet away from the river and providing a 150-foot setback from the ordinary high-water mark for all new construction or redevelopment
- Incorporating best management practices at new and redesigned parking areas to protect water quality
- Designating river access points in Wawona picnic areas to prevent erosion and informal trails

Free Flow/ Geological/ Hydrological Values

The Plan will reduce impediments to free flow (as defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act) and improve geologic/hydrologic processes by:

- Removing abandoned infrastructure in the river corridor
 - Incorporating large wood into riverbanks and the river channel to increase channel complexity and improve aquatic habitat
 - Restoring the river channel between Clark's and Sentinel bridges by placing constructed log jams, closing sensitive riverbanks, and brush layering
 - Removing 6,048 linear feet of riprap
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**Riparian Buffer/
Floodplain**

The Plan will protect riparian areas and floodplains by:

- Relocating campsites from the riparian buffer to resilient areas
- Providing visitors river access via resilient sandy beaches and sandbars
- Protecting riverbank and riparian areas
- Planting native vegetation to stabilize riverbanks and improve scenic views along the river
- Restoring a portion of the Lower Pines campground that was damaged by the 1997 flood and subsequently closed to a mosaic of riparian meadow and oak communities to enhance riparian and floodplain habitat

**Meadow
Restoration**

The Plan will protect and improve meadow habitat by:

- Restoring 189 acres of meadow and riparian areas, mostly within 100 feet of the river
- Filling ditches in meadows to restore natural hydrology
- Removing six miles of informal trails through meadows
- Returning ecological and cultural processes (hydrology and fire) to restore meadows and oak woodlands from currently conifer-dominated portions of the landscape
- Removing roadside parking and associated fill material along meadows

**Cultural
Resources**

Protection and enhancement of archeological sites and historic districts will provide future generations the opportunity to connect to their heritage. The plan will:

- Retain the historic Sugar Pine Bridge; future studies will add to the understanding of the bridge's hydrologic impacts and identify mitigation measures
- Relocate or remove campsites impacting archeological sites
- Retain and preserve the Ahwahnee Hotel, Wawona Hotel, Wawona Covered Bridge, LeConte Memorial Lodge, Merced Lake High Sierra Camp, and other historically significant properties
- Remove informal trails, non-essential roads, and infrastructure currently impacting archeological sites
- Delineate bike paths, roads, bridle paths, parking, staging, and trails away from sensitive cultural and ethnographic resource areas
- Remove graffiti and install fencing around rock art and other sensitive features to discourage inappropriate visitor use
- Develop site management guidelines for archeological sites with complex uses and impacts, such as Yosemite Village

Looking Forward

The Final Merced River Plan/EIS has been shaped by coordination and consultation with members of the public, traditionally associated American Indian tribes and groups, agency partners and other stakeholders. This collaboration has produced a plan that will improve the visitor experience and better protect the Merced River's unique values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.