

Yosemite National Park

Merced Wild & Scenic River

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Restoration

The Merced River and South Fork Merced River in California were designated wild and scenic in 1987 under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act stipulates that federal land managers must protect and enhance the values that merit a river's designation as wild and scenic. To protect and enhance these values, the act directs managers to prepare a comprehensive management plan for each wild and scenic river. The plan must begin with an accurate assessment of the current condition of those river values.

What is the condition of the river?

As part of the development of the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan, the National Park Service prepared Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Baseline Conditions Report to document conditions of river values at the time of designation and today. Additional research was also conducted to augment the existing knowledge base. In general, the report and ongoing research have found the river and its values (free-flow, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values) to be in overall good condition with some localized impacts. Regardless of which management alternative is selected, a suite of ecological restoration actions will be completed to protect and enhance the Merced Wild and Scenic River.

What is ecological restoration?

Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been compromised. Restoration is an intentional activity that initiates or accelerates the recovery of an ecosystem with respect to its health, integrity and sustainability. The overarching goal of ecological restoration is not to return to a particular point in time but rather to restore ecosystem processes, structure, and composition.

Ecological restoration addresses the National Park Service mission to allow natural processes to prevail, as well as protecting scenery and historic resources; it also addresses the goals of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by enhancing river free-flowing conditions, water quality and physical and ecological outstandingly remarkable values. Ecological restoration actions in riparian, riverine, and meadow habitats enhance the open, scenic quality which provides a sense of place for reflection and inspiration.

What is the goal of the ecological restoration program of the Merced River Plan?

Promote the ability of the Merced River to shape the landscape by reducing impediments to free flow, improving geologic/hydrologic processes, restoring floodplains and meadows, and protecting water quality.

What are major ecological restoration actions proposed in the Merced River Plan?

- Restore hydrologic function and connectivity with the floodplain including meadow and wetland habitats
- Repair eroded riverbanks, restore riparian plant communities and prevent further human-caused, erosion-induced widening
- Increase channel complexity by increasing the amount of large wood in the river channel
- Restore and protect the ecological processes that support riparian and meadow communities including naturally high groundwater levels and sheet flow
- Remove impediments to natural hydrology including ditches, berms, and abandoned roadbeds in order to protect and maintain native plant communities
- Restore and maintain the function, structure, diversity and productivity of native riparian and meadow plant communities to protect species diversity, ethnobotanical resources and wildlife habitat
- Protect and enhance the scenic values of meadows and riparian areas, while improving visitor experience
- Protect archeological resources

Riparian Buffer

Multiple actions would be taken across all alternatives to restore, protect and enhance hydrologic and ecological processes, free-flowing condition, water quality, and meadows and riparian habitat. A 150 foot riparian buffer, measured from the ordinary high water mark, would be protected and enhanced, corridorwide. This riparian buffer will filter runoff and provide a transition zone between the river and human land use. This riparian buffer will trap sediment, help to stabilize riverbanks, reduce erosion, and allow surface water to infiltrate the soil. The riparian buffer vegetation will provide a source of large wood to the river and adjacent floodplain, which will enhance important habitat for wildlife by allowing establish-

What are major ecological restoration actions proposed in the Merced River Plan?

ment of new vegetation and persistence of a complex habitat structure. The buffer will also protect aquatic ecosystems by providing organic nutrients, by supplying woody debris that will improve habitat complexity, and by moderating water temperatures by vegetative shading of the river. This riparian buffer will protect and enhance river values, and function as a setback for all future development in the corridor.

Eroded Riverbanks

Throughout the corridor, eroded riverbanks would be repaired through restoration and vulnerable riverbanks and riparian vegetation would be protected from trampling. Signage and appropriate river access points would direct visitors to use resilient riverbanks such as low-angle sandbar beaches. The majority of riprap in Yosemite Valley would be removed to enhance free-flowing condition, natural hydrologic processes and to improve riparian habitat. The large wood management policy would be enforced and large wood would be left in the channel or incorporated into riverbanks as part of restoration to increase channel complexity and improve aquatic habitat.

Enhancing Meadow and Riparian Habitat

In all alternatives, ditches in meadows would be filled, six miles of informal trails in meadows and riparian areas would be removed, and abandoned underground infrastructure would be removed. Roadside parking along meadows and associated fill material would be removed to restore meadow area and protect meadows from informal trailing. All action alternatives return ecological and cultural processes—hydrology and fire—to restore meadows and oak woodlands from currently conifer-dominated portions of the landscape. To improve riverbank condition, river channel restoration would occur in the reach between Clark's and Sentinel bridges, including placement of constructed log jams (CLJs), closure of sensitive riverbanks, and brush layering. In all alternatives, campsites and associated infrastructure within 100 feet of the ordinary high water mark would be removed or relocated to protect and enhance riverbanks and the riparian zone.

Providing Appropriate Infrastructure

Actions would be taken throughout the river corridor to restore eroded riverbanks and provide appropriate river access. Recreational river activity would be directed to designated river access points and all new development would be located at least 150 feet from the ordinary high water mark. The NPS would eliminate unnecessary development and limit the extent of new development in the river corridor, preserve viewpoints and scenic vistas along roadways and trails, and manage vegetation so that it does not interfere with the visitor's visual experience.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources such as archeological sites are non-renewable therefore impacts can result in irretrievable loss. For this reason, most actions to protect and enhance archeological resources in the action alternatives of this plan do not have a range across the alternatives.

Find Out More

If you're interested in learning more about the proposed changes to parking, traffic circulation, and more that were explored in the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan/DEIS; you can download the entire document at www.parkplanning.nps.gov/yose_mrp. For those who have time, reading the entire document cover-to-cover will convey the fullest understanding of the plan. For those interested in an overview of the Merced River Plan, park staff suggest you begin with: Learn more about this plan, including open house dates and other information on the Merced River Plan website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp.htm. You can also follow this and other park plans on Facebook at www.facebook.com/YosemiteNPS.

- Reader's Guide
- Executive Summary
- Chapter 8 - Alternatives for River Management

Tell Us What You Think

Comment on this draft environmental impact statement by visiting the Merced River Plan Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/yose_mrp. Comments made through this website are easiest for park planners to use. Comments can also be submitted by email to yose_planning@nps.gov or by mail sent to the following address:

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