Summary of How This Document Has Changed In Response to Public Comment

The following summary outlines changes made between the Draft and Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS as a result of the comments received during the 67-day public review period. The changes primarily addressed: 1) concerns about the complexity of the user capacity component; and 2) concerns associated with the river boundary and related management zoning in the El Portal Segment of the Merced River corridor. These changes are summarized below.

User Capacity Management Program

The National Park Service has improved the clarity and consistency of information presented in this document to specifically address concerns related to making the park's User Capacity Management Program more easily understood by the general public. It should be noted however, that none of the clarifications to the User Capacity Management Program substantially changed the description of the action alternatives, or materially change the analysis of environmental consequences from those presented in the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS. Changes related to these concerns are presented below.

- The Executive Summary has been rewritten to provide more clarity and detail for a better overview of the document.
- In order to better explain the concept of user capacity, Chapter II of the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS has been separated into two chapters. In this Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS, Chapter II is now entitled User Capacity Management Program, and Chapter III now contains the alternatives.
  - Chapter II better defines the concept of user capacity, and includes the history of, and various methods for addressing user capacity management on public lands. The chapter also explains Yosemite National Park's existing User Capacity Management Program and its various components. It also discusses the implementation of the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) program, which is the primary user capacity management method adopted by the National Park Service.
  - Chapter II also presents a series of management actions in table II-3 that could be implemented in the event monitoring indicates the Outstandingly Remarkable Values are not being adequately protected. In response to public comments, table II-4 has been added to clarify the level and type of NEPA compliance and public involvement that specific management actions would be subject to prior to implementation.
  - Chapter II, User Capacity Management Program now represents the user capacity elements common to all action alternatives. The user capacity elements presented in Chapter III would be added to the greater program presented in Chapter II.
  - The numbering of chapters throughout the rest of the document has changed as a result of the restructuring described above.

In addition to the above changes made to improve the document's clarity, various elements of the User Capacity Management Program have been refined for consistency and clarity and/or in response to public comment. These refinements are summarized below.

- The Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS has been changed to eliminate the 18-month transition period for the removal of old units at Yosemite Lodge after the new, replacement

lodging is constructed. The replaced structures would not be rented once the new facilities are in use; this ensures no net gain in the number of rooms rented at Yosemite Lodge.

- The Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS clarifies issues related to interim limits in Alternative 2. The document now states that the interim limits would last for approximately 5 years, while the VERP program's indicators and standards continue to be field tested and improved. At the end of the approximate 5-year interim period, the National Park Service would evaluate the VERP program's effectiveness in providing information needed to manage visitor use in a manner that protects and enhances the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values. At that time, the National Park Service would present a report to the public addressing whether the VERP program has provided the required guidance on visitor use levels and whether facility limits should be continued, modified, or eliminated. If the VERP program is providing sufficient data, interim limits would most likely be eliminated. However, if the VERP program is not providing sufficient data, interim limits would continue until VERP is functioning as intended and revisions to the interim limits could be considered. If changes proposed at this time would result in substantially different environmental consequences than were identified in the Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS, an appropriate level of NEPA compliance would be completed.
- In order to meet new National Park Service policy standards, Alternative 2 as presented in the Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS now amends the visitor capacity goals as described in the *General Management Plan*. In the era of the 1980 *General Management Plan,* carrying capacity was defined by overall facility levels. Alternative 2 proposes interim facility limits, but commits to the more responsive VERP process for each new planning effort undertaken. The VERP process is described in the 2001 National Park Service Management Policies and in new Park Planning Program Standards signed in August 2004.
- The VERP process adopted by the National Park Service will provide on-the-ground information about the impacts to resources and the visitor experience from visitor use. In response to public comments, the fixed annual visitation limits described for Alternatives 3 and 4 in the Draft SEIS are now more flexible. Should VERP monitoring indicate that use levels are causing standards to be exceeded in certain areas, park managers could take management actions to adjust daily segment and management zone limits as well as the proposed annual corridorwide visitation limits up or down.
- The 5.3 million annual visitation limit in Alternative 3 in the Draft SEIS is now presented as 5.32 million in the Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS in order to provide consistency with how other limit numbers have been expressed, and additional text has been added that clarifies how this number was determined.
- In response to comments, the annual corridorwide limit in Alternative 4 has been revised from 5.3 million in the Draft SEIS to 3.27 million in the Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS. This annual limit reflects the annual parkwide visitation in 1987, the year the Merced River was designated by Congress as a Wild and Scenic River. This annual corridorwide visitation limit is approximately 110,000 less visitors than came to the park in 2004.

El Portal Boundary

In response to public comment, the National Park Service has adopted a quarter-mile river corridor boundary with more protective management zoning in El Portal for Alternative 2, the preferred alternative. Changes as a result of this river boundary and more protective management zoning are summarized below.

- The change to a quarter-mile river boundary provides consistency with the remainder of the Merced River corridor within National Park Service administered lands and adjacent land management agencies with jurisdiction of the Merced Wild and Scenic River.
- The change in management zoning on the north side of the river would afford greater protection through increased Day Use (2C) management zoning in areas of know sensitive resources .
- The change in management zoning on the south side of the river would afford greater protection of scenic qualities, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources through Open Space (2A) management zoning east of the Highway 140 bridge.

The revised river corridor boundary and more protective management zoning for the El Portal segment is reflected in environmental analysis of Alternative 2 in Chapter V, Environmental Consequences.

Technical Corrections and Clarifications

In addition to changes in the document as a result of public comment, the National Park Service has re-evaluated the number of day use parking spaces and campsites in Yosemite Valley that were presented in the Draft SEIS. This has led to some minor adjustment in these numbers, which are reflected in the Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS. Also, more detailed information has been added to Chapter III, Affected Environment related to commercial buses and YARTS in the Transportation section; the Socioeconomics section includes more detailed information with regard to park visitation trends.

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