



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, California 95389

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Dear Yosemite Friends,

After nearly 900 comments, 13 public meetings, and well over 75 hours of conversations with the public, the *Final Merced Wild and Scenic River Revised Comprehensive Management Plan and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS) is now before you. While I was on the road during our public meeting tour, I spoke with many of you about your concerns for the Merced River and Yosemite National Park. While we did not always agree, one theme emerged with consensus by all: the Merced Wild and Scenic River is treasured by all people and must be preserved and protected for future generations.

The goal of this planning effort is to protect and enhance what the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act calls “outstandingly remarkable values” of the Merced River. These are the unique qualities that made the river stand apart from all other rivers in the nation, making it worthy of special protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In 1987, 122 miles of the Merced River were designated Wild and Scenic, with 81 miles flowing through lands managed by the National Park Service. To outline the guidance for managing future activities in the river corridor, the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* (Merced River Plan) was approved in 2000. Soon afterward, it became the subject of a lengthy legal challenge. In 2003, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals directed the National Park Service to revise the Merced River Plan to (1) better address the user capacity requirement of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by providing “specific measurable limits on use”, and (2) reassess the river boundary in the El Portal Administrative Site based on the Outstandingly Remarkable Values in that segment. The Draft Merced River Plan/SEIS was prepared and released for public comment in January 2005.

Since the end of the public review period in March, our dedicated team of park staff, nationally recognized experts, and scientists have worked with the guidance you have provided in your comments to modify the draft plan. Many groups and individuals expressed concern that the user capacity discussion was complex. In response, the Executive Summary provides a more succinct overview of the approach taken in developing the alternatives. We understand that user capacity is an esoteric topic. To help clarify, we separated the discussion of user capacity and the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework into its own chapter, apart from the presentation of alternatives. A number of other changes directly resulted from public comment—including revisions to the El Portal boundary and management zoning in the preferred alternative. These changes have been summarized for you in the following pages.

This Final Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS presents a range of alternatives, including identification of a preferred alternative. Following a required 30-day period of no action, I will select an alternative and recommend it to the Director of the National Park Service’s Pacific West Region. If approved, he will sign a Record of Decision which represents the conclusion of the planning process. Once the decision is published in the *Federal Register*, the proposals approved in the Revised Merced River Plan can be implemented. These revised elements will join the existing management elements adopted in the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan*, which was approved in 2000. This plan, as amended, provides future guidance for any proposed actions within the Merced Wild and Scenic River corridor in Yosemite National Park.

The Merced River Plan, as amended, represents our contract with the public to protect and enhance the special values of the Merced River. It is not intended to gather dust on a shelf, but to be used daily by park managers as we go about the work we have been entrusted with by the American people.

Thank you for helping us to create a stronger plan that protects the Merced River today and for those lovers of Yosemite yet to follow.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Superintendent