



Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections on El Portal Road

Where is the proposed project area located?

The El Portal Road begins at the western boundary of Yosemite National Park. This road climbs 7.5 miles through the Merced River canyon, gaining almost 2,000 vertical feet before it intersects the Yosemite Valley Loop Road at Pohono Bridge. Along the way, this road parallels the Merced Wild and Scenic River and passes Arch Rock Entrance Station. The project area begins at the Big Oak Flat Road intersection and extend east 1,350 feet. It focuses specifically on those areas in need of emergency repair.



Why undertake this project now?

Significant damage occurred during the 1997 flood, necessitating an almost complete reconstruction of the El Portal Road. Since then, the National Park Service has rebuilt the westernmost 6.5 miles of the road—referred to as Segments A, B, and C—but prior to completion, reconstruction of the final one-mile segment of the project, referred to as Segment D, was halted as a result of a successful legal challenge. The court decision directed the National Park Service to prepare a comprehensive management plan for the Merced Wild and Scenic River in advance of completing that project.

In the intervening nine years, the roadway and embankment have continued to be undermined by the river. As a result, the National Park Service has completed five emergency repairs to the current project area, including three retaining wall repairs to prevent roadway collapse. However, these emergency repairs have not addressed the fundamental instability of the roadway and cannot eliminate the potential for a complete roadway failure. Such a failure could endanger motorists, cause a long-term road closure, and potentially sever Yosemite Valley's primary electrical and sewage lines, which would have serious environmental consequences for the Merced Wild and Scenic River. A roadway collapse would prohibit access to Yosemite Valley from three park entrances.

While the original project that entails completely reconstructing the entire road segment is on hold pending the approval of a valid Merced River Plan, the National Park Service is addressing the immediate situation with a scaled-down reconstruction project that will stabilize the roadway, protect park resources, and ensure continued visitor access to Yosemite Valley. Other issues not directly related to the emergency repairs, such as intersection configuration, bicycle lanes, and parking will not be addressed at this time.



A portion of the undercut roadway bank.

What alternatives have been developed?

The public scoping period took place from November 11 to December 29, 2006. Following the scoping period, the National Park Service analyzed the comments that were received from the public and identified a range of issues and concerns. The issues and concerns were then used to inform the development of alternative approaches to reconstruct this portion of El Portal Road.

In February and March, 2007, the National Park Service convened experts in natural and cultural resources, construction and engineering, and park operations and transportation planning to develop a range of reasonable and feasible alternatives based on the project's purpose and need as well as input gathered during public scoping. After analyzing a number of potential solutions, the park identified two reasonable and feasible action alternatives that are analyzed in detail in the *Reconstructing Critically Eroded Sections of El Portal Road Environmental Assessment*.

The public comment period on the Environmental Assessment occurred from June 4- July 3, 2007 and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed in August 2007. The **preferred alternative** reconstructs the road with 11- foot travel lanes, a 4-foot paved drainage ditch, a 1-foot shoulder, and a short cantilever road section at the roadway's narrowest point.

What are the next steps?

The project is now underway with completion scheduled for May 23, 2008. During the reconstruction, one- way traffic will be controlled with flaggers or traffic lights. Delays may be up to 30 minutes. Nighttime closures may occur if necessary to stay on schedule.

Public Participation

Public participation is essential for the success of this and all other park improvement projects. Here are some ways to stay involved in park projects and plans:

- Attend a National Park Service public open house to talk with project specialists and obtain more information on projects. Visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/meetings.htm for upcoming dates.
- **Add your name to the park's planning list** and receive the *Planning Update* newsletter as well as other planning- related notices. You can also submit your email address to receive the park's periodic electronic newsletter.
- **Additionally, you can submit comments with your thoughts about this topic or any other project in the park by any of the following means:**

Mail: Superintendent
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

Phone: 209/379-1365; **Fax:** 209/379-1294

E- mail: Yose_Planning@nps.gov

For project updates, visit online: www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/eproad.htm

For 24-hour road conditions and construction updates: call 209/372-0200.