

Public Scoping Comment and Response Report

Merced Wild and Scenic River Revised Comprehensive Management Plan/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement



National Park Service
Yosemite National Park
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Introduction

In 1987, the U.S. Congress designated the Merced River a Wild and Scenic River to protect its free-flowing condition and to protect and enhance its unique values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations (16 USC 1271). The passage of Public Law 100-149 on November 2, 1987, and Public Law 102-432 on October 23, 1992, placed 122 miles of the main stem and South Fork of the Merced River, including the forks of Red Peak, Merced Peak, Triple Peak, and Lyell into the Wild and Scenic River System. The National Park Service manages 81 miles of the Merced River, encompassing both the main stem and the South Fork in Yosemite National Park and the El Portal Administrative Site.

Pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requirements for preparing a comprehensive management plan, the National Park Service prepared and issued the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Merced River Plan/FEIS) in June 2000. In August 2000, a Record of Decision was signed, making the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan (Merced River Plan) the official document for managing activities within the 81 miles of river corridor within National Park Service jurisdiction. A revised Record of Decision was signed in November 2000.

Since the Record of Decision was signed in August 2000, the Merced River Plan has been subject to a lengthy litigation process. The validity of the plan was challenged based on contentions that the National Park Service failed to prepare a plan that protected and enhanced the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Merced River, thereby violating the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Merced River Plan was upheld in U.S. District Court with the exception that language be added to specifically indicate how the plan amends the park's General Management Plan.

However, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals or the Court) further ruled that the Merced River Plan is deficient on two grounds. In its October 27, 2003, opinion, the Court stated that the "Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) is invalid due to two deficiencies: (1) a failure to adequately address user capacities; and (2) the improper drawing of the Merced River's boundaries at El Portal."¹ On April 20, 2004, the same court clarified its original opinion, stating that the National Park Service "must prepare a new or revised CMP that adequately addresses user capacities and properly draws the river boundaries in El Portal."

The purpose of the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is to produce a revised comprehensive management plan that:

- Protects and enhances the Merced Wild and Scenic River's Outstandingly Remarkable Values and free-flowing condition by adopting a user capacity program that is consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Secretarial Guidelines.²
- Develops a user capacity program that provides for a diversity of appropriate recreational opportunities and visitor freedom, so long as this does not conflict with the National Park Service mission of protecting natural and cultural resources and the quality of the visitor experience.

¹ Friends of Yosemite Valley v. Norton, 348 F.3d 789, 803 9th Cir. 2003.

² The 1982 Wild and Scenic Rivers Guidelines were prepared jointly by the Secretary of the Interior (National Park Service) and Secretary of Agriculture (U.S. Forest Service). These guidelines present the overall process for determining "Eligibility, Classification and Management of Wild and Scenic Rivers" on National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service lands. (See www.nps.gov/rivers/guidelines/html [Federal Register, Vol. 47, No. 173, September 7, 1982]). The General Management Principles for "Public Use and Access" state that, "Public use will be regulated and distributed where necessary to protect and enhance (by allowing natural recovery where resources have been damaged) the resource values of the river area. Public use may be controlled by limiting access to the river, by issuing permits, or by other means available to the managing agency through its general statutory authorities."

- Re-examines the river area boundary based on the Outstandingly Remarkable Values at El Portal pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act's protection and enhancement mandate.
- Makes appropriate revisions to the park's 1980 *General Management Plan* (as amended), as directed by the 1987 legislation designating the river Wild and Scenic.

The alternatives evaluated in this Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS are otherwise consistent with the purposes of the 2000 Merced River Plan, which provides direction and guidance on how best to manage visitor use, development of lands and facilities, and resource protection within the river corridor.

The project is needed to comply with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling directing the National Park Service to revise the Merced River Plan in a timely manner. The plan must remedy the deficiencies identified by the Court to ensure protection and enhancement of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Merced Wild and Scenic River.

The National Park Service issued a Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on the Revised Merced River Plan in July 2004. The public scoping period, initially advertised for 30 days was extended for an additional 15 days, based on public requests. Comments were accepted by e-mail, fax, letter, on comment forms, and through oral testimony presented at public meetings during the scoping period. The National Park Service received 148 public scoping responses (including letters, faxes, e-mails, comment forms, and oral testimony) during the comment period. This report, developed by Yosemite National Park Staff and contractors, is based on analysis of the responses received from the public. The report provides a comprehensive list of public concerns raised during the comment period, along with National Park Service responses and a summary of new issues raised and included or dismissed from further consideration in the environmental assessment. The public concerns identify common themes expressed by individuals or groups requesting particular lines of action by the National Park Service when analyzing the potential impacts of the Revised Merced River Plan. One or more quotes taken from public comments accompany and support each public concern, conveying the author's thoughts on how, when, where, or why the concern should be addressed. Note that supporting quotes are just that—a sample from amongst all comments on a particular theme of concern. A given public concern can reflect one or many supporting comments.

In addition to presenting the concerns identified in public comments on the Revised Merced River Plan, this report provides a series of appendices explaining the process for reviewing and analyzing public comments, presenting demographic information about those who sent comments to the park, and providing a list of the names of the National Park Service Staff and contractors who prepared the report.

Concern Screening and Response Process

Screening Public Scoping Concerns

Using the criteria described below for each of the four screening levels (screens #1, #2, #3, and #4), scoping concerns and their supporting quotes are analyzed and classified by park staff to identify the response needed. When screening a public scoping concern, each supporting quote must be examined for the presence of a rationale (the “why”) supporting the requested action.

Screen #1 identifies public concerns that are out of the scope of the subject planning process, or were non-substantive, and therefore do not warrant further consideration. These public concerns do not require management consideration. Any concern for which an affirmative answer can be given to one of the following questions falls in this category:

- 1.1 Is the concern outside the scope of the proposed action? (i.e., out-of-scope)
- 1.2 Does law or policy already decide the concern? (i.e., out-of-scope)
- 1.3 Is this the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern? (i.e., out-of-scope)
- 1.4 Would acting on the concern place untenable restrictions on management, conflict with approved plans, or entail significant and reasonably foreseeable negative consequences? (i.e., effectively out-of-scope)
- 1.5 Is the concern a simple editorial correction? (i.e., no response needed)
- 1.6 Is the concern an unsupported personal opinion (i.e., a question, problem, suggestion, or interest, with no supporting “why”); or a simple statement of fact with no request for action, stated or implied? (A non-substantive concern)

Concerns not matching any of the above criteria reasonably are considered within the scope of the subject plan, could be substantive, and are passed on to screen #2.

Screen #2 defines concerns and comments that fall within the defined scope of the project and already are being addressed in its compliance document (environmental assessment or environmental impact statement) or which, if new, can be included by the project manager based on reasonable interpretation of the defined scope of the project. In any case, any changes stemming from these concerns would not require a change in the planning direction and therefore do not require management review. Any public scoping concern for which an affirmative answer can be given to either of the following propositions does not need management review and is included in the environmental analysis of the subject plan or project:

- 2.0 A scoping concern raising an issue already included in the scope of the project
- 2.9 A scoping concern raising an issue not within the scope of the project as initially defined but that does not require management deliberation for inclusion

Public concerns that do not fall out at this screen are probably “substantive,” merit review by management, and are thus passed on to **Screen #4 – Identifying and Elaborating Issues** (see below).

Screen #3 is a variation of screen #2: if a screen #2 concern speaks in an important way to any screen #4 concern, it is designating a screen #3.x. This means it will be included “for information only” when it goes to the management team for deliberation, to provide additional context during their consideration of the related screen #4 public concern. The response to a Screen #3 concern does not need a management decision. A Screen #3 designation may be made retrospectively after screen 4.0 concerns are identified and examined.

Responding to concerns that do not fall out at Screen #1 or #2 (or #3) may require a change in plan direction or significant further analysis, and hence a decision by the management team. Such concerns are passed through Screen #4.

Screen #4 involves the evaluation of public scoping concerns and their supporting quotes raising issues that would require a change in plan direction and thus a decision by park management.

As defined in the National Park Service's *Director's Order #12 Handbook* ("Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-Making") and Council of Environmental Quality regulations, a concern is "substantive" if it meets the following criterion:

4.0 A scoping comment expanding, with reasonable basis, a project's scope as initially defined to the public

Note that, to be substantive, a scoping concern's supporting quotes must present a reasoned, factual basis supporting the contention that the issue raised is within the project's scope (different supporting quotes may offer different rationales).

Responding to Public Scoping Concerns

Responding to public scoping concerns (and the discrete comments that support those concerns) assigned a screening code of 1.x, 2.x, or 3.x is relatively easy, consisting of a simple restatement of the description of the screening code, which is the reason the concern received that code. Rarely a more extended response may be needed.

For public scoping concerns receiving a 4.0 (based on comments providing a reasonable basis for expanding the scope of the project as initially defined to the public), the response process is more complex. When a scoping comment raises a new issue and provides a rationale that it reasonably falls within a project's scope, that issue must be presented to the management team for deliberation on whether to include or exclude it from consideration. If management deliberation and available information support the rationale given, management will include the issue in the analysis of the project. If an issue is excluded, management provides the rationale supporting the decision not to include it within the scope of the project.

Using this Report

The report begins with a description of the scoping comment screening and response process. It then presents public concerns arranged by topic, along with a representative sample of supporting quotes and the National Park Service response to each concern, including the management rationale when appropriate. If a group of successive concerns and quotes receive the same response, these may be grouped, with one response following the last set. In such a case, appropriate notes are provided before the group and with each concern statement, alerting the reader to this fact.

Public Scoping Concerns and Responses

Planning

Acceptable Levels of Development

#35 Public Concern: The National Park Service should maintain the amenities, services, and management practices that currently exist in Yosemite Valley.

"I want the amenities of civilization that currently exist in Yosemite Valley. I want the recreational activities I have enjoyed for decades and the freedom to be restored by the natural splendor without excessive rules and restrictions. I don't want anything torn down or pushed out. I do want the number of cars and visitors controlled. I want responsible wildlife management to prevent over population and disease. I want aggressive forest thinning and relentless trail maintenance to prevent erosion. I want access for the disabled and interpretive services for foreign visitors. I want an educational camp for school children, particularly those from the inner city or those who are troubled. I want more public transportation services. I want more art and meditation. I want more peace and quiet." (Individual, Comment #64-3)

"I do not, under any circumstances, want to turn Yosemite Valley into some supposed pre-European-contact wilderness, approximating the vision of elitist, new-age habitat wonks. I do not want the National Park Service to be cowed into restricting free use of the valley by self-proclaimed saviors of the environment who think they know best what I should or should not do there. I do not want the valley turned into a police state with armed rangers at every turn." (Individual, Comment #64-4)

"The Yosemite Valley Management plan and the Yosemite Lodge Plan make great strides in eliminating offending facilities while maintaining facilities for public use and enjoyment. The Act does allow for trails and other recreational uses near the river." (Individual, Hanford, CA, Comment #82-4)

Response: Concern #35 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. This programmatic document sets park policies for management of use and development within the river corridor. Although other plans may provide the site-specific detail for the type, level, and locations of amenities and facilities within specific areas, such as Yosemite Valley, all development within the corridor will have to comply with the Merced River Plan, as revised under this project.

Clarity of Planning Documents

#36 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should include corrected information and more comprehensive analysis based on comments submitted on the original Plan.

"Page III-95 of the Plan. 'The South fork supports . . . and hardhead.' Again your information is wrong. Sacramento sucker, Sacramento squawfish, and hardhead are only found in the South Fork Merced outside the Park boundary, not throughout Wawona." (Recreational Organization, Coarsegold, CA, Comment #29-19)

"The consultants who wrote the fishery section did not use data that should have been supplied by the California Dept. Fish and Game on angler distribution and angler quality. Past creel surveys are a great source of this type of information. Again, since the Rainbow trout is an ORV the monitoring section should include fish population surveys using a size structure analysis. This monitoring could be done periodically at established index segments, where an actual quantitative analysis could be made. The best methods for this analysis is either electro-fishing or by snorkeling." (Recreational Organization, Coarsegold, CA, Comment #29-13)

Response: Concern #36 was assigned a screening code of 2.1, *the concern requests a technical correction to the document*. These corrections address other documents, but the information was considered in development of the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS.

#46 Public Concern: The National Park Service should revise the “User Capacity Management Program for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor” document to increase clarity.

"The first five "indicators" relate to wilderness and backcountry areas---areas that already are subject to use limits. Yes, these areas should be, and already are, subject to monitoring. Their inclusion in this VERP document gives the reader the false impression that this is something new." (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-9)

""User Capacity Management Program for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor" (NPS February 2004) is too long for the average concerned citizen, and is filled with extraneous information that confuses the issue. As an example, the Best Management practices (pp. 13-19) should be deleted as they have nothing to do with user capacity and these seven pages simply serve to overwhelm the general reader. Additionally, the NPS should note many of the BMPs have no substance due to non-committal wording." (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment # 114-2)

Response: Concern #46 was assigned a screening code of 2.1, *the concern requests a technical correction to the document*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the information from the cited document and updates and clarifies the relationship of these measures to proposed user capacity alternatives.

Planning Goals

#13 Public Concern: The National Park Service should expand the scope of the project to consider elements beyond user capacity and El Portal boundaries.

"NPS is improperly trying to limit the scope of scoping comments by stating in their scoping period announcement that they will not revisit River Plan management elements other than user capacity and El Portal District boundaries." (Individual, Comment #129-8)

"SCOPE OF SCOPING AND INTERRELATIONSHIP OF USER CAPACITY TO "ZONING" AND OTHER MANAGEMENT ELEMENTS: NPS is improperly attempting to limit the scope of scoping comments by stating in their scoping period announcements that they will not revisit River Plan management elements other than user capacity and El Portal District boundaries." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-4)

"I am concerned -- we are very concerned --that the Park Service is not taking a fresh look and not using the scoping period. Scoping is to bring in the scope, to widen -- to be wide; and the Park Service has very inappropriately narrowed the scoping period from the get-go -- the scoping comments from the get-go -- to user capacity and El Portal boundaries, as if they are not interrelated with the zoning. For example, management zoning certainly needs to be revisited with a fresh look in terms of user capacity. There is no question -- and I don't think I need to quote John Muir to this group -- as to everything being hitched to everything else. It truly is. And certainly, in the River Plan, user capacity is hitched to most of these if not all of the other management items." (Individual, Comment #30-4)

"NPS has deliberately directed public input away from these significant issues, with the resulting effect that it might appear to the Court that the public is not concerned about them. Not true. Public concerns, if allowed to address these issues, would warrant an overhaul of the River Plan, and not smaller revisions." (Individual, Comment #129-9)

"The park service is inappropriately narrowing the scope of scoping and so I urge the public to -- actually, scoping is supposed to be bringing in ideas and broad and focused, of course, on the plan and what we need for the river plan. So I urge the public to go broad and not narrow and the park service to broaden their viewpoint. In the planning process, I urge that the park service focus on making it outstandingly remarkable values based -- and it's easy to get lost in this very big and complicated planning process and then focus on what we're doing, which is mandated by the wonderful Wild Scenic River Act that we're really lucky to have, which is really going to protect a few rivers in this

country, Merced being one of them, which I bet everybody here really loves and knows well." (Individual, Comment #93-31)

Response: Concern #13 was assigned a screening code of 2.0 *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The scope of the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is based on direction from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which directed the park to revise the Merced River Plan to address user capacity and the corridor boundaries in El Portal. The Merced River Plan's management elements work synergistically to protect and enhance river values, and to the extent appropriate, the National Park Service is re-examining other elements of the plan. For example, with the development of revised boundaries in El Portal, the planning team gathered additional data on the location of Outstandingly Remarkable Values in El Portal. As a result of this additional site-specific analysis concerning Outstandingly Remarkable Values, the National Park Service determined that it would be appropriate to re-examine both the width of the river corridor boundary in El Portal and the zoning that would apply within that boundary. This re-examination had a demonstrable effect on the boundary and the zoning elements of the plan in El Portal. The boundaries and zoning presented in the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS are very different from the proposals in the Merced River Plan/FEIS. For all other river segments, the National Park Service evaluated whether revisions to the user capacity element of the plan required changes to other plan elements. The National Park Service determined that the user capacity program, which includes a fully developed VERP process, did not require changes to other plan elements. The user capacity methods serve as an overlay to the management elements, working in concert with the other elements to protect river values. Upon investigating the various user capacity methods for this planning effort, the National Park Service decided that it was appropriate to retain the VERP framework and, it was further determined that the other management elements themselves did not warrant further modification in this Revised Merced River Plan.

Relationship to Other Park Plans/Planning

#12 Public Concern: The National Park Service should discontinue projects proposed in Yosemite Valley and should reevaluate the Yosemite Valley Plan implementation plans after the Merced River Plan has been revised.

"As a result of FoYV/MERGS' 4 year work to get a truly protective Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) for the Merced Wild and Scenic River as required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the court ordered the Merced River Plan to be redone or revised. Thus the National Park Service has opened the Merced River Plan for revision; projects in the Yosemite Valley Plan, which tier from the illegal and unprotective River Plan, need to be revisited based on a valid CMP for the Merced River." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-1)

"VALLEY PLAN PROJECTS already have been planned by the NPS based on a River Plan determined by the court to be invalid. Those projects include a myriad of interrelated plans and projects in the Yosemite Valley Plan. These plans and projects and the Yosemite Valley Plan, including plans and projects throughout the Wild and Scenic River corridor, need to be revisited and based on a valid/protective revised CMP/SEIS." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-22)

"...the adopted Yosemite Valley Plan depended on there being a valid CMP. Since the CMP is invalid all projects contained in the Yosemite Valley Plan, as well as any other project planned for Yosemite Valley or the El Portal area, must not only be suspended until completion of a new CMP, but the public should have been informed that all projects are once again subject to public review and comment. Additionally, all the projects contained in the YVP or otherwise currently being planned may have to be changed or eliminated once a valid CMP is in place." (Individual, Comment #120-2).

"The MRP Revision must address these problems [protecting resources] since the Valley Plan does not. The Valley Plan will then need to be revised to make it consistent with a legal MRP." (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-22)

"If changes are required in the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan, changes may also be needed in the Yosemite Valley Plan for consistency between management documents." (County Agency, Sonora, CA, Comment #37-3)

Response: Concern #12 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern*. The comments above address issues relative

to the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, which is outside the scope of this planning effort. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic document that addresses management policy within the river corridor. All planning efforts and project implementation that occurs in the river corridor would need to comply with the Merced River Plan, as amended and the National Park Service would reexamine existing plans as appropriate.

General Management Plan

#25 Public Concern: The National Park Service should assign user capacities that are consistent with the 1980 General Management Plan.

"To minimally protect the Merced River and its Outstandingly Remarkable Values, the NPS first must immediately adopt and enforce the visitation/use goals set forth for Yosemite Valley in Yosemite's 1980 General Management Plan." (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-26)

"I suggest adopting the GMP capacities for the various segments of the river. These capacities were in place when the river was designated and in my opinion the ORVs have not suffered under these limits. In fact, there have been substantial improvements in the condition of meadows and forested areas in the Valley and streambanks in the Valley campground areas." (Individual, Comment #52-7)

"Please adhere to the "1980 General Management Plan". 1968 had 1005 camp sites in the Valley. 2004 had 379. The new plan has 500 +. It reduces Valley campsites by 50%." (Individual, Los Angeles, CA, Comment #84-1)

Response: Concern #25 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the user capacity numbers adopted in the General Management Plan and evaluate how some alternatives would amend these numbers.

Concession Services Plan

#28 Public Concern: The National Park Service should amend the Concession Service Plan and General Management Plan after the Revised Merced River Plan is complete.

"The CSP must be revised and concessionaire activities must adhere to meeting the WSRA protections for the Merced River, and the South Fork of the Merced. Specifically, the number of hotel units and concession eating areas may need to be reduced." (Individual, Comment #129-24)

"AMEND CONCESSION SERVICES PLAN: The Concession Services Plan (CSP) was put into place 5 years after the Merced was designated a Wild and Scenic River. However, at that time, 1992, there was no valid legally mandated Comprehensive Plan for the Merced River. Therefore, the Concession Service Plan, along with the General Management Plan which it amended, needs to be changed to specifically ensure protection and enhancement of the ORVs of the Merced River." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-31)

Response: Concern #28 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic document that addresses management policy within the river corridor. All planning efforts and project implementation that occurs in the river corridor will need to comply with the Revised Merced River Plan, including any projects proposed to implement the *Concession Services Plan*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS also addresses amendments to the *General Management Plan* to protect and enhance the Merced River's Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

#48 Public Concern: The National Park Service should recognize that decisions on user capacity and boundaries cannot be isolated from other elements of the Merced River Plan.

"I think it's really important to realize this and to, you know, do the revision in such a way that really is true to the Wild Scenic Rivers Act, goal and mandate of protection and enhancement of the ORVs, the outstandingly remarkable values of the river. The park service's determination and user capacity and boundaries in EI Portal cannot be made in isolation and then simply inserted to the old Merced River plan. Rather, decisions about

boundaries must be integrated." (Individual, Comment #89-5)

"The National Park Service's (NPS) determination on user capacity and boundaries in El Portal cannot be made in isolation and then simply inserted into the old Merced River Plan. Rather, decisions about capacity and boundaries must be integrated into a new or revised CMP and considered in combination with other management elements, which may need to be revised, or revisited to meet the Park Service's duty to protect and enhance ORVs. For example, the amount of use an area can sustain is linked to how the resource is to be used." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-5)

"Each of the following elements: the plan's management zoning program, the Outstandingly Remarkable Values, the River Protection Overlay, classifications and boundaries for all segments of the river will affect how NPS determines which data is collected, how it is collected, and to what degree the river will be restored and protected. NPS cannot separate these issues from user capacity. They are inextricably linked, and dependent each upon the other." (Individual, Comment #129-10)

Response: Concern #48 was assigned a screening code of 2.0 *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The scope of the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is based on direction from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which directed the park to revise the Merced River Plan to address user capacity and the corridor boundaries in El Portal. The Merced River Plan's management elements work synergistically to protect and enhance river values, and to the extent appropriate, the National Park Service is re-examining other elements of the plan. For example, with the development of revised boundaries in El Portal, the planning team gathered additional data on the location of Outstandingly Remarkable Values in El Portal. As a result of this additional site-specific analysis concerning Outstandingly Remarkable Values, the National Park Service determined that it would be appropriate to re-examine both the width of the river corridor boundary in El Portal and the zoning that would apply within that boundary. This re-examination had a demonstrable effect on the boundary and the zoning elements of the plan in El Portal. The boundaries and zoning presented in the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS are very different from the proposals in the Merced River Plan/FEIS. For all other river segments, the National Park Service evaluated whether revisions to the user capacity element of the plan required changes to other plan elements. The National Park Service determined that the user capacity program, which includes a fully developed VERP process, did not require changes to other plan elements. The user capacity methods serve as an overlay to the management elements, working in concert with the other elements to protect river values. Upon investigating the various user capacity methods for this planning effort, the National Park Service decided that it was appropriate to retain the VERP framework and, it was further determined that the other management elements themselves did not warrant further modification in this Revised Merced River Plan.

Americans with Disabilities Act

#7 Public Concern: The National Park Service should bring facilities into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"How would Disabled Individuals be Able to Access the Park - Not on a Crowded Bus and with a lack of necessary special equipment..." (Individual, Comment #116-3)

"All restrooms in campgrounds are in violation of A.D.A. No ramps, insufficient ingress & egress, no ramps to access outside water supply! No A.D.A. campsites." (Individual, Santa Monica, CA, Comment #20-9)

Response: Concern #7 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic plan that guides park policy on management of areas within the river corridor. Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is addressed at the site-specific planning and design level.

Consultation and Coordination

#14 Public Concern: The National Park Service should involve all stakeholders, including Gateway communities and user groups, in scoping, planning, decision making and monitoring.

"Here we are again, only different. This time I am hopeful. Hopeful that the comments made in this hearing will not disappear into a black hole in Idaho never to be seen again. Hopeful that the commitment to partnership made by this administration will prevail. That the Gateway communities, campers, hikers, climbers and groups like Merge and friends of Yosemite Valley who are truly concerned about the future of the Merced River and Yosemite Valley will have an active role in the developing of the revised Merced River plan." (Individual, Comment #93-3)

"My comments are going to center on process. Many comments have already been put on the public records by others documenting that the National Park Service has violated the spirit and the legal requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Organic Act. Therefore, my comments will focus on the need to change the process. Unless the process institutionalizes integrity and all stakeholders have a role in coping, planning, decision making and monitoring, it will fall short of developing a plan that will protect the Merced River and Yosemite." (Individual, Comment # 93-35)

"DIRECTIVE ORDER 75-A(11/14/02 TO 11/14/07), Civic Engagement and Public Involvement. In light of the improper removal of the Upper and Lower Campgrounds, as Co-Founder of the Yosemite Campers Coalition I respectfully request to actively participate in the planning and decision-making processes that this Directive Order mandates. The camping community as well as other stakeholders have a right to be involved in the planning and decision-making process as well as implementing and monitoring the final outcome. The camping experience has been part of Yosemite since the first visitors arrived. This most natural way of living in and with nature must be preserved for future families. Yosemite must be respected and the planning process needs to consider all issues, all sides." (Individual, La Habra, CA, Comment #124-6)

"My primary concern during this scoping process is that the National Park Service take this opportunity at Yosemite to strengthen their resolve to develop effective partnerships and to continue the work of Superintendent Tollefson to that end by bringing stakeholders to the table as a part of this planning process. This will certainly set the standard for more sincere involvement, greater awareness, a stronger call to action, and increased stewardship for everyone who loves our National Parks." (Individual, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #133-3)

Response: Concern #14 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The National Park Service is including stakeholder groups in the scoping, planning, decision making, and monitoring processes associated with the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS.

Public Involvement

#3 Public Concern: The National Park Service should extend the public scoping period and better publicize the comment period and public meetings.

"Extend the public comment period to Dec. 15th '04 It is an insult to the National Park Service, the public, and Yosemite to have written comments due a mere eleven days after public hearings began August 16th. Also, the National Park Service should run Public Service Announcements (P.S.A.'s) on the Radio, alerting the public to the Park Service's seeking comments on the Merced River Plan." (Individual,

"We feel that the 30-day scoping period is too short for interested parties to have time to adequately prepare a comprehensive response to the key issue of "user capacities" and the companion issue of drawing proper boundaries around the Merced River corridor. We would ask that the National Park Service extend scoping for an additional 30 days." (County Agency, Sonora, CA, Comment #26-1)

"I appreciate the extension of the comment period. However, in the future, please provide more advanced notice regarding requests for public input and public meeting notices. I did not receive the original notice, dated August 5, until August 9. The public meetings were one week later." (Individual, Comment #106-1)

Response: Concern #3 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the*

scope of the project. The National Park Service extended the public scoping period and will take steps to better publicize public future meetings regarding this planning process.

#8 Public Concern: The National Park Service should hold meetings on the Merced River Plan in southern California.

"Why don't you have a hearing in southern California? Why are you not down there? San Diego is still part of California. Los Angeles is still part of California. The greatest visitor you have in the park are western visitors." (Individual, Comment #93-24)

Response: Concern #8 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project.* During the official public review period, the National Park Service will hold a meeting on the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS in Southern California.

#33 Public Concern: The National Park Service should make all comments received during the public scoping period available for public review.

"ALL SCOPING COMMENTS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC by OCT 10, 04. Put out a CD containing all the public scoping comments as written (not excerpts) so the public can know what others are concerned about and what ideas people put forward. We want this to be a public dialogue not a one-way street. Post the availability of this CD on the NPS Yosemite Planning web site." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-36)

"In that light, I'm really interested in what other members of the public have to say and I would really urge the park service to publish the comments as soon after the scoping period -- the scoping comments that -- you can put it on CD or whatever, up on the website. Probably CD. So all of us can see what everybody else said. I think that's really critical and other members of the public who aren't directly participating." (Individual, Comment #93-30)

Response: Concern #33 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project.* The National Park Service has made public comments received during public scoping available on the park web site. This scoping report will also be made available to the public and will be posted to www.nps.gov/yose/planning.

#11 Public Concern: The National Park Service should allow the public to comment on the reduction of campgrounds in Yosemite Valley.

"There was no opportunity for the public to comment on that removal of those 40 percent of the campgrounds in Yosemite Valley. That needs to be opened up for public comment in the draft valley plan." (Individual, Comment #93-33)

Response: Concern #11 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project.* The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic document that addresses user capacity throughout the river corridor, including Yosemite Valley. Plan alternatives address user capacity, including levels of camping in various segments of the river corridor.

Alternatives

Range of Alternatives

#30 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should include and evaluate a full range of alternatives for protecting the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

"A FULL RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES must be presented to the public which REVISE the River Plan IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE ORDER FROM THE COURT to PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE MERCED RIVER'S OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES with user capacity based on that mandated protection and with the boundaries of the El Portal Administrative District drawn to protect ORVs not merely drawn proforma,

or drawn to allow predetermined developments, such as "Abbieville". We ask that these all be viable protective alternatives so the public has the opportunity to consider various valid options." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-35)

"As alternatives are developed in the new Merced River Plan, we hope that the Park will present choices with respect to the quantity and mix of recreation the land can sustain." (Individual, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #83-16)

"More wild river; less development. An alternative to keep it wild. Not a perfunctory alternative...a real alternative, with full and rigorous analysis. Be creative." (Individual, Live Oak, CA, Comment #101-1)

Response: Concern #30 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS evaluates a range of user capacity alternatives and El Portal boundary alternatives that protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the river.

Resources Generally

Conflicts between Resources

#41 Public Concern: The National Park Service should prioritize resource protection over visitor experience by minimizing development in undisturbed areas, restoring disturbed areas, and removing infrastructure wherever possible.

"In preparing the new revised plan, even though both are important, emphasize resource protection over visitor experience." (Individual, El Dorado Hills, CA, Comment #79-6)

"Avoid developing any undeveloped or restored areas for any purpose. If new development is required site it in already impacted areas. This should be a fundamental tenant in developing a new plan. In the new plan propose restoring areas and removing infrastructure wherever possible." (Individual, El Dorado Hills, CA, Comment #79-9)

"Generally, I would like to see a Merced River Plan (and all Yosemite planning documents) that focuses on preserving/restoring ecological values to the park and promotes/inspires minimal impact use of the Park. To me, this means that demolition/construction projects -- especially ones that REQUIRE the CLEAR CUTTING OF TREES - be avoided at all times. This project type serves to benefit only the commercial aspects of the park - with no benefit to the environment whatsoever. In fact, these types of projects offer most users no added connection to the natural environment and gives our national treasure a plastic feel." (Individual, Comment #106-3)

"Please consider reducing the need for new construction in Yosemite Valley. It is not necessary to build up the valley with more services and concessions. By avoiding this build up, the need for new buildings in Yosemite is no longer there. This is one of America's most precious national parks and new concrete and asphalt being placed in the ground is not contributing to anyone's experience of the natural beauty found here. The valley is already overcrowded in the summer months." (Individual, Comment #107-1)

Response: Concern #41 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. Central to the National Park Service mission is the protection of natural and cultural resources, as well as the enjoyment and education of visitors. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS includes a range of user capacity alternatives and El Portal boundary alternatives that address resource protection and visitor experience and the balance between them.

Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)

#26 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address using a method other than Visitor Experience and Resource Protection so that a numerical carrying capacity for the corridor can be established.

"The issues with park closures and overcrowding do require long-term planning that may be helped by a less

subjective VERP approach: overall, such gridlock and closure pressures and decisions are real-time in nature, and due to their infrequent occurrence, can be better managed by a simpler, more implementable visitor monitoring system. We recommend that you address the core question of visitor numbers by facility, area, or amenity, and stick to how they will be counted, and how the Park will optimize visitor distribution in order to avoid traffic deadlock and park closure. This way, we the public can understand your visitor experience intentions better and support your conclusions. We cannot support VERP at this time, or its presentation as a solution to the visitor capacity management need. It is at best a research tool, used to define more complex measures with derivatives to be measured in real-time. The real-time measures were concerned about are missing and should be provided."

"The Merced River Plan requires the process to recognize user capacity of the river corridor. I believe the VERP approach fails to acknowledge actual numbers of people accessible to the river at any particular time (i.e. hours, days, week etc)" (Individual, Mariposa, CA, Comment #131-1)

"Since VERP never gets to a number it is inappropriate to use it as a means of addressing carrying capacity, which in my opinion is a number. VERP should be used as a tool to continually monitor impacts to ORVs." (Individual, Comment #52-8)

Response: Concern #26 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. Prior to considering any specific user capacity alternatives, the planning team investigated and considered a number of other user capacity methods used for other land management agencies. Among those considered were the following: Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), Visitor Impact Monitoring System (VIMS), and Visitor Access Management Program (VAMP). Upon evaluating these various methods, the team chose to move forward with the National Park Service's preferred method: the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses a range of user capacity alternatives in addition to VERP, including alternatives that propose numerical quotas to manage user capacity.

#50 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should continue to develop and refine Visitor Experience and Resource Protection as a method for determining user capacity.

"Overall the National Parks Conservation Association supports the work the National Park Service is doing on the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) Framework as part of the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Merced River Plan). We believe this plan is a major step forward in protecting both the Merced River and the Valley. We also understand there are challenges and trade-offs that lie ahead in implementing the Yosemite Valley Plan. However, we are convinced that the plan will provide a quality experience for future visitors while protecting the natural and cultural resources -- the hydrology of the Merced River, the geology of the Valley's formations, the ecology of the region, the archeology and all that is unique to Yosemite." (Conservation Organization, Oakland, CA, Comment #113-3)

"I'd like to strongly recommend the VERP process being continued and refined to allow for the court's objection to its lack of specificity." (Individual, Comment #93-1)

"Basically I think that the (VERP) Visitor Experience and Resources Protection Program, the National Park Service's formally accepted approach to user capacity is sufficient for your task." (Individual, Berkeley, CA, Comment #31-1)

Response: Concern #50 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. Prior to considering any specific user capacity alternatives, the planning team investigated and considered a number of other user capacity methods used for other land management agencies. Among those considered were the following: Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), Visitor Impact Monitoring System (VIMS), and Visitor Access Management Program (VAMP). Upon evaluating these various methods, the team chose to move forward with the National Park Service's preferred method: the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the use of VERP to manage user capacity.

Cumulative Effects Analysis

#37 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address incremental degradation over time as part of the cumulative impacts analysis.

"There is a process best defined as "incremental degradation". New development regarded as an improvement may take place, which when considered by itself, does not represent a large impact on the general environment. But it sets the stage for further development that will inevitably follow. The effect is cumulative over time, and eventually the resource is damaged beyond repair. One would hope that this does not happen." (Individual, Los Angeles, CA, Comment #18-4)

"We are concerned that previous National Park Service environmental documents have not adequately addressed the increased cumulative impacts to native sites and traditional use areas. The Yosemite Valley itself is a huge cultural landscape that has been perpetuated by thousands of years of ecological involvement by Yosemite early people. This landscape is rapidly disappearing due to park mismanagement." (Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #92-1)

"There have been multiple cumulative impacts on ORVs from multiple recent Yosemite National Park projects and planned additional projects with additional cumulative impacts. Since hardly any impact from any project that NPS has designed and signed off on for Yosemite has any impacts determined other than, "No Significant Impact"; How many, "No Significant Impacts" make up a cumulative impact? We ask NPS to answer this question specifically for all and every part of the revised CMP." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-44)

Response: Concern #37 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the cumulative effects of the alternatives being evaluated. A description of these cumulative actions is presented as an appendix in the draft and final plans.

Water Resources

Hydrology and Floodplains

#20 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address natural hydrologic processes, such as floods, and the direct and cumulative impacts of National Park Service actions on these processes and the watershed as a whole.

"The EIS needs to delineate the 100 year floodplain in map form for all portions of the Merced River (Main Stem or South Fork). This needs to be done on a map with contour intervals of no more than five (5) feet. Without this datum the public can not make valid statements about what is or is not within the 100 year floodplain. Planning uses of the 100 year floodplain would include using the maps to see what structures would be underwater during a 100 year flood. This map needs to be shown in detail in the new EIS and considered in planning for natural processes of the Merced River." (Individual, Comment #60-2)

"The campaign to halt lateral erosion and increase drainage and provide better access routes have nearly destroyed the natural conditions which existed just a hundred years ago." Eagan recommends that records of road closures due to flooding or sedimentation be kept and correlated to precipitation and gauge height readings at Happy Isles and Pohono Bridge. He also concludes that roughness coefficients for overbank areas (floodplains) of Yosemite Valley have greatly increased since the floods of the 1950's. The increased roughness is responsible for slower moving flood water and deeper flood depths (post 50's floods) for a similar volume flood (see EIS page III-34 to 37). This means that even smaller flood volumes in the future will have greater "flooding capacity" in Yosemite Valley in the future. None of this has been addressed in the EIS." (Individual, Comment #60-12)

"Yosemite Valley is a watershed. The Merced River is the core of that watershed and is affected by the numerous projects and impacts from EVERY tributary (including Yosemite Falls/Yosemite Creek) in the watershed. Nationwide, it well known that watersheds need to be looked at holistically and not in pieces, which is how Yosemite has reviewed each project. This is wrong and goes against established watershed science, preservation and

restoration principles, and scientifically-established best practices." (Individual, Comment #106-5)

Response: Concern #20 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the direct and cumulative effects of the alternatives on water resources.

Water Quality

#49 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address water quality monitoring and the impact of National Park Service actions on water quality.

"NPS must clarify water quality standards and develop a peer-reviewed monitoring plan. The existing standard is unlikely to protect water quality. The existing standard also is unlikely to protect aquatic organisms.... "safe" levels of fecal coliform only relate to human health, and will not necessarily protect other organisms (e.g., aquatic invertebrates)." (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-15)

"Water chemistry and water quality monitoring should include the following: the standard water chemistry parameters (Ca, Mg, Na, K, HCO₃, SO₄, Cl, NO₃, Si, pH, TDS, turbidity), a suite of a minimum of ten (10) heavy metals including mercury (Hg), a suite of biologic parameters including at a minimum Giardia, coliform and other bacterias, viruses, and E. coli. A suite of twenty (20) to thirty (30) pesticides, herbicides, EPA priority pollutants, and anthropogenic aerosols (VOC, NO_x) that could be found within the Merced watershed due to auto traffic (EIS page III-123), housing and operational structures, gardening within the park, sewage pollution, etc." (Individual, Comment #60-6)

"The importance of the trout fishery requires the Park planners to monitor the condition of the riparian areas, water quality, and address plans for enhancement to this resource. As you can see from our previous comments we were one of the groups that appreciated the hard work that the Park had accomplished by its writing. We do believe that some restrictions on use are called for to protect this watershed." (Recreational Organization, Coarsegold, CA, Comment #29-2)

Response: Concern #49 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. Water quality was one of the indicators chosen for monitoring under the park's VERP program. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the direct and cumulative effects of the alternatives on water quality.

Management Direction

#39 Public Concern: The National Park Service should establish a hydrologic/geomorphic monitoring plan for the river.

"The EIS research and monitoring components should include hydrologic/geomorphic monitoring as one of the stated goals of the EIS is to: Protect and restore natural hydrological and geomorphic processes. To achieve the stated goals it seems reasonable to establish some monitoring plan for the river. Monitoring should consist of precipitation and its distribution; flow volumes and durations; current velocities and durations; erosion and deposition rates; sediment movement, sediment volumes, sizes and durations; water chemistry and water quality. Stream reaches and positions that need to be monitored include: the South Fork above and below Wawona and two (2) miles west of Chiquito Pass; the Main Stem of the Merced River at El Portal, Pohono Bridge, Happy Isles, and just below Merced Lake; Tenaya Creek just above Mirror Lake and just below Tenaya Lake; Yosemite Creek above Yosemite Falls and just above the Tioga Road; Bridalveil Creek below the Glacier Point Road and one (1) mile below Ostrander Lake; Illilouette Creek southwest of Mt. Starr King; and Cascade Creek just before the confluence with the Merced River." (Individual, Comment #60-3)

Response: Concern #39 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses monitoring needs for ensuring protection of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Cultural Resources

Management Actions

#40 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address the protection of cultural resources and the cultural Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

"Another area of concern is the Park's convoluted definition of what constitutes the Cultural ORV, a definition so hollow that it results in a lack of protection and an excuse to degrade. The WSRA mandates that 'Archaeologic' and 'Historic' are primary emphasis elements, while the Main Stem of the Merced River designates 'Cultural' as an ORV. Yet project after project (e.g., Lower Yosemite Fall EA, Curry EA, Utility EA, Yosemite Lodge EA, etc.) trumps the cultural ORV in favor of something else. There are no clear goals, objectives, or management prescriptions to clearly. (Individual, Comment# 83-7).

"Cited below are the impacts and affects on our traditional and continued use by associated tribes who utilize the Yosemite Valley for gathering acorn, materials, medicines, trading, and traditional food preparation. Ceremonies were held for the changing of seasons and are still practiced today. All these vital issues affect our right to practice our religion and ceremonies as we have actively done for thousands of years. Overall, the quality of these traditional uses are being compromised daily by the lack of water and the impact of visitors. Tribes have attached names and stories to special geologic and other features on the Merced River corridor. Many of these are sacred or spiritual and should not be mitigated. Once these are gone they are gone forever." (Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #92-4)

"NPS should stop all activities that contribute to the disturbance and degradation of archeological sites through their construction projects)." (Individual, Comment #129-25)

Response: Concern #40 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. Cultural river values will be the subject of additional studies and data gathering in preparation for reassessing the river boundary in the El Portal segment. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the protection of cultural resources and cultural Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Special Land Use Designations

Management Direction

#31 Public Concern: The National Park Service should prohibit any new development in the river corridor to prevent further damage.

"Our hope is a very general one: We hope that this important, scenic natural treasure will receive the highest protection possible so that the river and surrounding area will, indeed, be wild and free--free from the intrusion of human development as much as possible:" (Individual, Long Beach, CA, Comment #100-1)

"Other than the Indian cultural center, there should be no new development in the valley." (Individual, Comment #78-3)

"Any further development in the corridor should be indefinitely prohibited. This includes construction of new facilities, parking lots, campgrounds, transportation terminals, bridges, widening or relocation of roads, and new utilities. If elements of the existing infrastructure become worn out or unusable, they can be repaired or replaced in the form that currently exists." (Individual, Los Angeles, CA, Comment #18-2)

Response: Concern #31 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern*. Decisions regarding specific new development are presented in implementation plans, such as the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. The Merced River Plan is a programmatic level document that sets forth the management direction for activities and land uses in the Merced

River corridor. The goal of the Merced River Plan is to *guide* future decisions relating to development and use within the river corridor to ensure that the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values are protected and enhanced. This goal is carried forward in the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS. Future decisions regarding proposed development within the Merced River corridor must be consistent with the management direction set forth in the Merced River Plan, as amended.

#43 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address existing agreements in place with businesses, communities, and government agencies.

"The plan should address any agreements that are in place for the management of recreational use on the river. BLM manages rafting and has a register at the Red Bud Launch Site. The State Dept. of Fish and Game stocks the river with fish and has special regulations on fishing in the El Portal area." (Individual, Comment #52-5)

"The plan should address agreements with PG&E, SBC and El Portal Cable TV. All have facilities and rights of way within the river corridor." (Individual, Comment #52-4)

Response: Concern #43 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses existing agreements with these entities.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

#15 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address Outstandingly Remarkable Values better by identifying their locations, what influences them, and how they will be protected.

"Determination of user capacity must be built around specific defined conditions of each of the River's values as a baseline beyond which no value can be allowed to be degraded, and must be protected and enhanced. The River plan should show specifically for each river value how, where, and by what means each value (ORV) will be protected and enhanced." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-11)

"The Merced River is designated Wild and Scenic based on specific outstanding values. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires protection and enhancement of these identified "outstandingly remarkable values" (ORVs) of the Merced River. It does not allow for uses which degrade the ORVs. Start the planning process with identifying where each ORV occurs, what it is influenced by, what it affects, and build the plan(s) from that essential base." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #128-1)

"The Merced River Plan must be based on protecting and enhancing the ORVs of the Merced River. Not only Protect, but Enhance! If this plan once again fails to truly protect the Rivers values, the plan will again be a failure. Please start the planning process by identifying where each of the ORVs occurs-not merely where animal nests, but its range and the plants, animals, river processes and so on upon which it relies and with which it interacts." (Individual, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #94-1)

Response: Concern #15 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The National Park Service has conducted additional studies to locate and evaluate the Outstandingly Remarkable Values within the El Portal segment of the river. In addition, each of the alternatives addresses user capacity and El Portal corridor boundaries that include elements designed to protect and enhance Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

#27 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should include additional Outstandingly Remarkable Values to ensure protection of important resources.

"In my opinion, one of the outstandingly remarkable values that needs to be considered is the amazing beauty of the river valley: the hanging gardens of ferns and other plants, the river corridor with blooming redbud, the stark cliffs surrounding green trees and several waterfalls as well as the river course itself all in the El Portal area." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #132-4)

"Air quality should be included in the list of ORV's. The argument in the first instance that it is not specifically river-related is specious." (Individual, Comment #59-3)

"Camping along the Merced River is an "ORV"." (Individual, Santa Monica, CA, Comment #20-17)

"And we support the inclusion of two very important things in the plan. One is the restoration of low impact and affordable campgrounds in the valley. The plan talks about ORVs. I would like to also state camping in the valley can be an outstandingly remarkable experience and I think that's where we really need to be focused." (Individual, Comment #93-16)

Response: Concern #27 was assigned a screening code of 2.0 *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The scope of the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is based on direction from the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which directed the park to revise the Merced River Plan to address user capacity and the corridor boundaries in El Portal. The Merced River Plan's management elements work synergistically to protect and enhance river values, and to the extent appropriate, the National Park Service is re-examining other elements of the plan, such as the Outstandingly Remarkable Values. For example, with the development of revised boundaries in El Portal, the planning team gathered additional data on the Outstandingly Remarkable Values in El Portal. As a result of this additional site-specific analysis concerning Outstandingly Remarkable Values, the National Park Service determined that it would be appropriate to re-examine both the width of the river corridor boundary in El Portal and the zoning that would apply within that boundary. For all other river segments, the National Park Service evaluated whether revisions to the user capacity element of the plan required changes to other plan elements. The National Park Service determined that the user capacity program, which includes a fully developed VERP process, did not require changes to other plan elements. The user capacity methods serve as an overlay to the management elements, working in concert with the other elements to protect river values. Upon investigating the various user capacity methods for this planning effort, the National Park Service decided that it was appropriate to retain the VERP framework and, it was further determined that the other management elements themselves did not warrant further modification in this Revised Merced River Plan.

#29 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address the selection of and protection of Outstandingly Remarkable Values in more detail.

"We urge the NPS to present thorough documentation and justification of ORVs. The often-repeated statement that ORVs may be in conflict appears to be a barrier to providing adequate protection for any of them—are there too many; do they need to be weighted; what are the specific measurable goals and objectives for each ORV that will guarantee their protection within each project and plan. Currently, it appears that the decision as to which ORVs are protected and which are pushed aside using the "net gain" argument is made in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner by the NPS to advance a predetermined agenda; there is no clear and objective methodology that is consistently applied. The issue of ORVs needs to be reexamined." (Individual, Comment # 83-9)

"Recognizing the importance of ORVs, the WSRA Interagency Commission (2002) provided another management directive: "Thoroughly define the ORVs to guide future management actions and to serve as the baseline for monitoring," Though the invalid Merced River Plan made a feeble attempt to define ORVs, it fell far short in justifying selection, denoting goals for protection, and specifying how management prescriptions would achieve stated objectives." (Individual, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #83-3)

Response: Concern #29 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The specific criteria for selecting river values were outlined by the Interagency Coordinating Council for Wild and Scenic Rivers. These criteria are described in the 2000 Merced River Plan and will be included in the Revised Merced River Plan. Although the Revised Merced River Plan does not reconsider the determination of Outstandingly Remarkable Values from the 2000 Merced River Plan, additional fieldwork was conducted in El Portal to further locate river values in that segment and to develop boundary alternatives that address their protection. Protection of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values throughout the corridor was also addressed in this planning effort as part of development of the user capacity alternatives.

#32 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address widening the river corridor in the El Portal area.

"Crane Creek and Moss Creek: These should be within the Wild and Scenic River Boundaries. They are both major tributaries to the Merced River. Both deserve an overlay protection. Crane Creek in El Portal and Foresta has developed areas, but should have new limitations. The corner of Moss Creek in the Rancheria section of the El Portal Administrative site, though a small section, should have recognition as being under NPS care taking."

(Individual, Comment #121-8)

"I highly suggest the boundaries be expanded to the maximum available area under the Wild and Scenic Rivers act." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #132-3)

"Corridor of protection needs to be wider-specifically in El Portal area" (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #132-1)

"The El Portal Area Wild and Scenic River Corridor is more important biologically than understood years ago. In addition, some River values still remain in El Portal which have been degraded or lost elsewhere along the River. These need to be protected, and many still need to be identified. e.g., there is National Park land that is probably a pristine riverine area on the boarder of the Yosemite View Lodge, it is certainly currently undisturbed and contains a wetland area (we explored the area). (This area was shockingly almost traded off by the National Park Service in the last few years. Who knows what wildlife use this area?)" (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-29)

"I can certainly see the wisdom in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act recommending a ¼ mile protection on each side of the river, 1/8 mile of protection for all tributaries. Nearly all of Yosemite Valley and El Portal would be protected under these guidelines, as they should be." (Individual, Pahoa, HI, Comment #91-8)

Response: Concern #32 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS evaluates river corridor boundary alternatives that widen the river corridor in the El Portal segment.

#24 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should recognize and include the cultural resources in El Portal when determining the river corridor boundaries.

"Cultural Outstandingly Remarkable Values as a guiding principle for determining the river corridor boundary in El Portal must also recognize and include the 100 year modern history community of El Portal. From its inception the community has played an important role in the history of Yosemite National Park, as it has evolved from a logging and mining community, to a transportation gateway for the Yosemite Valley Railroad, to a residential community supporting the operation of the national park." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment # 122-4)

Response: Concern #24 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. Cultural river values were the subject of additional studies and data gathering in preparation for reassessing the river boundary in the El Portal segment. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the protection of cultural resources and cultural Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

#51 Public Concern: The National Park Service should not include Yosemite Grant lands in the river corridor.

"It is my understanding that except for El Portal, the river corridor boundaries are not going to be changed with this revised CMP. However, I suggest that you consider changing the boundaries to exclude Yosemite Grant lands from the MRP river corridor. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act does not apply to private lands and the conditions which were imposed on the Yosemite Grant lands are similar to rights acquired by ownership. The public has a right to use these lands for resort and recreation." (Individual, Wawona, CA, Comment #90-3)

Response: Concern #51 was assigned a screening code of 1.2, *the concern defines an issue that has already been decided by law, policy or an approved plan*. This issue addresses lands within Yosemite Valley. Park management has determined that it is appropriate for a portion of the Yosemite Valley area to be included within the boundaries of the river corridor.

#52 Public Concern: The National Park Service should eliminate the management zoning tool.

"The "Zoning" management tool needs to be thrown out. It is not based on the River's ORVs and it is not protective of the ORVs. If the revised River Plan still contains the zoning management element, it will not be based on the ORVs and the plan will once again not be a protective plan. The Merced River, and its ORVs, is a national treasure, not a grid on a planning use map for a city. The Merced River Plan should not be used (again) as a tool to allow development plans." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-9)

Response: Concern #52 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The National Park Service adopted management zoning within the river corridor in the Merced River Plan in 2000. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS evaluated management zoning as it relates to boundary alternatives in the El Portal segment and as it relates to user capacity throughout the river corridor.

#53 Public Concern: The National Park Service should reduce use levels to reduce adverse effects on visitors and resources.

"Yosemite Valley Is Suffering A Slow Death Due To Overcrowding And Yosemite's Basic Planning Document For Addressing User Capacity Will Not Remedy This Situation. The size and extraneous information in the User Capacity document could be construed as a smokescreen to distract people from the fact that natural resources, and Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Merced Wild and Scenic River within Yosemite National Park (particularly Yosemite Valley) have been, and are continuing to be, degraded from overuse by humans. Yosemite Valley is suffering a slow ecological death due to too much use. The visitor's experience in Yosemite Valley on almost any summer day is characterized by litter, exhaust fumes, noise, pavement, too many vehicles, overcrowding, dirty facilities, long lines for food service, and too few opportunities to interact with rangers." (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-3)

"We rarely spend time in the Valley because of the crowds. I have never stayed at the Ahwahnee or the Yosemite Lodge. We did require the Medical Clinic once and were happy that it was located in the Valley. We have attended Catholic Church services at the Wawona School or in the Valley on a number of occasions." (Individual, Comment #63-3)

"Yosemite - my home away from home! Since being introduced to the park for the first time 4 years ago, we have visited 2 - 3 times a year. We have seen the park with its first snowfall and the wondrous waterfalls in early spring. Although every time we visit is a great experience, my favorite time is in August each year when I celebrate my birthday on the many breathtaking adventures Yosemite has to offer. About 2 weeks ago on our annual trip, the day we were heading out, we decided to take a short hike around Pothole Dome and along side the river - the cascades were unbelievable and they seemed to go on forever - note - next year take this hike again with more time available to truly enjoy. We are hikers and enjoy the peaceful serenity of the park outside the Valley. I have visited the Valley but really do not enjoy the over populated tourism." (Individual, Comment # 70-1)

"Some restraints must be made as to how many people can be there at any given time. No one wants to try to share peace and tranquility with thousands of other people. Everyone needs to have a turn, and to appreciate it when their turn comes." (Individual, Winnetka, CA, Comment # 35-2)

"If anything, please take steps to reduce crowding, not promote it. Refer to Zion or Joshua Tree for good examples." (Individual, Comment # 107-2)

"Tour busses spew diesel. The impact on air quality would suffer. With added pollution hanging within the valley floor also one could expect impacts to plant life as well as wildlife. Wildlife would suffer considerably with the influx of countless visitors because after all it is unnecessary development and human encroachment that will undoubtedly affect the habitat of this wildlife as well as well being of such wildlife. I see no plans for protection either." (Individual, Fresno, CA, Comment #43-2)

"We're long time Yosemite lovers. It's the Park nearest & dearest to our hearts. We climb, backpack, & camp there with friends & family or by ourselves several times a year. We also raft the Merced below the Park. We recently returned from a trip to Zion National Park. It had been five years since we had been there. The beautiful result of the recent traffic closures & implementation of a reliable bus service was astounding! We were awestruck by the difference in the quality of our experience; the peace & quiet replacing the traffic noise lives on for us weeks after our visit there. Please do the same! Get the cars out of Yosemite!" (Individual, Santa Cruz, CA, Comment #71-1)

Response: Concern #53 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS evaluates use levels and their impacts on Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

#18 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address specific indicators, standards, and guidelines for monitoring the condition of Outstandingly Remarkable Values and make the monitoring information available to the public.

"I'm hoping for transparency in the process. We've had four years we have not had a protected River Plan. I'm here because I still have hope. That's why I'm here. So I would like to see in that transparency process the Park Service put their process -- make their process clear and put the ORV data up on the website so the public can follow it as it's developed." (Individual, Comment #30-5)

"it will be helpful to the public if NPS provided information about the current condition of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the River, the potential impacts from various visitor uses, the impacts of partial and total user capacity that the River could sustain before degradation occurs, what NPS is doing to mitigate potential degradation, and what visitors can do to assist NPS in their efforts to protect and enhance the ORVs. As a member of the public, I would take an active role in monitoring and protecting these public values." (Individual, Comment #129-21)

"We do see some areas where we believe the EIS could be strengthened. One of our major concerns is the lack of standards and guidelines. Each of the alternatives in the plan should include standards and guidelines to give the public and your staff mechanisms to measure your implementation of this analysis. Monitoring is also missing it too plays an important role in meeting quantifiable results, and helping to trigger the process of 'adaptive management' when your results are different from your predictions. Even though we have concerns over other sections of this document, we feel that these are the most important changes we wish to see made." (Recreational Organization, Coarsegold, CA, Comment #29-4)

"We, the public, need to know, and have the right to know, about the condition of each River value so, as a concerned members of the public, we can take an active role in monitoring and protecting these public values. This should be in and a part of the revised MRP." (Non-Governmental (Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-12)

Response: Concern #18 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses specific standards, indicators, and monitoring guidance and will describe how this information will be shared with the public.

Designated Wilderness

#2 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address preservation of the park's wilderness by not allowing development or roads and by setting the carrying capacity in the wilderness segments of the river according to the wilderness goals.

"I would expect that carrying capacity in those segments of the Merced River within Yosemite Wilderness to be controlled by wilderness goals." (Individual, Comment #118-1)

"Please, we need to keep wilderness areas as wilderness so we can hike, see wildlife in its natural state, and find some peace on a polluted, overpopulated, stressful planet. We don't need development or roads or off road vehicles. We need a sanctuary to escape from those things too." (Individual, Comment #88-1)

"Of the 81 miles of river, roughly 50 miles wends its way through Yosemite's wilderness...say from its head waters to the top of Nevada Fall. The ORVs of this stretch of the wilderness are entirely wild and scenic and its utilization can be determined by the number of wilderness permits and camping permits in little Yosemite Valley that are used each year. Once you've filled up those campgrounds and trails, that is an excellent indicator of the point at which everyone's enjoyment will be curtailed and the environment will degrade. That number or calculation then is the carrying capacity for that stretch of the Merced." (Individual, Wawona, CA, Comment #49-3)

Response: Concern #2 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses user capacity in wilderness areas in a manner consistent with wilderness goals.

Visitor Experience, Generally

Visitor Activities

#42 Public Concern: The National Park Service should manage visitor actions that adversely affect other visitors' experience.

"except in the restaurants, eliminate the sale of alcoholic beverages in Yosemite. We can bring our own beverage into the park, we do not need drunken teen-agers in Yosemite Valley shouting over & over at 3am "WHERE'S ELMO? WHERE'S ELMO?" (Individual, Berkeley, CA, Comment #41-2)

"Install "friendly" visible signs enforcing regulations on littering. For example \$500 fine for littering or possibly more." (Individual, Wawona, CA, Comment #85-1)

"...apply a \$250. ticket on the windshield of any car when its alarm sounds in Yosemite. Hearing car alarms while hiking up Yosemite Falls trail defies the beauty of Yosemite. (In confirming reservations, and in brochures promoting Yosemite, the Pack Service can place a notice that a \$250.-fine will be enforced upon cars that sound an alarm while in Yosemite. Motorists who may object to this fine for disturbing the peace can take the bus into Yosemite from Merced, or disconnect their car alarm while in Yosemite" (Individual, Berkeley, CA, Comment #41-3)

Response: Concern #42 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern.* The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic plan that guides park policy on management of areas within the river corridor. Operational issues regarding the activities of specific visitors are addressed by operations and law enforcement staff.

Access

Reservation System

#19 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address the institution of a reservation system for access to Yosemite National Park.

"The NPS Does Not Even Appear To Be Considering Regulation Of Day Use In Yosemite Valley, Which Would Be A First Step In Ensuring Long-Term Preservation Of Merced River ORVs. According to the User Capacity document, the wilderness user capacity program has been extremely well-supported by both park management and wilderness users, and is often held up as an example of science-based and defensible management practices in wilderness management. Why can't the NPS adopt a similar process for non-Wilderness portions of the park, including Yosemite Valley?" (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-23)

"When future visits are planned during some popular summer weekends, reservations need to be made to guarantee entry. Visitors without reservations should be allowed entry when space is available. This development should not be an unrealistic expectation when confronted with ever increasing demands on our National Parks. With current use patterns there are likely only three or four weekends annually when this will even be an issue in Yosemite. A Revised Merced River Plan without addressing this issue isn't going to be worth much." (Individual, El Dorado Hills, CA, Comment #79-5)

"A tried and proven method is to use reservations for the times tourists visit Yosemite. Already, the state has large "reader boards" to alert the public of road conditions, and it will be simple to include notice of availability to park entrance and facilities. More can be added. A radio frequency can help advise travelers, giving phone numbers to make reservations, etc. Hotels do this world-wide. Airlines, trains, buses, and other forms of recreation do this on a regular basis day-in-and-day-out. People, whether from afar or local, will adjust to this method as a normal way to gain access to one of the world's best parks." (Individual, Hanford, CA, Comment #33-3)

"Moderation in footprints is the objective, and this could just as easily be accomplished by setting a restrictive "carrying capacity" for the Merced River area, that would require a day use reservation system, which should also restrict the volume of day use tour bus traffic from my perspective. To put a balance to what the park service could have done - but didn't do, when they tossed out discussions about a much needed, but difficult to get their arms around concept of a "carrying capacity" in the Yosemite Valley Plan, I believe that is perhaps the park's last chance to rethink some of those decisions. Don't worry about how long it will take. Rome wasn't built in a day. Yosemite deserves more consideration in this area. We have an opportunity now to amend some oversights in the past, and this is one of them. A reservation system for day use on summer weekends is a simple and valuable solution. If done right, there would be far less need for ropes. Footprints would be limited to the relatively lower numbers of visitors who have reservations during busy periods, and the park would be ready for the throngs of future generations who will otherwise overwhelm her as the populations grow." (Individual, Truckee, CA, Comment #61-2)

"If anything, please take steps to reduce crowding, not promote it. Refer to Zion or Joshua Tree for good examples." (Individual, Comment # 73-1).

Response: Concern #19 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses various potential management actions for managing user capacity, including use of a reservation system.

#47 Public Concern: The National Park Service should address problems with the existing campsite reservation system.

"One last note: In order to get a full week of camping, many people end up having to move from one site to another in order to link their week vacation together. I think it would be nice if there were a way to weight the reservation system toward families with children who want to camp there for a full week, and give preference to families who have never been to the park to camp before. Camping in Yosemite is therapeutic for families. And if you did redo the campgrounds so that the camping experience were more natural, it would be a wonderful thing for future generations of children. Maybe there is another young John Muir among them." (Individual, Truckee, CA, Comment #61-14)

"It would be very helpful if you would restore some, or all of The River Campsites. If you have ever tried to make a reservation for The Pines Campsites, then you know how frustrating it is to get a campsite on the valley floor. Loosing half the sites in 1997 has made getting a reservation extremely difficult. This year, on January, and February 15th, at 7am Pacific time, my father and I were using the internet, and phone system, trying to make a reservation, and were not able to get through. After trying for 3 hours, we gave up. We need more campsites!" (Individual, Comment # 54-1)

"My use of Yosemite is most enjoyed when I am able to camp there. I realize that there are a limited number of sites available, and even less since the floods a few years ago, but the current system of reservations for a month long block makes it very difficult to get a reservation during the summer months. Try as I may, my early morning efforts to get through on the phone when a month long block opens up, have been unsuccessful for the last two years to get in during my desired month. I don't know the answer to make this easier, but maybe the possibility of more campgrounds could be considered. Another idea would be to not have reservation times open up for a month at a time." (Individual, Comment # 73-1)

Response: Concern #47 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic plan that guides park policy on management of areas within the river corridor. Operational issues regarding specific park systems are not within the scope of this plan.

Recreation

Water Recreational Use

#4 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address impacts of private and concessionaire rafting, as well as other Merced River use by visitors, when determining the carrying capacity for the river corridor.

"The concessionaire rafting (as opposed to families/individuals bringing their own raft) may need to be discontinued due to the high impact of multiple rafts entering the river at the same point and the impact of concession diesel trucks picking up the rafts in places that would otherwise be a quiet experience, such as Sentinel Beach." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-34)

"Planners always think about how many people to allow at once in a given stretch of river. Boaters and probably swimmers will likely regulate themselves due to a general feeling against crowding. Planners can help boaters not to over crowd by the size and number of people working at a place where watercraft are rented. Permits to boat are sometimes used to reduce crowding in whitewater parts of rivers to allow plenty of room to maneuver." (Individual, Comment #118-4).

"The commercial rafting on the river has to have an adverse effect on wild trout in the area, and we know it has an effect on the riverbanks, especially the one that they use for launching. You might even be able to establish a semi-native trout in the area from another source with a lot of work and luck, but that commercial rafting that's going on there would clearly be in direct conflict with that concept. What is a wild river without wild and native fish?" (Individual, Truckee, CA, Comment #61-11)

"Human impact to the unique and beautiful river environment created by the Merced River in Yosemite can be managed to increase the effective user/environmental carrying capacity, inherently monitor and adjust user levels as required, and to allow (currently forbidden) recreational boating use of one of the most scenic easy/moderate recreational river reaches in the world." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #123-1)

Response: Concern #4 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses recreation use levels in the user capacity alternatives.

Visitor Services

Carrying Capacity

#17 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should base user capacity and boundary determinations on complete and precise baseline scientific studies of use levels and resource conditions.

"We support these specific actions that we hold to be essential to quality of the visitor experience, regional economics, or access to Yosemite Valley for citizens of all economic levels: Quantification of the 'visitor experience' based on carrying capacity and scientific application." (Non-Governmental Organization, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #103-2)

"My next greatest concern is that the baseline scientific studies to determine user capacity of the Merced River in Yosemite as directed by the 9th Circuit Court be complete and precise. The example of measuring root exposure of trees adjacent to the river used in the open house presentation does not seem precise or scientific in nature. Erosion by the river itself during high water would render this method inaccurate for user capacity. It seems that inventory of current conditions and health of existing species of indigenous flora and fauna, soils and air would be a start. Let me say that I am not a scientist and refer back to Section II of this paper. All affected parties, including environmental scientists should be a part of this planning process." (Individual, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #133-4)

"Determining user capacity and human impacts ideally should be made based on long term peer review science and efforts should be ongoing to do that. But, common sense and empirical observation of resource degradation should be considered a useful and valuable tool in determining user capacity. Administrators do not have to undertake a five-year peer review study to determine that a thousand river rafts filled to the gunnel with people navigating down the Merced River during peak summer periods (estimate) below Stoneman Bridge are having a negative impact on the health of benthic fauna or the riparian habitat of the river corridor. Empirical observations of negative impacts are a valuable tool in making capacity decisions while supportive scientific studies are completed. It is unreasonable to suggest that years of study are required before decisions limiting or reducing use are made." (Individual, El Dorado Hills, CA, Comment #79-3)

Response: Concern #17 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses user capacity and the information needs for evaluating and addressing capacity and the reassessment of the El Portal Boundary. In February 2004, the park adopted a set of indicators and standards to quantitatively monitor and maintain environmental and social conditions in the Merced River corridor. These prescriptions—coupled with a monitoring program—will give park managers the information and rationale needed to make sound, science-based decisions about the impacts associated with visitor use. In the El Portal segment, additional studies and data gathering efforts were conducted in preparation for reassessing the river boundary in relation to the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values. These studies included a reexamination of recreational, cultural, and biological river values.

#45 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should consider capacity limits of utilities in the determination of user capacity.

"Provide assurances that necessary Utilities Project improvements do not allow for future increases in visitation by stating capacity limits in the Revised Comprehensive Management Plan." (Individual, El Dorado Hills, CA, Comment #79-15)

"Water is the lifeline for all living things! At present time the user capacity has been exceeded. Human consumption of water needs to be limited in order to maintain a balanced ecosystem in the Valley. Groundwater wells are the main source of water in Yosemite Valley and dependent on yearly snowfall. The continued depletion of groundwater affects the quantity and quality of water that also affects the plants, trees, wildlife and aquatic life. The gathering areas are endangered, or are producing a low yield of poor quality materials." (Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment # 92-5)

Response: Concern #45 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses utility capacities related to user capacity in the Merced River corridor.

Management Direction

#1 Public Concern: The National Park Service should improve commercial services offered by concessioners and should build more visitor facilities.

"I believe that an objective analysis would reveal that many visitors (and especially those who are return visitors) find that concessioner food services do not meet their needs [e.g., price, quality, selection and operating hours]. They frequently bring food from home and attempt to find a picnic site in the park. Picnic sites are very limited, and no group picnic facilities are offered. If we are sincere about reaching out to ethnically and socially diverse constituents, I recommend that we look carefully at this issue." (Individual, Yosemite, CA, Comment #80-6)

"It is not clear how larger volumes of visitors and a moderate tolerance for resource degradation fits with "ecological restoration" and why such a designation is environmentally preferable to a well-designed campground—unless the ONLY motivation is closing the road between the Rivers Campground as part of implementing the busing system, all other things not to be considered. And to add insult to injury, the plans are to remove the bathrooms and ultimately, the utility infrastructure from the area; how can a large volume of visitors be directed to an area with no restroom facilities? We've been told by the NPS that restrooms are available at Housekeeping and Curry; show us the young mother with multiple children who is going to walk a child any distance to a bathroom. The Merced River will become the public toilet." (Individual, Oakhurst, CA, Comment # 80-6)

Response: Concern #1 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses visitor facilities and their relationship to user capacities.

#9 Public Concern: The National Park Service should implement measures to reduce impacts of facilities and activities near the Merced River.

"Suggestions for the document to address: Add additional boardwalk trails throughout the valley to slowly eliminate use paths adjacent to the river. *River interpretive information board to explain the hydrology of the river, possibly at the Sentinel Bridge parking area and shuttle bus stop, (braided streams eliminating campgrounds, flood plains and their impact on infrastructure, ecology of a riparian zone, target benchmarks for a healthy ecosystem, future plans)." (Individual, Clovis, CA, Comment #34-8)

"The Merced High Sierra Camp has been identified as a major source of fecal contamination for the Merced River corridor—perhaps this concession operated facility dependant on horses and stock should be removed." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #128-8)

"In addition, you could restrict the number of campfires per night to a number that you can adjust relative to the current air quality, with fire permits available at the campground kiosk on a first come first serve basis." (Individual, Truckee, CA, Comment #61-7)

"I also advocate for putting stricter limitations on the numbers of campers in campgrounds at any one time. The campgrounds seem overcrowded to me and this takes away from the experience of being in nature. I think it is important to separate tent campers from RV campers in the campground." (Individual, Comment #75-2)

Response: Concern #9 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the impacts of uses and facilities within the river corridor as part of the user capacity program alternatives.

#54 Public Concern: The National Park Service should stop marketing Yosemite National Park.

"Look at the Lower Yosemite Fall project (if you can stand it). It controls tourist pedestrian traffic through a maze of split rail fencing and obtrusive stone walls. Do not deal with impacts by putting up more fences, instead the concessionaire and the National Park Service should stop marketing Yosemite as part of intensive tour packages and stop working to grow the numbers of tourists (dollars). Is this the kind of Yosemite experience you want? Separated from nature? Directed around by fencing?" (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-20)

"THE MARKETING OF YOSEMITE AND USER CAPACITY: While the National park Service has eliminated any user capacity numbers for Yosemite, it markets Yosemite as a part of quickie all-in-one-day tour packages -- actively enticing more people to tour and impact the Park's natural values. The Park Service then claims that it has to accommodate these tourists with ever increasing amounts of, and increasingly upscaled types of accommodations. Usually people on such tour packages spend a mere few hours in Yosemite, while leaving many dollars in the concessionaires pockets and a large impact on Yosemite's resources. Rather than taking home a priceless in-depth experience of Yosemite's natural values, they rush from spot to spot to take quick photos, purchase souvenirs, and eat. Rather than Yosemite leaving a lasting impact on them, their impact leaves a lasting impression on Yosemite. See for example the National Park Service Press Release: "Yosemite National Park Employees Attend Travel Expo [in China] to Promote Tourism to National Parks" http://www.yosemitevalley.org/HTML/Articles/2002_07_01.html (Attachment #2)" (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-18)

Response: Concern #54 was assigned a screening code of 1.1, *the concern defines an issue that is out of the scope of the project*.

Development/Developed Areas

#11 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should allow use of private vehicles to access Yosemite and should provide adequate parking for visitors.

"There has been much discussion on the subjects of personal vehicle parking and numbers of campgrounds, campsites and we are still of the opinion that the plan unfairly and inappropriately favors commercial address and other Gateway corridors. Our community, due to the unique road and economic conditions, caters to visitors in private vehicles wanting a more intimate park experience. We believe that this is why in the first place Yosemite National Park was created. We urge you to reconsider space for more private vehicle parking and more campgrounds in the valley floor." (Individual, Comment #93-11)

"We support these specific actions that we hold to be essential to quality of the visitor experience, regional economics, or access to Yosemite Valley for citizens of all economic levels: Restoration of parking to no less than 1200 day use spaces to accommodate less polluting and more highly preferred automobile travel." (Non-Governmental Organization, Oakhurst, CA, Comment #103-4)

"In order to make this experience [camping] available, the voluntary option of using private vehicles is very, very important. Therefore, the parking situation must be given great consideration and not removed from accessibility." (Individual, Comment #93-8)

Response: Concern #11 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses transportation issues (such as parking and traffic congestion) associated with user capacity and impacts on visitor experience and other river values.

Camping

#5 Public Concern: The National Park Service should increase camping opportunities and restore campgrounds lost in the 1997 flood.

"Furthermore, the Merced River corridor should provide for a few "use zones". Plans to eliminate existing campsites and lodging from the Merced corridor are one-sided insofar as they severely diminish whole categories of visitor usage. For a second time, you propose to curtail dramatically the experience of "living" near a view of the river, as well to reduce the affordable overnight accommodations that are so important to families and to the poor. I urge you to retain nearly all of the existing sites in Curry Housekeeping, North Pines, and the Backpackers' Camp. Retain Stoneman Bridge as well, if only because it facilitates walks between Camp Curry and the Village." (Individual, Comment #74-3)

"Please do not close upper pines, north pines or lower pines campgrounds. Leave our park alone. Its survived hundreds of years along the river. If anything restore the lower river and upper river campgrounds and let the people set up a fund to restore them? Response please! You need to be an advocate for families that cannot afford motels. You have squeezed us out of our park. I hope millions of others can express their views before you decide." (Individual, Comment #27-1)

"The only thing to do is reopen the camp grounds that were closed after the flood in 1997." (Individual, Comment #105-2)

"Open Group camping along Tenaya Creek to spread out the multiple families that over populate one site. Limit the size of RV's and their choice of campgrounds. Spaces are too small in North Pines, which should be only tent camping. Consider the expansion of the tent camper with a small trailer or pop up tent v. the RV support services for waste water, road wear, generator exhaust, and the fact that the roads are engineered for cars not RV's and bus vehicles." (Individual, Santa Monica, CA, Comment #86-4)

"I'm not sure if any of this is addressed in the latest Revised Merced River Plan, but would like to again express my ongoing concern about camping in Yosemite Valley. It is a unique experience not found anywhere else. The natural beauty combined with the number of activities the Valley accommodates (biking, hiking, river rafting) are not available in any other national park. In your Curry Village and East Yosemite Valley Campground Improvements Project, under the public comments E.2-20, the issue was mentioned under public comment #23 - but no response is given. The issue is that where there were once about 800 campsites - there are now less than 400 and even with an increase to approx. 500, that is still a net LOSS of approximately 300! Add to that the fact that some of the sites added are walk-ins which are NOT family friendly and the situation becomes even more dismal. I would strongly encourage the Park Service to carefully examine each campsite closed and to carefully look for areas where additional campsites can be added to at least replace those lost." (Individual, Comment #22-1)

"Increase North Pines and Lower Pines Riverside Campsites. Do not push them back away from the river so families can watch their children and enjoy the calm of the river." (Individual, Santa Monica, CA, Comment #20-16)

Response: Concern #5 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern.* The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic document that addresses management of user capacity within the river corridor. Future decisions on facilities in specific areas will continue to be addressed in more detailed planning studies and project designs. If at some time in the future such efforts result in decisions relating to specific campsite numbers in Yosemite Valley, they will have to comply with the Merced River Plan, as amended.

NPS Interpretive Services

#6 Public Concern: The National Park Service should better educate visitors to reduce resource impacts.

"User Capacity-Management Action: A visitor orientation program-upon entrance-needs to be established in the park to: 1) Enhance the visitor experience (by educating visitors to Yosemite's uniqueness up front 2) modify visitor behavior to preserve Yosemite's resources 3) heighten visitors awareness that issues exit regarding user capacity and resource protection due to the park's beauty, uniqueness and popularity." (Individual, Orinda, CA, Comment #9-1)

"I will say though, that there are areas of the Merced River specially the sides of the river on North Pines and South Pines campgrounds where the sides of the river appear to be eroding. I saw, this summer, many large rocks placed in the center of the river for amusement purposes-as far as I could tell- with the rocks missing from the river banks, the soil is loose and falls into the river along with grass and trees. This condition could be addressed through education of the public to keep river banks in place." (Individual, Berkeley, CA, Comment #31-2)

"the Council believes that public education is key if protection of the resources is to be balanced with visitor use. Yet the SEIS does not address the need for public education in its discussion of Best Management Practices or of Monitoring Techniques. If these BMPs or Monitoring Techniques are to be effective, visitors must understand why they are being implemented and how they will improve the experience of visitors to Yosemite National Park and the Merced River Watershed." (Non-Governmental Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #97-1)

Response: Concern #6 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project.* The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the use of public education to reduce impacts as part of its user capacity program alternatives.

Transportation

Effects on Visitor Access and Use

#21 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address transportation requirements for visitors and employees and traffic impacts on the Merced River.

"The protection and enhancement of outstanding resources should be the basis for which user capacities are determined. The Park Service needs an objective and honest appraisal of how differing user activities, as well as differing transportation models will effect the environment of the Merced River corridor, including the Yosemite Valley floor, which is a part of that river corridor." (County Agency, Sonora, CA, Comment #37-1)

"This methodology should provide an objective and honest appraisal of how differing user activities, as well as differing transportation models (for visitor access) will effect the physical and cultural environment of the Merced River corridor, including the Yosemite Valley floor, which is a part of that river corridor." (County Agency, Sonora, CA, Comment #26-3)

"There needs to be affordable and reasonable public transportation for El Portal residents and tourists staying in El

Portal into the park. Constant traffic on the El Portal Road and hwy 140 along the river is a major impact on air and water quality in the Merced River." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #132-2)

"2. Visitation should be limited at levels never to exceed those that currently exist. Some method of regulating the number of private vehicles entering the corridor has to be implemented." (Individual, Los Angeles, CA, Comment #18-3)

Response: Concern #21 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses transportation issues and traffic impacts in development of the user capacity program alternatives.

Management Direction

#55 Public Concern: The National Park Service should reduce vehicle traffic in Yosemite National Park.

"Yosemite is not the only park I have visited - recently a trip to Utah - I was able to experience both Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks. Why I bring this up - I was very impressed with the shuttle system within Zion. Yosemite needs to thin out the vehicle traffic within the park - especially in the Valley. It may not be possible to limit it to the extent at Zion but it is more than possible to minimize the park congestion as it exists today." (Individual, Comment #70-2)

"...when we visited Zion in 2001 we were so very impressed with the system and commented that Yosemite should implement the same program. we parked at the visitor center, checked out the hiking trails and picked one. we boarded a not -powered- by-gasoline bus (busses arrived every few minutes). one could get off at any point as well as getting on at any point. it was quiet, no stench of exhaust, people were relaxed and friendly. if a party had reservations at the lodge, their vehicle was allowed to drive in and park. besides viewing incredible beauty, we experienced a very positive time. I realize that there are many complex issues concerning a most beautiful park, but getting the vehicles out of the valley is a huge start in resolving the problems." (Individual, Comment #72-2)

"Since 1851, it has been a privilege for anyone able to make the journey to visit Yosemite Valley. Air, noise and all other human-caused pollution diminishes every visitor's experience. Pollution negatively affects human, wildlife and environmental health. Plans have been proposed to reduce private vehicle traffic in the Valley. Yet, now access may increase? Are decisions being made in the interest of preserving the Park's beauty or is access only enhancing environmental destruction? All forms of pollution lead to decreased respect for the land and will lead to the loss of a very special and unique place." (Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #92-6)

"I think you should reduce the number of cars in the valley by only allowing those with camping reservations to bring their cars in. This is working well for Devil's Postpile and also at Zion. Why not Yosemite, too? The bus service is already in place, all that's required is to create parking lots at some location just outside the valley." (Individual, Comment #62-1)

"I have visited Yosemite every year since we moved to Ca. that is about 15 years now. I spend my time there doing day hikes, backpacking, fishing, camping, biking and taking photos. I have hike half-dome about 10 times. I just recently got back from Zion. At first I was not sure about the bussing the many visitors around to the many hiking spots. But I must admit that I surprise at the ease it was done with and how few complaints there were from people about giving up their cars. My only thought at the days end was how can they do this to the Yosemite Valley." (Individual, Comment #67-1)

"We're long time Yosemite lovers. It's the Park nearest & dearest to our hearts. We climb, backpack, & camp there with friends & family or by ourselves several times a year. We also raft the Merced below the Park. We recently returned from a trip to Zion National Park. It had been five years since we had been there. The beautiful result of the recent traffic closures & implementation of a reliable bus service was astounding! We were awestruck by the difference in the quality of our experience; the peace & quiet replacing the traffic noise lives on for us weeks after our visit there. Please do the same! Get the cars out of Yosemite!" (Individual, Santa Cruz, CA, Comment #71-1)

Response: Concern #55 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses user capacity in the river corridor and effects on traffic and transportation in development of the user capacity program alternatives.

Parking

#23 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should consider alternative ways to manage the number of private vehicles in the Valley and reduce impacts from parking.

"An Idea: Number all parking spaces in the valley and notify the public & employees that they will have only one numbered spot to park in the valley. This could reduce the amount of "cruising around" to find parking. Move the entrance station to El Portal and hand out parking spaces from there, while providing shuttle busses for those who do not get a parking spot because they've all been given out. Allow people to purchase an entrance ticket/parking ticket ahead of time, online, for this numbered space." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #10-3)

"Voluntary Shuttles: I suggest that we explore the potential for shuttling visitors to and from existing parking lots located at private lodging in El Portal and Fishcamp, especially during periods of peak demand! It seems evident that we should attempt to make the best possible use of parking lots that have already been developed near park boundaries before we attempt to build more parking lots within the park to facilitate private vehicles from moving just outside the park to inside the park. I believe that doing this could alleviate a significant portion of our congestion during periods of peak demand. I expect that members of the business communities in gateway locations could eventually see the logic for limited, voluntary shuttle services to locations directly adjacent to the park boundaries." (Individual, Yosemite, CA, Comment #80-7)

Response: Concern #23 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses user capacity in the river corridor and effects on transportation and parking in development of the user capacity program alternatives.

Socioeconomic Considerations

Management Direction

#16 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address the social-economic impacts of planned actions.

"Decisions made by the Park concerning user capacity also affect the surrounding gateway communities- Once user capacity in the Valley has been determined, the new Merced River Plan should also include an analysis as to how those numbers differ from historical visitor use as well as the socioeconomic impact on the surrounding region. Whether it's 10 million visitors or 3 million visitors—all must travel through one of the four corridors into the park, utilizing the services and infrastructure (e.g., water and sewer) within the gateway communities." (Individual, Oakhurst, Comment # 83-24))

"We are also concerned about potential loss of campsites along the river corridor in Yosemite Valley as it discriminates against visitors of more modest incomes than the average guest in the Ahwahnee Hotel for instance. The Park Service needs to examine this issue of equality." (County Agency, Sonora, CA, Comment #37-4)

"The average family is being more and more shut out of Yosemite as Yosemite becomes more and more of a resort/Disney style destination. This is how not only the concessionaire, but also the NPS markets Yosemite. This is not equitable. Camping is also an important opportunity for social interaction in Yosemite which builds democracy. Lodging separates people both physically from social interactions and stratifies them economically." (Non-Governmental Organization, Yosemite, CA, Comment #115-17)

"There should be a certain amount of cabin/hotel type accommodations but we do not believe that the numbers of the most expensive accommodations need to increase. Keep the valley accommodations affordable for the average American." (Individual, San Diego, CA, Comment # 117-7)

"In Tuolumne County alone, the economic impact from tourism is over 200 million dollars and the combined economic impacts for the Gateway is many times that number. The planning efforts which are ongoing affect the economic and social well-being of our Gateway communities, but they also have far reaching affects. They have an affect across the nation and our friends around the world who come to California and they have Yosemite National

Park in the top three designations they hope to visit." (Individual, Comment #93-19)

Response: Concern #16 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses socioeconomic effects of the proposed user capacity and El Portal boundary alternatives.

Park Operations

Management Direction

#22 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address the dangers of locating facilities in the rockfall zone or floodplain.

"Development in the flood plain, structures and infrastructure both, will impact the natural flow of the rivers. A natural river will, statistically, overtop its banks every 2.3 years (see the books water, rivers and creeks and a view of the river by Luna Leopold). The overbank flow is then on the floodplain, a natural portion of the river. Development on the floodplain, no matter how close or far from the river bank, will then restrict (see Sean Eagan Masters Thesis), constrict, and impact the normal flow of the river during its high water flows. During the extreme flow events the river has the potential to destroy infrastructure (witness broken sewer lines, destroyed roads, etc. in the 1997 flood). This destruction then has the potential to pollute and has polluted the Merced River. Also destroyed structures and infrastructure create debris/waste that will be deposited down stream creating unsightly messes." (Individual, Comment #60-9)

"Geologic Hazards/rockfalls. Any discussion of user capacity also includes discussion of the quantity of recreation use that can be sustained without adverse impacts on public health and safety. Such a discussion should include an in-depth study of rockfalls, talus zones, and shadow zones as they relate to management zoning along the River Corridor. It is irresponsible to dismiss rockfalls as a common occurrence in the Park when geologists. (Individual, Comment # 83-19)

Response: Concern #22 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses effects on geologic and hydrologic resources, including the hazards associated with rockfalls and floodplains.

#34 Public Concern: The National Park Service should consider eliminating inappropriate facilities from Yosemite National Park.

"Why is there a golf course at Wawona? A golf course is antithetical to every aspect of the concept of a wild and scenic river. The pesticides/herbicide runoff for one thing is appalling from golf courses. I think the golf course at Wawona should be removed." (Individual, El Portal, CA, Comment #12-1)

"National Parks were formed to protect and preserve the habitat, native Botanical treasures and the wildlife. While accommodations are necessary for the visiting public, to enhance their enjoyment and ability to see the Park for more than a one day visit; a golf course is NOT. There is NO shortage of golf courses in California, and the waste of water and acreage used for the existing golf course defeats the purpose of a National Park. National Parks ARE NOT to be treated as theme or amusement parks, and to allow this waste of Park territory for such a purpose is incompatible with Park preservation needs." (Individual, Comment #76-1)

"A National Park is unique. It is a nature and scenery preserve essentially. It was not meant to go the way of an amusement park, but to be left uniquely itself with people respectfully discovering and enjoying its charms. Services for people would be absolutely minimal as in many national parks, but more helpful, such as free drinking water available, clean restrooms, a bicycle exchange for Valley touring, more and frequent ranger programs and guided walks by the Park Service." (Individual, Pahoa, HI, Comment #91-9)

Response: Concern #34 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic plan that guides park policy on management of areas within the river corridor. Consideration of the

removal of existing facilities is not within the scope of this plan and is more appropriately addressed in site-specific implementation plans.

Maintenance Activities

#10 Public Concern: The National Park Service should better maintain existing facilities and evaluate whether inadequate maintenance and service levels are limiting user capacity in the Valley.

"Limitations on use may be determined by budgetary constraints. At present there is insufficient law enforcement, litter cannot be picked up, bathrooms cannot be kept clean. Does this indicate that we are already exceeding the capacity of the Valley?" (Non-Governmental Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #114-33)

"Properly maintain existing trails based on demand and condition them as the visitors use increases; in other words, do not eliminate or close popular trails." (Individual, Santa Monica, CA, Comment #20-5)

Response: Concern #10 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses the impacts of user capacity programs on park facilities.

Concession Operations

#38 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should include information on the park's business model, especially the balance between maximizing concession revenues and minimizing impacts to resources.

"As far as user capacity goes, yes, we agree that there's a major issue here. But I think one of the issues is that one of the most important decisions we need to hear is the park business model, which we're not hearing, and that is the commercial goals derived from the sources. Yes, it's critical to consider resource protection equally important. However, it's the business model being implemented. It's one of maximizing concession revenues. Or is it of minimizing resources or is it a balance act? We do not see the balancing point in your plans. Please include that information." (Individual, Comment #93-14)

Response: Concern #38 was assigned a screening code of 1.3, *the concern defines an issue that is out of scope because this is the wrong planning level for a decision on this concern*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is a programmatic plan that guides park policy on management of areas within the river corridor.

Employee Housing

Management Direction

#44 Public Concern: The Revised Merced River Plan should address housing development issues, particularly in El Portal and Wawona.

"I'd like to suggest that if the biological resource in the quarter-mile section of the El Portal portion of the wild and scenic river proves to be too sensitive to allow a development crew within it, that we look at a Mediterranean village style, walk-in steep-slope village construction that on Fox, who's a landscape architect in the park, had proposed in the original El Portal plan. A careless town development. Anyway, that we look at that again, if we have to stay out of the quarter mile zone." (Individual, Comment #93-2)

"It has been brought to our attention that an evaluation of user capacities in the Merced River Corridor will also include an analysis of capacities of the South Fork of the Merced River as it traverses the community of Wawona. We are very concerned that as the NPS analyzes user capacities along the Merced River's corridors and considers

alternatives, that it recognize and respect the language in the Record of Decision (ROD) on the 2000 Merced River Plan pertaining to Wawona. The 2000 Merced River Plan ROD includes specific language with respect to, among other things, restricting development of high-density employee housing by NPS in section 35 in Wawona. As the provisions in that ROD pertaining to Wawona were negotiated at length in good faith, we strongly urge that their integrity be retained without compromise." (Business, Wawona, CA, Comment # 46-1)

"Section 35 in Wawona is almost entirely zoned as Mountain Residential. This consists of single family homes. Mariposa County zoning for private property does not allow for high density housing. A number of Park Service buildings are currently being used as dorms for Park Service and DNC employees. While Mariposa County zoning does not apply to Park Service property, the Revised Record of Decision states that in Section 35, on either side of the south fork of the Merced River that it is the intent of the National Park Service that any development for administration or operations in Section 35 would be compatible in character, density, and scale to existing residential and commercial development (page A-19). The issue of new, high density housing on the south side of the river is still an option for the Park Service, it is not compatible to the communities character." (Individual, Wawona, CA, Comment #98-2)

Response: Concern #44 was assigned a screening code of 2.0, *the concern defines an issue already within the scope of the project*. The Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS addresses employee housing in the river corridor as part of the development of the user capacity program alternatives.

Appendix A

Content Analysis Process

Public input on the Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS is documented and analyzed using a process called *content analysis*, which is a systematic method of compiling and categorizing the full range of public viewpoints and concerns regarding a plan or project. Content analysis is intended to facilitate good decision-making by helping the planning team to clarify, adjust, or incorporate technical information into preparing the environmental assessment. All responses (i.e., public hearing transcripts, letters, emails, faxes, and other types of input) are included in this analysis.

In the content analysis process used for this project, each response is given a unique identifying number, which allows analysts to link specific comments to original letters. Respondents' names and addresses are then entered into a project-specific database program, enabling creation of a complete mailing list of all respondents. The database is also used to track pertinent demographic information, such as responses from special interest groups or federal, state, tribal, county, and local governments.

All input is considered and reviewed by two analysts. Each response is first read by one analyst and sorted into comments addressing various concerns and themes. Comments are then entered verbatim into the database. A second analyst then reviews the sorted comments to ensure an accurate and consistent database.

In preparing the final summary analysis, public statements are reviewed again using database reports. These reports contain all coded input and allow analysts to identify a wide range of public concerns and analyze the relationships between them. The final product includes a list of public concerns addressing the proposal, and supporting sample quotes.

This process, and the resulting summary, are not intended to replace comments in their original form. Rather, they provide a map to the letters and other input on file at the Supervisor's office in Yosemite, California. Both the planning team and the public are encouraged to review the actual letters firsthand.

It is important for the public and project team members to understand that this process makes no attempt to treat comments as votes. In no way does content analysis attempt to sway decision makers toward the will of any majority. Content analysis ensures that every comment is considered at some point in the decision process.

Appendix B

Demographics

Demographic coding allows managers to form an overall picture of who is submitting comments, where they live, their general affiliation with various organizations or government agencies, and the manner in which they respond. The database can be used to isolate specific combinations of information about public comment. For example, a report can include public comment only from people in California or a report can identify specific types of land users such as recreational groups, government agencies, or businesses. Demographic coding allows managers to focus on specific areas of concern linked to respondent categories, geographic areas, and response types.

Although demographic information is captured and tracked, it is important to note that the consideration of public comment is not a vote-counting process. Every comment and suggestion has value, whether expressed by one or a thousand respondents. All input is considered, and the analysis team attempts to capture all relevant public concerns in the analysis process. Yosemite National Park received and processed two electronic messages for the Yosemite Valley Integrated Utility Master Plan.

Geographic Representation

Geographic representation is tracked for each response during the course of content analysis. Scoping letters were primarily received from California, although there was one scoping letter received from Hawaii, one from New Jersey and one from New York.

Organizational Affiliation

Organization types were tracked for each letter, email, or fax received. The vast majority of responses were received from individuals, however, there were also responses from tribal groups, county offices, a business, recreational groups, a conservation group, and some non-governmental organizations.

Response Type

Approximately half of the scoping letters received were submitted via electronic mail. Of the remainder, just over half were mailed or faxed to the National Park Service. Others were handwritten on comment forms from public meetings and open houses. In addition, there were 19 scoping comment submitted through oral testimony at the public meetings held during the scoping period.

Appendix C

List of Preparers

National Park Service Staff (and Contractors)

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