

BACKGROUND

Introduction – The National Park Service is conducting a series of Public Planning Workshops throughout the planning process for creating a new comprehensive management plan for the Merced Wild and Scenic River (Merced River Plan). The results presented in this report are an outcome of the Friday, March 7, 2008, Public Planning Workshop.

The purposes of the Public Planning Workshops are to: (1) share National Park Service planning policy and guidance with the public, (2) provide an opportunity for the public to work alongside the National Park Service in creating each element of the new Merced River Plan, (3) objectively discuss and deliberate the range of public scoping comments which inform decision making, and (4) provide an opportunity for input and open dialogue among stakeholders and staff to gain an understanding of planning in the National Park Service, within the constraints of laws, policies, and public opinion.

On Friday, March 7, 2008, the second Public Planning Workshop for the new Merced River Plan was held in Yosemite Valley. The two planning objectives for this workshop were: (1) to review and discuss the draft Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) developed by the National Park Service, and (2) develop draft desired condition statements for the Merced River's ORVs through an interactive exercise.

A Range of Desired Conditions – Creating desired conditions for the ORVs is part of the beginning stages of developing a management framework to be used in the new Merced River Plan. Desired conditions help to identify the range of conditions, which could be managed for in the future; in plain language, these are *goals* for the future.

Once a *range of desired conditions* have been developed, the desired conditions for different ORVs will be grouped together to form a suite of management objectives called *management prescriptions*. Management prescriptions will *prescribe* the combination of the types of natural and cultural resources conditions, as well as the visitor experiences, to be achieved in specific areas of the river corridor. The specific areas along the river corridor the management prescription will be applied are called *management zones*; these management zones will be shown on a map. Future land managers will derive guidance for land use planning, visitor services and activities, resource conditions, and administrative uses from these management zones

Public Planning Workshop Exercise – Participants were asked to create two desired condition statements for each of the ORV categories presented in the *Draft Outstandingly Remarkable Values Report for the Merced and South Fork Merced Rivers* (February 2008), and the additional input received on the draft ORVs during the workshop to develop following statements.

DRAFT DESIRED CONDITION STATEMENTS

Organization of Results – This report presents two sections for the draft desired condition comments derived from the desired condition exercise.

Section I provides a synthesis of the results from the exercise. This section is provided because time constraints did not allow time for group consolidation and synthesis of like ideas, and because a number of statements provided were actions to be taken by the National Park Service, rather than a goal statement.

Section 2 provides the unedited/verbatim text (with the exception of spelling corrections) of the individual desired condition comments developed during the exercise. These comments are grouped under the draft desired condition statement developed by the National Park Service during the synthesis.

Feedback Requested – Workshop participants are asked to review this summary and provide comments to the National Park Service to indicate whether or not the draft Desired Condition statements accurately reflect your thoughts.

Please provide comments by Wednesday, March 26, 2008 to Attn: Elexis Mayer, Project Manager by email: Elexis_mayer@nps.gov, by fax: 209/379-1294, or by mail: P.O. Box 700-W, El Portal CA, 95318.

Next Steps – Once participants' comments have been incorporated into this report, it will be posted on the park web site and used as the basis of the online exercise available to the public for review and input. Additionally, the results will be incorporated into desired condition statements and draft management prescriptions which the National Park Service planning team will soon develop.

The results of the draft management prescriptions will be presented during the **next Public Planning Workshop on Saturday, May 10, 2008, in Yosemite Valley.**

SECTION 1 (Synthesis of results)

This section is organized by ORV category, with the synthesized draft desired condition statements under each heading. Text shown in parentheses are suggestions regarding additional or other ORV categories the desired condition statement may apply to.

Natural Values

Geological Processes Draft Desired Condition Statements:

- Geological resources are clearly visible due to excellent air quality (possibly capture under scenic ORV).
- Geological processes occur naturally and contribute to human experience and knowledge.
- No development occurs in rockfall zone.

Hydrologic Processes Draft Desired Condition Statements:

- The river bank and floodplain is free of visible infrastructure
 - Hydrologic Processes are unconstrained by the built environment or management actions.
 - Water quality is protected and enhanced.
 - Concentrated river access points are eliminated, access is unmanaged and dispersed (possibly capture under recreational ORV).
 - Fallen trees are removed from the river (possibly capture under biological ORV).
 - Personal rafts and other floatation devices are allowed, with use managed to reduce riverbank impacts (possibly capture under recreational ORV).
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- Restoration of the terminal moraine recreates historic hydrologic processes related to large glacial features on the landscape
- Management actions minimize riverbank erosion related to human activities.
- River sites are designed & managed to provide access, promote understanding, & minimize erosion in high use zones (possibly capture under recreational ORV).
- High Sierra camps support high country visitor use by providing appropriate wastewater treatment and human waste disposal.
- Historic bridges are present and may affect natural hydrologic processes.
- Landscape features are modified to recreate historic conditions.

Biologic Draft Desired Condition Statements:

- River habitats are actively managed for preservation.
- Sensitive areas are protected, access to riverbank is located in less sensitive areas (sand and gravel) (possibly capture under recreational ORV).
- Historic meadow extent and conditions are restored through management actions.
- Management actions result in a net reduction of emissions that contribute to global warming.
- Management actions are supported by knowledge of the resource and are clearly explained through the environmental planning process.

Socio-Cultural Values

Cultural Draft Desired Condition Statements:

- Visitors understand the role the river played in attracting settlers, sustaining early pioneers and influencing the park we know today.
- Historic destinations & features are preserved, restored, and interpreted.

Scenic Draft Desired Condition Statements:

- Historic bridges are preserved as scenic resources.
- The visibility of infrastructure is reduced to minimize impacts to scenery in the river corridor.
- Automobile access to view scenic resources is maintained or expanded.
- Scenic views are preserved and actively managed to provide vistas of park resources.
- Scenic values within the river corridor are enhanced by minimizing visual impacts associated with motor vehicles & reducing the number of motor vehicles.
- Visual impacts related to recreational use are minimized.

Recreational Draft Desired Condition Statements:

- Camping opportunities within the river corridor are restored to pre-1997 flood conditions.
 - Ample auto-based camping opportunities are available for families and groups.
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- Low-density camping and picnicking sites are available.
- Infrastructure to support camping is readily available and in good condition.
- Low-density visitor experiences are available, crowding is minimized.
- Recreational use of the river is unconstrained from Clark's Bridge to Swinging Bridge.
- Diverse recreation opportunities exist and are designed to promote visitor connections with natural resources while minimizing resource impacts.
- Campgrounds (including group and walk-in sites) are located to avoid sensitive resources.
- Recreation Trails are created and/or maintained.
- River access is available to a wide range of visitors of diverse age, physical ability, and economic background.
- Visitor services are provided by inholders and gateway communities.
- Infrastructure to support visitor safety is enhanced.
- Rock climbing is maintained as natural, management action: retain access.

SECTION 2 (Unedited/Verbatim text from exercise)

This section is organized by ORV category as follows:

- This bullet represents the desired condition statement developed as a result of the synthesis the National Park Service performed, and is identical to the desired condition statements presented in Section 1
 - ❖ This bullet represents the unedited/verbatim text developed by the participant during the public workshop exercise.

Natural Values

Geological Processes ORV:

- Geological resources are clearly visible due to excellent air quality (possibly capture under scenic ORV).
 - ❖ Keep air quality clear so the cliffs can be seen
- Geological processes occur naturally and contribute to human experience and knowledge.
 - ❖ Let the rocks fall as they may
 - ❖ Do not interfere with nature's process, support it. Accept change and encourage new experiences and knowledge.
- No development occurs in rockfall zone
 - ❖ Rockfall accepted as natural – management action: stay out of rockfall area

Hydrologic Processes ORV:

- **The river bank and floodplain is free of visible infrastructure**
 - ❖ Natural floodplain free of man made intrusions
 - **Hydrologic Processes are unconstrained by the built environment or management actions**
 - ❖ Hydrologic – preserve unimpeded the free flow of the river during periods of extreme flood stages
 - ❖ Unimpeded River Flow
 - ❖ Remove bridges which interfere with free flow
 - ❖ No woody debris is removed from river – leave all woody debris in river
 - ❖ Improve hydrology of river flow- remove Sugar Pine &/or Ahwahnee Bridges? Modify Valley Trail System appropriately
 - ❖ Pack-train trails should not be in/across or along-side the river.
 - ❖ Riverbank erosion is a natural hydrological condition – snowmelt flooding etc.
 - ❖ Natural/unimpeded channel – free flow
 - ❖ Recognize that natural erosion occurs each and every year to the riverbanks which supersedes any human & animal footprint or riparian damage.
 - **Water quality is protected and enhanced.**
 - ❖ Install outdoor showers at each camp ground restroom to control wastewater, human oils, etc. for sustaining river water quality – all campgrounds
 - **Concentrated river access points are eliminated, access is unmanaged and dispersed (possibly capture under recreational ORV).**
 - ❖ Remove split-rail fences along riverbanks to allow/spread access points along river banks and not concentrate points of entry
 - ❖ Eliminate concession rafting altogether to remove concentrated points of entry/exit points and associated river bank degradation
 - **Fallen trees are removed from the river (possibly capture under biological ORV).**
 - ❖ Remove the fallen trees in the river to facilitate safe and free floating (child/family friendly) from Clark’s Bridge to Swinging Bridge
 - **Personal rafts and other floatation devices are allowed, with use managed to reduce riverbank impacts.**
 - ❖ Allow personal rafts/water floatation devices of light weight nature; promotes low/minor riverbank impact: from Clark’s Bridge to Swinging Bridge.
 - **Restoration of the terminal moraine recreates historic hydrologic processes related to large glacial features on the landscape**
 - ❖ Restore terminal moraine
 - **Management actions minimize riverbank erosion related to human activities.**
 - ❖ Minimize the amount of riverbank erosion created by man’s on-river activity
 - **River sites are designed managed to provide access, promote understanding, & minimize erosion in high use zones (possibly capture under recreational ORV).**
 - ❖ Specific pathways with viewing areas to control damage to the river
 - ❖ Reinforce river sites as needed to prevent erosion – ie The Ahwahnee & Housekeeping campgrounds
 - ❖ Viewing areas with educational material
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- High Sierra camps support high country visitor use by providing appropriate wastewater treatment and human waste disposal.
 - ❖ Improve all High Sierra camps for wastewater & human waste, improving their condition to promote high country use
- Historic bridges are present and may affect natural hydrologic processes
 - ❖ Preserve Stone Bridges
- Landscape features are modified to recreate historic conditions.
 - ❖ Dredge Mirror Lake bringing it back to a true mirror & put dredged sand along riverbanks that have eroded

Biologic ORV:

- River habitats are actively managed for preservation
 - ❖ Preservation of river habitats through designated zones.
 - ❖ Emphasis & awareness of biological features near river.
- Sensitive areas are protected, access to riverbank is located in less sensitive areas (sand and gravel) (possibly capture under recreational ORV).
 - ❖ Increase river bank protections- restrict access to sensitive areas – encourage or direct access to non-sensitive sand & gravel river areas
 - ❖ Protect riparian areas from degradation (includes removing camping along river) to enhance biological diversity near river
- Historic meadows extent and conditions are restored through management actions
 - ❖ Restore meadows to pre-1900 conditions
 - ❖ Remove trees from areas that were originally meadows
- Management actions result in a net reduction of emissions that contribute to global warming.
 - ❖ All management prescriptions must show a net reduction in emissions causing global warming.
- Management actions are supported by knowledge of the resource and are clearly explained through the environmental planning process.
 - ❖ All management prescriptions must include studies of the mitigation of any impacts, whether or not these are significant. All EA/FONSI's must include definitions of "significant impacts."

Socio-Cultural Values

Cultural ORV:

- Visitors understand the role the river played in attracting settlers, sustaining early pioneers and influencing the park we know today.
 - ❖ Cultural – educate visitors on how the river drew early pioneers to it's shores, how it sustained them & how they have influenced the park we know today
 - Historic destinations & features are preserved, restored, and interpreted.
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- ❖ Preserve & restore historic features
- ❖ Bring back “Indian Caves” as historical destination w/interpretive signage.

Scenic ORV

- **Historic bridges are preserved as scenic resources.**
 - ❖ Preserve all bridges over river as they are all historical structures
 - ❖ Preserve the bridges – which are historical - & “scenic”
- **The visibility of infrastructure is reduced to minimize impacts to scenery in the river corridor.**
 - ❖ Reduce visual (scenic) impacts of human infrastructure on or near river corridor ie open parking lots, non resource-centric recreation (ice rink) roadside parking (El Cap Straight) other
 - ❖ Consider scenic impacts of human infrastructure from rim views, ie ice rink, parking lots, swimming pools, social trail
- **Automobile access to view scenic resources is maintained or expanded.**
 - ❖ Preserve roads, North Side & South Side – as exists for safe emergency access
 - ❖ Provide more access to as many areas of the river as possible. Do not remove/close any more roads. Not all baby boomers can walk/hike long distances.
- **Scenic views are preserved and actively managed to provide vistas of park resources.**
 - ❖ Preserve viewsheds with Vegetation Mgmt.
 - ❖ Preserve vistas of park resources.
 - ❖ Create vistas of geology for its enjoyment
- **Scenic values within the river corridor are enhanced by minimizing visual impacts associated with motor vehicles & reducing the number of motor vehicles.**
 - ❖ Excessive #'s of vehicles greatly impact scenic quality of river corridor, buses are even more objectional than pvt vehicles, reduce to a more appropriate number.
- **Visual impacts related to recreational use are minimized.**
 - ❖ Consider visual impacts of river use (ie rafting) to visitor experience

Recreational ORV

- **Camping opportunities within the river corridor are restored to pre-1997 flood conditions.**
 - ❖ Replace all flood damaged campground & sites to pre-flood conditions, include group campground/sites.
 - ❖ Restore campgrounds that were flooded out
 - **Ample auto-based camping opportunities are available for families and groups.**
 - ❖ For most families, especially young ones, economics determine recreational exposure. So, camping facilities are a must! A large portion of our population is in this group.
 - ❖ Family-Friendly auto-based camping facilitates the underprivileged to Yosemite Valley and all Valley ORV's
 - ❖ Encourage family-friendly auto based camping as a welcomed activity in Yosemite Valley
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- ❖ Increase camping
 - ❖ Add additional campsites east of Ahwahnee Hotel
 - ❖ Rec. Family-friendly auto-based camping promotes safe back-packing and rock climbing
 - ❖ Remove stables & replace with RV sites/ keep other sites for tent camping
 - ❖ Maintain current R.V. camps

 - **Low-density camping and picnicking sites are available.**
 - ❖ Reduce density of campgrounds for more quietness and outdoor experience
 - ❖ Recreational – Preserve the camping and picnicking experience by designing sites that are not close together.

 - **Infrastructure to support camping is readily available and in good condition.**
 - ❖ Have easier accessible camping reservation system
 - ❖ Remodel all campground restrooms to comply with federal rehab act for the disabled
 - ❖ Bring back firewood vending machines at campground heads
 - ❖ North Pines – repair potholes in all campgrounds – install outdoor showers in all campgrounds

 - **Low-density visitor experiences are available, crowding is minimized.**
 - ❖ Limit the amount of tour buses per day
 - ❖ Reduce the impacts to the visitor experience at Happy Isles – foot prints!!!
 - ❖ Congestion at trailheads To recreate in the park to avoid crowding and congestion

 - **Recreational use of the river is unconstrained from Clark’s Bridge to Swinging Bridge**
 - ❖ Allow recreational use for zone from Clark’s Bridge thru Swinging Bridge regardless of restrictions and the do what you want for all downstream 79 miles of river.
 - ❖ Remove all split-rail fences along riverbank for unfettered access to river bank from Clark Bridge to Swinging Bridge

 - **Diverse recreation opportunities exist and are designed to promote visitor connections with natural resources while minimizing resource impacts.**
 - ❖ People come to National Parks to recreate. Recreation takes on all shapes & forms. Visitors connect with the natural resources through recreation.
 - ❖ Encourage recreational activities that minimize resource impacts restrict/eliminate non eco-centric recreation inimical to resources
 - ❖ Manage activities to promote the river resources rather than diminish.
 - ❖ Minimize Asphalt Trails
 - ❖ Maintain current visitor participation and enjoyment of rafting, hiking, riding, biking, climbing with resource protection emphasis

 - **Campgrounds (including group and walk-in sites) are located to avoid sensitive resources.**
 - ❖ Restore/replace some campgrounds w/group & walk-in sites at appropriate non-resource sensitive sites only

 - **Recreation Trails are created and/or maintained**
 - ❖ Recreation – creation of a recreation trail that utilizes and circles the whole of Yosemite Valley
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- River access is available to a wide range of visitors of diverse age, physical ability, and economic background.
 - ❖ Rec – Provide access to the river, at varied & diverse, to visitors of varied age, physical limitations & economic abilities
 - Visitor services are provided by inholders and gateway communities.
 - ❖ Private Sector (inholders & gateway communities) providing services to the park visitor - NPS support their role in helping the visitor with their park experience
 - Infrastructure to support visitor safety is enhanced.
 - ❖ Expand cell towers for all carriers to facilitate communications in case of emergency
 - ❖ Ensure safety of people using YNP for recreational purposes by maintaining roads, e.g. Foresta Drive to “Swinging Bridge” in Wawona. Area of responsibility = YNP + Mariposa County
 - Rock climbing is maintained as natural, management action: retain access
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The following comments did not describe desired conditions for the ORVs, but are included for the public record.

- **Comments related to Draft ORV report**
 - ❖ Pg. 18 ORV, Y.V. Recreation incl: floating, camping, rock climbing
 - ❖ Correction Pg 17. ORV 1-wilderness – Recreation – incl. floating, rock climbing
 - **Comments related to campground management**
 - ❖ Enforce max. 6 people per site
 - ❖ Allow campfires 6am – 10am, 5 pm – 11pm w/o snuffing coals, which cause personal injury
 - **Comments related to planning process**
 - ❖ Planning Staff: Go through E-petitions and add signer comments to this exercise. Most are either socio-cultural or recreational.
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