

**Summary of Public Comments
Yosemite National Park
Notice of Scoping for Preparation of a
Comprehensive Management Plan and
Environmental Impact Statement for the
Merced Wild and Scenic River**

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Note: This document does not constitute the National Park Service's Response to Public Comment. Rather, it is one element of analysis that will be used to help formulate a response to all comments and concerns. Other tools the National Park Service will use to complete this analysis include a review of the original letters and database reports of coded comments prepared as described in the introduction and Appendix F of this document.

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Summary of Public Comments

Notice of Scoping for Preparation of a Comprehensive Management Plan and EIS for the Merced Wild and Scenic River

Yosemite National Park, California

Introduction

This document provides analysis of concerns raised by the public during scoping for the Notice of Scoping for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (throughout this Report, Merced River Plan, Comprehensive Management Plan, and MRP/DEIS are used interchangeably). For more information, the reader may refer to database reports and original letters available at the Yosemite National Park Research Library, Yosemite Valley, California.

In this analysis each public concern is supported by sample comments cross-referenced to the original letters. Although the analysis attempts to capture the full range of public concerns, this summary should be used with caution. Comments from those who responded do not necessarily represent the sentiments of the entire public. It is also important to note that while an effort has been made to qualify the strength of public concern over specific issues, this analysis is not and should not be thought of as a tally of votes. All comments are treated equally and are not weighted by number, organizational affiliation, or other status of respondents.

How to Use this Document

The Content Analysis Summary is divided into two chapters. Chapter 1 includes analysis of comments with regard to the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action for the MRP/DEIS. Chapter 2 covers analysis of responses on topics that will be addressed in the description of affected environment and environmental consequences in the MRP/DEIS including: natural environment concerns, biologic environment concern, social environment concerns, and concern over effects on socioeconomic conditions in and outside the park.

Each chapter begins with a general introduction followed by sections and subsections on more specific topics. At the section level a narrative description of the range of public sentiment is presented. Subsections are denoted by more specific titles and include public concern statements. These statements attempt to capture common themes in project response in a format that suggests a necessary action at the appropriate juncture in the planning process. Thus, concerns that will be addressed in the DEIS for the Merced River Plan are directed to that portion of the planning process. Each public concern is, in turn, followed by sample quotes from public comment referenced to original letters.

Appendix A provides a summary of demographic information. Appendix B, Index of Public Concerns, offers a list of all concern statements and index references back to the main document, although readers are encouraged to review the entire document or at least the portions that address their areas of interest. Appendix C describes the coding process used for this content analysis.

Chapter 1 - Purpose and Need

This chapter discusses public comment regarding the purpose and need of the proposed Merced River Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement (MRP/DEIS).

According to many respondents, reducing the level of commercial development along the Merced River should be a goal of the MRP/DEIS. Similarly, other individuals feel that the National Park Service (NPS) should aim toward preserving the Merced River Corridor in a more natural, pristine state. The identification and protection of Outstanding and Remarkable Values (ORVs), others assert, must also be addressed within the Merced River Plan. More specifically, several individuals suggest that the MRP consider maintaining high water quality. (Public Concerns 1-5)

While the goal of preserving natural resources is important to many respondents, numerous individuals believe the MRP should provide a balanced management direction for the Merced River Valley. Recreational use of the river corridor, they state, is a valuable family activity that allows park visitors to enjoy the beauty of the natural environment. Some point to specific California statutes regulating the park's ability to restrict non-commercial use of navigable waters. Many people express concern regarding the inclusion of developed areas within Wawona in the MRP, citing the importance of river valley recreational resources to the local community. These individuals question the desirability of removing or reducing recreational opportunities and facilities in this area. Many people in particular are worried that the Wawona Golf Course will be removed if that section of the river corridor is designated to be scenic. The NPS lacks authority under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, some believe, to manage developed areas of the Merced River in Wawona. (Public Concerns 6-9)

The National Park Service, several respondents feel, should provide direction for the Comprehensive Management Plan and not allow special interest groups to influence important decisions regarding the proposed plan. Other individuals believe the MRP should address problems related to construction projects which they claim are causing negative impacts to the park environment. The MRP, according to one person, should provide solutions for the larger traffic congestion problem in Yosemite Valley. (Public Concerns 10-19)

Many respondents express opinions regarding the designation of certain sections of the Merced River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA). These individuals may be unaware of the procedures, applications and consequences of classifying river sections as recreational, scenic and wild, yet they are concerned about how use of the Merced River will be affected by these designations. Numerous people believe the river should be designated as scenic or wild within park boundaries to protect the natural environment. A no-development corridor along a 1/4-mile boundary on each side of the Merced River, some feel, is an important and appropriate standard in keeping with the intent of the WSRA classification. The developed Wawona section of the river, others specify, should be designated as recreational because of the facilities available in that area. (Public Concerns 20-29)

The MRP planning process draws numerous comments from individuals who cite the importance of developing a comprehensive Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which includes a wide range of alternatives. Others assert the NPS should wait to make decisions regarding the Merced River Management Plan until a full EIS is complete. A variety of scientific studies and surveys of affected plant and animal species within the river corridor, some feel, should be conducted in order to assess possible impacts of the proposed action. To more adequately address area-wide planning concerns, several individuals suggest the NPS should collaborate with regional officials in developing the MRP/DEIS. (Public Concerns 30-37)

Public involvement is important to many respondents who express concern regarding recently held public meetings for the MRP scoping period. They are unhappy about the short notice given for public meetings

and believe the NPS should provide more advance notice of these meetings to solicit adequate and informed public participation. Others feel some meetings were poorly organized, offered little information to participants regarding the proposed action, and provided no formal structure for recording public comments. Decision-makers should have attended the meetings, one person asserts. The length of the scoping comment period, according to numerous individuals, was inadequate for people to digest and understand the proposed action and reply with informed responses. (Public Concerns 38-43)

The relationship between the Merced River Plan and other park planning processes drew many comments from individuals who suggest the NPS should stop other planning and construction activities until the MRP is completed. The MRP/DEIS, some suggest, should be developed in coordination with other park planning processes to “maximize protection of the natural systems in the park.” Others believe this plan should be completed independently to provide for an unbiased resource to guide future planning. The MRP/DEIS, some feel, should provide mitigation or include provisions to repair damage caused to the Merced River corridor through other projects, including El Portal Road construction. (Public Concerns 44-54)

Following, organized by major issue categories, are the specific public concerns identified that relate to the overall purpose and need for the MRP/DEIS.

PURPOSE AND NEED

1. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should identify a preferred alternative that restricts commercial development in the Merced River Corridor.

“American Whitewater does not recommend or support the creation of any new facilities, parking areas, or roads for the purposes of enjoying or managing the Merced River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.” (#257)

“Let’s work to ensure the protection of the resource from the 4 million visitors. Tourists don’t come to eat a burger at a restaurant. They want to become reacquainted with nature. Protection of that will enhance the visitor experience.” (#111)

“One concern is the commercial developments within Yosemite National Park, especially along the river. There are numerous superfluous services available which degrade scenic and environmental experiences and values that the Park Service should be protecting and promoting.” (#207)

2. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address restoring the Merced River Valley to a more natural environment.

“[The management plans for the river and valley] must reflect an effort to follow the mandate – to let the natural processes prevail and to assist in restoring the river and valley to the conditions which would have been expected to exist had there not been human interference.” (#99)

“I recommend that the draft management plan support: the entire park river segments to be designated wild; minimal development of facilities; and a prohibition on all motorized uses. I believe that these actions would all be reasonable and necessary to maintain the natural qualities that initially justified the river’s protective designation.” (#175)

“The policy directive of letting natural processes prevail must not be taken as merely one consideration in management decisions. It is the prime directive. I hope that now, as the Park Service engages in a comprehensive planning effort for the Merced River and then for Yosemite Valley, you keep this principle firmly in mind.” (#221)

3. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should be developed to ensure the preservation of Outstanding and Remarkable Values in the Merced River Corridor.

“The River Management plan (RMP) must ensure not only the safety, but also the enhancement of the Outstanding and Remarkable values of the Merced River.” (#281)

“The outstanding remarkable values (ORVs) must be preserved (scenic, geologic, recreational, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, vegetative, and others).” (#215)

4. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should establish broad management standards for the Merced River Corridor.

“... the river plan should be a conceptually based plan that identifies the outstanding and remarkable resource values and characteristics for the Merced River corridor as well as establishing broad management standards for the river. We do not believe it is necessary for the plan to analyze the benefits and impacts of individual management actions within the corridor. Those impacts are best analyzed in the context of the YVP or project-level environmental documents. For example, the impacts and benefits associated with the removal of Cascade Dam do not have to be examined in the river plan. Certainly, the role the dam plays in impeding the free-flowing nature of the Merced River should be discussed in the river plan. But is not necessary to analyze the impacts of dam removal in the document. More generally speaking, the river plan should provide a benchmark from which to measure specific management actions proposed in the river corridor. That action would be required to comply with the management standards set forth in the river plan as well as be protective of the resource values identified in the plan. (#247)

5. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should focus on improvement and maintenance of the Merced River's health.

“The NPS needs to manage the South Fork as a Wild Trout stream maintaining excellent water quality and maximum flows at all times. The major concerns here would be development/overflows/contaminants in Wawona.” (#89)

“I would question classifying that portion of the S. Fork of the Merced River ‘from the top of pool at water system impoundment to 200 feet below dam.’ It falls into your category of recreational, which is pretty broad. The impoundment water is used for drinking water for the Wawona Community. As such it should not be used for swimming or related recreational activities.” (#276)

6. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should allow a variety of public uses for the Merced River Valley.

“In all cases, keep a reasonable and historic balance of river uses that are proportionate to the human enjoyment as well as natural and cultural resource protection.” (#176)

“I feel the river should be for my family and for people like us to enjoy. I understand the environmental concerns, but enjoy certainly does not mean destroy. Maybe efforts could be focused on making sure people use the river responsibly.” (#196)

“The Merced River and its South Fork in YNP are recreational avenues. Rafting, kayaking and the like are an excellent alternative means to enjoying YNP, especially in the valley and through Wawona. The management plan must include provision for this very popular and valuable recreational activity.” (#129)

“The primary concern of the NPS must be for the resource, not for endless accommodation of commercial interest and an ever increasing public demand.” (#215)

“I hope that our national treasure, Yosemite, will be preserved for all generations to come.” (#27)

7. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should not include the developed areas of Wawona.

“Our main concern is the Wawona Golf Course, Hotel, Meadow Loop Road, Camp Ground areas, and developed areas of Wawona (store, gift shop, horseback riding etc.). We use these areas extensively, as do many other local residents and visitors. It helps alleviate traffic and visitors to the valley floor! These areas are wonderful recreational areas, and must be left as they are.” (#206)

“It seems inconsistent to take any action concerning the golf course unless there is going to be a drive to remove all recreational facilities and opportunities from the park not entirely connected to the primary park purposes of preservation and providing an opportunity to the public to experience and be educated about the natural wonders of the park.” (#263)

“The Wawona Meadow thrives perfectly with the golf course, and there is no reason to change that co-existence. It is my opinion that the Wawona Meadow, including the golf course, should not be included at all in these proposals.” (#304)

8. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address the entire length of the Merced River Valley.

“Your letter of June 1, 1999 identifies several issues to be addressed in the Management Plan. These are consistent with the purposes of the Wild and Scenic River Act. It is important that these issues be addressed in an integrated fashion for the whole length of the River included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Much attention is directed to environmental protection within the boundaries of Yosemite National Park proper. It is equally important that Merced River resources be considered and protected on the South Fork, including segments in Wawona, on segments within the El Portal Administrative Site, and on segments managed by other agencies.” (#289)

9. Public Concern: The NPS should focus attention on areas of the Merced River Valley that need immediate attention.

“We encourage you to call attention to those areas that in your estimation are most in need of immediate care. From our experience we would expect this list to include areas such as Lower Yosemite Falls, Emerald Pool/Vernal Falls, and the top of Nevada Falls.” (#282)

10. Public Concern: The development of the MRP DEIS should be guided by National Park Service regulations.

“It is our impression that the legislation that established the National Park system (providing for protection of natural and cultural resources and for public access, use, enjoyment and recreation) should serve as the principle guide for construction for your plan for the Merced.” (#282)

11. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should allow Yosemite officials to charge fees that are used for river management within the park.

“I am willing to pay a token extra for improvements in river management that remain in the control of the park super, not in the general national parks funds where the political hacks can mismanage the monies.” (#4)

12. Public Concern: The NPS should not allow the viewpoints of special interest groups to affect decisions regarding the MRP DEIS.

“I suspect that the plan now being given preference is driven by the desires of local businesses and concessionaires to increase tourism and, especially, access of tour buses to the Park. This is a complete distortion of the intent of the legislation which established the Park.” (#97)

“Please do not let your efforts when writing the Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for the Merced River be swayed by corporate interests, political pressure or monetary contributions. If you are steadfast in your commitment to protect the river now, it will be a commitment for the future of the river, its habitat and future generations of people to enjoy it.” (#254)

13. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address problems created by the El Portal Road project.

“The cumulative impacts to the Merced River resulting from absence of a MRP since 1987 should be quantified and plans for the reversal of cumulative impacts should be part of planning to protect and enhance the Merced River....The impacts of the El Portal Road project must have a remedy fashioned by the MRP.” (#295)

“The Management Plan should include mitigation and restoration of the extensive damage done to the El Portal Road along the river. All recent plans must be extensively revised to carry out the protection mandate of the GMP and the mission of the Park Service.” (#258)

“Since much habitat and species have been negatively impacted by the El Portal Road project, the additional cumulative impacts the Merced River corridor must be taken into account in planning for the Valley Plan. Since the hydrology of the River has been altered by the El Portal Road project, this additional cumulative impact to the River corridor must be taken into account in planning for the Valley Plan.” (#242)

14. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should account for the environmental impact of the gravel paving work done this summer at Camp 6.

“The ‘Categorical Exclusion’ used for the provision of gravel paving at the Camp 6 Parking Area this summer creates new impacts within the Merced Scenic River corridor. The area has slowly, cumulatively, by custom, and now by design, been transforming itself into a very large parking area. It is clearly, entirely within any protective corridor which the NPS can designate in Yosemite Valley. The formal addition of this area as parking does not protect and enhance the values of the Merced River in any way. The use of a categorical exclusion fails entirely to account for cumulative impacts to the Merced River as a whole. Moreover, the existence of Camp 6 as the preferred location for significant additions of in-Valley parking in pre-existing studies leaves the impression that the goal is to pre-impact the area in order to qualify previous leanings preferring development at the site. For these reasons we object to the additional parking, the use of a categorical exclusion, and the decision to further develop this area absent a MRP.” (#295)

“The development of Camp 6 as a parking lot is an outrageous example of stopgap (lack of) planning. It is on the banks of the Merced River. Runoff will go directly into the river. The area is inside the flood plain and inside the riparian areas where your own studies call for restoration.” (#249)

15. Public Concern: The NPS should avoid utilizing the “design and build” process in the Merced River Valley.

“Discontinue use of the ‘design and build’ contracting option for those projects within the National Park Boundaries.” (#90)

“The Design and Build concept has had its one disastrous outing. Let us hope that the NPS will never again use this deceptive process which prevented the public from having full disclosure of the impacts of the road project in the canyon.” (#215)

16. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address traffic congestion in Yosemite Valley.

“Any viable Scenic River Management Plan should encourage diminished construction and traffic leading into the valley. Anything less only magnifies the plight of Yosemite as a cash cow the government uses to bolster its treasury.” (#103)

APPLICABLE LAWS

17. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should avoid restricting non-commercial use of the Merced River in accordance with California law.

“Under the California Constitution (Article 10, Section 6), all rivers and waterways in the state, including those in Yosemite, are in fact navigable. The courts have ruled that non-commercial access for small craft such as canoes or kayaks may not be limited even for purposes of river ‘safety’ such as high water closures. However, the Park is permitted certain management responsibilities that supercede the state rights.... In other words, the Park may manage commercial use on the Merced below the park’s boundaries; however, the park may not be permitted to interfere with the citizens’ rights on navigation for non-commercial purposes.” (#257)

“The RMP should recognize that floating and whitewater recreation on the Wild and Scenic segments of the Merced River, within the National Park Boundaries, are current and appropriate uses. Therefore, the RMP should specifically protect that use. In this regard, we note that the right of the public to navigate the rivers of California is protected under the state constitution (Article 10, Section 6). The state court decisions have extended the definition of navigate rivers to streams that are navigable in small boats at least part of the year.” (#281)

18. Public Concern: The NPS should acknowledge that California state law encourages preservation of public golf courses.

“The laws of the State of California make clear that California strongly favors preservation of golf courses as important public recreational facilities. There is even a provision in the California Constitution, Article 13, Section 10, adopted in 1974, which gives favorable real property taxation rules for golf courses to prevent their loss to other uses.... Numerous other state laws encourage development of recreational facilities and their preservation by governmental bodies within the state. It is expected that federal law in general also recognizes the desirability of preserving beneficial recreational facilities like golf courses.” (#263)

19. Public Concern: The NPS should recognize that it lacks authority to manage the Merced River Corridor in Wawona under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

“The Wawona meadow, including the Wawona Golf Course, has been a part of Wawona ambiance since 1918, before it was included in the YNP in 1932. Wawona has a land use element with zoning in its adopted Specific Plan. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act specifically limits the authority of the NPS to manage the river within Section 35 of Wawona.” (#266)

“As of this date, it is our understanding that because Wawona has a land use element with zoning in its adopted Specific Plan, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act specifically limits the authority of the National Park Service to manage the river within Section 35 of Wawona. That does alleviate to some extent our personal concern about the Management Plan vis-a-vis our Wawona properties.” (#310)

“Your proposal ignores the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act which specifically limits the authority of the NPS to manage the river within Section 35 of Wawona, and the 1980 General Management Plan which calls for retaining the golf course along with other recreational activities in Wawona.” (#313)

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT

20. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should designate a no-development corridor along the Merced River in accordance with the Wild and Scenic River Act.

“I am writing to ask that the Merced River Plan include no development along the 1/4 mile corridor by the banks of the entire Merced River. The River should be designated scenic from the Wilderness Boundary to the Park line at El Portal.” (#300)

“As a Wild and Scenic River, the Merced should be surrounded by a corridor 1/4 mile from the usual high water line on both sides and 1/8 mile from its tributaries. To have a river running through a world famous park such as Yosemite without adequate protection for it is a crime. Most people would think that such a river is already protected but recent events prove otherwise.” (#139)

“The Wild and Scenic Corridor along the river is a quarter mile on both sides and an eighth of a mile on its tributaries. Do not do anything to screw up anything in this corridor. Protect all oak woodlands and the unique flora and fauna which has not already been wantonly, and probably illegally, destroyed.” (#78)

21. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should assess utilization of the 100-year floodplain criteria for designation of Wild and Scenic River Corridor boundaries.

“At the San Francisco meeting we strongly objected to the corridor boundaries that NPS has selected within Yosemite Valley. The decision to limit the boundaries of the Merced River in Yosemite Valley between Happy Isles and Swinging Bridge to the 100-year floodplain is arbitrary.” (#295)

“The 1997 Hi water Floodplain should be the designated corridor for the reach between the eastern boundary of Section 35 to Squirrel Creek near the Wawona Campground. The GMP calls for rehabilitating the existing 100 sites campground and 30 person group camp.” (#292)

22. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should designate the Merced River as scenic or wild instead of recreational to protect the natural environment.

“The Merced River should be classified as Scenic from the park line at El Portal to the wilderness boundary and then classified as Wild.” (#199)

“I am pleased that the Valley section was made Scenic and not Recreational, since this should help limit further development in an already overdeveloped area. With the extensive development of the Valley, I understand that achieving a Scenic classification took careful definition of the river corridor.” (#121)

“I favor wild status for the Merced River. As this river always appears to be a Wild body of running water; a river of life to enhance all life. I urge that this river's national qualities be fully preserved and always protected; an outstanding American scenic resource, a Wilderness river for all Americans.” (#141)

23. Public Concern: The NPS should designate the developed Wawona section of the Merced River as recreational.

“As a member of the general public and property owner in Wawona, for over twenty years, I have enjoyed the recreation along the South Fork of the Merced. I am concerned that your proposed ‘Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for the Merced River’ will change all that. The Merced River area in Wawona, between the Yosemite National Park's water system intake upriver and the Wawona campground down river, remain recreational.” (#299)

“The Wawona Meadow, including the golf course, should not be included in the South Fork corridor. Those portions of the South Fork of the Merced River through Wawona should be classified as Recreational, not Scenic.” (#310)

“The rationale for including the meadow while excluding Big Creek escapes us, since the meadow is not even adjacent to the river and doesn't include any significant tributaries. In any event, if Wawona Meadow must be included, it should also be designated as ‘recreational’ since a major portion of the original meadow is a golf course which has existed since well before the Wawona area was annexed to YNP in 1932.” (#303)

24. Public Concern: The NPS should reassess designating Wawona Meadow as scenic in order to provide greater public access to the area.

“I disagree with the NPS proposal to categorize all of the Wawona Meadow in the South Fork corridor as Scenic. Only a few years ago, the road around the Wawona Meadow was closed to cars. This was a mistake on the part of the National Park Service because closing the road has limited the enjoyment of the meadow. It also meant that people with disabilities or those who are unable to walk are now prevented from enjoying the peaceful scenery that the meadow provides.” (#304)

25. Public Concern: The NPS should assure that all Yosemite management plans comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

“The language of the Wild and Scenic River Act clearly requires that the general management plan for both Yosemite National Park and the El Portal Administrative unit be revised to reflect the requirements and the objectives of the Act. It specifically states that the plan ‘shall assure that no development or use of the

park lands be undertaken that is inconsistent with the designation of such river segments.’ It in no way exempts the El Portal Administrative site, as has been suggested at your public meetings.” (#289)

26. Public Concern: The NPS should not make any decisions regarding designation of river sections prior to the development of the MRP.

“Another revision needed in the current process, perhaps demanding re-workshopping (we made that ‘word’ up, based on ‘re-hearing’), is wild and scenic boundary-setting in Yosemite. No pre-conceptions or stipulations about the effective corridor width should be established prior to the plan itself.” (#290)

“It seems detrimental to divide one river into sections with different classifications. If one area is developed, then it will eventually create problems in the ‘scenic’ areas further down river. Since the National Park Service was created to preserve for future generations, then these areas along the river should be protected to the fullest.” (#115)

“Several significant decisions have already been made by NPS staff. Why was the public—on whose behalf you are charged with protecting Yosemite—not allowed to participate if decisions were made by NPS staff on ‘the boundaries in which the river values will be protected and enhanced,’ ‘the outstandingly remarkable values for what the river was designated.’ etc.?” (#118)

27. Public Concern: The NPS should strictly adhere to the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in protecting the Merced River.

“The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act should be rigidly enforced, not subject to misguided and abusive interpretation by the Park Service. We’ve seen what the Park Service means when it comes to discretionary protection of the Merced River. It isn’t pretty and it isn’t protection.” (#287)

28. Public Concern: The NPS should properly identify and protect the Outstanding and Remarkable Values within the Merced River Corridor.

“Unusual in the designation of the Merced River, was that a study identifying the outstandingly remarkable values was not done before Congress acted. This leaves the NPS with the added duty to properly identify the scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural and other similar values before classifying reaches of the river. Otherwise, the proposed classification is arbitrary and capricious.” (#292)

“We are told that classifications, boundaries, and identification of outstandingly remarkable values for the 81 miles of the Merced River administered by the National Park Service has been completed. This was apparently accomplished through two internal river management planning workshops. The fact that the information was published in the 1996 Draft addendum to the now withdrawn Yosemite Valley Housing Plan is being deemed sufficient public notice. This does not meet the objectives of the Wild and Scenic River Act. Issues related to classifications, boundaries, and remarkable values are an integral part of the management plan and should not be considered a separate (sic) and unrelated process. These issues should be open to public (and other affected agency) review as part of the river management planning process and decisions reconsidered after input is taken.” (#241)

“The plan should adequately document the resources within the river corridor and adjoining lands that may influence the river. The plan should provide protection for those resources judged to be ‘Outstanding Remarkable Values’ by the planning team and public.” (#277)

29. Public Concern: Outstanding and Remarkable Values identified for the Wild sections of the Merced River should include fishing opportunities.

“The Wilderness section above the Valley does not include fishing under recreation of fish under biological ORVs. I realize there is controversy over whether any fish above the falls are indigenous but certainly there is a tradition of fishing in the area. I would hope that fish and fishing would be included if for no other reason than to preserve whatever population still exists and to prevent stocking in the future. I strongly believe in the Yellowstone model for managing fish in the park - no stocking - catch and release in all areas.” (#121)

PLANNING PROCESS / POLICY

30. Public Concern: The NPS should develop a broad range of alternatives in the MRP DEIS according to the NEPA process.

“All road improvement projects in wild and scenic river corridors, and in National Parks for that matter, should be carefully scrutinized and full Environmental Impact Statements done before any construction is started. Past history of ‘Road Improvements’ in National Parks is reason enough for an EIS.” (#90)

“The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must contain a broad range of alternatives. To include a ‘no action’ alternative or other alternatives which have minimal ‘action’ are completely unacceptable. Unlike the El Portal Road project, an Environmental Assessment will not be accepted. All of the environmental consequences must be analyzed with close scrutiny as required by an EIS. This also means the input from the specialists on the ID Team.” (#111)

“There should be a complete EIS on all plans before any future development in the Park with studies of the scientific, scenic, historic, biological and hydrological values.” (#250)

31. Public Concern: The NPS should avoid selecting strategies regarding Merced River management until the full MRP EIS process is complete.

“The NPS staff development of a WSRMP for the Merced River is to involve and encourage public input. The NPS staff indicated, at the public scoping session in Mariposa, that decisions had already been made as to the width of the corridor: 100-year-flood as evidenced by the 1997 flood; the values had been determined. ‘These are not subject to public input/discussion. They are set’ - was the message. This approach precludes any input, any question of the decisions presented as ‘fixed.’ The selection of the boundaries of the Wild & Scenic River Corridor should be subject to public input.” (#317)

“I strongly encourage the agency to avoid setting up one and only one across-the-board generalized overall plan ‘alternative’ as the agencies’ ‘preferred alternative’ at the Draft EIS [DEIS] stage. NEPA permits the agency to state no, one, or more than one preference amongst the various ‘alternatives’ proposed at the DEIS stage. Instead, for each individual plan issue (topic, etc), the agency should identify which one or several, from amongst the various ‘alternatives’ proposed for that particular plan issue (topic, etc.), it feels it prefers or is likely to prefer, or state its lack of a preference-together with an explanation of the agency’s rationale for such preference(s) or lack of preference(s). As opposed to a polarizing or strait-jacketing of the decision-making process which may occur if participants feel that the agency has ‘predetermined’ what it wishes to do, I feel this approach is likely to encourage and facilitate cooperative collaboration rather than adversarial confrontation.” (#235)

32. Public Concern: The NPS should conduct a wide range of scientific studies on the Merced River Corridor as a part of the MRP DEIS process.

“Full and complete scientific studies and surveys of flora and fauna must be completed along the Merced River corridor as part of the RMP.” (#122)

“Your overriding concern should be sensitivity to environmental matters, strict attention to the recommendations of biologists and other scientists, and an undeviating devotion to the values of protecting the park and preserving its natural features.” (#197)

“The Merced Plan should utilize the current data to:

- Identify and articulate the Merced's critical resource values and attributes;
- Establish strong standards for the protection of these values;
- Develop comprehensive management standards for the river; and
- Provide a benchmark against which management actions outside the river can be evaluated.” (#291)

33. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address the possible negative effects of the proposed action on Threatened and Endangered species.

“Has YNP surveyed all known existing and potential T, E and Species of Concern for both Federal and State Listing? There are many other species in addition to the listed species which are important to the ecosystem of the riverine and riparian areas along the river. We request that these are also studied and surveyed. What survey protocols is the NPS using for each species? Are the species being surveyed during breeding, nesting, roosting, migrating, foraging, hibernating and flowering seasons? We request that this is done for a comprehensive, adequate survey. Many species which are not currently documented to be present in Yosemite which use the river corridor, may be present in one season and not in the other seasons. Is YNP ensuring that all potential species will be surveyed for during all four seasons? This is essential as many species migrate, burrow, hibernate, move away from the river seasonally, etc. and may not be present during a limited survey, yet may be present during other seasons. For example, the red legged frog breeds in the spring and is known to go the highlands in winter. Pond turtles can be found burrowing up to a mile from the river. How will the MRP affect the Threatened, Endangered and Species of Concern which are identified to be in and around the corridor at anytime of the year? We also request that proper surveys for limestone salamanders, hydromantes brunus be completed. We request that the health of the various species be assessed. How will the MRP assure that the health of the various species is not degraded? What species which are not found to be present yet have appropriate habitat will be reinstated? We request that all these essential surveys be adequately addressed and completed and included in the EIS for review by the public.” (#294)

34. Public Concern: The NPS should conduct a slow and careful Comprehensive River Management Planning process.

“...we are concerned about this massive work taking place before the River Plan is in place. This seems backwards. We think the River Plan should have come first. We also note that road work has preceded by an Environmental Assessment (EA). As we understand it, this is not as thorough a process as an Environmental Impact Study (EIS). The issues seem too important to have been put on a ‘fast track.’” (#116)

“I hope this process of river management planning is a careful one.” (#207)

35. Public Concern: The NPS should provide full details of present and estimated river designation sections under the proposed action.

“Please clarify the issue of navigability and the extent of limitations on use in the Merced Wild & Scenic RMP. Please detail the extent of current limits on non-commercial canoeing and kayaking on the Merced

and include a map of the river corridor in the RMP showing existing trails, parking areas, viewing platforms, and other areas of human usage related to the Merced river. Also provide estimates of existing use for different activities within the various segments of the river corridor.” (#257)

“Sections of the river classified as Wild or Scenic must be clearly defined and delineated as such on the maps.” (#199)

36. Public Concern: The NPS should include mitigation measures in the Merced River Plan to offset damage caused by rebuilding projects.

“We encourage you to make reference and to utilize the power of mitigation to offset required intrusion in natural areas. Inevitably, rebuilding infrastructure, especially in Yosemite Valley will require impacts to resources. Offsetting these through renewal projects elsewhere, or on site, is an acceptable means of achieving renewal and making wise use of limited territory.” (#282)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

37. Public Concern: The NPS should coordinate with other land users and government agencies in developing the MRP DEIS.

“The Wild and Scenic River Act requires that the River Management Plan be coordinated with management planning for affected adjacent Federal lands. It is required that the Plan be prepared after consultation with State and local governments as well as the interested public. This coordination and consultation with other agencies needs to occur prior to the preparation of the Plan. To my knowledge there have been no efforts made to consult with Mariposa County beyond the standard public notice provided to other interested parties. Efforts to coordinate and consult should begin immediately.” (#241)

“I think the park service is doing this backwards! Why wasn’t this management plan completed when Forest Service and BLM completed their part on the Merced River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan?” (#142)

38. Public Concern: The NPS should provide adequate notice for MRP public meetings.

“In the future, please ask your staff to provide adequate notice of meetings and workshops so that community members can prepare and contribute their ideas and concerns.” (#321)

“We understand that at the recent Scoping Workshop held in Wawona on July 7, 1999 the current Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan was discussed. We have two concerns regarding this. First it seems that this meeting was announced via fliers posted on public bulletin boards only a day in advance of the meeting. Clearly this is not really an adequate amount of time to inform interested parties. Additionally, many of those interested in the Merced Plan obtain information from the NPS Yosemite Web site, and not directly from the various park bulletin boards. We would like to recommend that at least 15 days notice be provided for any future meetings and that notification be posted on the appropriate part of the Yosemite planning web site.” (#293)

“Concerning the Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for the S. Fork of the Merced River: The one-day posting at Wawona about the scoping workshop on July 7, 1999 is deplorable if not unlawful.” (#276)

39. Public Concern: The NPS should more thoroughly organize the MRP public meetings.

“At the recent scoping meeting in Mariposa no minutes were taken and no tape recording was made. What is the point of the meeting? At the same meeting, the NPS representatives were not decision makers, and were like the public, part of a charade. The decision makers should come and make public appearances.” (#215)

“...I found the meeting poorly planned and poorly publicized. The sign up in the window looked like it was done at the last minute and was hard to see from the parking lot. I counted about ten people from the public and mostly were environmental activists. Only a few maps were posted up on the wall and background information was almost non-existent. No one from the Park Service was taking notes. The talk on the El Portal was very limited. I gained more information from talking with people who voiced their views on the road-widening project.” (#189)

40. Public Concern: The MRP public meetings should be conducted as official hearings.

“The scoping ‘meetings’ should be official ‘hearings’ with transcripts for the public record.” (#122)

41. Public Concern: The NPS should extend the length of the MRP scoping period.

“The public must have time to absorb what is happening and comment.” (#9)

“Please slow down with changes and modifications to the spectacular Yosemite area! Allow the public time to really participate and comment!” (#10)

“More time is needed than the allotted month in which to complete an adequate plan and have enough time for the public to understand it and respond to it.” (#32)

“You are giving the public a very short time frame (July 7 to July 30, 1999) to respond to your proposal of classifying the South Fork in Wawona as scenic which would impact the Wawona Golf Course. You want to change a recommendation that was in place for 19 years but give the public only 24 days to respond.” (#274)

42. Public Concern: The NPS should clarify the consequences of designating river segments under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

“...make it clear where the river is wild and scenic and where there is recreational access.” (#119)

43. Public Concern: The NPS should utilize and acknowledge all public comment regarding the MRP.

“Letters to the Park Service should be acknowledged. Letters discussing important topics should be reviewed and answered.” (#74)

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANNING

44. Public Concern: The NPS should complete the River Management Plan before considering any further actions on other park plans.

“The RMP must be completed before any more planning for the 1/4 mile W&SR corridor occurs. Attempting to do these in parallel efforts will mean that ‘protection and enhancement’ of the W&SR

corridor will be conditional on the ability to accomplish other planning objectives. Such an approach will only lead to conflict situations.” (#99)

“Complete the Merced River Management Plan before any more plans are done, both for the highway and the valley. The Merced is the central, underlying feature along the road and in the Valley. What needs to be done regarding the river governs all other plans.” (#78)

“Because the Merced River plays a crucial and reciprocal role with the valley that it flows through, no planning decision should be made regarding the Yosemite Valley until the management plan for the river is completed. Without protection for the river--and the studies and inventories necessary to guide and ensure that protection--no plans for facilities or structures in the wider river corridor can be developed without potentially endangering the natural role that the Merced River plays within the park.” (#118)

45. Public Concern: The NPS should stop construction within the park until the Comprehensive Management Plan is complete.

“It is absurd, contradictory, and wrong to continue to impact the Merced River under to the El Portal Road widening project between Park line and the Cascade Dam. We believe that the project should be halted until and unless a River Management Plan is in place which demonstrably protect and enhances the Merced River Gorge. Again we appeal to the National Park Service: stop the lawless and destructive road project.” (#295)

“We would like to see no further destruction of this unique historical road. Construction should stop until the Merced River Management plan is completed.” (#120)

“The National Park Service must develop a River Management Plan for the Merced Wild & Scenic River before any more construction takes place in the river canyon and before any more planning for the valley takes place.” (#135)

46. Public Concern: The Comprehensive Management Plan should be completed independently of other park planning processes.

“If the provisions of the Act are to be met, the Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan must be prepared independently of other planning efforts in order to guide those other efforts without bias. The inter-agency Wild and Scenic Rivers Council should be looked to as a resource to assist in such an independent assessment.” (#241)

“The management plan for the river should be completed as basis for other planning efforts, rather than modified in response to other plans and projects. A sound riverine environment is a key component of the park.” (#277)

47. Public Concern: The River Management Plan should be developed in coordination with other park plans.

“I am writing specifically to ask that the Valley Plan and the Merced River Management Plan be coordinated in ways that maximize protection of the natural systems in the park.” (#248)

“This plan is completely inter-related with the Yosemite Valley Plan, and may have different and conflicting requirements. Therefore it is difficult to understand how this can be developed as two separate plans. This would seemingly repeat the mistake of developing four separate plans for Yosemite Valley instead of one.” (#3)

48. Public Concern: The NPS should not allow the River Management Plan to delay work on the Yosemite Valley Plan.

“The Wilderness Society believes it is of utmost importance that the Merced River Plan not unduly delay planning efforts associated with the ongoing Yosemite Valley Plan (YVP). The Wilderness Society has worked and waited a long time to see the goals of the 1980 GMP implemented through the YVP. Any undue delay in releasing the draft YVP is unacceptable to The Society.” (#247)

49. Public Concern: The NPS should avoid using the Wild and Scenic River designation to change the management direction mandated by the 1980 General Management Plan.

“The reach of the Merced that runs through Yosemite Valley should be classified as Recreational. The corridor in that reach should be limited to the 1997 Hi water Flood Plain. Activities contemplated by the GMP within the corridor should not be abridged by an arbitrary WSR classification. The NPS planning staff has invested countless hours in developing the Valley Plan. This effort, as well as the WSR Management Plan, must be in accordance with the GMP. Classifying the Valley as Scenic and then using that classification to justify amending the GMP for the Valley, operates against the public process.” (#292)

50. Public Concern: The NPS should recognize that the 1980 General Management Plan calls for the Wawona Golf Course to be retained.

“The Wawona Golf Course was established in 1918, long before it was included in the Park in 1932. The Wawona Golf Course should not be included at all. The 1980 General Management Plan calls for retaining the golf course along with other recreational activities in Wawona.” (#274)

“The Wawona Meadow should not be included at all. There is no river or lake there and the historical golf course dates back over 80 years. The General Management Plan of 1980 calls for retaining the golf course along with other recreational facilities in Wawona.” (#312)

“The Historic Golf Course and the Meadow are covered by the Yosemite General Management Plan and their use and protection will continue to be covered by the ‘new’ General Management Plan when it is completed.” (#297)

51. Public Concern: The NPS should explore the issue of removing the Cascade Dam in the MRP.

“Re-evaluate the removal of Cascade Dam in the MRP. There is certainly a benefit to dam removal minus the massive re-engineering of the road alignment. The Park should not remove the Dam in conjunction with any proposal to widen the intersection. Turbidity and changed river flows should be fully understood and mitigated.” (#295)

52. Public Concern: The removal of the Cascade Dam should be addressed in an EIS separate from the MRP.

“The much-anticipated removal of the Cascades Dam needs to be the subject of a separate EIS. There needs to be a clear demonstration that the removal of the dam will enhance the values of the Merced River.” (#111)

PUBLIC SAFETY / LAW ENFORCEMENT

53. Public Concern: The NPS should strictly enforce regulations protecting the natural environment.

“Fines must be levied against those who commit destructive acts to this portion of wilderness. These fines must be in excess of \$500 for each offense (accumulative). In other words a separate fine for each offense. The water must be scientifically tested on a regular basis and any one found to be contaminating the river of the wilderness along side the river must be forced to pay a \$10,000 fine and serve at least 1 year in jail.” (#100)

“I support educational efforts at reducing negative impacts, where such can be shown to be cost-effective, but the bottom line is really enforcement procedures. There are, unfortunately, a small number of people who will do non-permitted things knowingly, so long as they think they can get away with it. I strongly support a vigorous enforcement policy, with stiff enough fines to (hopefully) offset most, if not all, of the costs associated therewith.” (#235)

54. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should allow for developed areas within the Merced River Corridor to ensure public safety.

“The fire staging area has been a god send over the years and if it were abolished where would staging take place in the future.” (#138)

“Provision should be made for a bridge connecting the north and south sides of Wawona 2 + miles up river to provide emergency exit in case of fire or other disaster.” (#273)

“My concern about making this area ‘scenic’ rather than leaving the meadow classified recreational is the ability of the National Park Service to use this area to land helicopters in emergency situations. If the classification of the meadow is changed from recreational to ‘scenic’ will this mean the National Park Service will not be allowed to land in the meadow for emergencies, such as fire and medical response?” (#324)

Chapter 2 - Affected Environment/ Environmental Consequences

This chapter includes discussion of public concerns regarding the existing condition of the Merced River corridor; its role in the enjoyment of Yosemite National Park by visitors; and suggestions for how best to mitigate the negative effects of river use while preserving opportunities for recreation and protecting biological resources. Topics of concern included in this chapter are natural environment, biologic environment, socioeconomic environment, cultural and historic environment and general park operations. Each of these topic areas is described with a brief narrative followed by statements of themes in public concern supported by quotes from actual letters.

The majority of the public who offered comments at this stage of planning, referenced general concerns with regard to the purpose of the MRP/DEIS and their view of desired future conditions. Specifically, most are concerned about effects of the Merced River Plan on access to the river and use of the river for swimming and boating. These general concerns are captured in Chapter 1 of this Report.

Desired or existing conditions within the river corridor itself were not topics of comment for many among those who responded. Several people took advantage of this opportunity for public input to identify their concern with general development of park facilities, transportation in the Yosemite Valley, and past planning efforts.

Natural Environment

This section summarizes public concerns regarding existing and desired future conditions for non-living aspects of the environment including ecosystem and physical processes. Comments were received that addressed flooding and general hydrologic processes, water quality, and restoration of riparian and other areas, protection of scenic values and noise. (Public Concerns 55-64)

HYDROLOGIC PROCESSES

55. Public Concern: Analysis for the MRP DEIS should assess effects under a regime of more frequent 100-year scale floods.

“It would be prudent to plan for more frequent floods and droughts, because of climatic changes that are well underway now. The old 100 year flood boundaries may now be meaningless.” (#258)

“There should not be any permanent facilities within the River Corridor that cannot be washed out by a 500-year flood event. This would also include parking facilities that are paved. Oils and other pollutants from the pavement generally tend to wash off and will drain directly into the river.” (#111)

56. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address restoring the Yosemite Valley moraine.

“The question of restoring this moraine (which I understand was explosively breached in the 19th century) should be examined. I have heard that the growth of incense cedars, over and above the preceding oaks, was in large part encourage by the drying out of the valley floor which followed the breaching of this moraine.” (#235)

DAMS

57. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should remove the dam on the Merced River.

“Please do remove the dam to restore the free-flowing characteristics of the Merced River. However, please do deep analyses of the sediment that has piled up behind the dam, and also on ways to negate any impact on life forms below the dam upon its removal. Please do not allow the sediment and impurities behind the dam to be washed downstream to the very possible detriment of the life of the river below the dam. Please go easy.” (#288)

“In keeping with its special designation, we feel the river should be returned to as natural a state as is practical and feasible. With this theme in mind, the dam at the intersection of Route 140 and Big Oak Flat Road should be removed.” (#94)

“The EIS should not contain provisions for the removal of historic bridges. Let the hydrologists determine and devise a means for preventing washouts when the river comes out of the channel.” (#111)

WATER QUALITY

58. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration and mitigation of road related water pollution.

“No parking lots in protected corridor (fuel runoff is inevitable and compaction serious enough to ruin a riparian habitat forever).” (#243)

59. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should eliminate water pollutants from the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

“Gasoline, oil, human waste and other pollutants should be eliminated from this very sensitive zone.” (#326)

“Public restrooms and other human waste need to be minimized and removed in this designated and protective corridor.” (#326)

60. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider options for removing human-made debris from the river.

“There is an incredible amount of debris on the bottom. From pieces of wrecked cars to pots, pans, fishing tackle, rails from the railroad, rebar, rope and more. It is our dream to get help in cleaning this up. When we saw your notice in the newspaper, we thought we could bring our suggestion to your attention. We feel we owe something to the river, after all, we all use the river and/or the highway at some point.” (#14)

“It is the condition of the river adjacent to the Highway that concerns us. Under the surface and out of view to almost every other user group on or in the river, there is an incredible amount of debris on the bottom. From pieces of wrecked cars to pots, pans, fishing tackle, rails from the railroad, rebar, rope and more. And after the big flood damaged so much of the area, we find even more of this kind of stuff.” (#14)

RESTORATION

61. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should include restoration of riparian and meadow systems.

“We encourage you to include in your plan continued restoration of the streambank riparian and meadow systems adjacent to the river. Dramatic examples of successful projects are found at Lower River, Housekeeping, Devils Elbow, Sentinel Bridge, Little Yosemite Valley and Mirror Lake.” (#282)

“Quality and abundance of the wildlife (flora and fauna) in the river area/corridor.” (#114)

62. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should establish criteria for the removal of logjams and protection of associate aquatic habitat.

“Serious logjams or "treefalls" such as now exist below Sentinel Beach and upstream from the Tenaya Bridge do not constitute "snags" that are beneficial to waterfowl and fish, but rather seriously impede the free flowing nature of the river and cause an exceedingly foul situation in late summer and autumn. To preserve the freeflowing characteristics of the river, each logjam or treefall should be considered on its own terms and removed if it hampers the free-flowing nature of the river or its tributaries, most especially if they occur within Yosemite Valley.” (#243)

SCENIC QUALITY

63. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should mitigate impacts on scenic resources in the Merced River corridor.

“The golf course is aesthetically pleasing; I know it very much adds to the charm of Wawona for me, and I have never heard another person complain about the presence of the golf course.” (#263)

“The plan should address issues of the possibly undesired visibility of unnaturally obtrusive man-made objects in wilderness or quasi-wilderness settings-e.g., do visitors want their enjoyment of a peaceful and natural-appearing lake or river vista intruded upon by brightly scintillating metallic surfaces or ‘Day-Glo orange’ inflatable rafts? (I would propose that a non-emergency exposure to the view of others of these and similar unnatural objects be prohibited in such areas.)” (#235)

“Improvements of the traffic below at the 120/140 intersection is not an enhancement of the scenic qualities of the Merced River W&S Corridor. There should be no alteration of the River characteristics from those that existed at the time of designation without the proof that these alterations will undoubtedly enhance the river qualities of this beautiful Wild and Scenic River.” (#111)

“Government houses boarded up by River (within plan) a hazard, eye-sore, and plain ugly.” (#140)

NOISE

64. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should establish stringent noise standards and prohibitions.

“That the use of noisy machinery and equipment (motorized boats, chain-saws, low flying aircraft, firework, etc) be prohibited or minimized.” (#20) [editor’s note: motorized boats are now allowed on any segments of the Merced River under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.]

“Efforts should be made (a) to document a baseline of the ‘natural (sounds and) quiet’ in various parts of this area, and (b) to establish quantifiable noise and audibility standards and criteria to help in determining what types and levels of man-produced sounds- including military, commercial, or other air overflights- constitute and unacceptable ‘pollution’ of the ‘natural sounds and natural quiet’. The plan should address the possibility of even more stringent standards against unnatural sounds and lights during those hours when sleep is often sought-say, between nine p.m. and seven a.m.” (#235)

“Noisy administrative operations (e.g. helicopters; blasting) - if to be allowed at all, should these, to the extent possible, be (a) restricted to certain hours and days; (b) restricted as to certain cumulative totals per day per week, etc.; and (c) be undertaken only at times and places published a certain amount of time in advance?” (#235)

Biological Environment

This section summarizes public concerns regarding the existing and desired future condition of the biological environment associated with the Merced River. The majority of respondents expressed their perspectives on issues related to the biological environment within the context of the general purpose and need for the proposed EIS. These general comments are captured in Chapter 1. Specific references to protection of certain species or types of habitat were few. (Public Concerns 65-66)

NOXIOUS/ EXOTIC WEEDS

65. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider and mitigate for the effects of noxious and exotic weeds.

“The exotic plants issue is a major concern in the Park and we well know that plants do not pay attention to lot lines and boundaries. I believe the Park could have some control over that kind of development.” (#207)

GRAZING

66. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should restrict cattle from riparian habitat.

“The management plan must keep cows out of the stream and river vegetarian zones. The Merced River can not be wild if it is left open to cattle grazing.” (#30) [editor’s note: cattle grazing is not allowed along any segments of the Merced River under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.]

Historic and Cultural Resources

This section summarizes comments and concerns regarding protection of historic and cultural resources. In general, respondents who commented on this topic believe protection of historic resources in Yosemite National Park such as bridges, the Wawona golf course, and Camp4 (also known as Sunnyside Campground), is necessary. They assert historic resources offer an important connection to the past history of the park and can enhance the scenic quality of visitor experiences. (Public Concerns 67-69)

67. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include careful consideration of the need to remove historic bridges.

“I strongly question the proposal to remove some of the historic bridges. If, as has been suggested, a large part of the campgrounds, and a large part of the Lodge facilities, are moved out of the flood plain, I believe that we could tolerate a 100 year flood with an acceptable level of damage, even if some water does back up behind the bridges.”(#125)

“I am disappointed that you plan to remove some of the stone bridges. They are not an eyesore and they do make it possible to do nice loops when walking or biking. With our small kids, we need the option of small and medium size loops as well as large loops.” (#84)

“We would like all existing bridges to remain, and if necessary repaired, such as Happy Island Bridges, so that persons of all ages can move about and enjoy the splendors of Yosemite.” (#96 SOCIO 51030)

68. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should recognize the historic values and significance of the Wawona golf course.

“When the golf course became 50 years old, we all heard that it was put on the national historical Register. If not, why not?” (#143)

“The course is well-qualified under the ‘historic vistas’ referenced in the Scenic elements of Table 2,7 Wawona, based on its long-time presence (and probably on who have played there).” (#296)

69. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should recognize and protect the historic status of Camp 4 (aka, Sunnyside Campground).

“Please honor Camp 4 as a National Historic Register - eligible site, allowing no construction there.” (#10)

Socio-Economic Environment

This section summarizes public comment and concerns with regard to the existing and future condition of social and economic environments in Yosemite and surrounding communities.

Yosemite Valley's carrying capacity and its relationship to visitors' experiences in the park lies at the heart of most public comment that address the social and economic environment. Regardless of their perspective on other issues, most respondents agree that the carrying capacity of the Valley should be addressed in the MRP as well as other planning efforts. How and at what level such a capacity limit could or should be established and enforced is a subject of much debate. In the following paragraphs and public concerns, varied approaches to reconciling desire for access, specific park uses, and quality visitor experiences are summarized. (Public Concerns 70-75)

Road construction and transportation planning, although not directly related to the MRP/DEIS are a concern for many who responded. They view motorized vehicle access to the Yosemite Valley as directly related to problems with park carrying capacity and the quality of visitor experiences. It is important to note that opinions are divided on whether restrictions on vehicle access or implementation of a plan for buses and large parking areas are necessary. Respondents offer several suggested means of mitigating traffic concerns including: promoting or, conversely, limiting bus access to the Valley; construction of parking facilities outside the park; retaining the existing one-way road configuration; retaining the current configuration of the intersection of highway 120 and 140; and, constructing a bridge between north and south areas of Wawona. (Public Concerns 76-82)

Many people offered specific comments on current construction along the El Portal road. As noted in Chapter 1 of this document, some feel this construction should be halted until the MRP/DEIS is completed. They argue that road construction in the Merced River Canyon will, inevitably, result in impacts on the river. They ask that transportation-planning efforts for this area include consideration of public safety, the need for more scenic overlooks and viewpoints, and whether construction in the canyon is even necessary. (Public Concerns 83-86)

Restrictions or changes in existing public access to the Merced River are topics of concern for many respondents. The concerns are placed within the broader context of discontent with any restriction on access to the Yosemite Valley. While most of these people feel access to the Merced should not decrease under alternatives in the MRP/DEIS, some also identify a need to mitigate the impacts of human use on the river. These members of the public want to protect their interests and use of the river, but not necessarily at the expense of other users or the environment. In particular, some boaters raise the question of whether or not the Park Service has the authority to restrict river use during peak high water periods. Other boaters seek protection of existing access points or encourage creation of more. A few ask the agency to make sure it considers the needs of people with disabilities and assert the Park Service should provide access that meets the needs of these people. Those who do favor restrictions on river use suggest the Park Service consider a ban on motorized boats and restrictions on commercial or concessionaire river use. (Public Concerns 87-92)

Camping in the riparian corridor is also important to many people who responded. They note that the public enjoys camping in existing campgrounds located in the Merced floodplain for precisely that reason: the floodplain is close to the river and affords easy access for swimmers and boaters, as well as, what many call a "unique" perspective on the scenery of Yosemite Valley. These respondents ask that the MRP/DEIS not result in the closure of campgrounds in floodplain. Indeed, some people feel there is a need for more campgrounds near the Merced River. A few respondents suggest some or all of these campgrounds should be designed for walk-in use. (Public Concerns 92-94)

Trail users, both hikers and people using trails as routes of access to the river or other Yosemite Valley resources, ask for development of the old Bagby to Merced railroad grade as a public trail. A few

respondents also suggest that consideration should be given in planning to mitigation of potential negative impacts of trails on the riparian and river environment. They are concerned that trails may serve to concentrate public use or result in increased erosion. (Public Concerns 95-96)

Conflicts with private land or potential land exchanges, potential impacts on quality of life for park and Wawona residents, and potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on concessionaires and gateway communities are important concerns for people who offered comments on the economic environment. They ask that the MRP DEIS include an analysis of the consequences of the managing the Merced on these areas of concern. (Public Concerns 97-101)

Following, organized by major issue categories, are the specific public concerns identified that relate to the socioeconomic effects of the MRP/DEIS.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

70. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider and identify need for and location of new bathroom facilities.

“My comments are regarding the South Fork of the Merced River in Wawona. It has two wonderful, highly-used swimming holes: The Swinging Bridge and Flat Rocks. We need to keep these swimming holes, but we should equip them with toilet facilities.” (#16)

71. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the needs of older park visitors.

“I would suggest and hope that in the scoping process for the Merced River that the National Park Service would take into consideration the older visitors to the river.” (#177)

“It would seem that there might in effect be some age and physical condition discrimination if very active sports like rock climbing and downhill skiing are allowed to continue while golf, a sport you can play your whole life, is no longer allowed.” (#263)

CARRYING CAPACITY

72. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should establish a human carrying capacity for Yosemite Valley.

“The NPS has long since established carrying capacities for campgrounds, Curry Village, the Lodge, the Ahwanee, and back country use. How can a day use carrying capacity for the valley itself be ignored.” (#215)

“Providing ‘visitor services’ for the ever increasing number of visitors will doom the Wild and Scenic aspects of the Merced River. The plan needs to set limits on the amount of people and infrastructure that will be allowed in Yosemite Valley.” (#280)

73. Public Concern: Yosemite Valley human carrying capacity should be determined by numbers of humans and impact on the Park..

"What do I want to experience when I visit Yosemite? A carrying capacity determined by numbers of humans in the environment of the Valley itself, rather than an imposed, artificial quota system determined by parking spaces available and elapsed time spent waiting in traffic jams and lines at cash registers." (#36)

"Park visitation should be based on the sensitivity of the park to human intrusion. A carrying capacity limit should be established for times of maximum visitation." (#74)

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER CORRIDOR ACCESS

74. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should not restrict access to Yosemite Valley.

"My concern with what I have been involved with in the Yosemite Valley Plan appears to be continuing, al be it subtle and slow by special interest groups, to gradually eliminate those of us that choose to drive into the Valley or have no other choice due to the special interest groups ability to manipulate the NPS into accelerating their 'proposed' plan and eliminating approximately 50% of the campgrounds (Lower and Upper Rivers and part of Lower Pines) because they are in a 100 year flood plain." (#246)

75. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should provide river and floodplain campgrounds access for people with disabilities.

"At the Wawona Campground parking lot put in a handicapped access ramp. This area is easy for all to reach and would benefit a forgotten segment of the population easily.... Try to find another location on the river where handicapped access would be feasible." (#119)

GENERAL ROAD CONSTRUCTION and TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

76. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should emphasize a decrease in motorized vehicle access.

"The management plan for the valley should prioritize the elimination of private motor vehicles..." (#34)

"No more road building - already too many vehicles in [the] Valley – smog! Solve with better public transport, not easier access to outside vehicles." (#202)

"I would like to suggest that one day access to the park is restricted to non-motorized vehicles completely..." (#239)

"I consistently called for fewer vehicles driving fewer miles in the Valley and that seems to have been the view of almost all who were involved. If that means some people will miss visiting Yosemite because they are unwilling to walk, ride a bike or take a shuttle, that is a consequence that is acceptable under the terms of the General Management Plan. (#221)

77. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should not widen the intersection of highways 120 and 140.

“Segment D should not be widened. I have not seen any problems there. As it is now, it is an enjoyable and leisurely drive. The intersection of 120/140 has never been a problem in my experience. I do avoid busy weekends, but overloading existing roads can be taken care of by other means (reservations, temporary closure, warnings, timed advertising, traffic cops, etc.). Don’t widen it!” (#258)

“Segment D (of the El Portal Road) should be permanently protected. No widening of the road along Segment D (120/140) intersection. There should be no widening of the 120/140 intersection.” (#243)

78. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should consider promoting or limiting tour bus access to Yosemite Valley.

“This grandiose road project was over designed and over funded from its inception and is a de facto subsidy to the tour bus/ hospitality industry running tours into Yosemite for profit. It points to the fact that a cap on tour buses (none were allowed in the Valley before 1977) is needed.” (#109)

“ I can tell you, from too many years of unpleasant experiences, that tour buses and their fumes, noise, and overall intrusion detract seriously from the enjoyment of those who come to cherish the Park rather than photograph selected sites and be on their way.” (#97)

“I would like to see people bused into Yosemite Valley for the day versus accommodating more cars on the road. A system of advanced registration for cars going into the Valley would limit the traffic and buses would provide for transportation for last minute travelers and overflow of drivers.” (#163)

“Improving bus transportation (free) to limit auto’s in the Valley is important.” (#22)

79. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should consider construction of parking structures outside the park and de-emphasize construction of parking lots in Yosemite Valley.

“Suitable, large parking structures built in several gateway communities (partially underground facilities would be least obtrusive) could help eliminate a lot of the most unpleasant externalities associated with the N.P.S. ‘ emphasis in day...visits to Yosemite Valley.” (#109)

“No new parking lots. Use the area where parking has been eliminated.” (#137)

80. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should provide adequate parking for climber access.

“Regarding the Merced River W&S River Management Plan, the Access fund wants to be sure that there is adequate parking for climber access to the walls along the canyon between Pohono Bridge and the park boundary.” (#5)

“Folks, On behalf of the Access Fund, I’d like to know the number, location, and size of turnouts that will be incorporated into the new Highway 140 road plan. These are very important to climbers for access to the walls along the canyon. I would like to get a set of the road plans (plan views only, no need for sections).” (#6)

81. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should not result in a change to existing one-way roads.

“Keep the one way road pattern that exists today.” (#137)

“Keep the one way road pattern. It is much safer than two way and eliminates the need for major reconstruction of the Southside Drive.” (#215)

82. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the need for a bridge connecting north and south sections of Wawona.

“The Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan prepared by the National Park Service: The need for a bridge connecting the north and south sections of Wawona for purposes of improved traffic circulation and public safety.” (#289)

EL PORTAL ROAD

83. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should include consideration of the contribution of roads to over use of the Park.

"My main concern regarding the Merced River is the recent massive highway construction on the roadway along the river leading into Yosemite will only encourage more use of an over-used ecosystem." (#103)

84. Public Concern: Construction on the El Portal Road and planning for roads should include consideration of effects of road design on visitor safety.

"One problem with this project (El Portal Road) is that people then can drive at 50 miles per hour allowing worse car wrecks than have occurred before." (#75)

"The campers, buses, and/ or trucks are too big for the road, and cause undue danger to others, prohibit them. No one has an inherent right to endanger others, and you have no obligation to accommodate whatever anyone wants to bring into the Park." (#78)

85. Public Concern: Construction of the El Portal Road and planning for roads should include provisions for scenic overlooks and viewpoints.

"A few more viewpoints, or perhaps some path segments below the roadway would enable visitors to savor the gorge more deeply." (#104)

86. Public Concern: Yosemite transportation planning and implementation should not include construction on the El Portal road.

“I urge you to undertake no further construction/ widening along El Portal road.” (#108)

BOATING and OTHER WATER USE

87. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not restrict river access.

"I grew up with Yosemite and with all it has to offer, one of its primary offerings is, of course, the Merced River. Indeed, I can still remember the day I was introduced to the river by my father...I now have a child of my own. I look forward to introducing the river to him the way it was to me. But now I am beginning to worry that soon that won't be a possibility. I fear that when the new Merced management plan comes out, the river may become less accessible. Thus, I write this letter to persuade those in charge not to place restrictions on the river." (#196)

"I very strongly urge the NPS to maintain at least as much access to the river as is currently. In other words, do not promulgate a bunch of new regulations which would interfere with peoples ability to use and enjoy the river, in whatever way they choose. The people ought to be able to kayak, raft, swim, fish, or just hang out at the river." (#107)

"The MMP should not be used as a justification to reduce public access facilities near the river (trails, concessions, rooms, campsites, bridges, roads...) within the existing recreation oriented areas. If anything the MMP should enable the increase of accessibility, in a protective way, by ordinary families..." (#188)

"In relation to managing the Merced River, I think that means that substantial riverbank areas should be accessible for swimming, wading and just being in the water. Beaches and picnic areas and walking trails and benches are all important if ordinary people are going to be able to stop long enough to appreciate river scenery and wildlife." (# 7)

88. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of restrictions on private boat and /or commercial boat use on the Merced.

"Do not restrict private boating - it has nowhere near the impact of commercial outfits, and private trips were being done long before the commercial outfitters came into being." (#17)

"Do away with the rafts that you guys rent and this would decrease the amount of people rafting, because unless they brought their own they wouldn't be able to raft." (#187)

"If large numbers of people are allowed to boat, regardless of the kind of craft, it would contribute to the degradation of the stream bed and banks.... There are many opportunities in California for people to participate in river recreation." (#254)

89. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not categorically restrict river use at high water.

"American Whitewater does not support high water closures. During periods of high runoff, the Park may encourage people not to boat certain sections for specific periods of time. However, by saying that one level is safe, and another level is unsafe, the Park opens itself to unique questions of liability. Park officials should take safety equipment, skills, and flow conditions into account before taking excessive measures to limit use for extended periods based on high water." (#257)

"The park does not have a clear right to ban canoeing or kayaking outright on any segment of the a Wild and Scenic River unless these activities will substantially interfere with other users or the unique attributes that led to the segment's inclusion under the act.... It is inappropriate to ban these traditional uses; however it may be appropriate to limit overall access. Limitations should be based on clearly defined and documented impacts. If the park determines that whitewater use will substantially interfere with the management of the resource for its wild, scenic, or recreational attributes, then American Whitewater might support moderate limits on access to protect the resource." (#257)

90. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should include provision of public access to the river above the Arch Rock park boundary.

“The RMP should make specific provisions for public access to the Merced immediately above the Arches Rock park boundary, in order to allow legal access to the Motels section of the Merced.” (#281)

91. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not allow motorized river traffic.

“There must be absolutely no motorized river traffic...” (#100) [editor’s note: motorized water craft are not allowed on any segments of the Merced River under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.]

CAMPING

92. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should provide more camping along the Merced.

“Considering the many miles of Merced River and tributaries within Yosemite, I would recommend the establishment of several campsites to provide open space enjoyment to vacationers who aren't interested in "the valley", or perhaps they would like a fresh experience on this trip.” (#77)

93. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not close campgrounds in the Merced floodplain.

“After the heavy rains the park service closed two campgrounds and 1/2 of another campground because they got flooded. These campgrounds have served well for over 50 years. [Where] is the damage? I have walked through both lower river campgrounds and the only damage I have seen was the sand left by the river. Now I know damage occurred in lower pines campground and I can understand closing part of that campground [because] the damage was severe.” (#319)

“The camp grounds in the flood plain have survived many floods over the years and are relatively cheaply reconstituted. There is no need to pay \$17 million to move to another spot in the flood plain. The infrastructure is in place and would have to remain to serve Curry, so why not just replace the prior camp grounds allowing some less expensive visitation and less need for the high end Lodge development.” (#215)

94. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should emphasize walk-in campgrounds in floodplain areas.

“I feel the best use of scenic sections of the river is walk-in camping. The most beautiful secret spot in the Valley is the Back Country Wilderness Permit Campground. But almost no one can use it.” (#200)

TRAILS

95. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider and mitigate effects of trails and their use on river water quality.

“[I would suggest that] trails or some kind of walking area be provided near the river in areas where damage to the environment would be at a minimum.” (#177)

96. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the old railroad grade along the Merced River as a trail and year-round access along the South Fork Trail to Wawona.

“Our main interest is the present and future status of the old railroad bed in the far side of the Merced river running from Bagby to El Portal. We know the County of Mariposa, the BLM and Rails to Trails have looked at turning the old railroad bed into a trail and tried to work out a compromise with private landowners for public access. We are hoping that you keep that option on the agenda in this planning process. Hopefully these issues can be resolved long term simply because they are in the Management Plan and are consistently on the agenda.” (#23)

“Lastly, we would like to see the Merced South Fork Trail open all year up to Wawona. We know a private landowner limits access upon the basis of Fire Danger from the Merced side and the far side is barely passable. It is very rich historically, for wildflowers, and beauty. It should be as accessible to the public as beaches on the coast.” (#23)

SOCIAL

97. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should account for potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on quality of life for park employees and Wawona residents.

“Part of the Yosemite experience is the use of the river. My family and I have and still enjoy swimming, rafting, and snorkeling in the Merced River. In today’s concern about the erosion of the family core and its relation to increasing crime and lack of personal responsibility, we need more Yosemite’s for families to gather and renew family values before returning to the pressure of the city. Please protect and preserve the Merced River. Your main challenge should be [to] protect and preserve without putting up a fence around it and keeping us out. We humans also need to use the river as part of the human spirits’ need to relax and rejuvenate.” (#246)

98. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should account for potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on the economic viability of concessions.

“Removal of the golf course would seriously injure concessionaire operations in Wawona, perhaps even rendering continued operation of the Wawona Hotel undesirable.” (#263)

99. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include analysis of potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on the economics of gateway communities.

“Though the Merced River is located outside of Tuolumne County, outdoor recreation provided by mYosemite National Park, including that dependent upon the Merced River, generates customers for Tuolumne County businesses, especially those visitor-serving businesses located along the State Route 120

corridor. Please evaluate effects of the Plan on the economy of gateway communities in the environmental review document prepared for this project.” (#2)

Private Property

100. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the use of and conflicts with land exchanges in the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

“As you know there are several parcels of private property in Section 35 that include the river and its floodplain. We will also use our best efforts to assist the NPS in effecting land exchanges authorized by the WSR Act that would provide even greater protection.” (#292)

“The Merced Wild and Scenic River Management Plan prepared by the National Park Service: The effects of the proposed El Portal land exchange tentatively approved by Congress in 1998.” (#289)

Park Operations

Park operations such as facilities maintenance were of little direct concern for respondents. Many people commented indirectly on park operations in the context of overall Yosemite Valley carrying capacity, in reference to their view of the purpose of the park, or from the perspective of users who are unhappy with the level and range of existing services. These topics are covered in Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need/ Proposed Action. One concern did directly address operations and is captured below.

101. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should move all park and concessionaire housing and services outside the park.

“Housing, concessions should be situated outside of park boundaries.” (#74)

Appendix A – 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 campers, local residents or business users. Demographic coding allows managers to focus on specific areas of concern linked to respondent categories, geographic areas, and response types.

A total of 1030 comments were identified, representing 309 separate letters, comment forms or email. These numbers, however, should be interpreted with caution. Those who responded do not constitute a valid random or representative sample of the general public. While this information can provide insight into the perspectives and values of respondents, it does not necessarily reveal the desires of society as a whole.

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 was considered, and the analysis team attempted to capture all relevant public concerns in the analysis process.

GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

Letters and Emails came from 12 states and Canada. 56 responses were received in a format that did not reveal geographic origin. A total of 235 responses (76%) of the total responses were received from the state of California. Responses with unknown geographic origin accounted for 18% of the total responses, Texas and Utah constitute 1%, Minnesota and Oregon, Arizona, Illinois, Massachusetts, Montana, Vermont, Wisconsin and Canada constituted less than 1%. Geographic representation was tracked for each letter, email, fax or comment form during the course of content analysis.

Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Response

Country	State	Number of Respondents
USA	Arizona	1
	California	235
	Illinois	1
	Maryland	1
	Massachusetts	1
	Minnesota	2
	Montana	1
	Oregon	2
	Texas	3
	Utah	3
	Vermont	1
	Wisconsin	1
Canada		1
Unknown Geographic Location		56
Total		309

ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATION

Responses were received from various organizations and unaffiliated individuals. These respondents include government representatives, non-government environmental groups and other non-government groups, and unaffiliated individuals. Unaffiliated individuals accounted for 93% of the total respondents. Non-government environmental organizations constituted 4% of the total respondents, other non-governmental organizations constituted 2%, and county and federal government organizations constituted 1%. These different organization types were tracked for each letter, Email, fax or comment form in the course of the content analysis.

Table 2. Number of Respondents by Organizational Affiliation

Organization Field	Organization Type	Number of Respondents
C	County Government Organizations	2
E	Non-Government Environmental Organizations	11
F	Federal Government Organizations	2
I	Individuals (No specific affiliation)	287
N	Other Non-Government Organizations	7
TOTAL		309

USER TYPE

Respondents were further categorized by park or other user type. In all cases user types were only counted if the respondent identified themselves as such in their letters, comment forms or Emails. Those with no identified user type constituted 78% of the total responses by user type. Residents of Yosemite, Wawona or El Portal, constituted 7% of the total respondents, long-time users constituted 5%, conservationists constituted 2%, campers constituted 1.6%, rafters and kayakers constituted 1%, and hikers, climbers, businesses, anglers and other water users constituted less than 1% each. These different user types were tracked for each letter, fax, Email or comment form in the course of the content analysis.

Table 3. Number of Respondents by User Type

User Field	User Type	Number of Respondents
B	Anglers	1
C	Conservationists	7
E	Businesses (economic / entrepreneur)	2
K	Rafters / Kayakers	4
M	Campers	5
O	Hikers / Casual Walkers	3
R	Climbers	3
T	Long-time Users / Multi-generational Users	14
W	Other Water Users (e.g. swimmers, snorkelers)	1
X	No Identified Type	246
Z	Residents (Wawona, El Portal)	23
TOTAL		309

REFERENCES TO OTHER PLANNING OR SPECIFIC PROJECTS

Because Yosemite is engaged in several different planning efforts, many respondents did not limit their comments to the MRP EIS. Each comment or statement of concern in a letter or other correspondence was individually assessed as to which planning effort it referenced. A total of 815 comments (79%) were coded to the Merced Wild and Scenic River Plan. Non-specific Plans made up 9% percent of the comments; references to construction on the El Portal Road made up 8%; comments on the Yosemite Valley Plan comprised 2%; Valley Implementation Plan references accounted for 8%; and, comments on the Yosemite Lodge Plan, the Valley Housing Plan and references to the status of Camp 4/ Sunnyside made up less than 1% each. These different plans were tracked at the level of individual public comments in the course of the content analysis. Each letter, fax, email or comment form contained one or several separate comments.

Table 4. Number of Comments Sorted by Reference to Specific Plans or Projects

Alternative Field	Plan or Project	Number of Comments
C	Merced Wild and Scenic River	815
D	Yosemite Lodge	5
E	El Portal Road	79
H	Valley Housing Plan	2
N	Non-Specific / Outside Park Boundary / Outside Merced Drainage	95
Q	Camp 4 / Sunnyside	3
V	Valley Implementation Plan	8
Y	Yosemite Valley Plan	23
TOTAL		1030

* This table shows the number of comments, not the number of letters received.

Appendix B - List of Public Concerns

Chapter 1 ~ Purpose and Need / Proposed Action

Purpose and Need

- p. 3 1. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should identify a preferred alternative that restricts commercial development in the Merced River Corridor.
- p. 3 2. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address restoring the Merced River Valley to a more natural environment.
- p. 3 3. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should be developed to ensure the preservation of Outstanding and Remarkable Values in the Merced River Corridor.
- p. 3 4. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should establish broad management standards for the Merced River Corridor.
- p. 4 5. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should focus on improvement and maintenance of the Merced River's health.
- p. 4 6. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should allow a variety of public uses for the Merced River Valley.
- p. 4 7. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should not include the developed areas of Wawona.
- p. 5 8. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address the entire length of the Merced River Valley.
- p. 5 9. Public Concern: The NPS should focus attention on areas of the Merced River Valley that need immediate attention.
- p. 5 10. Public Concern: The development of the MRP DEIS should be guided by National Park Service regulations.
- p. 5 11. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should allow Yosemite officials to charge fees that are used for river management within the park.
- p. 5 12. Public Concern: The NPS should not allow the viewpoints of special interests to affect decisions regarding the MRP DEIS.
- p. 6 13. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address problems created by the El Portal Road project.
- p. 6 14. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should account for the environmental impact of the gravel paving work done this summer at Camp 6.
- p. 6 15. Public Concern: The NPS should avoid utilizing the "design and build" process in the Merced River Valley.
- p. 6 16. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address traffic congestion in Yosemite Valley

Applicable Laws

- p. 7 17. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should avoid restricting non-commercial use of the Merced River in accordance with California law.

- p. 7 18. Public Concern: The NPS should acknowledge that California state law encourages preservation of public golf courses.
- p. 7 19. Public Concern: The NPS should recognize that it lacks authority to manage the Merced River Corridor in Wawona under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

- p. 8 20. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should designate a no-development corridor along the Merced River in accordance with the Wild and Scenic River Act.
- p. 8 21. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should assess utilization of the 100 year floodplain criteria for designation of Wild and Scenic River Corridor boundaries.
- p. 8 22. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should designate the Merced River in the park as scenic or wild instead of recreational to protect the natural environment.
- p. 8 23. Public Concern: The NPS should designate the developed Wawona section of the Merced River as recreational.
- p. 9 24. Public Concern: The NPS should reassess designating Wawona Meadows as scenic in order to provide greater public access to the area.
- p. 9 25. Public Concern: The NPS should assure that all Yosemite management plans comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
- p. 9 26. Public Concern: The NPS should not make any decisions regarding designation of river sections prior to the development of the MRP.
- p. 10 27. Public Concern: The NPS should strictly adhere to the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in protecting the Merced River.
- p. 10 28. Public Concern: The NPS should properly identify and protect the Outstanding and Remarkable Values within the Merced River Corridor.
- p. 10 29. Public Concern: Outstanding and Remarkable Values identified for the Wild sections of the Merced River should include fishing opportunities.

Planning Process / Policy

- p. 10 30. Public Concern: The NPS should develop a broad range of alternatives in the MRP DEIS according to the NEPA process.
- p. 11 31. Public Concern: The NPS should avoid selecting strategies regarding Merced River management until the full MRP EIS process is complete.
- p. 11 32. Public Concern: The NPS should conduct a wide range of scientific studies on the Merced River Corridor as a part of the MRP DEIS process.
- p. 11 33. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address the possible negative effects of the proposed action on T and E species.

- p. 12 34. Public Concern: The NPS should conduct a slow and careful Comprehensive River Management Planning process.
- p. 12 35. Public Concern: The NPS should provide full details of present and estimated river designation sections under the proposed action.
- p. 12 36. Public Concern: The NPS should include mitigation measures in the Comprehensive Management Plan to offset damage caused by rebuilding projects.

Public Involvement

- p. 13 37. Public Concern: The NPS should coordinate with other land users and government agencies in developing the MRP DEIS.
- p. 13 38. Public Concern: The NPS should provide adequate notice for MRP public meetings.
- p. 13 39. Public Concern: The NPS should more thoroughly organize the MRP public meetings.
- p. 13 40. Public Concern: The MRP public meetings should be conducted as official hearings.
- p. 14 41. Public Concern: The NPS should extend the length of the MRP scoping period.
- p. 14 42. Public Concern: The NPS should clarify the consequences of designating river segments under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
- p. 14 43. Public Concern: The NPS should utilize and acknowledge all public comment regarding the MRP.

Relationship to Other Planning

- p. 14 44. Public Concern: The NPS should complete the River Management Plan before considering any further actions on other park plans.
- p. 14 45. Public Concern: The NPS should stop construction within the park until the Comprehensive Management Plan is complete.
- p. 15 46. Public Concern: The Comprehensive Management Plan should be completed independently of other park planning processes.
- p. 15 47. Public Concern: The River Management Plan should be developed in coordination with other park plans.
- p. 15 48. Public Concern: The NPS should not allow the River Management Plan to delay work on the Yosemite Valley Plan.
- p. 15 49. Public Concern: The NPS should avoid using the Wild and Scenic River designation to change the management direction mandated by the 1980 General Management Plan.
- p. 16 50. Public Concern: The NPS should recognize that the 1980 General Management Plan calls for the Wawona Golf Course to be retained.
- p. 16 51. Public Concern: The NPS should explore the issue of removing the Cascade Dam in the MRP.

- p. 16 52. Public Concern: The removal of the Cascade Dam should be addressed in an EIS separate from the MRP.

Public Safety / Law Enforcement

- p. 16 53. Public Concern: The NPS should strictly enforce regulations protecting the natural environment.
- p. 17 54. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should allow for developed areas within the Merced River Corridor to ensure public safety.

Chapter 2 ~ Affected Environment/ Environmental Consequences

Natural Environment

HYDROLOGIC PROCESSES

- p. 18 .55. Public Concern: Analysis for the MRP DEIS should assess effects under a regime of more frequent 100 year scale floods.
- p. 18 56. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should address restoring the Yosemite Valley moraine.

DAMS

- p. 19 57. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should remove the dam on the Merced River.

WATER QUALITY

- p. 19 58. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration and mitigation of road related water pollution.
- p. 19 59. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should eliminate water pollutants from the Wild and Scenic River corridor.
- p. 19 60. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider options for removing human- made debris from the river.

RESTORATION

- p. 20 61. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should include restoration of riparian and meadow systems.
- p. 20 62. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should establish criteria for the removal of logjams and protection of associate aquatic habitat.

SCENIC

- p. 20 63. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should mitigate impacts on scenic resources in the Merced River corridor.

NOISE

p. 21 64. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should establish stringent noise standards and prohibitions.

Biological Environment

NOXIOUS/ EXOTIC WEEDS

p. 21 65. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider and mitigate for the effects of noxious and exotic weeds.

GRAZING

p. 21 66. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should restrict cattle from riparian habitat.

Historic and Cultural Resources

p. 22 67. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include careful consideration of the need to remove historic bridges.

p. 22 68. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should recognize the historic values and significance of the Wawona golf course.

p. 22 69. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should recognize and protect the historic status of Camp 4/Sunnyside.

Socio-Economic Environment

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

p. 24 70. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider and identify need for and location of new bathroom facilities.

p. 24 71. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the needs of older park visitors.

CARRYING CAPACITY

p. 24 72. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should establish a human carrying capacity for Yosemite Valley.

p. 24 73. Public Concern: Yosemite Valley human carrying capacity should be determined by numbers of humans and impact on the Park.

WILD and SCENIC RIVER CORRIDOR ACCESS

p. 25 74. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should not restrict access to Yosemite Valley.

p. 25 75. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should provide river and floodplain campground access for people with disabilities.

GENERAL ROAD CONSTRUCTION and TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- p. 25 76. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should emphasize a decrease in motorized vehicle access.
- p. 25 77. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should not widen the intersection of highways 120 and 140.
- p. 26 78. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should consider promoting or limiting tour bus access to Yosemite Valley.
- p. 26 79. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should consider construction of parking structures outside the park and de-emphasize construction of parking lots in Yosemite Valley.
- p. 26 80. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should provide adequate parking for climber access.
- p. 26 81. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should not result in a change to existing one-way roads.
- p. 27 82. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the need for a bridge connecting north and south sections of Wawona.

EL PORTAL ROAD

- p. 27 83. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park transportation planning should include consideration of the contribution of roads to over use of the Park.
- p. 27 84. Public Concern: Construction on the El Portal Road and planning for roads should include consideration of effects of road design on visitor safety.
- p. 27 85. Public Concern: Construction of the El Portal Road and planning for roads should include provisions for scenic overlooks and viewpoints.
- p. 27 86. Public Concern: Yosemite transportation planning and implementation should not include construction on the El Portal road.

BOATING and OTHER WATER USE

- p. 27 87. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not restrict river access.
- p. 28 88. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of restrictions on private boat and /or commercial boat use on the Merced.
- p. 28 89. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not categorically restrict river use at high water.
- p. 29 90. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should include provision of public access above the Arches Rock park boundary.
- p. 29 91. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not allow motorized river traffic.

CAMPING

- p. 29 92. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should provide more camping along the Merced.
- p. 29 93. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should not close campgrounds in the Merced floodplain.
- p. 29 94. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS preferred alternative should emphasize walk-in campgrounds in floodplain areas.

TRAILS

- p. 29 95. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should consider and mitigate effects of trails and their use on river water quality.
- p. 30 96. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the potential use of the Bagby-Merced rail line as a trail.

SOCIAL

- p. 30 97. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should account for potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on quality of life for park employees and Wawona residents.
- p. 30 98. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should account for potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on the economic viability of concessions.
- p. 30 99. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include analysis of potential effects of Wild and Scenic River management on the economics of gateway communities.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

- p. 31 100. Public Concern: The MRP DEIS should include consideration of the use of and conflicts with land exchanges in the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

Park Operations

- p. 31 101. Public Concern: Yosemite National Park should move all park and concessionaire housing and services outside the park.

Appendix C – The Coding Process: Public Comments and Demographics

Introduction

Public comments on the Notice of Scoping for a Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Merced Wild and Scenic River (MRP EIS) were documented and analyzed using a process called Content Analysis. This is a systematic method of compiling, categorizing, and capturing the full range of public viewpoints and concerns regarding the role of the MRP EIS.

Information from public and employee meetings, letters, emails, faxes, and other sources are all included in this analysis. Content Analysis is intended to help the MRP EIS Team clarify, adjust, or use technical information to prepare the Draft EIS.

In the Content Analysis process used for this project, each letter was given a unique identifier number. This letter number allows analysts to link specific comments to original letters. All respondents' names and addresses were then entered into a project-specific database program, enabling creation of a complete mailing list of all respondents. The database was also used to track pertinent demographic information such as: special interest group input and federal, state, county, and local government responses.

All input was considered and reviewed by two analysts. Each comment was read by an analyst, sorted into concerns and themes, and then entered verbatim into the database. In preparing the final summary analysis, public statements were reviewed again using database printouts. These reports track all input and allow analysts to identify a wide range of public concerns and to analyze the relationships between them. The final product includes a narrative description of public comment by topic, a list of public concerns addressed to 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 Yosemite National Park Superintendent's Office, Yosemite, CA. Both the MRP EIS Team and the public are encouraged to review 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 do the results of the content analysis attempt to sway decision makers towards the will of any identifiable majority. There are many reasons for this, the primary one being a desire to prepare a MRP EIS in a way that best meets the mission of the Park Service and serves all the people -- not just some. Content Analysis ensures that every comment is considered at some point in the decision process.

Coding

Coding public comments lies at the heart of our analysis process. A well-planned coding process can save time when we begin the writing phase of each project. Coding is the act of reading a public comment and breaking it down into different areas of concern. A letter may address many different things, and our job is to capture all of these concerns and separate them into subject areas for our database. The database can then be used to call up all comments regarding a specific area of concern. From these database reports we can begin to write our summary of public comment.

It is important in our process that we capture the emotion and emphasis of a letter. The "I think" or "I want" statement does not tell us enough. We search the letter for the WHY and BECAUSE. Explanations for why people "think" and "want" are the true essence of people's opinions. When coding a letter, we think about what would be useful when attempting to summarize public comment.

In order to accurately reflect a person's sentiments it may be appropriate to code a large portion of a comment. We code as much as is necessary to capture WHY someone feels a certain way.

We use as specific a coding category as possible. However, we do not split paragraphs when doing so would result in losing the full meaning or emphasis of the comment. When in doubt, we lump rather than split so that each concern will stand-alone and make sense?

Overlap or grey areas between codes do occur. In these instances we talk to our teammates and arrive at a group consensus as to where comments will be coded. Coding consistency helps us during the writing and analysis phase of each project. We pick a category from the coding structure that fits the public concern best.

Coding Structure

Coding categories were derived directly from letters and other public comment. They were designed to help us better organize and sort through a large amount of information. The coding structure is arranged into a numerical structure. For example, all comments addressing the planning process for this project fall under numbers 10,000 to 15,000. A comment specific to a particular resource, such as wildlife, may be coded to a different number range. Codes were written on the left hand side of the coded comment. This allows for data entry personnel to more easily read and track comments.

When coding, we split out bullet statements or separate sentences from within a paragraph to place into different code categories. When needed we included the lead-in sentence or idea with each comment (bullet statement) in the list? Example – “I feel you must strengthen the policy in the following ways or it will be ineffective...A...B...C...” The lead in sentence is important in understanding the bullets “A, B, and C.” We included a note in the margin for data entry personnel to type the lead sentence before each separate statement.

First and Second Reading

Each letter was read twice. The first reader coded the letter and initialed the bottom of the first page. The second reader either concurred with the coding or revised the coding after discussing changes with the first reader. The second reader also used colored highlighter markers to separate the different comments. This makes it easier for data entry personnel to visually track comments. The second reader also initialed the bottom of the first page. Two initials indicate that a letter is ready to be entered into the database.

First coders responsibilities:

- Assign header (i.e. I-2-1)
- Break out sentences and paragraphs and code them according to the coding guide.
- Assign any Alternative codes
- Initial

Second coder's responsibilities:

- Check that the header information is correct
- Check that the correct alternative codes have been assigned (this is the most forgotten item)
- Double check coding. If you disagree, take it back to the first coder and discuss the codes. Take it to the team leader if an agreement can not be reached.
- Color comment
- Initial

Demographic coding

Demographic coding allows managers to form an overall picture of who is offering public comment, where respondents live, general affiliation to various organizations or government agencies, and the manner in which people respond. The database can be used to isolate specific combinations of information about public comment. For example, a project manager can run a report that only includes public comment from people in Washington State who are members of conservation oriented organizations. The power of the demographic coding combined with the public comment subject categories allows managers to utilize the database to focus on specific areas of public concern linked to types of respondents, geographic area, and how public comment was received. The demographic codes are written at the top center of the first page of each letter. For this project, the demographic codes are as follows:

Affiliation (Self-identified affiliation of respondent)

- I Individual (no specific affiliation)
- F Federal Gov't
- S State Gov't
- C County Gov't
- L Local Gov't
- E Non-Governmental Environmental Organizations
- N Non-Governmental Other Organizations (not environmental)

Number of signatures (authors) – We Records the number of signatures. Internet or e-mail messages count as 1 signature, even though there is not an actual signature. If a letter has no signature the letter will still be counted as having one signature. To be counted as two or more signatures there must be a distinction between the signatures. If Jane Smith signs her name and her husband's name, John Smith, only one signature is generally counted.

Response Type (format of comment)

- 1 Letter
- 2 Email
- 3 Fax
- 4 Form Letter
- 5 Petition
- 6 Comment Form
- 12 Mailing List Only

User Type (assign to first primary)

- X No identified type/ Not Applicable
- M Campers
- A Lodge Users (e.g. Ahwanee)
- K Rafters/Kayakers
- B Fishers (as in bait)
- W Other water users (e.g. swimmers, snorkels)
- R Climbers (as in rope)
- H Stock Users (as in horse)
- O Hikers/ other foot access (e.g. "I like to walk in meadows")
- E Business (as in economic/ entrepreneur)
- T Long-Time User (self-identified e.g. 50 years/ multi-generation user)
- P Park Staff (self-identified)
- Z Residents (Wawona, El Portal)
- C Conservationist

Alternative Field 1 (use only when respondent references a specific plan)

Y	Yosemite Valley Plan
C	Merced Wild and Scenic River
V	Valley Implementation Plan
D	Yosemite Lodge
H	Valley Housing Plan
F	Yosemite Falls Project
E	El Portal Road (any references)
Q	Camp 4/Sunnyside
N	Not specific/ outside park boundary/ outside Merced drainage)

Alternative Field 2 (use only when willingness is identified by respondent)

- Null (no identification of willingness to pay, sacrifice, give-up access etc.)
- Willingness to pay, sacrifice, give-up access for the betterment of the park)

Petitions - Use this code only if the letter has five or more signatures of unrelated individuals or organizations. Count the number of signatures and use response type 3 for a petition. If complete addresses are included, each signature with an address will be put into the database with their own mail ID and a letter ID number linked to the petition. Signatures without addresses will be counted towards the number of signatures for the petition but will not receive a mail ID.

Petitions or other letters that have multiple Mail ID's need to reflect the correct number of signatures. For example, if you have a petition with 1200 signatures, that number goes in the header.

Form Letters

Description

The term "form letter" is used to refer to comments received under separate letterhead that are identical in content. Generally, the text of these letters is 100% identical, however, in some cases and at the discretion of the coder, letter text may paraphrase the content of a form letter with no changes in topics discussed etc.

Letters with largely, but not entirely, identical text are know as "form letters with additional comment." As an example, this term describes a letter of 6 paragraphs where one paragraph differs from a letter identified as "form letter 1 -- No Mines." The 5 "form" paragraphs can be coded like the form (in this case this means you only need to code the "additional comment.")

- **Form Letter = identical or very closely paraphrased**
- **Form Letter with Additional Comment = identical or very closely paraphrased with one or more additional comments.**

Process

Each Form letter will be given a unique number and a name descriptive of the letter's content. This number and name will be assigned by an Information Systems Specialist (ISS) Team Leader. Each form letter receives a number preceded by the letter "f." Thus, f2 in the header means Form Letter #2 - "River Lovers United". The ISS Team Leader will maintain a list of Form Letter #s and titles for each project. Only form letters receive an f (form) number in the header.

Coding Structure

Purpose and Need/ Proposed Action

PLANN

- 10000 Purpose and Need
- 11000 Applicable Laws (Exec. Orders, Floodplain, Wetlands, Clean Water Act, Environmental Justice)
 - 11010 Wild and Scenic River Act (procedural concerns, legal definition)
- 12000 Planning Process and Policy (other than public involvement – see 14000 for relationship to other planning processes)
- 13000 Public Involvement
- 14000 Relationship to other Planning (general)
 - 14010 Yosemite Valley Plan (conflicts with/ combine with MRP)
- 15000 Public Safety/ Law Enforcement

Affected Environment

NATUR

- 20000 Natural Environment (general comments)
 - 21000 Ecosystem Processes (hydrologic, physical processes, fire)
 - 21010 Water Quality (general – if specific to clean water act see 11000)
 - 21020 Air Quality (general compliance, conditions, abatement)
 - 21030 Soils
 - 21040 Floodplain (guidelines for development in areas subject to flooding)
 - 22000 Scenic Resources (general statements on scenic values – for river specific see 51060)
 - 23000 Noise

BIOLO

- 30000 Biologic Environment (organisms)
 - 31000 Aquatic
 - 32000 Riparian
 - 33000 Threatened and Endangered
 - 34000 Biologic Environment/ user conflicts/ buffers – for protection of the resources

CULTU

- 40000 Cultural/ Historic (includes native Americans)
 - 41000 Structures (national historic register)
 - 42000 Landscapes (national historic landscape elements, districts, nominations)
 - 43000 Cultural Practices (traditional uses)

SOCIO

- 50000 Socio-Economic Environment (general)
 - 51000 Visitor Experience (general)
 - 51010 Carrying Capacity (use level)
 - 51020 Access
 - 51025 Traffic/ Congestion (vehicles and parking)
 - 51030 Specific Recreation Use (concerns/conflicts)
 - 51040 Water (swimming/rafting/kayaking, fishing)
 - 51050 Floodplain/ non-water (riparian area activities e.g. hiking, camping)
 - 51060 Non-floodplain/river related (as in view of the river/view from river)
 - 51070 User/ User Conflicts/ buffers for incompatible uses
 - 52000 Social (community/ human interaction/ social fabric)
 - 53000 Economic (effects on businesses, gateway communities and concessions)
 - 54000 Private Property (easements, water rights, ownership)

PARKO

- 60000 Park Operations (general maintenance, services)

Appendix D – Content Analysis and Public Input: Some Common Misconceptions

Public scoping comments on the proposed Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan (MRP) were documented and analyzed using a process called Content Analysis. This is a systematic method of compiling, categorizing and capturing the full range of public issues and concerns regarding the role of this project in the future of Yosemite National Park as reflected in public input. Over the course of the planning process for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the MRP, information from formal public hearings, written comment, workshop proceedings and other sources will be included in that analysis.

Common Misconceptions

Myth: Letters from the Public Are Not Read

Fact: Not only is the opposite true, we do read your letters: we generally read them twice. All input is considered and reviewed, in most cases by two analysts. Comments, sorted by issues and themes, are then entered verbatim into a database. In preparing the final summary, public statements are reviewed again using database printouts. Content Analysis is not intended to replace reading actual input and comments. Rather it serves to augment input.

Myth: Public Comment Is a Vote

Fact: It is important for the public to know this process does not constitute a vote. In no way do the results of the content analysis attempt to sway decision makers towards the will of the majority. There are many reasons for this, the primary one being a desire to plan for management of the Merced wild and scenic river corridor in a way that protects the land and serves all the people -- not just some. What Content Analysis does do is ensure that every comment is considered in the decision.

Myth: Form Letters Are Not Counted Equally

Fact: This statement assumes public comment is a vote. Form letters are counted, but what counts is not the number of letters. The purpose of analysis of public input is to identify what people are concerned about and why. We count concerns not how many people have them. Thus if we receive, 100 letters with exactly the same statement of concern, we enter that statement into our database once and tie the statement to each of the people who signed off on it. 100 identical postcards does not equal 100 identical statements in the database.

Myth: Long Letters or Comments Are Not Effective

Fact: In all cases, all comments are read regardless of length or content. However, many people assume that short, "to the point" type input is preferred by federal managers and decision-makers. While this kind of input often takes less time to read and process, substantive comments that include a personal issue, a statement of why it is significant and how the agency should fix it provide us with more information to work with in making a decision. Comprehensive, carefully written input is always appreciated.

If you have further questions about the Content Analysis process, you may contact the US Forest Service **Content Analysis Enterprise Team** at (406) 329-3386.