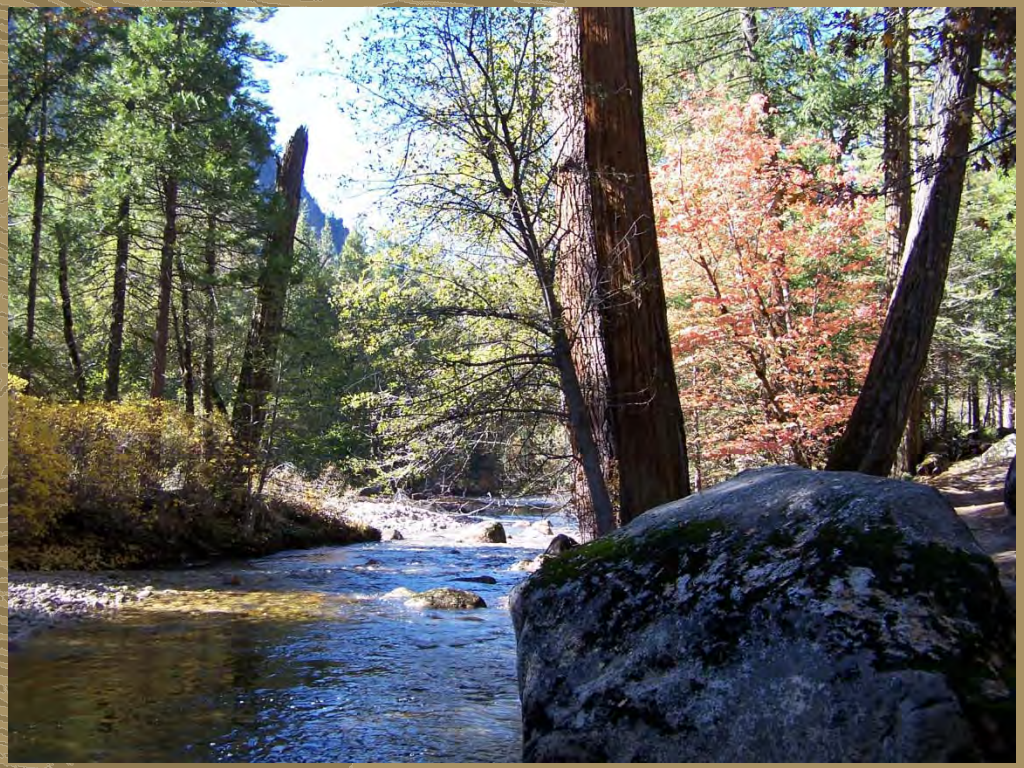
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yosemite National Park

Merced Wild and Scenic River Plan

Foundational Elements



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Wild & Scenic River Act

River Values

(The Pillars of the Act)

- Protects free-flowing condition
- Protects water quality
- Protects and enhances the river's *Outstandingly Remarkable Values* – the qualities that make the river worthy of special protection

Wild & Scenic River Act

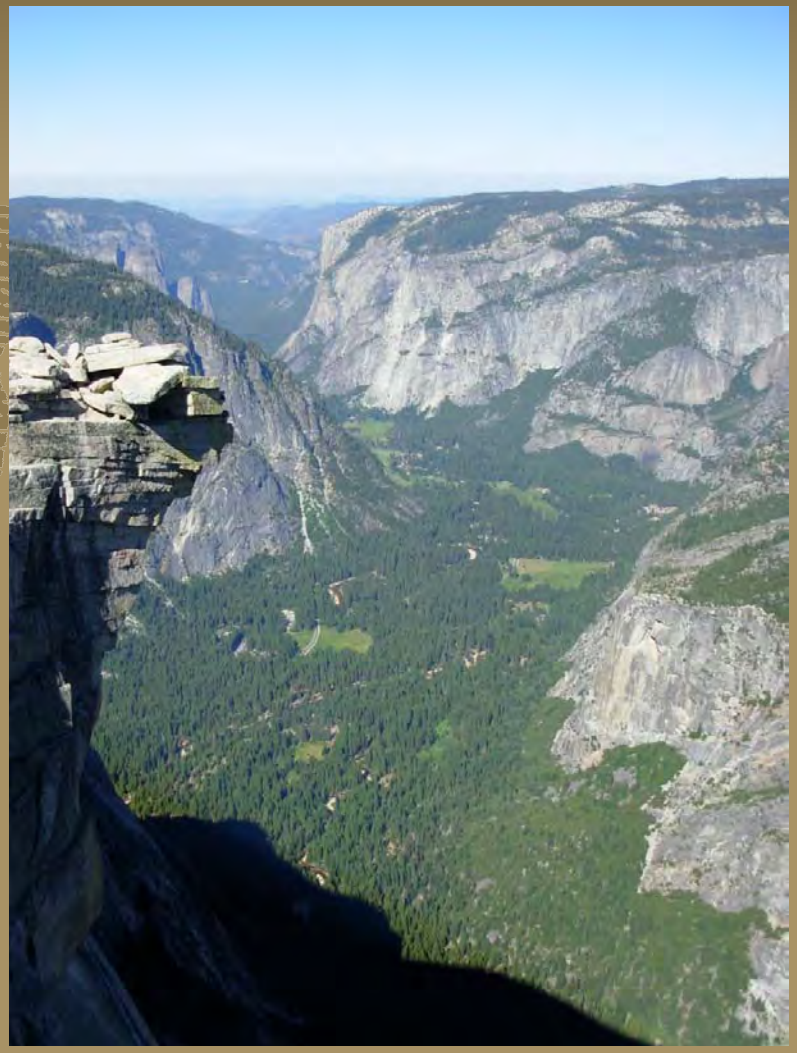
- Requires a Comprehensive Management Plan to provide long-term guidance
- Ensures visitor access and enjoyment
- Addresses user capacity, or the kinds and amounts of visitor use appropriate in the river corridor.

Merced Wild and Scenic River

- In 1987, 122 miles of the Merced River were designated as Wild & Scenic, 81 miles of which are in Yosemite National Park
  - Main Stem and South Fork Merced Rivers
  - Headwaters in Wilderness
- Portions of the river fall into Wild, Scenic and Recreation Classifications

History of the Merced River Plan

- Original Plan 2000
- Revised Plan 2005
- Appeals, Mediation & Settlement Agreement 2007-2009
- New Plan 2009 - 2012



Foundational Elements of this Wild and Scenic River Plans

- Define Goals/Objectives
- Boundaries
- Classifications
- Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV)
- River Values Baseline Condition
- Address User Capacity
- On-going Monitoring

What Yosemite Planning Staff Have Been Working On…

- Scoping—2009-2010
  - Scoping Summary Report
- ORV Classification and Determinations
- Baseline Condition
- Public Outreach Materials

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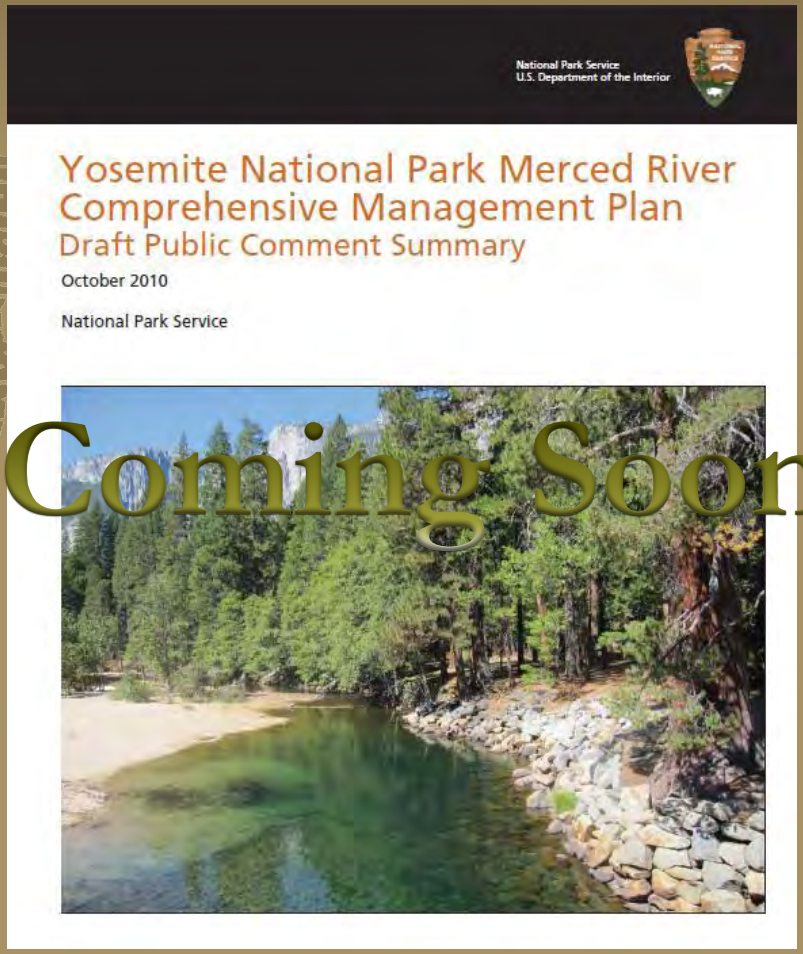
What We've Heard

- **Scoping: Approx. 500 letters**
- **Three Broad Categories**
  - Restoration
  - Visitor Experience
  - Infrastructure



Restoration

- Impediments to Free Flow (bridges, riprap)
- Facilities within the Floodplain or Wetlands
- Trampling of Vegetation & Erosion of Soils from Human foot-traffic
- Integrity of Archeological Sites
- Water Contamination/Conservation

Visitor Experience

- Overall Visitor Numbers and Crowding at Attraction Sites
- Recreation Diversity
- Recreational Boating
- Crowding, Lack of Solitude in Wilderness, and Stock Use
- Demand for Additional Camping & Affordable Accommodations

Infrastructure

- Facilities and Level of Development
- Transportation Issues Including Vehicle Congestion & Crowding

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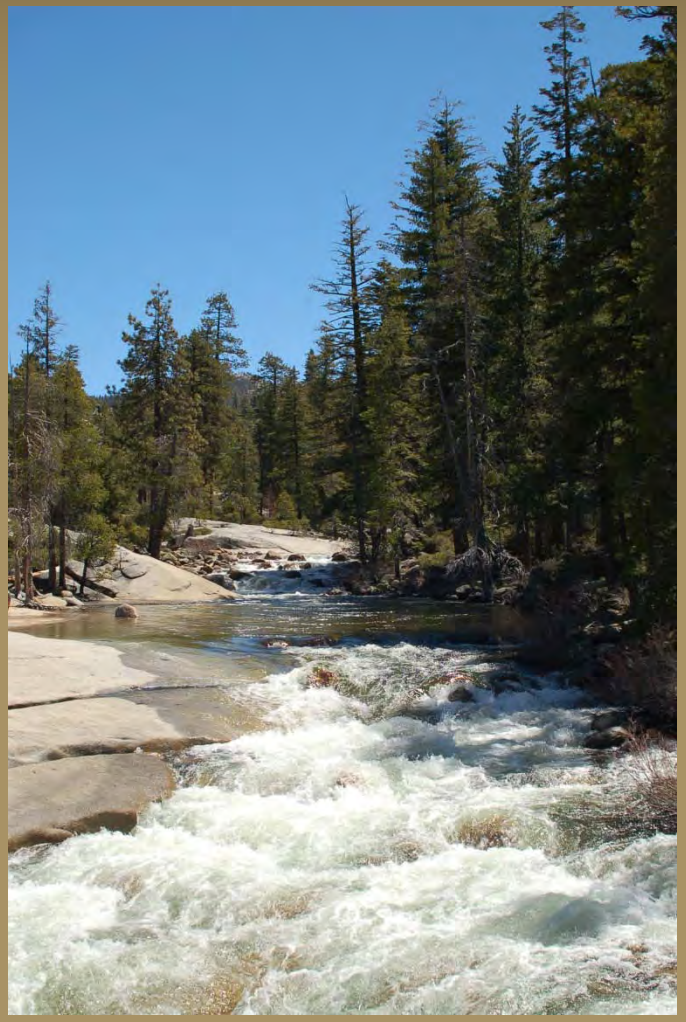

Overall Goal of the Merced River Plan

To protect and enhance the outstanding scenery, recreation, geology, habitat, and cultural values for which the river was designated Wild and Scenic, leaving the river unimpaired for future generations.

Specific Goals of the Merced River Plan

Promote the river's ability to shape the landscape by:

- reducing impediments to free flow,
- improving hydrologic function, and
- restoring flood-plains and meadows, where possible.

Specific Goals of the Merced River Plan

Provide opportunities for visitors to experience and have a direct connection to the Merced and its unique significance as a place of reflection, education, recreation, and inspiration.

Specific Goals of the Merced River Plan

Establish clear direction on land uses and associated developments in the river corridor, allowing for appropriate structures, such as roads, trails, boardwalks, etc., to support the protection and enhancement of river values.

Specific Goals of the Merced River Plan

Establish a visitor use management program that balances the provision of visitor use opportunities in the river corridor with the protection and enhancement of river values today and into the future.

Foundational Elements of this Wild and Scenic River Plans

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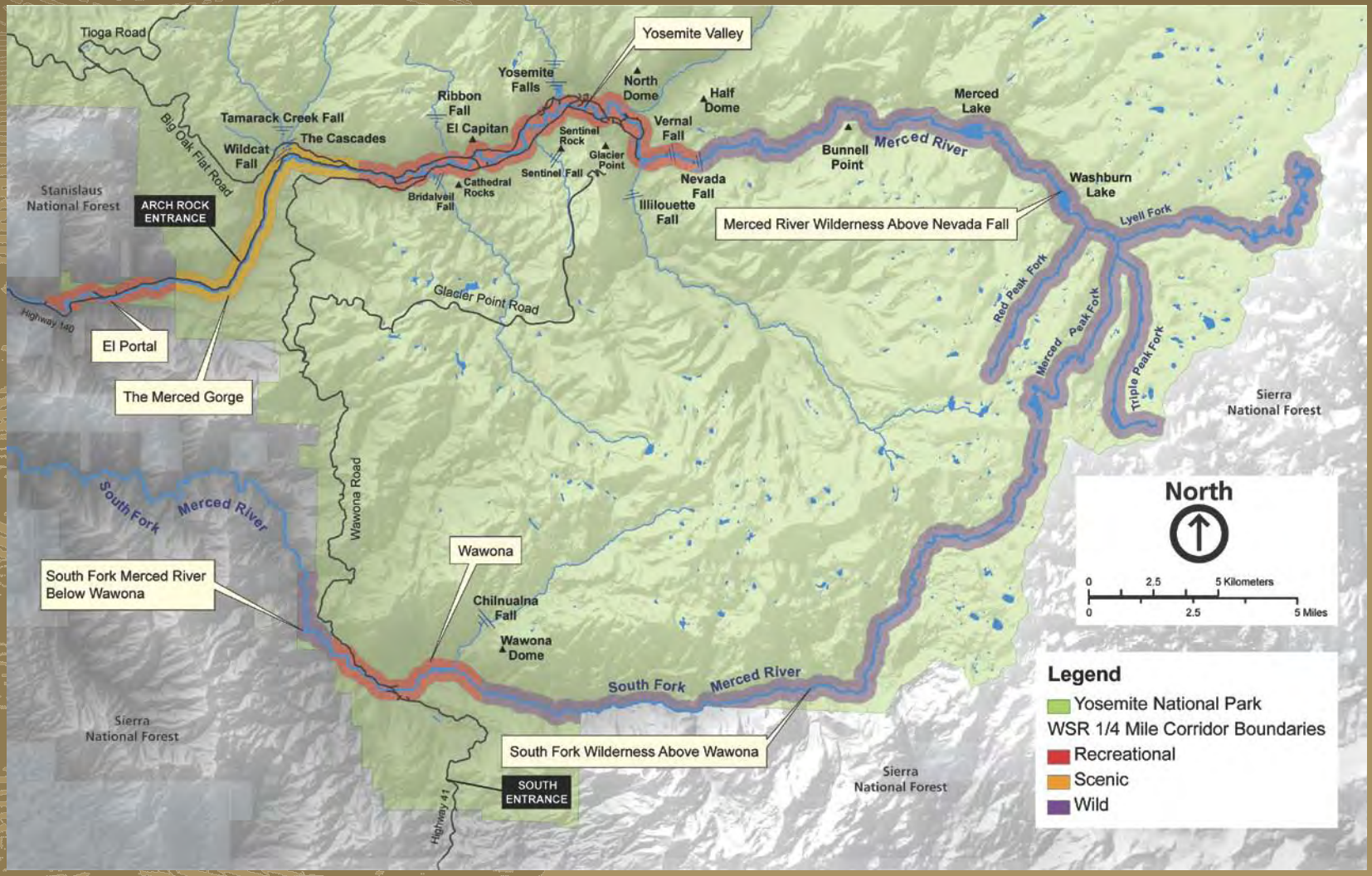
Quarter-Mile Boundaries



Wild and Scenic River Plans

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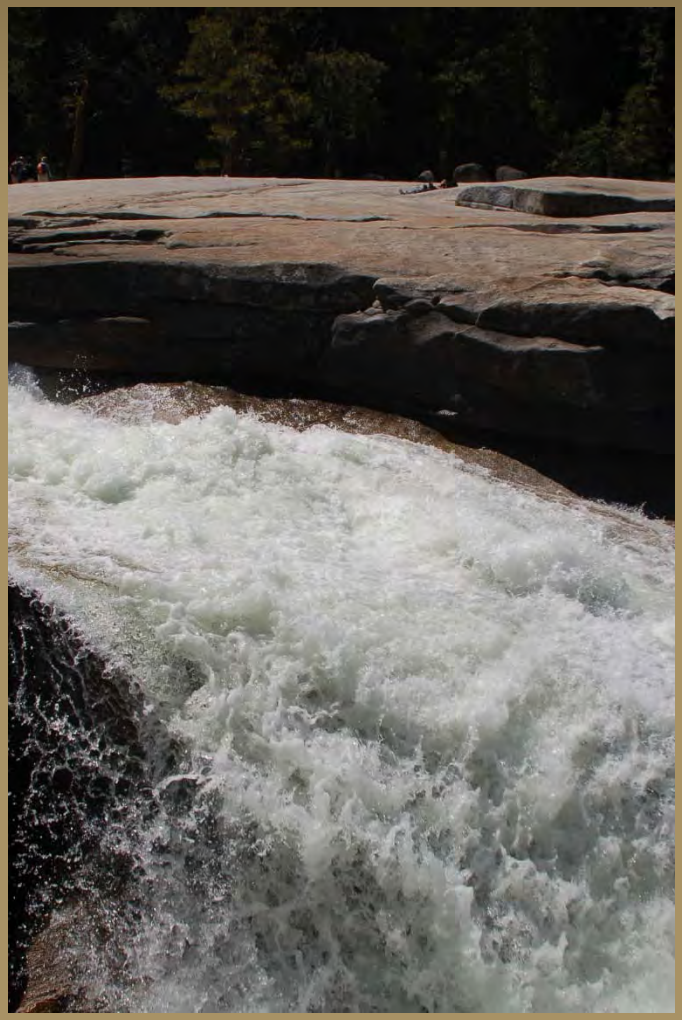
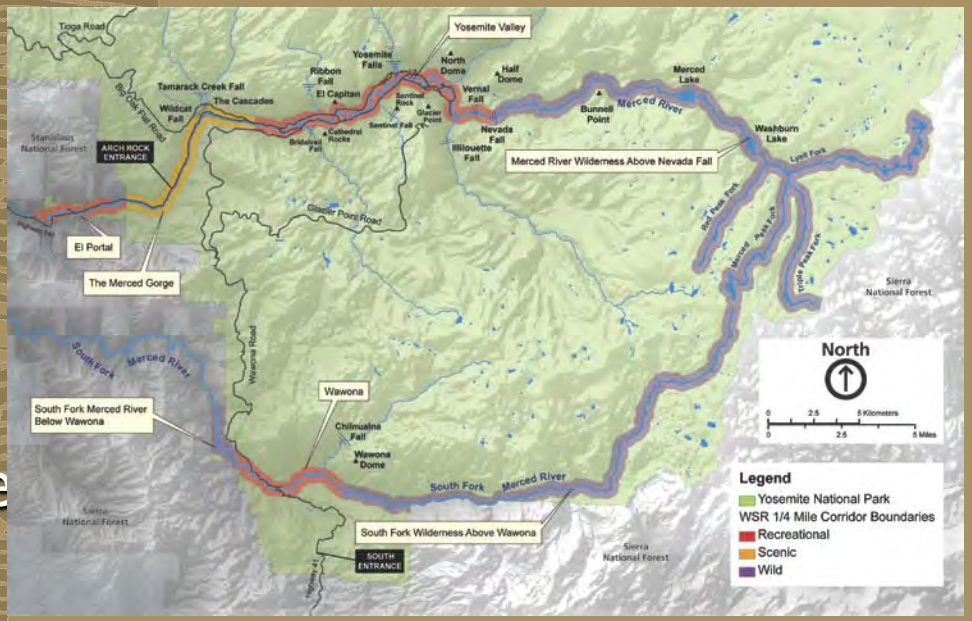


River Segment Classification

- Wild
  - Merced River Wilderness Above Nevada Falls
  - South Fork above Wawona
- Recreation
  - Yosemite Valley
  - El Portal
  - Wawona
- Scenic
  - Merced River Gorge



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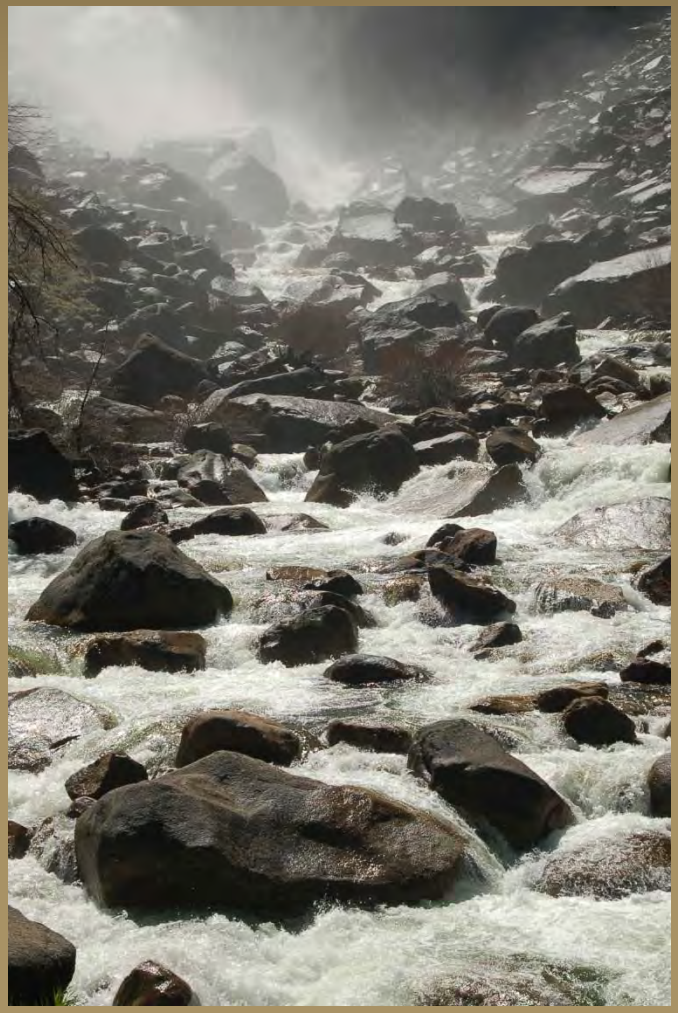
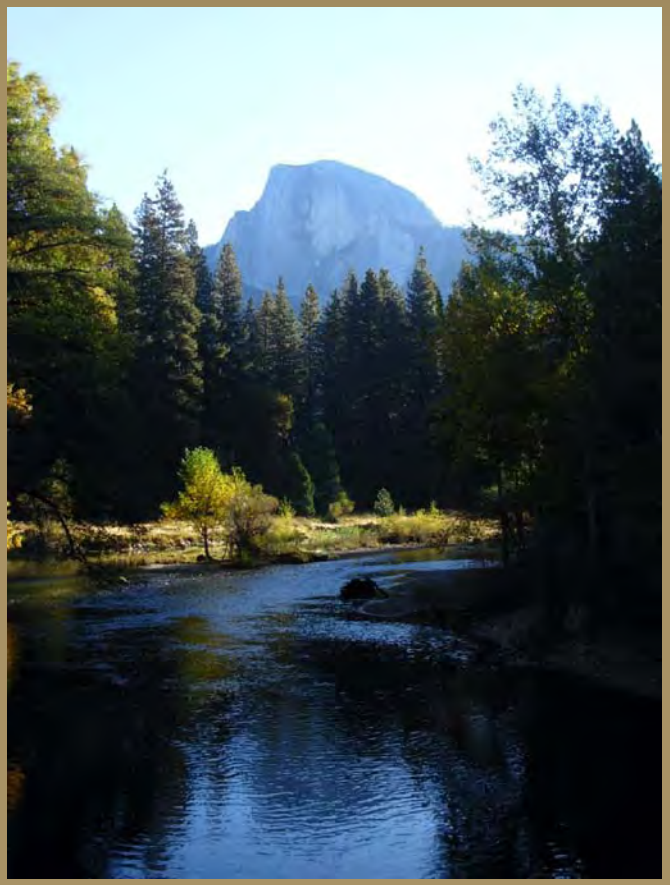


ORV Determinations for Each River Segment

- Biological
- Cultural
- Recreation
- Geologic & Hydrologic
- Scenic



Biological

Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- Largest mid-elevation meadow complexes in the Sierra Nevada
- Small Meadows Above Nevada Falls
- El Portal Valley Oaks
- River Dependent special status plant (Sierra Sweet Bay) and animal species

Cultural

Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- Yosemite Valley—Tribal Cultural Property
- El Portal—Archeological District
- Wawona—Covered Bridge

Recreation

Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- Nationally/Internationally renowned destination.
- One of America's first National Parks
- World Heritage Site
- Swimming and fishing in El Portal, Merced Gorge and Wawona
- Active, creative, educational, social and contemplative recreation in Yosemite Valley
- Back-packing, solitude and hiking in the Wilderness Areas

Geologic and Hydrologic
Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- Glacial pathways
- Classic Stair-Step River Morphology
- Moraine
- Alluvial River in Valley

Scenic

Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- World-renowned scenery
  - Rushing River
  - Flat Valley River
  - Boulder-strewn River
  - Tall Waterfalls
  - Serene Lakes

New Information

Incorporated into the ORV Definitions for Each Segment

- El Portal: Boulder bar and valley oaks added
- Yosemite Valley:
  - Climbing and camping kept;
  - Circulation system removed as not unique;
  - Meadows further refined (22 sedges species)
- South Fork above Wawona: small meadows added
- Wawona and Wilderness areas: ORVs stayed the same

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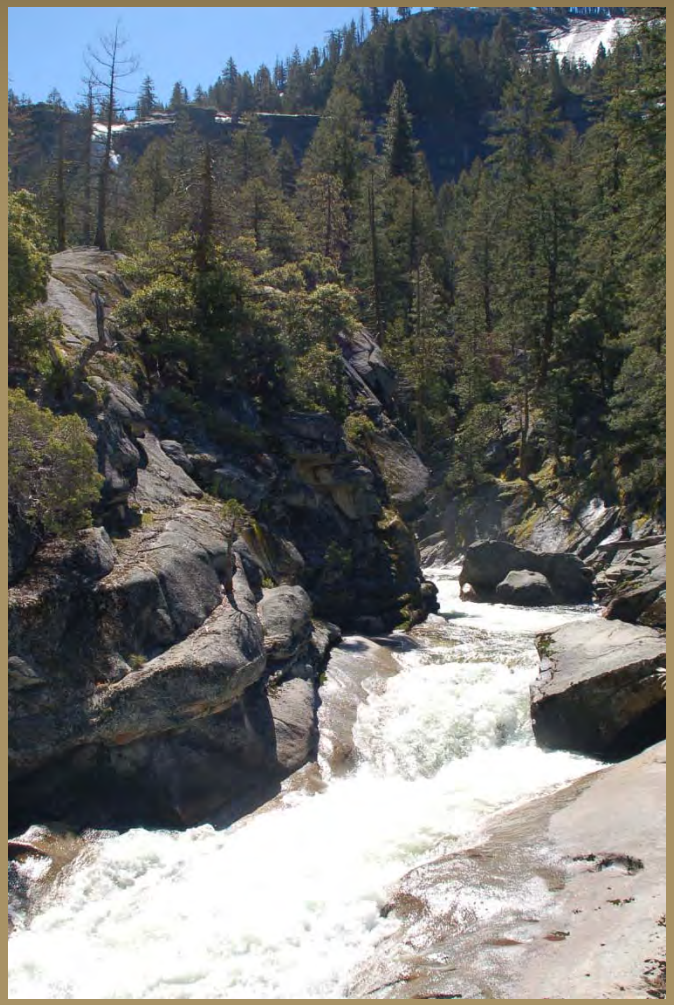


Outstandingly Remarkable Values

- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Historic
- Recreation
- Scenic
- Geologic and Hydrologic

River Values Baseline Condition Report

- Yosemite benefits from a wealth of existing studies
- Thirteen studies, filling information gaps to be used in a Baseline Condition Report
- Performed by NPS, universities, and US Geological Survey
- Results due in late spring 2011

Hydrologic/Geologic Studies

- Yosemite Valley Groundwater Assessment and Conservation Planning
- In-stream Flow Requirements, South Fork Merced
- Geomorphic Assessment & Restoration Alternatives for the Merced River in East Yosemite Valley
- Ordinary High Water Mark & Floodplain Determinations
- Comprehensive Geologic Hazard & Risk Assessment in Yosemite Valley

Biological Studies

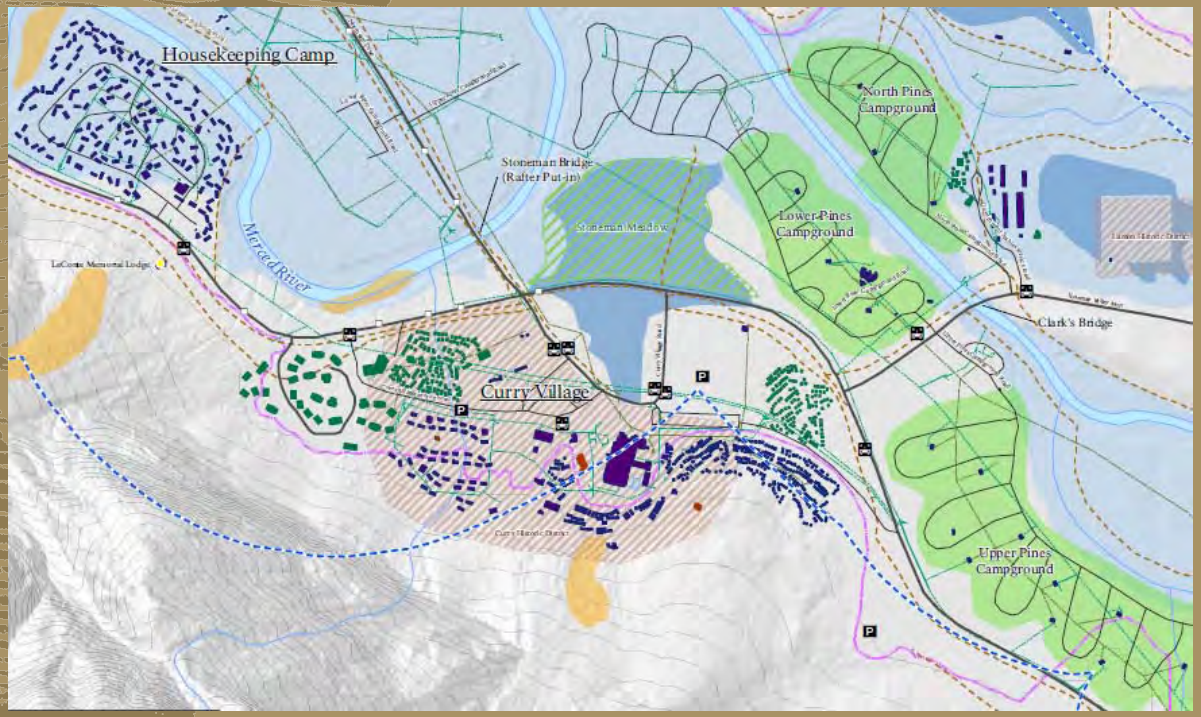
- Merced River and Meadows Condition Assessment
- Wildlife Special Status Species
- Rare Plant Surveys
- Assessment of High Country Meadows Condition

Cultural Studies

- Cultural Landscape Inventory for El Portal
- Archeological ORV Documentation
- Ethnographic Assessment

Additional Studies

- Merced River Rafting Study
- Site Suitability Analysis
- Transportation Studies
- Computer Simulation Models



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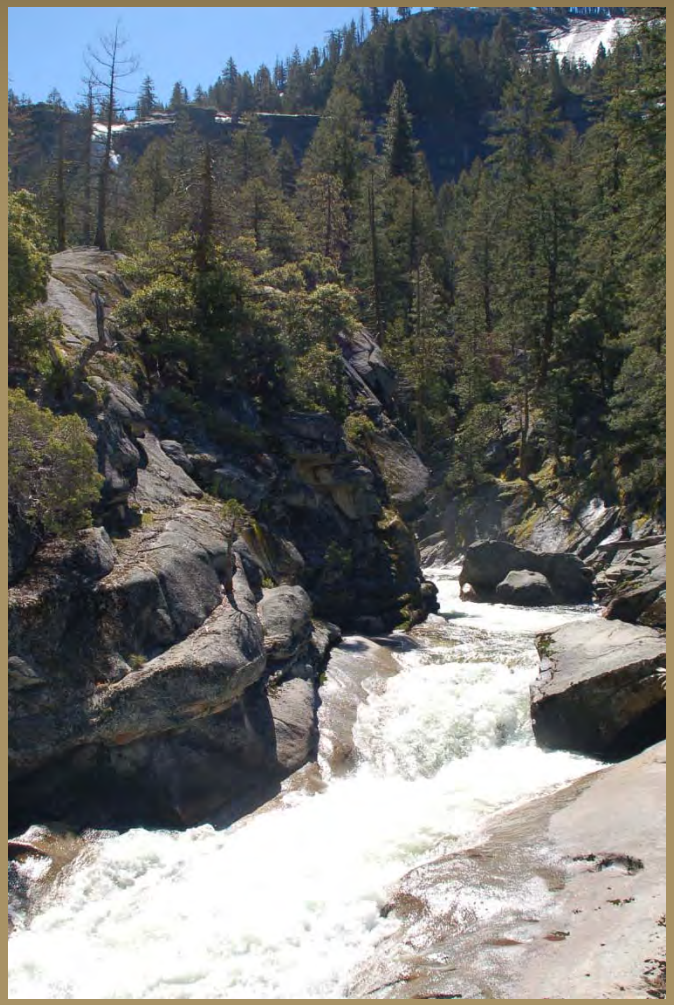

User Capacity Mandate

- **1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law §3(d)(1).**
  - "The [comprehensive management plan] shall address resource protection, development of lands and facilities, *user capacities*, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purpose of this act."

Terms and Definitions

- **1982 Interagency Guidelines on the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.**
  - "the *kinds and amounts* of public use which the river area can sustain without impact to the values for which it was designated."

User Capacity Process

1. Identifies the kinds of visitor use appropriate in the river corridor
2. Based on management goals and objectives establishes indicators and standards of quality
3. Addresses facilities, services, and management strategies
4. Identifies the maximum amounts of visitor use that can be accommodated in the river corridor while protecting and enhancing ORVs, free flow and water quality
5. Incorporates monitoring and on-going study

Two Phase Alternative Development

- Phase I: Identify the Issues and Tools
- Phase II: Ask for Feedback on the Alternatives Developed by the Planning Team Prior to Effects Analysis
- Accomplished through a Series of Workshops in the Spring and early Summer
  - Webinar
  - Video Streaming

Yosemite National Park

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