

Scenic Vista Management Plan for Yosemite National Park

Finding of No Significant Impact

June 2011

Based on the following summary of effects, as discussed in the environmental assessment (EA), the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 3 (*Use Ecological Conditions to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing*) is determined not to have a significant effect on the human environment and is adopted by the National Park Service (NPS) for scenic vista management in Yosemite National Park. Upon approval of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), work plans for the first year's management actions will be posted, and available for public review. Work will commence no earlier than September 1, 2011.

Purpose and Need

Yosemite National Park is an icon of scenic grandeur. When set aside in 1864, Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove were the first scenic natural areas in the United States protected for public benefit and appreciation of the scenic landscape. Scenic quality is a core value embedded in the legislation that established the National Park Service in 1916:

Federal areas known as national parks . . . which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.
(National Park Service Organic Act 1916)

In 2009, park staff inventoried 181 scenic vistas in Yosemite (outside of Wilderness) (Tables IV, V and VI) and found that encroaching vegetation completely obscured about one-third of the vistas, and partially obscured over half the vistas. Vegetation encroached on these vistas for a number of reasons, including the exclusion of American Indian burning, the suppression of lightning-ignited fire, and human-constructed changes to hydrologic flows. The purpose of the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* is to develop a systematic program to document, protect, and reestablish Yosemite's important viewpoints and vistas, consistent with the natural processes and human influences that created them. This plan considered which vistas the park would treat, how the park would prioritize treatments, and the extent and intensity of treatments.

Selected Action and Alternatives Considered

The environmental assessment analyzed five alternatives including *Alternative 1, No Action*, and four action alternatives: *Alternative 2, Use Scenic Value to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing*; *Alternative 3, Use Ecological Considerations to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing (Preferred Alternative)*; *Alternative 4, Use Professional Team Assessment to Prioritize Vistas for Treatment*; and *Alternative 5, Use Professional Team Assessment and Ecological Conditions to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing*. These alternatives represented a reasonable range of options that satisfied the purpose and need for the project, met relevant legal requirements, and satisfied park policies and guidelines.

Selected Action

The Selected Alternative, *Alternative 3, Use Ecological Considerations to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing*, emphasizes assessment of scenic value of vistas for prioritizing site management, and ecological condition of vista sites to determine the extent and the intensity of clearing. Vistas would be prioritized according to their scenic value using the Visual Resource Assessment (VRA) (Table I). Managers will use standardized clearing guidelines to give initial clearing treatments intensity of vistas with medium and high values (Table II) and also based on the vegetation communities present at each site (Table III). The maximum work area for each vista is then based on the viewing area width, as given by prioritization, and the distance from the viewing area, as defined within the ecological condition. Distances are defined as:

- Foreground – up to 60 meters from the viewing area;
- Middle Ground – from 60 meters to 1 kilometer from the viewing area; and
- Background – beyond 1 kilometer from the viewing area.

Low-value vistas will not be initially cleared; they may, if within specific vegetation zones, only be maintained as they currently exist. After clearing each vista, crews will revegetate the site with local native plants that could not grow to obscure views. Park staff would maintain cleared vistas. No sites in proposed, designated potential or designated Wilderness will be managed. A National Park Service team will develop annual work plans and post them for public comment prior to work beginning.

Vista Prioritization and Selection

Vistas will be prioritized for management and ranked as having high, medium, or low value with the VRA. The VRA assesses the value of vistas using predefined weighted criteria and ends with a quantified result. The rating criteria are primarily scenic values – the vividness, uniqueness, access, and intactness of a vista site. This evaluation method is selected for its consistency, predictability, and transparency.

The scoring team assigns points for each factor, up to a total of 18 possible points. The total score is used to categorize a vista as having high, medium, or low value (see Table I). As staff continues to assess and manage vistas, Visual Resource Assessment categories could be modified to maintain a balance of sites and best reflect scenic vistas in the park.

Table I. Visual resource assessment values in Yosemite

Vista Value	Score (out of a possible 18 points)	Percent of total vistas
High	10.0 and above	30%
Medium	7.01 – 9.99	40%
Low	7.0 and below	30%

Table II. Viewing area and feathering limits

Vista Value	Static Vistas – Maximum Width		Dynamic Vistas – Maximum Width	
	Viewing Area	Feathering (to each side) ¹	Viewing Area	Feathering (to each side) ¹
High	30 meters	30 meters	150 meters	60 meters
Medium	20 meters	20 meters	75 meters	30 meters
Low	10 meters	10 meters	Not applicable	Not applicable

¹Vistas across a broad, open expanse such as a meadow may be feathered up to 60 meters.

Vista Clearing Extent and Intensity

The Selected Alternative prescribes the intensity of vegetation clearing at each vista based on the vegetation communities present at each vista site. The Yosemite landscape encompasses a remarkable range of plant communities, as it rises from 2,000 feet to over 13,000 feet. The diverse vegetation in the park includes foothill chaparral, giant sequoia, California black oak, and lodgepole pine. Some vistas encompass more than one vegetation community. The vegetation types form a basis for site-specific clearing prescriptions (see Table III).

Table III. Vista management specifications based on ecological conditions

Vista Management Intensity in Ecological Zones		
High-Value Vistas	Medium-Value Vistas	Low-Value Vistas
Subalpine Forest - Lodgepole Pine Forest, Whitebark Pine/Mountain Hemlock		
Obstructing trees in the foreground or middle ground may be removed, except: • Whitebark pine unless critical to the vista. • Snags unless critical to the vista.	Obstructing trees in the foreground may be removed, except: • Whitebark pine. • Any snags.	No clearing or maintenance actions will occur.
Subalpine Meadow		
• Conifers under 30" dbh (including saplings) may be removed to maintain current subalpine meadow extent. • No feathering will take place outside meadow boundaries as defined in the 1997 Parkwide Vegetation Map (Fig. I). • Heavy equipment will not be utilized in sensitive areas.		
Upper Montane Forest - Montane Chaparral, Western White Pine/Jeffrey Pine forest, Red Fir Forest, Sierra Juniper		
Obstructing trees in the foreground or middle ground may be removed, except: • Large diameter sugar pine (over 30" dbh) unless critical to the vista. • Large diameter snags (over 24" dbh) unless critical to the vista.	Obstructing trees in the foreground or middle ground may be removed, except: • Large diameter sugar pines (over 30" dbh); but other sugar pines (under 30" dbh) may be removed only if locally common. • Underrepresented trees (Table IV) unless critical to the vista. • Large diameter snags (over 24" dbh) unless critical to the vista.	No initial clearing actions. Maintenance actions only in foreground; no actions in the middle ground. The following also applies: • No red fir or Sierra juniper removed. • No sugar pines removed, unless locally common. • No snags removed.
Lower Montane Forest - California Black Oak, Canyon Live Oak, Blue Oak		
Obstructing trees in the foreground or middle ground may be removed, except: • California black oak unless critical to the vista.	Obstructing tree in the foreground or middle ground may be removed, except: • California black oak. • Sugar pine, unless locally common.	No initial clearing actions. Maintenance actions only in foreground. No actions in the middle ground. The following also applies: • No sugar pine removed. • No broad-leaved trees removed.
Montane Meadow		
• Conifers under 30" dbh (including saplings) will be removed to maintain nonwilderness montane meadows within the existing outline of the meadow as defined in the 1997 Parkwide Vegetation Map (Figure I). • Feathering could take place up to 60 meters outside of the meadow boundary. • Heavy equipment will not be utilized in sensitive areas.		
Foothill Woodland: Foothill Pine/Live Oak/Chaparral, Foothill Chaparral		
Obstructing trees in the foreground may be removed, except: • California black oak. • Elderberry above 3,000 feet.	Only shrubs obstructing a vista in only the foreground may be removed.	No vista clearing activity will take place.

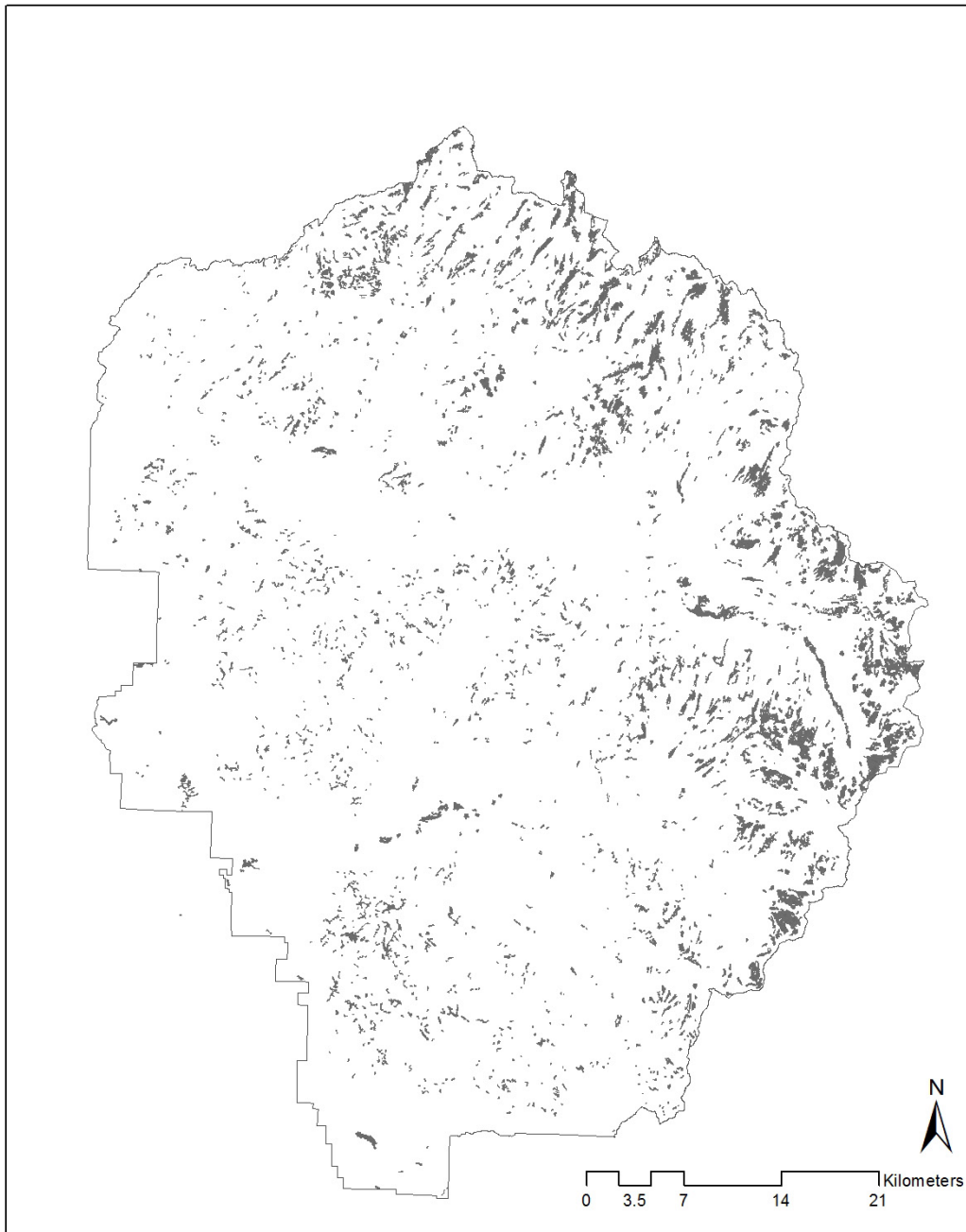


Figure I. Meadow Boundaries as defined in the 1997 Parkwide Vegetation Map

Changes to Preferred Alternative

After reviewing public and agency comments, the following changes are made:

- Specific initial management actions for vista points in or near the Tuolumne River Wild and Scenic River corridor (Table IV) or the Merced River Wild and Scenic River corridor (Table V) will be analyzed and directed by the respective river plan. No actions will be taken on vista points within either Wild and Scenic River corridors until a Record of Decision (ROD) is signed for the respective river plan. Points outside of the Wild and Scenic River corridors (Table VI) can occur after work plans are completed and reviewed.

Table IV. Vista points with initial VRA scores in which specific proposed management actions will be analyzed in the Tuolumne River Wild and Scenic Corridor Plan.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
High Priority			
1	108	Pothole Dome	13
2	103	Islands Above the Ice interpretive sign (T35)	11
3	101	Dana Gibbs View (T36)	10.5
4	107	Tuolumne Meadows trail to Parsons Lodge	10.5
Medium Priority			
5	175	Soda Springs	9.75
6	102	Dana Fork of the Tuolumne	9.5
7	105	Little Blue Slide (T33)	9.25
8	106	Lembert Dome parking	8.75
9	176	Parsons Lodge door	7.5
Low Priority			
10	104	T34 Road Guide Marker	3.5

Table V. Vista Points with initial VRA scores in which specific proposed management actions will be analyzed in the Merced River Wild and Scenic River Plan.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
High Priority			
1	146	Valley View	16
2	49	Tunnel View	15.2
3	33	El Cap Meadow, east end	14.5
4	34	Hanging Valley, Bridalveil Fall	14
5	6	Stoneman Meadow Boardwalk	13.5
6	28	Sentinel Bridge	13.5
7	38	Bridalveil Straight interpretive sign	13
8	1	Residence One	12.25
9	42	Wosky Pond	12.25
10	17	Hutchings View A	12
11	25	Stoneman Bridge	12
12	44	Ferry Bend	12
13	158	Hutchings View B	12
14	11	Church Bowl picnic area	12
15	31	Leidig Meadow, west end	11.75
16	12	Sentinel Bridge parking	11.5
17	23	Swinging Bridge	11.5
18	24	Sentinel Meadow boardwalk	11.5
19	227	Ahwahnee Meadow, Peeling Domes sign	11.5
20	22	Sentinel Beach	11.25
21	159	Ahwahnee Lounge	11.25
22	47	Superintendents Bridge, flood sign	10.75
23	10	Ahwahnee Meadow, Northside Drive	10.5

Table V. Vista Points with initial VRA scores in which specific proposed management actions will be analyzed in the Merced River Wild and Scenic River Plan.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
24	20	Chapel	10.5
25	32	Four Mile Trailhead	10.5
26	156	Roosevelt Turnout	10.5
27	16	Ahwahnee hotel front lawn	10.25
28	36	Valley View, Old Big Oak Flat	10.25
29	40	Cathedral Beach	10.25
30	161	Ahwahnee Dining Room	10.25
31	152	Bridalveil Fall approach, Southside Drive	10.25
32	48	Lower Falls Bridge	10
Medium Priority			
33	26	Housekeeping Beach	9.75
34	27	Curry Village parking	9.75
35	164	Old Wawona Road (point 3)	9.75
36	169	Old Wawona Road (point 5)	9.75
37	224	Curry Village ice skating rink	9.75
38	226	Cathedral Beach parking	9.75
39	39	Visitors Center benches	9.75
40	3	El Capitan Postage	9.5
41	19	Yosemite Lodge portico	9.5
42	43	Bridalveil Meadow	9.5
43	46	Curry amphitheater	9.5
44	228	Ahwahnee Winter Club Room	9.5
45	162	Old Wawona Road (point 1)	9.25
46	41	Devil's Elbow	9
47	165	Old Wawona Road (point 4)	9
48	18	Yosemite Falls view	8.75
49	157	Old Hutchings View (Cedar Cottage)	8.75
50	160	Ahwahnee Solarium	8.75
51	170	Old Wawona Road (point 6)	8.75
52	171	Old Wawona Road (point 7)	8.75
53	14	Happy Isles Bridge	8.5
54	21	El Capitan Postage beach	8.5
55	30	Illilouette View	8.25
56	2	Cooks Meadow, south boardwalk	8
57	7	Clark's Bridge	8
58	35	Cascade Falls View	8
59	92	Housekeeping Bridge	8
60	163	Old Wawona Road (point 2)	7.75
61	225	Cathedral Spires, Southside Drive	7.5
62	29	Vernal Fall foot bridge	7.25
63	37	Bridalveil Fall footbridge	7.25

Table V. Vista Points with initial VRA scores in which specific proposed management actions will be analyzed in the Merced River Wild and Scenic River Plan.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
Low Priority			
64	8	Lamon Orchard	7
65	57	Wawona Hotel	7
66	90	Sugar Pine Bridge	7
67	178	Nevada Fall Bridge	7
68	180	Vernal Fall	7
69	89	Ahwahnee Bridge	6.75
70	4	Black Spring	6.5
71	179	Nevada Fall	6.5
72	181	Lady Franklin Rock	6.25
73	13	Happy Isles, interpretive sign	5.5
74	56	Wawona golf course, south end	5.25
75	59	Texas Turnout	5
76	60	Panetta's turnout	4.25
77	61	Mosquito Creek helispot	4.25
78	62	North of Mosquito helispot	4.25
79	63	Chain Control point, north of Wawona	4.25
80	58	Turnout north of Chilnualna Falls Road	3.5
81	91	El Capitan Meadow, east end	Not scored
82	234	Leidig Meadow, west end	Not scored
83	230	Yosemite Falls Trail 1	Not scored

Table VI. Vista Points with initial VRA scores outside of Wild and Scenic River corridors in which management actions may be proposed immediately.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
High Priority			
1	79	Washburn Point	17.25
2	116	Olmsted Point	15.25
3	83	Bridalveil View (B3)	13.5
4	81	Glacier Point	13.25
5	130	Clark Range view (T11)	12.5
6	118	Clouds Rest view, exfoliating granite (T23)	12.25
7	121	Tioga Road, Cones and Needles interpretive sign (T18)	11.75
8	141	Crane Flat Tower	11.75
9	100	Dana Meadow interpretive sign	11.5
10	80	Glacier Point amphitheater	11.5
11	114	West of Tenaya Lake (T25)	11.5
12	70	Big Turnout south of Wawona Tunnel	11
13	84	Half Dome Overlook (B4)	11
14	93	Hetch Hetchy Dam	10.5
15	134	Siesta Lake	10.5

Table VI. Vista Points with initial VRA scores outside of Wild and Scenic River corridors in which management actions may be proposed immediately.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
16	87	North Country view	10.25
17	82	Cascade Fall Bridge	10
18	113	Tenaya Lake east beach	10
19	149	Wawona Point	10
Medium Priority			
20	174	Mount Conness view (T27)	9.75
21	98	Tioga Pass entrance station (T39)	9.5
22	15	Mirror Lake Dam interpretive sign	9.25
23	85	Big Meadow Overlook	9.25
24	86	San Joaquin Overlook	9.25
25	76	Glacier Point Sierra interpretive sign	8.75
26	77	G1 Road Guide Marker	8.75
27	136	South Fork Bridge (T5)	8.75
28	172	Half Dome view, near Snow Creek	8.75
29	45	Mirror Lake interpretive sign	8.5
30	74	Fire interpretive sign	8.25
31	96	Hetch Hetchy (H3)	8.25
32	117	Large turnout east of May Lake	8.25
33	128	West of Lukens Lake trailhead (T13)	8.25
34	183	Sentinel Ridge, below dome	8
35	229	Elephant Rock View (B1)	8
36	50	Wawona Point	7.75
37	97	Hodgdon Meadow	7.75
38	127	Tioga Road turnout	7.75
39	138	Gin Flat (T4)	7.75
40	145	Foresta burn overlook	7.5
41	173	Half Dome view, east of Coyote Rocks	7.5
42	5	Clark Range (G6)	7.25
43	94	Hetch Hetchy, northwest side of	7.25
44	95	Hetch Hetchy, 2 miles south of	7.25
45	115	East of Olmsted Point	7.25
46	129	T12 Road Guide Marker	7.25
Low Priority			
47	75	Avalanche Creek turnout	7
48	124	Summit Meadow	7
49	131	West of Lukens Lake (Clark Range)	7
50	132	Clark Range turnout	7
51	88	Meadow (G7)	6.75
52	120	Porcupine Flat trailhead	6.75
53	125	Waterfall (T16)	6.75
54	140	Crane Flat Meadow	6.75

Table VI. Vista Points with initial VRA scores outside of Wild and Scenic River corridors in which management actions may be proposed immediately.

	Site ID	Site Name	VRA Score
55	51	Mariposa Grove Museum, east of	6.5
56	71	Wawona Road, 2 miles south of tunnel	6.25
57	72	Wawona Road, 2.25 miles south of tunnel	6.25
58	78	Chinquapin, 1 mi. north of	6.25
59	122	Yosemite Creek drainage overlook	6.25
60	133	Turnout west of White Wolf	6.25
61	135	Fire management turnout	6.25
62	52	Grizzly Giant	6
63	142	Tuolumne Grove (1)	6
64	143	Tuolumne Grove (2)	6
65	144	Tuolumne Grove (3)	6
66	123	Yosemite Creek turnout	5.75
67	111	Ghost Forest	5.5
68	139	T3 Road Guide Marker	5.5
69	65	Alder Creek trailhead	5.25
70	66	Deer Lick	4.75
71	109	Daff Dome turnout	4.5
72	110	Turnout west of Tenaya Peak	4.5
73	126	Yosemite Creek trailhead	4.5
74	64	Mosquito Creek trailhead	4.25
75	67	Wawona, 7 miles north of	4.25
76	112	Pywiak Dome turnout	4
77	55	South of golf course at Stud Horse	3.75
78	53	Angels Wash	3.5
79	54	Stud Horse	3.5
80	68	North Strawberry Creek	3.5
81	69	Rail Creek	3.5
82	99	Mono Pass trailhead	3
83	119	Tuolumne just west of May Lake	3
84	147	Wawona Point, from west	Not scored
85	148	Wawona Point, from north	Not scored
86	150	Mariposa Grove Museum	Not scored
87	151	Mariposa Grove Grizzly Giant	Not scored
88	235	G3 Road Guide Marker	Not scored

- Work plans will be posted on the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website, with notices provided on the park website, and in the *ENewsletter*. Individual site surveys will be included, and the public will have an opportunity to review and comment for a period of 60-90 days. Additionally, the project manager will respond to public comments; however, formal comment analysis and comment and response reports will not be published.

- At the time a ROD for a river plan is signed, the Scenic Vista Plan will be reevaluated for consistency with the river plan. If required the FONSI could be revised to be consistent with the river plans.
- Park staff will clear and maintain not more than 93 obscured or partially obscured sites, at a rate of about 30 initial clearings per year, or as available funding allows. In addition, not more than 21 sites (18%) that may not need initial clearing could be maintained. These sites will be chosen from the list of 181 potential vista points analyzed (Table IV, Table V, Table VI). Any additions to the list of 181 potential vista points will require additional compliance such as revising the FONSI.

Actions Common to All Action Alternatives

The following actions are incorporated into the Selected Alternative and were common to all the Action Alternatives (2, 3, 4, and 5) as analyzed in the EA:

- This is a scenic vista management program, rather than an individual project-based approach.
- All clearing actions would adhere to the target conditions specified in Tables VII and VIII for target densities and gap distribution. Maximum limits for annual acres cleared for vista management, when combined with the annual acres cleared by managed wildland fire, will not exceed 16,000 acres cleared in any given year. This is the limit identified as what would have burned naturally in the park to simulate natural conditions. These target conditions and annual area clearing limits will be updated to conform to any future *Fire Management Plan* updates.
- Employee and visitor safety will be the highest priority during vista clearing operations. Tree felling operations will occur under the direction of the park forester, subject to strict supervisory control.
- Maximum sizes for the viewing area and feathering (a technique to manage the visual transition from cleared areas to the surrounding natural vegetation) will apply (Table II).
- Managed vista sites are meant to appear in keeping with the surrounding natural environment and viewing areas, and feathering widths should be minimized, as practicable, with some trees left in the vista to naturalize the appearance. The number of trees removed at each site will vary.
- Cut tree stumps will not remain exposed to view.
- Old growth trees and trees older than the establishment date for the particular vista will not be removed.
- Mechanical equipment will be chosen to minimize impacts based on the conditions at a site.
- Biomass may be utilized or disposed of in any way that would not require additional compliance. This could be cultural use, lop and scatter, onsite mulch, chip and haul, pile and burn, haul to woodlot, or contracted timber removal.
- Noise levels near residential or visitor use areas will be restricted.
- Temporary road closures will generally not exceed one-half hour. Road closures will be scheduled in periods of low visitation when possible.
- Vista sites will be revegetated, if necessary, after clearing, by seeding or planting local native plants that would not obscure vistas.
- Each site will be evaluated as to whether it requires initial clearing or maintenance. Maintenance activities will be restricted to removal of trees smaller than 6 inches diameter breast height (dbh). Cleared sites will be maintained on a cycle of one to five years, depending on the assessed scenic value of the site.

- A National Park Service team will develop and review annual work plans for vista clearing treatments and the protection of resources. Consultation will take place with American Indian tribes and groups associated with the park. Work plans will be posted on the National Park Service PEPC website as described previously.

Mitigation measures apply to protect wildlife, as well as important habitat elements such as snags, special-status species, air quality, riparian corridors, soils, and cultural resources.

Table VII. Stem density and species composition target conditions

Vegetation Type/Monitoring Unit		Stem Density			Species Composition		
		Desired Condition	Current Condition	Objective Achieved Yes, No, or NC *	Desired Condition	Current Condition	Objective Achieved Yes, No, or NC *
Red Fir Forest	Smaller Trees*	20-202 trees per acre	38.4 trees per acre (+/- 36.6)	NC	70-100% fir 0-30% pine	100% fir (56% red, 44% white)	Yes
	Larger Trees*	4-30 trees per acre	20.2 trees per acres (+/- 6.7)	Yes		100% fir (70% red, 30% white)	Yes
Montane Chaparral	Smaller Trees	4-61 trees per acre	No data		60-80% pine, 20-40% fir	No data	
	Larger Trees	2-20 trees per acre					
Giant Sequoia Mixed Conifer	Smaller Trees	20-101 trees per acre	116 trees per acre (+/- 43.0)	NC	35-65% fir, 0-20 % sequoia, 40-55% pine	73% fir, 11% pine, 11% cedar, 2% sequoia, 2% dogwood	No
	Larger Trees	4-26 trees per acre	10.4 trees per acre (+/- 2.6)	Yes		55% pine, 23% sequoia, 20% fir, 3% cedar	No, but very close
White Fir/Mixed Conifer Forest	Smaller Trees	20-89 trees per acre	97.1 trees per acre (+/- 25)	NC	40-65% fir, 15-50% pine, 0-10% cedar	69% fir, 20% cedar, 5% pine	No
	Larger Trees	4-20 trees per acre	13 trees per acre (+/- 2.9)	Yes		49% fir, 35% pine, 16% cedar	Yes
Ponderosa Pine/Mixed Conifer Forest	Smaller Trees	4-91 trees per acre	409.8 trees per acre (+/- 311)	NC	60-95% pine, 15-40% cedar, 1-10% oak	64% fir, 16% cedar, 17% pine, 3% oak	No
	Larger Trees	4-30 trees per acre	15.2 trees per acres (+/- 5.7)	Yes		74% pine, 20% cedar, 7% oak	Yes
Ponderosa Pine/Bear Clover Forest	Smaller Trees	No management objectives identified	165.4 trees per acre (+/- 79.3)		No management objectives identified	41% cedar, 34% pine, 19% oak, 6% fir	
	Larger Trees		8.8 trees per acre (+/- 2.4)			68% pine, 30% cedar, 3% oak	
NC = No Confidence, assuming 90% Confidence Interval; Larger Trees are greater than 31.5 inches diameter at breast height; Smaller Trees are less than 31.5 inches diameter at breast height (which can still be quite large).							

Table VIII. Fuel loading and canopy gap distribution target conditions

Vegetation Type/Monitoring Unit	Fuel Loading			Canopy Gap Distribution		
	Desired Condition	Current Condition	Objective Achieved Yes, No, or NC *	Desired Condition	Current Condition	Objective Achieved Yes, No, or NC *
Red Fir Forest	1-25% of area has 5-30 tons/acre 30-70% of area has 30-60 tons/acre 5-20% of the area has greater than 60 tons/acre			70-95% of gaps are 0.1 to 1 hectare in size 5-30% of gaps are 1-10 hectare Less than 1% of gaps are 10-100 hectare. 0-1% of the gaps are less than one year old.	No data	
Montane Chaparral	1-30% of area has 5-30 tons/acre 25-75% of area has 30-60 tons per acre 5-20% of area has greater than 60 tons/acre	No data		Not applicable – woodland savannah type	No data	
Giant Sequoia Mixed Conifer	20-40% of area has 5-3- tons per acre 20-50% of area has 30-60 tons/acre 5-20% of area has greater than 60 tons per acre	8% of plots have 5-30 tons/acre 56% of plots have 30-60 tons/acre 46% of plots have greater than 60 tons/acre	No Yes No	75-95% of gaps are 0.1 to 1 hectare 5-25% of gaps are 1-10 hectare Less than 1% of gaps are 10-100 hectare	No data	
White Fir/Mixed Conifer Forest	20-40% of area has 5-3- tons per acre 20-50% of area has 30-60 tons/acre 5-20% of area has greater than 60 tons per acre	46% of plots have 5-30 tons/acre 38% of plots have 30-60 tons per acre 17% of plots have greater than 60 tons per acre	No Yes Yes	75-95% of gaps are 0.1 to 1 hectare 5-25% of gaps are 1-10 hectare Less than 1% of gaps are 10-100 hectare	No data	
Ponderosa Pine/Mixed Conifer Forest	20-40% of area has 5-3- tons per acre 20-50% of area has 30-60 tons/acre 5-20% of area has greater than 60 tons per acre	Not enough plots have been treated to determine if we meet these objectives		75-95% of gaps are 0.1 to 1 hectare 5-25% of gaps are 1-10 hectare Less than 1% of gaps are 10-100 hectare	No data	
Ponderosa Pine/Bear Clover Forest	No management identified	50% of plots have 5-30 tons/acre 28% of plots have 30-60 tons/acre 22% of plots have greater than 60 tons/acre		No management objectives identified	No data	

NC = No Confidence, assuming 90% Confidence Interval; Larger Trees are greater than 31.5 inches diameter at breast height; Smaller Trees are less than 31.5 inches diameter at breast height (which can still be quite large).

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1

Alternative 1, No Action describes existing conditions and serves as a basis for comparison among the alternatives, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Park staff would prioritize vistas for treatment on an individual basis. There would be no consistent process to prioritize vistas for management or determine the intensity of treatments. Each vista treatment would undergo individual compliance, and any vista point in the park could be considered for action. The current rate for treatment is about three vistas every 10 years. There would not be a regular vista maintenance program.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2, Scenic Value to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing, would use an evaluation tool, the Visual Resource Assessment (VRA), to assess the scenic value of each vista and prioritize vistas for treatment. Field crews would apply a standardized prescription for initial clearing (Table II). Park staff would clear and maintain about 104 obscured or partially obscured vistas, at a rate of about 30 per year. No more than 23 vistas would receive only maintenance treatments.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4, Use Professional Team Assessment to Prioritize Vistas for Treatment, would use a team of park professionals to prioritize vistas for management on an annual basis. Managers could use factors such as site popularity or existing facilities on-site to prioritize vistas for treatment. Following vista prioritization for treatment, park staff would apply a standardized clearing prescription (Table II). About 180 vistas would be considered for management; of those, no more than 32 would receive only maintenance, and initial clearing would occur at a rate of about 30 sites per year.

Alternative 5

Alternative 5, Use Professional Team Assessment and Ecological Conditions to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing, would use a team of park professionals to prioritize vistas for management on an annual basis, and uses ecological conditions for determining the extent and intensity of vista clearing (Tables II and III). Managers would opt to use factors such as the site popularity, or existing facilities on-site, to prioritize vistas for management. The ecological conditions at each vista site would determine the prescription for vegetation clearing. About 167 vistas would be considered for management, and of those, 30 vistas would require maintenance. Initial clearing treatments would occur at a rate of about 30 sites per year.

Actions or Alternatives Considered but Dismissed

Use Herbicides to Clear Vistas

Herbicide use was considered for vegetation removal for purposes of vista management. As a vista clearing agent, herbicides are most effective on species that resprout from stumps after vegetation has been removed. In Yosemite, conifers are the most common species that block viewing areas. Conifers do not resprout after removal, and the few species of broadleaved trees that may block vista points could be kept open with regular maintenance rather than herbicide use. For this reason, herbicide use was not considered as an effective means to clear obstructed vistas. Herbicides may be used as allowed under other approved park plans, but not for the purpose of clearing trees for vista management.

Clear Vistas in Wilderness

Vista clearing is not considered an appropriate activity in Yosemite's Wilderness, or proposed Wilderness areas because intentional management of vistas is in conflict with the Wilderness Act.

Rehabilitate or Reconstruct Infrastructure at Vista Points

Cracked pavement, broken railings, and outdated parking space layouts are found at many vistas. Rehabilitation or reconstruction of such facilities could require the development of different design alternatives for each site – currently 181 sites have been assessed in areas outside of the Yosemite Wilderness. Such changes in infrastructure would be subject to additional site-specific planning and associated environmental compliance. Infrastructure repair, rehabilitation, and reconstruction are beyond the scope of the SVMP, but could be addressed through alternate planning processes or (in some cases) be covered as routine maintenance.

Improve Line of Sight Communication

Vista management can be associated with the operation of communication systems. Microwave and some radio transmission systems require point-to-point line of site to transmit signals. Vegetation may block that line of site and interfere with communication (both voice and data). In such cases, vegetation control could be required to restore function. This clearing serves a purpose different from that of scenic vista management and is not analyzed in this document. A separate FONSI for this issue was determined and affirmed on May 11, 2010.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations regarding implementing NEPA guidelines require that “the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable” be identified (CEQ Regulations, Section 1505.2). “Environmentally preferable” is defined as “the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.”

Section 101 of NEPA states:

It is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to . . . (1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; (2) assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; (3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences; (4) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice; (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and (6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Section 101 Requirement 1. “Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.”

Conformance: Alternative 1, the No Action alternative, would restore vistas at a rate of about three vistas per decade. With 80 or more largely obstructed vistas in Yosemite, Alternative 1 would not meet goals to preserve, protect, and restore scenic resources for succeeding generations. The Selected Action, Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 would largely meet these scenic goals.

The Selected Action and Alternative 5 would give greater consideration to trees, shrubs, and habitat components with high biologic value, such as snags and California black oak.

Section 101 Requirement 2. “Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.”

Conformance: Alternative 1, the No Action alternative, would not restore vistas at a rate that would meet goals to preserve, protect, and restore aesthetically pleasing scenic resources. The Selected Action and Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 would largely meet these aesthetic goals by restoring 80 to 93 completely obstructed vistas in three to five years. In addition, the Selected Action and Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 prescribe comprehensive safety and best management practices.

Section 101 Requirement 3. “Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or undesirable and unintended consequences.”

Conformance: Alternative 1, the No Action alternative would not meet goals to preserve, protect, and restore scenic resources. The Selected Action and Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 would largely meet these scenic goals by restoring 80 to 93 completely obstructed vistas in three to five years. The Selected Action and Alternative 5 would give greater consideration to trees, shrubs, and habitat components with high biologic value, such as snags and California black oak, protecting high-value habitats. The Selected Action would use a standardized methodology to prioritize vistas for treatment, giving a more predictable outcome and assuring that the criteria used to prioritize vistas are consistent through time. The Selected Action provides a consistent and transparent methodology for prioritization, limiting undesirable and unintended consequences associated with vista clearing.

Section 101 Requirement 4. “Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice.”

Conformance: The Selected Action and Alternative 2 would best support historic, cultural, and natural elements, as well as diversity and cultural heritage, by employing the VRA as a standardized approach. By assigning an additional numeric value to historic and cultural sites for a priority site assessment, this rating tool would ensure that historic and cultural resources receive special consideration at all sites, currently and in the future.

Section 101 Requirement 5. “Attain a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities.”

Conformance: Alternative 1, the No Action alternative would not meet goals to preserve, protect, and restore scenic resources. The Selected Action and Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 would balance population and resource use by providing more opportunities for park visitors with a wide range of abilities to experience the scenic resources of Yosemite National Park. The Selected Action and Alternative 5 would give greater consideration to natural resource use in restoring scenic vistas. The Selected Action would use a standardized methodology to prioritize vistas for treatment, giving a more predictable outcome and ensuring that the criteria used to prioritize vistas are consistent through time. The Selected Action provides a consistent and transparent methodology for prioritization, attaining the best balance between population and resource use, and permitting a high standard of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities.

Section 101 Requirements 6. “Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.”

Conformance: Alternative 1, the No Action alternative does not prescribe consistent measures to recycle woody material cleared from obstructed vistas. The Selected Action and Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 would prescribe actions for reuse of woody material cleared from obstructed vistas. The Selected Action and Alternative 5 offer greater protection of trees, shrubs, and habitat components with high biologic value, such as snags and California black oak, protecting high value habitats during vista clearing treatments.

In conclusion, upon full consideration of the elements of Section 101 of NEPA, the Selected Action (*Alternative 3: Use Ecological Conditions to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing* as analyzed in the EA) represents the environmentally preferable alternative for scenic vista management in Yosemite National Park. The Selected Action and Alternative 5 would give greater consideration to habitat components with high biologic value, causing the least damage to the biological and physical environment. Of these two alternatives, the Selected Action best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources, as it provides a consistent and transparent methodology for prioritizing vistas for management, limiting undesirable and unintended consequences associated with vista clearing.

Rationale for Decision

Vegetation has encroached on Yosemite National Park's vistas for a number of reasons, including the exclusion of American Indian burning, the suppression of lightning-ignited fire, and human-constructed changes to hydrologic flows. Park staff have inventoried 181 scenic vistas in Yosemite (outside of Yosemite Wilderness) and found that encroaching vegetation completely obscured about one-third of the vistas, and partially obscured over half the vistas. The purpose of the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* is to develop a systematic program to document, protect, and reestablish Yosemite's important viewpoints and vistas, consistent with the natural processes and human influences that created them. This plan considered which vistas the park would treat, how the park would prioritize treatments, and the extent and intensity of treatments.

The No Action Alternative would not create any program or management criteria and could protect only a very limited number of vistas when compared with the Action Alternatives. The Selected Alternative, *Alternative 3: Use Ecological Conditions to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing*, creates a system to identify, document, and prioritize scenic vistas using a quantified tool called the Visual Resource Assessment (VRA). The alternative also prescribes management actions using the ecological conditions found at each vista site. This alternative has the clearest defined and most transparent criteria for selection and management actions of all the Action Alternatives and will best protect the natural and cultural resources of Yosemite National Park.

Why the Selected Action Will Not Have a Significant Impact on the Human Environment

In considering the ten criteria for significant impact as defined by CEQ regulation 1508.27, it was determined that the Selected Action will not have a significant effect. All criteria were considered and the most relevant points are summarized.

- Impacts may be beneficial or adverse. The language in the EA analysis sections *Special-Status Vegetation*, *Special-Status Wildlife* and *Historic Structures, Archeological and Ethnographic Resources, Buildings and Cultural Landscapes* differs to reflect other relevant federal law, but is in keeping with this concept.
- Although there were some opposing comments made during public review, the level of controversy was determined not to be significant.

- Scenic vista clearing has occurred in the past and creating a management program is determined not to significantly determine future actions.
- The impact to sensitive species or features can be avoided so it was determined not to be significant.

Based on the following summary of effects, and as discussed in the environmental assessment (EA), the Selected Action (*Alternative 3: Use Ecological Conditions to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing* as analyzed in the EA) is determined not to have a significant effect on the human environment.

Wetlands

Management actions in wetlands would comply with NPS mandates, Executive Order 11990 requirements, riparian corridor mitigation measures, and mechanical equipment best management practices. There will be no permanent net loss of wetlands. Adverse impacts would be localized short-term minor.

Vegetation

Restrictions on clearing would reduce the number of scenic vistas considered and increase protection to some habitat components. Initial clearing impacts could include trampling, soil compaction, and ground disturbance. Tree and shrub removal could increase forest canopy gaps. Localized decreases in proportions of larger trees in cleared vista sites could result. Trees would remain if older than the vista point. Adverse impacts would be long-term minor.

Special-Status Vegetation

If potential impacts on special-status plants could not be mitigated, the proposed work site would be eliminated from consideration. Adverse impacts on special-status plant individuals and populations would be insignificant. Alternative 3 may affect, and is not likely to adversely affect, special-status plants.

Wildlife

Using ecological conditions would retain more valued habitat. Tree and shrub removal could increase forest canopy gaps. Clearing would comply with FMP prescriptions, viewing area and feathering limitations, no old growth tree removal prescriptions, mechanized equipment best management practices, and protective special-status species mitigations. Adverse impacts would be long-term negligible.

Special-Status Wildlife

If potential impacts on special-status wildlife could not be mitigated, the proposed work site would be eliminated from consideration. Specific special-status bird species that prefer large coniferous trees could be affected. Management actions would comply with protective special-status species mitigations. With mitigation, adverse impacts on special-status wildlife would be insignificant. Alternative 3 may affect, and is not likely to adversely affect, special-status wildlife.

Soils

Soils in or adjacent to vistas could be disturbed, causing erosion, compaction, and altered soil structure or hydrologic regime in both resilient and sensitive soils. With the reduction in social trails and the revegetation of previously compacted areas, there would be long-term benefits. There would be a short-term minor adverse impact on soils, but overall the alternative would have long-term negligible to minor benefits.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Using ecological conditions would benefit wetland hydrologic regimes. Actions common to all and mitigations provide a framework for minimizing potential adverse impacts on hydrology and water quality due to equipment use. Adverse impacts would be short-term negligible to minor.

Air Quality

Air quality would be temporarily affected due to increased air emissions from vegetation removal equipment use and prescribed burning activities. Impacts on air quality would be short-term localized minor to moderate, but negligible over the long-term.

Natural Quiet

Clearing actions would increase noise levels in the short-term with minor to moderate adverse impacts. Continued site maintenance would also have adverse impacts that would be minor to moderate, but likely be shorter in duration. Chainsaws would not always be necessary.

Geologic Hazards

No vistas would be cleared if significantly located within geologic hazard zones as reviewed by the park geologist. There would be localized negligible increased risk of rockfall impact on park staff, visitors, and resources.

Global Climate Change

Green House Gas (GHG) emissions related to vista management would be generated by vegetation removal equipment, prescribed burning, and the reduction in carbon sequestration provided by vegetation. Adverse impacts on global climate change would be negligible.

Wilderness

This alternative could cause short-term localized negligible to minor indirect adverse impacts in wilderness areas adjacent to vista clearing due to noise from vehicles and mechanized equipment.

Scenic Resources

There would be an increase in vista viewing opportunities for visitors. Vista management action would have minor localized short-term adverse impacts, but overall have long-term localized moderate beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Archeological and Ethnographic Resources

The annual work plan review would identify sensitive and valuable resources and adverse effects on archeological resources and traditional cultural properties (NHPA) would be avoided, or mitigated through the 1999 Programmatic Agreement (PA). The VRA process gives additional consideration to clearing at traditional properties as identified through consultation.

Impacts on traditional cultural practices (NEPA) cannot be analyzed at this time. Ongoing consultation with the tribes would continue through the annual work plan review on a site-by-site basis to mitigate or avoid any adverse impacts.

Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes

The annual work plan review would identify cultural resource concerns and provide a framework to avoid or minimize and mitigate potential adverse effects to historic structures and cultural landscapes. If adverse effects could not be avoided or mitigated, the vista would not be managed. This alternative would have no adverse effect.

Visitor Experience and Recreation

Actions such as re-vegetating sites and removing social trails would benefit the visitor. These actions could result in short-term localized minor to moderate adverse impacts, but provide localized long-term moderate beneficial impacts on visitor experience.

Roads and Transportation

Management may require temporary closures of turnouts, roads, or trails during management operations to ensure visitor safety. Reestablishing clear viewing areas could reduce pedestrian and traffic conflicts. This course of action would result in localized short-term minor adverse impacts on park transportation, but also localized long-term negligible beneficial impacts on roads and transportation.

Park Operations

Vista clearing and management actions would increase. Park staff would need to create and review plans, as well as carry out actions. Adverse impacts on park operations would likely be long-term negligible to minor.

Mitigation

The mitigation measures presented in Table IX are incorporated into the Selected Alternative to avoid or lessen impacts on park resources.

Table IX. Mitigation Measures

	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestone
NATURAL RESOURCES			
▪ Annual work plans will be reviewed by park resource staff. Staff will determine whether special-status plant species are present in the area. If special-status species are present, the park shall develop site-specific mitigations to ensure no adverse effects on special-status plant species. If federally protected plant species are discovered in proposed work areas, the USFWS will be consulted, and no control activities will take place until that consultation is complete. ▪ Annual work plans will be reviewed by park resource staff. Staff will determine whether likely habitat for special-status wildlife is present. If work is proposed to take place in likely special-status wildlife habitat, surveys will be conducted before any type of work is performed. In the event that special-status wildlife occupies areas planned for management, managers will develop site-specific mitigations to ensure no adverse effects on special-status wildlife. If federally protected plant species are discovered in proposed work areas, the USFWS will be consulted, and no control activities will take place until that consultation is complete. ▪ Work shall be scheduled to minimize potential adverse effects on bird and bat species. In general, September through October would be the best estimated time for vista clearing to take place, subject to site-specific conditions. If vista management actions are required outside of this timeframe, surveys will be done, and actions recommended, to protect special-status birds and bats. ▪ Features with obvious high value to wildlife, such as snags (particularly those with evidence of wildlife use), very large diameter trees, oak trees, large diameter logs, and decaying wood would be preserved, where possible. ▪ See Table III for additional mitigations by vegetation community. ▪ Key habitat features for Pacific fisher would be retained where possible. ▪ Viewing platform maximum widths are set by scenic value. Maximum widths range from 10 to 30 m for static vistas and 75 to 150m for dynamic vistas. ▪ Feathering is intended to allow a more natural appearing vista, but is limited to the width of the defined viewing area, with a maximum of 60m to each side. ▪ No tree would be removed if it originated before the year in which the particular vista point was established. ▪ Equipment would be inspected before clearing activities commenced to ensure that machinery is clean and free of weed seed and propagules. ▪ Vista sites would be revegetated if necessary after clearing treatments by seeding or planting local native plants that would not obscure vistas. ▪ Within riparian corridors : • White alder trees (<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>) would not be removed unless critical to restoring a vista of high or medium value. Action would be limited to no removal of species in the willow family (<i>Salix</i>), including black cottonwood trees (<i>Populus balsamifera</i>). • Action would be limited to no removal of trees located immediately adjacent to the water's edge that hang over the stream or river. • Action would be limited to no removal of in-stream, downed large wood. • Action would be limited to no heavy equipment use in sensitive areas.	Vegetation Special-status Vegetation Wetlands Wildlife Special-status Wildlife	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review

Table IX. Mitigation Measures

	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestone
- Action would be limited to no heavy equipment use in areas vulnerable to soil compaction and bank erosion. - Vista clearing would be done in accordance with the Wild & Scenic River Act of 1968.			
SOILS			
- Work crews would avoid soil compaction when operating trucks or heavy equipment in wet or compactable soils by distributing machinery weight with military landing mats, snow, heavy plywood, or alternatives. Operators would move tracked equipment straight in and out of work sites and avoid turning while off pavement. - Impacts on soils would be minimized by using the best available technology and by rehabilitation of disturbed soils. Areas with a high probability of erosion would be stabilized using best available methods, as determined by park resources management staff. Disturbed soils would be rehabilitated by restoring slope contour and using other best practices.	Soils Wetlands	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review and concurrent with management operations
CULTURAL RESOURCES			
- Cultural resource experts in the branches of History, Architecture and Landscapes (HAL) and Anthropology and Archeology (AA) would review the annual work plan to ensure an absence of adverse effects on cultural resources and to apply appropriate mitigations. - Specific vegetation that is a critical component of a cultural landscape would not be removed. - Locally affiliated tribes and American Indian groups will be consulted by managers regarding proposed annual work plans during the planning phase of vista management activities. These groups would have the opportunity to notify the park of any potential effects on resources and to specify appropriate mitigations to traditional cultural properties or practices. - California black oaks will be removed only if critical to reestablish a high-value vista in the lower montane forests. See Table II under Lower Montane Forests.	Archeological and Ethnographic Resources Historic Structures, Buildings, and Cultural Landscapes	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review
AIR QUALITY			
- Biomass could be utilized or disposed of in any way that would not require additional compliance. This could be: cultural use, lop and scatter, onsite mulch, chip and haul, pile and burn, haul to woodlot, or contracted timber removal. - Burning of slash piles would occur only on designated burn days. Wood would be allowed to cure prior to being burned in order to reduce smoke generation. - The park would examine the practicality of replacing power equipment with four-stroke engines or other power sources that have low emissions. Replacement of two-cycle engines with other types would take place only if other engine types displayed adequate power-to-weight ratios and were otherwise practical for field use.	Air Quality	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Concurrent with management operations

Table IX. Mitigation Measures

	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestone
HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY			
- Subject matter experts would review the annual work plan to minimize adverse effects. - The annual work plans would be submitted to the USACE to ensure actions do not adversely affect the waters of the United States and any permits applied for as appropriate.	Hydrology and Water Quality	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review
WILDERNESS			
No operations will take place in wilderness.	Wilderness	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review
EMPLOYEE AND VISITOR SAFETY			
- During felling operations, park visitors and nonessential staff members would be restricted to a safe distance from work sites. The park forester would ensure that sufficient staff would be present to maintain a safe perimeter. The chain saw operator and staff, or contractors directly associated with felling trees, would be the only people allowed within a tree felling worksite. - Tree fellers would be trained through the S-212 Wildfire Powersaw Operator series or equivalent, and would be restricted to operations allowed by their certifications. Staff members would be provided with appropriate training and safety equipment (including Kevlar chaps, hard hats, eye and hearing protection, and reflective clothing). Saw crews would be equipped with two-way radios and first-aid kits appropriate for dealing with major traumatic injuries. Crews would be trained in procedures for treating injured staff and transporting them to a higher level of medical care. - Vehicles would contain equipment for the prevention and cleanup of spills. - Temporary fuel storage and staging areas would be flagged, signed, and monitored. Work crews would use safe and environmentally friendly fuels, lubricants, hydraulic fluid, and other fluids.	Visitor Experience and Recreation Natural Quiet Hydrology and Water Quality	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review and concurrent with management operations
VISITOR EXPERIENCE			
- Visible limb cuts and cut tree stumps at vistas detract from the experience and leave a site that is out of place with the surroundings. Stumps would be ground down, or flush cut, and buried with debris to hide the obvious cut appearance. Larger stumps may have habitat value, and some may be retained as long as the stump does not appear to be cut and is in keeping with the surrounding area. - All work that generates noise levels above 76 decibels near residential or visitor use areas would be performed between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. - Temporary road closures would generally not exceed one-half hour. Road closures would be scheduled in periods of low visitation when possible.	Visitor Experience and Recreation Natural Quiet	Yosemite National Park, Vegetation and Restoration Branch Chief and History Architecture and Landscapes Branch Chief	Work Plan Review and concurrent with management operations

Consultation and Coordination

Scoping

The public scoping period for the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* Environmental Assessment (EA) began on February 12, 2009 and continued through March 20, 2009. The park mailed out 135 notices to people or organizations who have expressed interest in park operations or who have worked on scenic vista planning elsewhere. The scoping announcement was included in the *Yosemite National Park Electronic Newsletter*, which has approximately 7000 subscribers. A press release was issued on January 23, 2009 and printed in the *Mariposa Gazette* on January 26, 2009. A fact sheet was made available at the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center and on the park's webpage during the scoping period. The plan was presented at Open Houses in the park and at the Valley Visitor Center on January 28, 2009 and February 25, 2009. Information has been available at this venue throughout public scoping and the development of the EA. Plan representatives attended Open Houses at the Tuolumne Meadows Visitor Center on July 18, 2009 and August 22, 2009. Open Houses with field walks in Yosemite Valley were attended by project managers and representatives on June 24 and July 29, 2009.

Written scoping comments were received at the public scoping meetings, and by fax, email, and online through the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. The park received a total of nine comments. They included comments from two different chapters of the Sierra Club (Tehipite Chapter and Yosemite Committee), one letter from Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC), and six comments from individuals.

An interdisciplinary team analyzed the letters and broke them down into individual concerns. Issues identified were as follows:

- limit the scope of the SVMP;
- allow the National Park Service to continue their work without making them go through the environmental assessment process;
- avoid creating new viewing areas;
- manage scenic views using a holistic approach;
- address vista management in Yosemite to restore and maintain the quality of the visitor's visual experience;
- consider mechanical thinning in addition to the use of fire for the removal of large trees;
- minimize any runoff of petroleum into ephemeral streams when conducting major structural grading or paving at scenic vista points;
- use native plantings to ameliorate unsightly views and improve near and middle views of a scenic vista;
- be willing to remove trees when they are young to improve views and alleviate the issue of removing large tree;
- retain mature oaks;
- intensively remove trees in dense thickets to open up views;
- consider safety and impacts on other resources or facilities;
- consider impacts of burning and smoke on the visitor experience and visitors' ability to see vistas;
- consider all views — near and middle as well as distant;
- consider the creation of new vista points along part of Tioga Pass Road;
- encourage visitors to use foot travel to see the views of Yosemite;
- refrain from clearing vistas in designated wilderness;
- avoid the use of mechanized equipment within areas of the park managed as wilderness;

- refrain from enhancing scenic vistas along wilderness boundaries if doing so causes more than minor degradation to wilderness values;
- use natural vegetation to restore aesthetic conditions of park campgrounds;
- identify trailheads and destinations that guide visitors to alternative viewpoints accessed without vehicles;
- ensure accuracy in interpretive displays;
- minimize the visual impacts of construction activity;
- consider removal of structures in order to restore views;
- consider changing the name of Tunnel View to “Valley Overlook;”
- evaluate what would be needed to restore a portion of the El Capitan Moraine; and
- include correct American Indian history in planning documents.

The issues and concerns dealing with naming conventions, American Indian history, and the El Capitan moraine were considered outside of the scope of the project. The other issues and concerns brought up during public scoping are addressed in the EA.

Internal scoping took place concurrent with public scoping. Representatives from all park divisions attended a series of core team meetings to identify issues and participate in the development of the plan. Public comments received during scoping shaped the alternatives presented. After scoping was completed, two internal workshops were held to develop action alternatives. A Choosing by Advantages (CBA) workshop was held on October 21, 2009 to select a preferred alternative.

Public Comment

The *Scenic Vista Management Plan for Yosemite National Park* was available for public review from August 9, 2010 to September 17, 2010. The public review period was announced in the Electronic Newsletter, a press release, the Yosemite National Park Daily Report, and was presented on the Yosemite National Park website and published in the *Mariposa Gazette*. In addition, stories about the public release appeared in the *Fresno Bee*, *Modesto Bee* and *Sacramento Bee* newspapers. On August 25, 2010, the National Park Service held an Open House to answer questions and collect written comments. Comments could be submitted by fax, U.S. mail, at the Open House, or on-line through the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website.

The National Park Service distributed over 600 copies in printed form or on CDs to individuals and organizations, including public libraries. The document was also posted on the PEPC website for the project on August 9, 2010.

During the public comment period, the National Park Service received 40 letters containing a total of 29 unique concerns from individuals and organizations. The planning team prepared responses to comments that were considered substantive. All such comments, and NPS responses, are documented in the document Errata which has been prepared as a technical attachment to the EA. Listed below are the main concerns expressed:

- avoid adverse effects on air quality;
- consider the Hetch Hetchy area or other specific points;
- complete comprehensive management plan, such as the Wild and Scenic River plans, prior to initiating other planning;
- separate vista planning from the Fire Management Plan;
- keep the public informed of management activities;
- adopt the No Action alternative;
- adopt the Preferred Alternative;
- minimize vista management actions such as trimming instead of removing trees;

- monitor the cost of the plan because it could become expensive;
- consider the value of each tree before removing;
- remove structures to improve vistas;
- retain hardwoods and old growth trees;
- utilize existing vista points before establishing new points;
- leave the trees alone;
- consider the effect on wildlife; and
- provide more turnouts.

Concerns considered out of scope included alternative transportation issues, public comment methods, requests for additional campgrounds, and proposed actions related to other park planning efforts.

American Indian Consultation

Yosemite National Park works with seven tribes and tribal groups that have connections to Yosemite. The park initiated tribal scoping on July 22, 2008 at the All-Tribes meeting in Wawona. Contact with tribal groups has occurred intermittently throughout the plan and is regarded as a government-to-government relationship.

A letter and the fact sheet were sent to each of the seven tribes in January 2009. The vista management project manager presented an announcement of the planning process to the Tuolumne Band of Mi-Wuk on February 4, 2009. The park's historic preservation officer and American Indian liaison presented the same announcement to the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians on February 12, 2009. On April 2, the project manager met with the Mariposa tribal council, and on June 10, the project manager and the historic preservation officer and American Indian liaison met with representatives of the North Fork Mono Rancheria in the Wawona area.

Several common themes emerged during tribal scoping. These themes are listed below.

- Fire management is very important.
- The park needs to have more prescribed fires, especially as a way of preserving California black oak habitat.
- California black oak trees are very important, and they seem to be in decline.
- Clearing the understory from under California black oaks is essential for the health of the trees.
- Yosemite Valley was once much more open than it is now.
- The park needs to make a greater effort to preserve existing black oaks and to encourage regeneration of oak woodlands.
- Conifer growth has reduced the number of meadows in the Valley and generally blocked many views.

The tribes and tribal groups were provided with a copy of this EA in August of 2010 for review. Consultation and tribal review will continue as the annual work plans are created.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 USC 1531 et seq.), requires all federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by the agency does not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or adversely modify critical habitat. The NPS requested a list of federally listed endangered and threatened species that may be present, and then had it updated on March 1, 2010. The NPS reviewed these lists to determine whether these species were known to live in the park, and the lists were used as a basis for the

special-status analysis in this EA. The Selected Alternative would not adversely affect species that are federally listed as threatened or endangered. Official correspondence and a copy of the EA were mailed to the USFWS Endangered Species Branch, from the Yosemite National Park Superintendent, and received by the USFWS on September 3, 2010.

US Army Corp of Engineers – Wetlands and Floodplains

The National Park Service has determined that the Selected Alternative would not adversely affect waters of the United States or special aquatic sites in a manner that would require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Official correspondence and a copy of the EA were mailed to the USACE Regulatory Division, on September 1, 2010, from the Yosemite National Park Superintendent. The USACE response was received by the Superintendent on September 21, 2010. Prior to implementation of annual work plans, the National Park Service will consult with the USACE to ensure permit compliance.

State of California Regional Water Quality Control Board – Wetlands and Floodplains

The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCBs) are the regulatory boards within California's Environmental Protection Agency that derive their authority from Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. The SWRCB allocates rights to the use of surface water and, along with the RWQCBs, is charged with protecting surface, ground, and coastal waters throughout the state. The RWQCBs issue permits that govern and restrict the amount of pollutants that can be discharged into the ground or surface water, which includes regulating stormwater during construction activities. Yosemite National Park is under the jurisdiction of Regional Board (5), Central Valley, and therefore consults with and obtains any necessary permits and/or certifications for construction activities from the Central Valley RWQCB.

The RWQCB Central Valley Region received a copy of the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* EA during the public review period. Official correspondence was mailed to the RWQCB on September 3, 2010, requesting document review and comments. The RWQCB Central Valley response was received on September 21, 2010. Prior to implementation of annual work plans, the National Park Service will consult with the RWQCB regarding water quality certification requirements.

California State Historic Preservation Officer/Advisory Council on Historic Preservation - National Historic Preservation Act

The NPS made the determination of effect of the Selected Alternative on historic properties pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in accordance with the *1999 Park Programmatic Agreement Among The National Park Service At Yosemite, The California State Historic Preservation Officer and The Advisory Council On Historic Preservation Regarding Planning, Design, Construction, Operations And Maintenance, Yosemite National Park, California* (1999 PA). The agreement stipulates methods by which the park may carry out its responsibilities under Section 106 of the NHPA.

For the purpose of NEPA and NPS policy, an effect on a historic property that is eligible to be or is listed in the *National Register of Historic Places* would be considered significant if an adverse effect could not be resolved in agreement with the state historic preservation officer (SHPO), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), American Indian tribal governments, or other consulting and interested parties and the public. Consultation with the SHPO is required to resolve adverse effects by implementation of standard mitigation measures, pursuant to Stipulation VIII of the 1999 PA.

The *Scenic Vista Management Plan for Yosemite National Park Environmental Assessment* has determined that there would be no effects on archeology, historic structures or cultural landscape resources. Any potential future effects could be identified through annual work plans and avoided. If effects are

identified through the work plan review, but not adverse, the standard mitigations as defined under the 1999 PA will be implemented, with SHPO consultation at that time. A copy of the EA was mailed to the office of the California SHPO in August, 2010.

Non-Impairment of Park Resources

The 1916 Organic Act created the National Park Service and gave it the responsibility “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of future generations.” Therefore, the National Park Service cannot take an action that will “impair” park resources or values.

Based on the analysis provided in the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* EA for Yosemite National Park, the National Park Service concludes that implementation of the Selected Alternative, *Alternative 3: Use Ecological Considerations to Determine Intensity of Vista Clearing*, will have no major adverse impacts on a resource or value whose conservation is (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of Yosemite National Park; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of Yosemite National Park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or (3) identified as a goal in the park’s General Management Plan or other relevant National Park Service planning documents. Consequently, implementation of the selected alternative will not violate the 1916 Organic Act.

Conclusion

Based on information contained in the *Scenic Vista Management Plan for Yosemite National Park* EA as summarized above; the nature of comments received from affected agencies and the public; and the incorporation of the mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, it is the determination of the National Park Service that the Selected Action is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. There will be no unacceptable impacts or impairment of park resources or values as a result of the Selected Action. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The Selected Action as detailed may be implemented as soon as practicable.

Recommended:

Don L. Neubacher
Superintendent, Yosemite National Park

Date

Approved:

Christine S. Lehnertz
Director, Pacific West Region, National Park Service

Date