



Packstock in the Tuolumne River Corridor



Stock use has a long and varied history in the Tuolumne River corridor and stock animals continue to be used today to explore the backcountry, supply food and materials to backcountry trail crews and High Sierra Camps, and assist with search and rescue missions. In the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement, park planners have evaluated a range of alternatives related to stock use. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that each of these action alternatives protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values within the river corridor.

What are the current levels of stock use?

Currently Tuolumne Meadows contains one concessioner stable located west of Lember Dome, and one NPS stable located east of the Wilderness Center. The majority of non-NPS packstock use in the river corridor is associated with concessioner supply trips for the High Sierra Camps, which totaled 2,409 passes (one horse or mule passing a fixed point along a trail) in 2011. Concessioner stock day rides into the wilderness are limited to 3 two-hour rides per day, 2 four-hour rides per day, and occasional all-day rides. Other commercial guided stock trips are not limited in number, and in 2011 there were 382 total passes on trails within the Tuolumne River Corridor. NPS administrative stock use occurs in wild segments in support of trail maintenance and backcountry utility operations at Glen Aulin, and totaled 200 passes in 2011.

What will change under the Preferred Alternative?

Concessioner stock day rides into the wilderness would be discontinued to reduce hiker-stock conflicts on trails. On an average year, less than 100 visitors on commercial trips using stock would be displaced from trails in the Tuolumne River corridor. NPS would work with the commercial outfitters and visitors to direct these stock rides to other lower use trails within the park. The NPS and concessioner stables would be co-located at the current site of the concessioner stables and would support stock operations associated with High Sierra Camps and NPS administrative uses. Glen Aulin's capacity would be reduced from 32 to 20 people per night, reducing the number of re-supply trips.

The Preferred Alternative would establish an opening date for stock to enter the high country that protects meadow and riparian areas during the wettest portions of the spring and early summer when plants and soils are most susceptible to impacts from stock. This alternative would also reduce stock use levels in Lyell Canyon to 192 grazing-nights per year, which is the level that research shows can be sustained without undesirable effects on the meadow habitat. Camping with stock in Lyell Canyon would occur at two campsites located away from sensitive areas. Access to these campsites would be directed to areas found suitable to protect natural and cultural resources.

What do the other action alternatives propose?

Alternative 1: All concessioner stock day rides and overnight stock trips would be discontinued to enhance opportunities for self-reliance and solitude. As with the preferred alternative, the NPS and concessioner stables would be co-located at the current site of the concessioner stables with concessioner use limited to supplying the High Sierra Camps outside of the river corridor.

Alternative 2: This alternative is comparable to the preferred alternative in establishing an opening date and reducing stock use levels to 192 grazing-nights per year. A reduction in concessioner day rides into the wilderness would accommodate a maximum of 24 people per day (2 two-hour rides with up to 12 visitors per ride). Alternative 2 would also involve co-location of the NPS and concessioner stables, but at a new location near the wastewater treatment plant.

Alternative 3: Management actions would be implemented similar to those in the preferred alternative with 2 campsites designated for stock use and access to grazing areas and routes directed to resilient areas. As in Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would also include similar reductions in concessioner day rides and the reduction in stock use levels to 192 grazing-nights per year. This alternative would keep the NPS and concessioner stables in their present locations.

Determining the extent that stock use is "necessary"

Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the National Park Service must adopt specific, measurable limits on use within the river corridor to ensure that the kinds and amounts of visitor use protect and enhance river values. Currently, Yosemite limits overnight use in wilderness by the trailhead quota system; however, to date, the National Park Service has not limited the amount of commercial use within wilderness areas in the corridor. Through this planning process, the park will determine the extent to which commercial services (both guided stock and guided hiking trips) are necessary in the Yosemite Wilderness within the Tuolumne River corridor. The need for this type of specialized finding stems from a 2004 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in the case *High Sierra Hikers Association v. Blackwell*. The court ruled that agencies that manage wilderness areas must determine the maximum allowable amount of commercial services in Wilderness, and then manage commercial services accordingly. This specialized finding is included as an appendix in the Tuolumne River Plan.

How to stay involved

Learn more about this plan, including open house dates and other information on the Tuolumne River Plan website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/trp.htm. You can also follow this and other park plans on Facebook at www.facebook.com/YosemiteNPS.

Comment on this draft environmental impact statement by visiting the Tuolumne River Plan Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/trp_deis. Electronic comment submittal through PEPC saves resources and allows for direct entry into the NPS comment analysis system. Alternatively, your comments can be emailed to yose_planning@nps.gov, faxed to 209/379-1294 or mailed to:

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