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 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Dear Park Planners:

It is my hope that you receive many public comments, as it relates to the Tenaya Lake Scoping, and that my letters are in good company. I wish to submit one last comment on this subject. I hope that by doing so you will find something useful in what is in fact not my own comments, but a reprint of the famous letter from the late David Brower that was addressed to Yosemite National Park, as it relates to the Yosemite Valley Plan, back in 2000. I believe that it should be considered by park planners as a guideline in your current efforts associated with Tenaya Lake. Brower's letter makes very heart felt and cogent points about not only his passion for camping, but his preference for camping over other kinds of accommodations, such as Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel or its lodges. He makes very clear that experiencing nature by camping offers a unique opportunity that should be available for future generations.

My earlier comments stated that a campground could be constructed at Tenaya Lake in such a way that would offer the potential of a different kind of Yosemite camping experience, in such a way that would offer the lowest of human impacts possible. Though this is my view, this topic is not the purpose of this letter.

This letter is to simply remind you of David Brower's relevant comments. His thoughts about the park and its future planning efforts are of the highest relevance to Tenaya Lake specifically. Though his words were associated with the Yosemite Valley Plan, he makes several about Tenaya Lake that are especially germane at this time of the current Tenaya Lake planning effort.

Some of what Mr. Brower made specific reference to, as it relates to Tenaya Lake, is in regards to the changes made during the Mission 66 expansions, which offer an historic record needed at a time when you might be considering what to do next, perhaps to accommodate the next generation of park visitors. As each generation of park planners tend to feel a need to accommodate the pressure put upon the park at every specific period in history, it can sadly be assumed that in the future, park planners will continue to widen and pave roads and parking lots as impacts from ever increasing tourist populations necessitate. Until such time that someone in the park service speaks out, tourism will inevitably increase. When that time comes, perhaps the park service will determine what a park wide "user carrying capacity" study should commence, so that overflow from Yosemite Valley will some day stop impacting Yosemite's remote areas such as Tenaya Lake and Tuolumne Meadows.

I am submitting his letter to you today, for historic reference, because I believe that no current Tenaya Lake Plan would be complete without Mr. Brower's words of wisdom. But also, I send this to you to remind you that future historians will judge your decisions on a different scale than we do today, just as historians now criticize decisions made during the Mission 66 period. Please take David Brower's comments to heart, as follows:

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Published on Monday, November 20, 2000 in the San Francisco Chronicle

## David Brower on the Yosemite Valley Plan

by David Brower

RIGHT NOW, the National Park Service, which has heretofore cherished Yosemite, seems intent on converting this temple into a profit center, with pricey hotels, scant camping, few modest accommodations, wider roads to field bigger diesel buses, ecological roadside mayhem, atmospheric damage and requiring people who want to celebrate Yosemite Valley to park outside the park in various still unspoiled places that are soon to be paved. This is all to exploit what you can do when you have \$200 million or \$300 million dollars to spend instead of the discipline former National Park Service Director Newton Drury enjoyed when he said, "We have no money, therefore we can do no harm."

The National Park Service is trying to do too much, too fast in Yosemite, forgetting that protecting the park, not the Yosemite park service revenues, is the most important thing here. It's time it remembered what Yosemite is all about.

Anyone who has been visiting Yosemite for almost 82 years is likely to brag about it, and I do incessantly. I started going to Yosemite in 1918. There were 37,000 visitors that year and I celebrated my sixth birthday camped alongside the railroad that was helping construct an alien dam in Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley. Restoring this lost treasure should be an ongoing part of the park service agenda.

Unbeknown even to many in the National Park Service, Yosemite was the first national park, set aside eight years before Yellowstone, and its mission clearly stated a year later by none other than Frederick Law Olmsted. After he had done his bit for Central Park in New York City, Olmsted came to California and the Fremont Estate to recover and to advise California on how to take care of the best of its nature, including Yosemite.

Mountains have a voice, and Olmsted was one of the first to try to speak for them. He proposed the rights for nature implicit in the national park idea.

"The first requirement is to preserve the natural scenery and restrict within the narrowest limits the necessary accommodation of visitors.

"Structures should not detract from the dignity of the scene. In preventing the sacrifice of anything that should be of the slightest value to visitors to the convenience, bad taste, playfulness, carelessness, or wanton destructiveness of present visitors, would probably yield in each case the interest of uncounted millions to the selfishness of a few."

Thus, in 1864, did an idea born on one coast reach another.

Maybe Olmsted can help all of us, including the National Park Service, remember what the national park idea is all about. It was probably not just to let people who can afford the Ahwahnee or Yosemite lodges to luxuriate there, but to be a place to celebrate a bit of equity in a magical place meant to be shared with the current brief tenants of the Earth, but most importantly, one held in trust for the "uncounted millions" not yet born. The greatest luxury in Yosemite comes from what the Valley has to say, not just from its structures. If Old Dave Brower wants to go slumming at the Ahwahnee, OK. But maybe his kids and friends would rather camp, as he used to.

I am deeply concerned these days about Yosemite. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that national parks were not set aside to create profit centers for concessionaires nor to pad National Park Service construction budgets for park officials to shortchange the future. Large crowds are seasonal, but new roads, hotels and parking lots despoil the park year-round.

I saw the trouble begin with an earlier development policy, Mission 66, when then-National Park Service Director Connie Wirth went to the American Automobile Association, not to conservationists, for advice. What he let happen to Yosemite in the controversy over rerouting the Tioga Road was a disaster, which the Sierra Club let happen by not opposing it strongly

enough. Park service people should have been jailed for what they destroyed at Tenaya Lake, just as I would now urge long prison sentences for engineers who molest roads until they are wide enough to accommodate big diesel buses. Left alone, the park service would get rid of Yosemite's autumn color with 2-stroke leaf blowers.

In the 1950s, my attempt to save Yosemite from what photographer Ansel Adams described as National Park Service vandalism at Tioga Pass was enthusiastic enough to bring Horace Albright, second director of the National Park Service, to San Francisco to try to get me fired as executive director of the Sierra Club.

He was not successful, but neither was I successful in stopping the National Park Service from demolishing Tenaya's granite domes. I have had more than one park ranger lament how right we were to have opposed that project and how our alternative would have been better. We have seen this pattern repeated in the Merced River Canyon, where Judge Anthony Ishii confirmed the righteousness of our protest against illegal National Park Service vandalism of the river, but mostly too late.

When I see the war-zone that used to be the Merced River Gorge in Yosemite, I am furious that the perpetrators, who pushed this project through in violation of the National Environmental Policy and the Wild and Scenic Rivers acts, are allowed to continue their shoddy planning in the rest of the park rather than taking some time out to rethink.

On the contrary, no one is taking time out and no one is rethinking and none of the lawbreakers is in jail, or even repentant.

The Merced River Plan was rushed through using old wildlife data (the wildlife situation may have changed a bit since one bank of the river was paved by the National Park Service). The river plan was not meant to be a formality; it was intended to be the biological foundation of planning efforts for the entire valley, Judge Ishii's statements in the courtroom indicate that he would concur. If the National Park Service is not violating the letter of his ruling, releasing the draft valley plan before the river plan was finalized, it certainly is violating the spirit of Ishii's call for sound planning. I call on the park service to submit a complete plan for the Merced River before asking us to comment on a draft Yosemite valley plan. The National Park Service seems to be drunk on appropriations money. This time, I don't have another 40 years to wait for the park service to realize their mistake. It's time to wake up, and for God's sake, no more construction on the river between the Highway 120 junction and Yosemite Valley!

This brings us to the next major disaster contained in the alternatives of the valley plan. Why did that road need to be widened (other than to spend some of the congressional cash)?

In a private statement to me in a meeting last year, Regional National Park Service Director John Reynolds said that the road had to be widened because buses were a necessary piece of Yosemite's transportation future. He repeated this once to the press, but has been denying it ever since. The emphasis on diesel buses in the draft Yosemite Valley plan force me to infer that he was telling the truth the first time. With both the Environmental Protection Agency in California and Washington, D.C., currently cracking down on diesel as a carcinogen and a massive air pollution problem, it is unconscionable for the National Park Service to advocate a dramatic increase in diesel traffic in Yosemite Valley.

Yosemite gets more pollution than it needs already from the Central Valley without creating a new toxic menace locally. Until clean-fuel buses can make the grade, we are stuck with diesel buses, which is far dirtier than gasoline-burning modern cars, even per passenger-mile. The Central Valley is beginning to look to rail as a solution to its air problems, and I strongly encourage the National Park Service to climb aboard this statewide effort, which can be part of the solution for Yosemite as well.

Finally, let's put the brakes on any new parking lots. Parking is currently sited in areas long-since developed while the draft Yosemite Valley plan suggests that we pave over huge lots in unspoiled areas of the park so diesel buses can serve expanded hotels in the valley on widened roads. All of the alternatives are based on the assumption that it is inevitable that we will continue to try to pack as many people into the park as possible at any given time.

Congestion problems are relatively easy to solve; as Ansel Adams said, "When the theater's full, they don't sell lap-space."

National parks were created to be a natural haven from the world of mindless development and endless growth. Placing no limit on the number of current visitors who can visit the park at one time is a violation of the Organic Act and a breach of our

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contract with future generations. This may be easy to miss with so much fee-demonstration-project money pouring into Yosemite, but it is your job as the appointed guardians of Yosemite not to miss it.

So skip the hotel expansion, replace lost camping sites instead, and if you want parking lots, limit them to impacted nonriparian areas where other structures are being removed. As for restoring Yosemite, I'm glad the park service is at least aware of the concept, but I don't see much restoration in the plan that isn't undone by destruction elsewhere. That's not restoration, it's called mitigation, as your highway building friends can tell you.

If you widen Southside Drive and pull out other roads, there is no net ecological gain, especially if the other roads are not actually removed. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and others have said that the future of the parks is in restoration. I heartily agree and will begin applauding the moment that the National Park Service gets done using this kind of language as green-wash for half-baked development plans like the draft Yosemite Valley plan.

End quote.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter.

Sincerely,

 Truckee, CA