

Alternative 3

YOSEMITE'S MERCED RIVER DRAFT PLAN / EIS

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



ALTERNATIVE 3: DISPERSED VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND EXTENSIVE RIVERBANK RESTORATION

ALTERNATIVE 3 OVERVIEW

The guiding principles of Alternative 3 would include the restoration of large portions of the floodplain and riparian area within 150 feet of the river. This alternative would accommodate much lower maximum visitor-use levels than today and offer fewer commercial services and facilities. Visitor-use levels would be managed to allow for dispersed visitor experiences free of crowding or congestion.

Actions in Alternative 3 would:

- Restore 302 acres of meadow and riparian habitat.
- Slightly increase the camping inventory in Yosemite Valley (+2%) but slightly reduce it throughout the entire river corridor (-3%).
- Significantly reduce the lodging inventory in Yosemite Valley (-40%) and throughout the entire river corridor (-38%).
- Reduce day-use parking for Yosemite Valley (-32%).
- Reduce commercial services.
- Make significant changes to the traffic circulation pattern in Yosemite Valley to accommodate ecological restoration goals and reduce traffic congestion.
- Accommodate approximately 13,200 visitors per day in East Yosemite Valley.
- Continue to manage overnight use through Wilderness quotas, and reservation systems for lodging and camping.
- Manage day-use capacity for East Yosemite Valley through parking permits and a reservation system required during peak season (May through September).



PROTECT AND ENHANCE

Alternative 3 would protect and enhance river values through extensive ecological restoration that would include some portions of the 100-year floodplain and riparian and meadow habitat corridorwide. This alternative would prioritize enhancement of ecological river values over the retention of existing infrastructure and circulation patterns.

RIVER VALUES

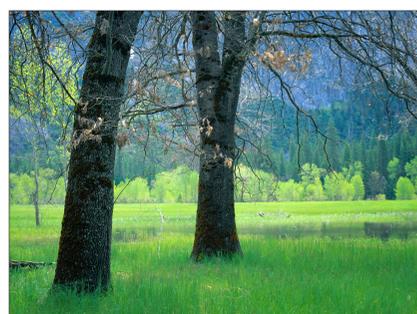
- Enhance hydrologic connectivity of meadows to the riparian floodplain through the removal of road segments that bisect Ahwahnee and Stoneman meadows.
- Ecological restoration would target priority areas, including the current Wawona Golf Course area; Housekeeping Camp; buildings at Yosemite Lodge within the 100-year floodplain; and the dynamic 10-year floodplain area formerly occupied by Upper and Lower River campgrounds.
- Enhance the free-flowing condition of the river by removing three historic bridges (Sugar Pine, Ahwahnee, and Stoneman) within the bed and banks of the river that constrict flow during high-water events.
- Establish a large valley oak recruitment area of at least 2.25 acres in El Portal.
- Recreational values would be protected and enhanced by reducing facilities and zone capacities in the Wilderness above Nevada Fall (Segment 1).
- In Yosemite Valley (Segment 2), crowding would be reduced at key attraction sites and private boating would be allowed in longer reaches of the river to improve dispersed recreation.
- Cultural and scenic values would be protected and enhanced as described under "Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6." Alternative 3 would also relocate and rehabilitate Residence 1 (Superintendent's House) to the NPS housing area and restore informal trails and black oak woodlands near Cook's Meadow.



Wawona Campground



Merced Lake



Leidig Meadow

USER CAPACITY, LAND USE, AND FACILITIES

Alternative 3 would focus on providing a dispersed visitor experience, with marked reduction in commercial services and facilities. The overall visitor-use levels would be lower than current levels to allow for increased resource restoration and reduced crowding and congestion in the most popular areas of the river corridor.

CAMPING

- The campsites inventory in Yosemite Valley would increase (+2%), but it would be reduced throughout the entire river corridor (-3%), as a result of natural and cultural resource enhancement.
- All campsites within 150 feet of the river would be removed.
- Campsite losses would be offset with new camping sites adjacent to Upper Pines Campground; east of Camp 4; as well as new sites west of Backpackers Campgroup and west of Yosemite Lodge.
- The number of campsites in Yosemite Valley would increase to 477—a net gain of 11 sites—and the number of campsites available throughout the corridor would be 549.

LODGING

- In-park lodging availability would be reduced (-37%) as compared to existing conditions—from 1,160 to 725 units.
- Lodging would be removed from the 100-year floodplain at Yosemite Lodge and Housekeeping Camp and in Wilderness.
- All permanent infrastructure at Merced Lake High Sierra Camp would be removed. A temporary pack camp with a 15-person capacity would be sanctioned at the former High Sierra camp, providing overnight lodging in this location and converting this area to designated Wilderness.
- No new hard-sided lodging would be constructed in any part of the river corridor.

DAY-USE CAPACITY AND VISITOR ACCESS

- Day-use parking capacity in Yosemite Valley would be reduced (-32%) compared to current levels and would be actively managed and potentially restricted during peak-use season (May through September).
- A day-use parking permit system would be implemented immediately for East Yosemite Valley during peak season.
- The most significant changes to parking and circulation would take place in the vicinity of Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area, and Yosemite Lodge.
- Day-use visitors would park at a re-designed Yosemite Village Day-use Parking Area with a total 550 parking spaces outside the 10-year floodplain.
- A new Yosemite Lodge Day-use Parking Area with 150 spaces would be added west of the lodge.
- Total parking for East Yosemite Valley (including day, overnight, and administrative) would be approximately 4,300 spaces.
- Transit services would remain unchanged on the Highway 140 and Highway 120 East corridors; service would be reduced to one round-trip per day on the Highway 120 West corridor, and one round-trip run per day would be added to the Highway 41 corridor.
- All shuttle services within the Valley would remain the same, and the East Valley shuttle would be optimized to decrease shuttle intervals to five minutes.
- Private boating would be allowed in sections of Wilderness, Yosemite Valley, the Gorge, El Portal, and Wawona.



Alternative 3: Camping Facilities

Existing Locations	Alt 1 (No Action)	Alt 3	Details
Backpackers	25 sites	0 sites	25 walk-in sites removed from the 100-year floodplain, 16 of these sites will be relocated west of Backpackers
Camp 4	35 sites	35 sites	No change to the National Historic Register site
Lower Pines	76 sites	61 sites	15 sites within 150 feet of the river removed
North Pines	86 sites	52 sites	34 sites within 150 feet of the river removed
Upper Pines	240 sites	238 sites	2 sites removed for cultural resource concerns
Yellow Pine Administrative	4 sites	4 sites	No changes to these group administrative sites
Wawona	99 sites	72 sites	27 sites removed within 150 feet of the river or in culturally sensitive areas
Total Existing Locations	565 sites	462 sites	
New Locations			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 3	Details
West of Backpackers	0 sites	16 sites	16 walk-in sites relocated from Backpackers to less sensitive area outside 100-year floodplain
East of Camp 4	0 sites	35 sites	35 walk-in sites constructed east of Camp 4
Upper Pines	0 sites	36 sites	36-site RV loop constructed
Total New Camping	0 sites	87 sites	
Total Camping in Corridor	565 sites	549 sites	

Alternative 3: Lodging Facilities

Wilderness	Alt 1 (No Action)	Alt 3	Details
Merced Lake High Sierra Camp	22 units (0 beds)	0 units (15 people)	Remove all permanent infrastructure. Wilderness lodging facility converted to 150-person temporary pack camp
Yosemite Valley			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 3	Details
Ahwahnee Hotel	123 rooms	123 rooms	No change at the National Historic Landmark
Housekeeping Camp	266 tent cabins	0 tent cabins	Remove all units from 100-year floodplain
Curry Village	400 units	433 units (290 tents and 143 hard-sided units)	* Retain 290 tents * Retain 47 hard-sided cabin-with-bath units * Retain 18 units at Stoneman House * At Boys Town, Southside Drive is re-routed and the area restored.
Yosemite Lodge	245 rooms	143 rooms	Remove 102 rooms (four buildings) from the 100-year floodplain
Wawona			
Existing Locations	Alt 1	Alt 3	Details
Wawona Hotel	104 rooms	104 rooms	No change at the National Historic Landmark
Total Lodging in Corridor	1,160 units	725 units	

* El Portal: Private accommodations exist but are not on NPS land; therefore, they are not listed here.

EMPLOYEE HOUSING

- **Yosemite Village Area.** Lost Arrow: Remove temporary employee housing. Re-establish an administrative parking lot to accommodate 50 spaces. Retain Ahwahnee Row and Tecoya employee housing.
- **Yosemite Lodge Area.** Remove concessioner housing at Highland Court and the Thousands Cabins. Construct two new concessioner housing areas for 104 employees and construct 78 employee parking spaces.
- **El Portal Area.** Rancheria Flat: Construct one dormitory for 12 employees plus units for seven additional employees to replace temporary housing removed from Yosemite Valley. Abbeville and Trailer Village Housing: Remove or relocate 36 existing private residences. Continue to provide housing land use for 40 employees and volunteers at this location.
- **East of Yosemite Valley Area.** Concessioner Stables: Retain 25 employee beds.