

ANALYSIS TOPICS: SOCIOCULTURAL RESOURCES

Scenic Resources

Affected Environment

Regulatory Framework

Scenic views from nearly all lands in the Merced River corridor are distinct. Scenic quality is a core value embedded in the National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act of 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.”
(NPS Organic Act, 16 USC 1)

The Yosemite Land Grant of 1864 legislation granted the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees from the federal government to the State of California “upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation; inalienable for all time.” This was the first time land in the United States was preserved for its scenic values and for public benefit.

The visual landscape factored prominently in the decision to designate Yosemite as a national park and is one of the primary resources that the NPS is charged with protecting. As such, the NPS has taken the approach of analyzing potential impacts on visual resources by considering these inherent resources to be self-evidently valuable, and that the crux of any analysis should focus on how visitors to the park experience these resources. Following this principle, the NPS established policies and regulations, as described above, to protect visual resources, including efforts to characterize and catalog important scenic landscapes. The NPS has further developed these policies by identifying important scenic resources and establishing a framework for protecting them, including restrictions on development of human-made structures in visually important areas. Today, although structures and infrastructure intrude into some scenic views from the main stem Merced River and South Fork Merced River, or views to the river (such as the roads near the river in Yosemite Valley), the area is largely pristine and human-made features do not dominate, even in the landscapes where they are visible.

The 1980 *Yosemite General Management Plan* specifies the following management objectives to preserve, protect, and restore scenic resources:

- Identify the major scenic resources and the places from which they are viewed.
- Provide for the preservation or protection of existing scenic resource and viewing stations.
- Provide for historic views through vista clearing.
- Permit only those levels and types of use that are compatible with the preservation or protection of the scenic resources and with the quality of the viewing experience.

Tiered from the *Yosemite General Management Plan*, the final *Scenic Vista Management Plan for Yosemite National Park (Scenic Vista Management Plan)* (NPS 2011d) provides a systematic program for documenting, protecting, and reestablishing important viewpoints and vistas outside of designated Wilderness, consistent with the natural processes and human influence that created them.

The 2005 *A Sense of Place, Design Guidelines for Yosemite Valley* provide a framework for describing appropriateness of architectural and landscape character of new buildings, site work, and alterations. In general, the goals of the Design Guidelines include:

- Retention of natural site character, including setting, materials, and ecological processes.
- Design new buildings and facilities to blend with the natural environment, emphasizing non-intrusive design. They are sensitive to the environmental capacity of the site to absorb modifications. Facilities fit in with their sites rather than dominate them. Buildings are subordinate to the environment.
- Compatibility of structures and facilities with the cultural context and character in which they are located and protection of cultural integrity.
- Coordination and integration of the design of individual structures with those of the site plan as a whole.
- Enhancement of unifying architectural and landscape themes and elements within defined areas throughout Yosemite Valley.
- Emphasis on simplicity and restraint in design and respect for past building character, traditions, and practices.
- Recognition of the principles of rustic design used by previous designers, identification of those who retain validity today, and contemporary interpretation of those principles.

The detailed guidelines sections of *A Sense of Place* provide direction as to which design strategies and themes may be suitable for particular areas, including: Yosemite Village; Curry Village; the Ahwahnee; Yosemite Lodge; campground, Camp 4, and Housekeeping Camp; and day-use areas, the Indian Cultural Center, LeConte Memorial Lodge, Happy Isles, and shuttle bus stops.

Regional Scenic Context

The scenery of Yosemite is one of its most significant resources and is largely responsible for the high visitation of the park by people from around the world. The 2009 summer visitor study indicated that the most common visitor activity was viewing scenery (93%) and the primary activity for 41% of visitor groups was also viewing scenery (Blotkamp et al. 2010). The 2008 winter visitor study indicated that for 67% of visitors, interest in seeing Yosemite scenery in wintertime was the most common factor affecting their decision to visit the park. The most common visitor activities were viewing scenery/taking a scenic drive (84%), taking photographs/painting/drawing (73%), and day hiking (35%) (Le et al. 2008).

As described in the “American Indian Traditional Cultural Resources” subsection later in this chapter, American Indian tribes and groups assign strong spiritual value to the Merced River and Yosemite Valley, attaching names and stories to geologic and other features in the river corridor. Since the first

explorations and descriptions of the Valley by Euro-Americans in the mid-19th century, views of the pastoral Valley juxtaposed with towering geologic features and dramatic waterfalls have been recognized as outstanding resources of Yosemite Valley. Indeed, the beauty of the Yosemite landscape came to the attention of the nation largely through the early writings, paintings, and photographs produced by nationally recognized artists and visitors to the region, whose inspiration in many ways influenced the U.S. Congressional legislation, leading to the designation of Yosemite as a place worthy of preservation. The scenic resources of Yosemite have a high degree of cultural significance. Most of the quintessential views into and from the Valley are iconic and are reflected in the works of artists including Albert Bierstadt, Ansel Adams, Thomas Moran, and Myron Hunt. The entire park, including the Wilderness and other areas outside Yosemite Valley, remains a favorite subject for professional and amateur artists, photographers, and writers, whose work continues to communicate to visitors and nonvisitors alike the unique scenic resource values of the park.

Scenic views from nearly all lands in the Merced River corridor include steep valleys and canyon walls, clear air, spectacular rock formations, and panoramic views, which combine to offer a wealth of visual resources nearly unsurpassed in the United States. As people move through the varied topography and vegetation along sections of the valleys and canyons that frame the Merced River, they experience a varied sequence of visual resources that provide a cumulative visual experience that is unique and above and beyond that of enjoying any one single viewpoint. This experience involves the interaction of multiple elements in relation to each other: the juxtaposition of individual features with the foreground and background, the interface of different surfaces, and the interplay of light reflecting off the different colors and textures of the elements making up the visual landscape.

Wildfire suppression practices initiated in the early 1900s have changed vegetation patterns from open, park-like vistas to more dense vegetation that have restricted views. In addition, historic wildfire suppression practices have resulted in catastrophic fires that affect scenic views. Vegetation changes that have affected scenic viewpoints are discussed further below, by segment.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Visual resources along this segment are less studied than those in Yosemite Valley and other developed areas, but exhibit equivalent scenic resource value. The scenery of this wilderness segment of the river is characterized by dramatic, glacially carved canyons; montane lakes framed by steeply sloping and sparsely vegetated granite rock faces; and meandering creeks flowing through broad pristine meadows. Scenic landmarks visible from the river and its band, and that contribute to this segment's scenic outstandingly remarkable value (ORV), include Washburn and Merced Lakes (see Photo SCN-1), Echo Valley, Bunnell Point, and Little Yosemite Valley, and many other named and unnamed scenic landmarks.

This long river segment of great visual variety, with its largely uncompromised natural setting, provides diverse, exceptional scenery, all with the river in the foreground. Human-made features in this segment are relatively few. Moreover, the comparatively low visitor use in Segment 1 enhances its scenic quality. Noteworthy human-made features visible in the river corridor are generally limited to the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp (see Photos SCN-2 and SCN-3) and the composting toilet at Little

Yosemite Valley Campground. The Little Yosemite and Merced Lake Ranger Stations are also visible from the river corridor.

Other factors that may influence the area's aesthetic character include regional air pollution (e.g., haze), which can limit visibility during the summer (NPS and Colorado State University 2002); and crowding near the backcountry designated camping areas as viewed in the foreground of scenic views or views of the river, which operate near capacity all summer. Despite the presence of existing structures, views from the river and trails along Segment 1 continue to have high aesthetic value.



Photo SCN-1: Merced Lake – 2010 (Yochim 2010)



Photo SCN-2: Merced Lake High Sierra Camp – 2010 (Yochim 2010)



Photo SCN-3: Merced Lake High Sierra Camp – 2010 (Yochim 2010)

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

The Merced River enters Yosemite Valley at Nevada Fall, flows through Emerald Pool, then over Vernal Fall and through Happy Isles. Once in the flat Valley, the Merced River provides the foreground to many of Yosemite’s most famous landmarks. From the river and its banks, views consist of Yosemite Falls, Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan, Half Dome, and other named and unnamed parts of the cliffs and hanging valleys rimming the Valley (see Photos SCN-4 and SCN-5). Meandering through a sequence of compound oxbows, wetlands, and meadows, the river and its related features provide broadened panoramas. Throughout the Valley, views from the river and its banks encompass the lower montane forest as it rises up to sheer rock faces of granite cliffs and talus slopes, with a flat valley bottom serving as a contrasting foreground. The juxtaposition of granite domes and waterfalls is unique, as is the concentration of river-related views found in the Valley.

During development of the *Yosemite General Management Plan* in the late 1970s, the NPS conducted an analysis of existing and historic viewing conditions in Yosemite Valley and identified the landscape features most visitors look for and are able to distinguish (NPS 1980). The study found the 11 most important features in the Valley to be Half Dome, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, Bridalveil Fall, Three Brothers, Cathedral Rocks and Spires, Sentinel Rock, Glacier Point, North Dome, Washington Column, and Royal Arches. The study also evaluated all points from which these features could be seen (assuming no vegetation or structures obstructed the view) to establish the scenic viewing potential of different locations on the Valley floor. Existing viewpoints were identified, and the quality of their views and their proximity to roads and trails were noted. All of the identified “most important features” included in the *Yosemite General Management Plan* analysis are visible from various sections of the Merced River through Yosemite Valley.

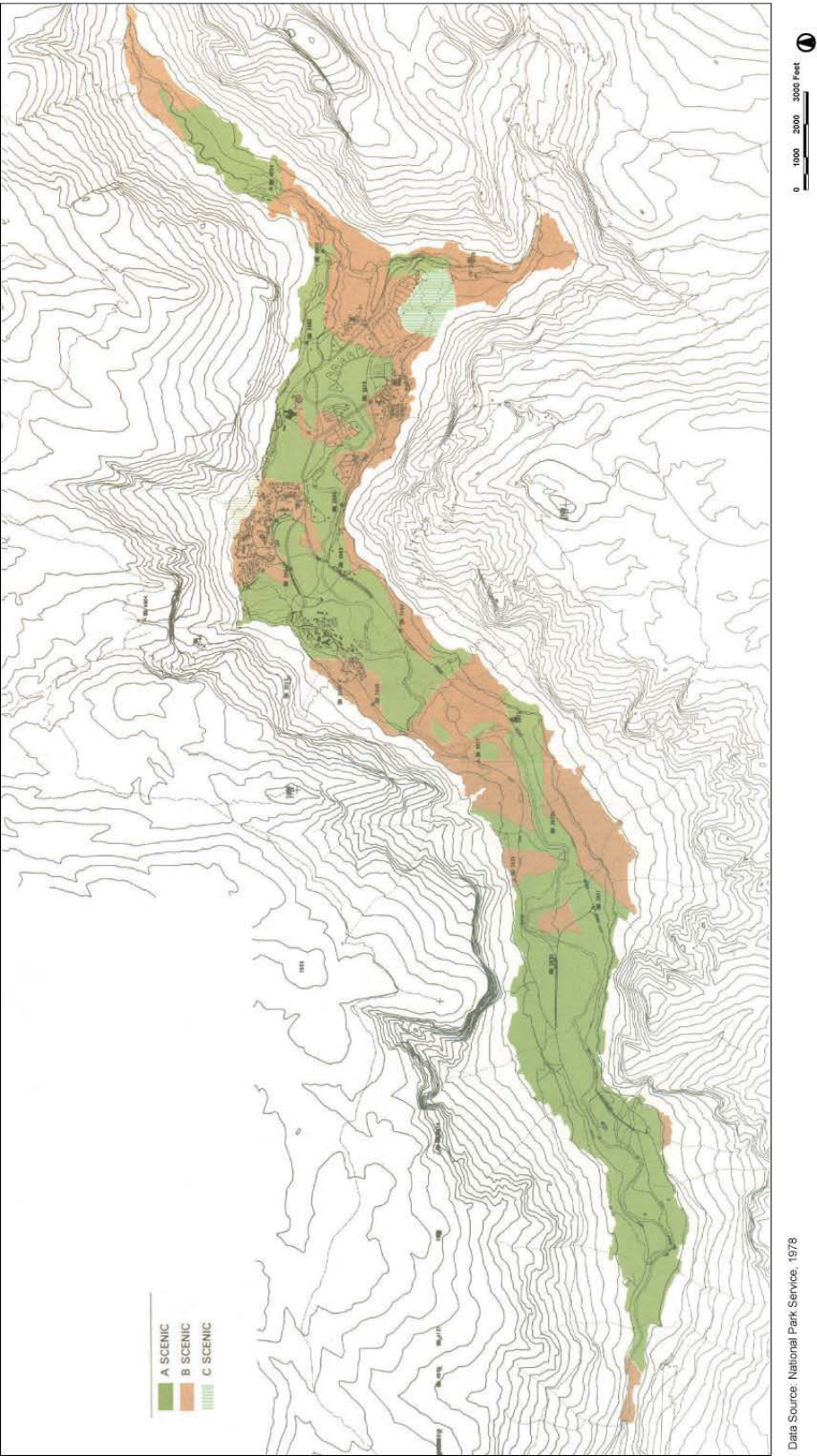


Photo SCN-4: El Capitan – 2009 (Yochim 2009) **Photo SCN-5:** Half Dome – 2010 (Yochim 2010)

The viewpoint analysis conducted for the *Yosemite General Management Plan* identified areas in Yosemite Valley that were consistently selected by eminent early photographers and painters as the best areas to pursue their activities. The Merced River is featured prominently in many representations of the Valley as both a foreground subject in the river corridor and a scenic feature from outside the river corridor. When the existing and historical viewpoints were established for the *Yosemite General Management Plan* viewpoint analysis, Yosemite Valley was classified according to the following criteria:

- A-Scenic: Areas included in scenic views commonly chosen by eminent early photographers and painters, or included in the most significant scenic views that exist today (includes all meadows and the entire length of the Merced River in the Valley).
- B-Scenic: Areas included in scenic views less commonly chosen by historic photographers and painters, or that compose less-significant modern views based on park management observations.
- C-Scenic: Areas of minor scenic quality and areas that can absorb visual intrusion without detracting from either primary or secondary views.

The viewpoint analysis considered potential opportunities, as well as existing and historic viewpoints, and resulted in the development of the Yosemite Valley Scenic Analysis map (see **figure 9-38**). The acreage of the classification areas is as follows: 1,800 acres classified as A-Scenic, 1,116 acres classified as B-Scenic, and 73 acres classified as C-Scenic. In these areas, the study found visual intrusions resulting from human-made features and vegetation affected views, and the major visual intrusions were roads and traffic through Ahwahnee Meadow, Stoneman Meadow, and other meadows when viewing Half Dome and other important features of Yosemite Valley from the Valley floor (including



Merced River Comprehensive Management Plan and EIS
Figure 9-38
Yosemite Valley Scenic Analysis

SOURCE: NPS, 1978

from lands in the Merced River corridor). Other major intrusions into the scenic beauty of the Valley included NPS and concessioner maintenance and warehouse facilities, Camp 6, Housekeeping Camp, and Curry Village (NPS 1980).

Views from trails, bridges, and vista points throughout Yosemite Valley continue to retain high aesthetic value. However, the built and natural environments have changed somewhat since the river was designated as Wild and Scenic and the Yosemite Valley segment was classified as Recreational. These changes include those associated with damaged and removed structures, meadow and riparian conditions, park visitation patterns, and altered conditions at scenic viewpoints, as described below.

The January 1997 flood caused perhaps the most significant change in views across the Yosemite Valley segment since completion of the viewpoint analysis. The flood damaged or destroyed approximately half of the lodging units at Yosemite Lodge (which were subsequently removed) as well as many campgrounds in the Merced River floodplain. Other more recent changes to the human-made environment include installation of curbing along Northside and Southside Drives, which reduced the number of cars that could be parked in the foreground of scenic resource views; completion of the Yosemite Falls project, which removed idling buses from distant views of the falls; replacement of Sentinel Bridge; and removal of employee housing (tent cabins) at Yosemite Lodge.

Over the past 20 years, the park has undertaken a number of meadow restoration projects, including the construction of meadow boardwalks, planting native vegetation, removing nonnative vegetation, and implementing monitoring programs. While meadow conditions continue to experience damage associated with ongoing informal trail use, soil disturbance, etc., overall meadow conditions have improved; as a result, direct views of meadows as well as the contribution of foreground meadow views to iconic scenic vistas have improved as well. Constrictions to the free-flowing condition of the Merced River occur at bridges with openings too small to accommodate spring floods, resulting in bank erosion which affects views of the river or other scenic resources where eroded areas are seen in the foreground. In addition, vegetation trampling associated with visitor access to river points also causes bank erosion. Both actions affect direct views of the river and long-range iconic views where the river is visible in the foreground (see Photo SCN-6).

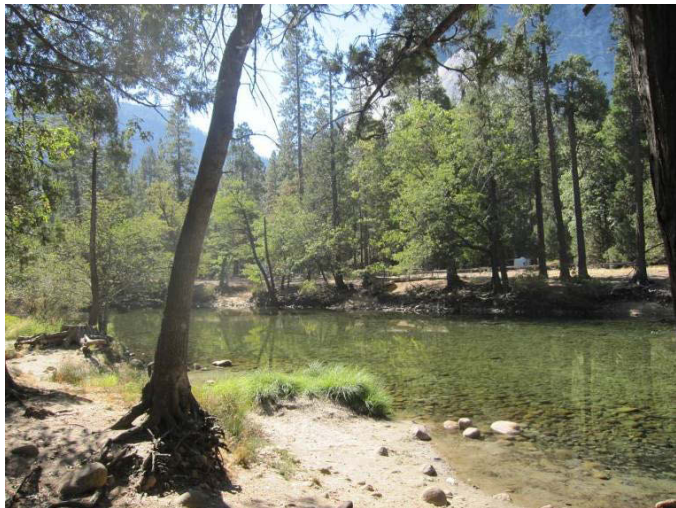


Photo SCN-6: Informal trails along Merced River riverbank – 2010 (ESA 2010)

The *Scenic Vista Management Plan* describes vegetation changes that have affected scenic viewpoints, rates and ranks the quality of viewpoints, and defines limits on management actions based on ecological conditions. The *Scenic Vista Management Plan* (NPS 2011d) prioritizes sites based on a visual resource assessment. These assessments include scores (compiled points assigned to vividness, uniqueness, access

and intactness) for vista points as of 2009. Scores of 10 to 18 (the highest possible) are considered “high value,” scores above 7 to 9.99 are considered “medium value,” and scores of 7 and below are considered “low value.” The assessment results for sites in the Merced River corridor and for sites that provide views of the river and river-dependent resources are included in Appendix H. The assessment describes the iconic features visible from each vista point and provides recommendations for vegetation management actions that would improve scenic views. The study found that vegetation currently obstructs scenic views at many of the Valley (Segment 2) vista points due to conifer encroachment in the meadows. Scenic vistas can also be obscured by regional air pollution, which results in occasional haze during the summer (NPS and Colorado State University 2002). It is noted that specific initial management actions for vista points in or near the Tuolumne River Wild and Scenic River corridor or the Merced River Wild and Scenic River corridor will be analyzed and directed by the respective river plan. No actions will be taken on vista points within either Wild and Scenic River corridor until a Record of Decision (ROD) is signed for the respective river plans.

While a substantial number of structures were removed from Segment 2 following the January 1997 flood, and several restoration projects have been completed, a number of visual intrusions identified in the *Yosemite General Management Plan* remain throughout the Valley, including traffic, parking, and crowding at popular visitor attraction sites; roads and traffic through Ahwahnee, Stoneman, and other meadows; NPS and concessioner maintenance and warehouse facilities; Housekeeping Camp; and Cathedral Beach Picnic Area.

Segment 3: Merced River Gorge

Visual resources in the V-shaped Merced River gorge downstream from Yosemite Valley are somewhat limited because of the steep terrain and forest cover. Important views from the Merced River or its banks in the gorge include panoramic views of the steep walls and rock features that define the gorge, such as Pulpit Rock, the Rostrum, and Elephant Rock, as well as the Cascades and other spectacular rapids among giant boulders.

Roadway pullouts along Segment 3 allow for short- and long-range views of the river (see Photo SCN-7). The river and Cascades Fall are intermittently visible from vehicles traveling along El Portal Road and Big Oak Flat Road. Some structures in the gorge do intrude into



Photo SCN-7: Merced River Gorge – 2010 (Yochim 2010)

scenic views of Segment 3, such as the Cascades Powerhouse. However, these structures do not dominate the natural landscape from any viewpoint.

With the exception of El Portal Road and the structures described above, there are few visual intrusions along Segment 3. Views from the river and roads in the Merced River gorge continue to have high aesthetic value. However, regional air pollution periodically results in haze during the summer, which can limit views.

Segment 4: El Portal

As the river gorge widens into the El Portal area, views are slightly expanded. As in Yosemite Valley and the Merced River gorge, the canyon walls are still steep in El Portal. No formal visual resource studies have been conducted for this portion of the Merced River, and the landscape viewed from in the Merced River corridor consists primarily of the river and the canyon walls. Because the vegetation has changed from a Sierran mixed conifer to oak woodland in the lower part of the Gorge, and because the canyon walls illustrate the geologic transition from granite to metasedimentary bedrock, the El Portal segment provides scenery that is different from other parts of the Merced River corridor in Yosemite. Distinct views of Chinquapin Fall to the east of El Portal are visible from several locations in Segment 4. Human-made structures (including stores, housing, a fuel station, a trailer village, park administrative facilities, aboveground utilities, abandoned infrastructure, and riprap) and Highway 140 are adjacent to the river and some of these structures contrast in color, materials, and form, and/or lack screening (trees) from views of the river.

Segments 5 and 8: South Fork Merced River Above and Below Wawona

The South Fork Merced River above and below Wawona is largely inaccessible, with just a few trail crossings above Wawona and none below (see Photos SCN-8 and SCN-9). While no formal visual resource studies have been conducted for this portion of the river, the wilderness segments of the South Fork Merced River remain largely natural and undisturbed. As discussed in the previous sections, summer haze can also limit views to and in Segments 5 and 8.

Scenery that can be directly viewed from in the river corridor above Wawona is generally limited to the South Fork Merced River itself at trail crossings, as well as longer-range views from the trails to Breeze Lake, Chain Lakes, Buck Camp, and Wawona Point areas (see Photo SCN-10). Views from the river corridor include distant views of forests and granite features such as Wawona Dome. Scenery along the South Fork Merced River below.

Wawona is characterized by forested slopes descending to the meandering river, with intermittent gravel bars apparent. With river access difficult and few turnouts, viewing opportunities are typically brief and experienced by motorists from the road. One scenic viewpoint in Segment 8 below Wawona and one viewpoint that provides views to the South Fork Merced River above Wawona (Segment 5) are characterized in the *Scenic Vista Management Plan*, as summarized in Appendix H.



Photo SCN-8: South Fork Merced River above Wawona Crossing – 2010 (Yochim 2010)

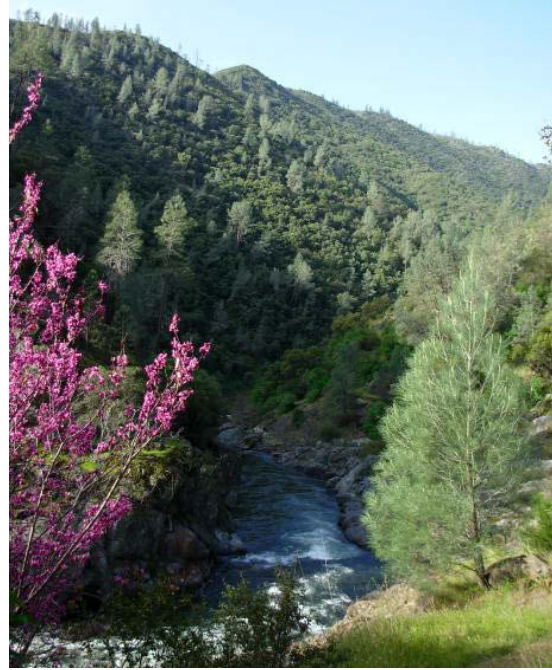


Photo SCN-9: South Fork Merced River – 2010 (Yochim 2010)



Photo SCN-10: South Fork Merced River above Wawona from a ridge between Chain Lakes and Breeze Lake (Yochim 2010)

Segments 6 and 7: Wawona Impoundment and Wawona

Scenery viewed directly from in the river corridor in the Wawona area is primarily of the South Fork Merced River itself, with distant views of forests and granite features, such as Wawona Dome. In the foreground, views include managed landscapes throughout the private development in Section 35, which consists of the largest privately owned area in the park, and downriver to the Wawona Campground. In the broader context of the watershed, these elements do not dominate the landscape but are certainly apparent among the mix of landscapes in the region. The *Scenic Vista Management Plan Environmental Assessment* (described above for the valley segment) includes an evaluation of scenic viewpoints in Segment 7 and viewpoints that afford views of this segment; the visual resources assessment findings for these segments are presented in Appendix H.

Environmental Consequences Methodology

The impact analysis associated with scenic resources is based on comparisons between Alternative 1 (No Action) and Alternatives 2–6. The effects of each alternative are evaluated by analyzing potential impacts on natural and cultural landscape features and how impacts might be experienced by visitors. Professional judgment was applied to reach reasonable conclusions as to the context, intensity, duration, and type of potential impacts.

- **Context.** For the purposes of this analysis, only local impacts are considered. This includes impacts that would occur in the Merced River corridor.
- **Intensity.** Scenic resources impacts would be assessed based on a substantial: (a) change in existing landscape character, whether foreground, intermediate ground, or background, and be visible from viewpoints the NPS has identified as important; (b) change in access to historically important viewpoints; or (c) change in the visibility of a viewpoint. The magnitude of impacts to scenic resources, either on the physical component of the natural or cultural landscape (quantitative) or on how the change might be experienced (qualitative), is described as negligible, minor, moderate, or major.
 - **Negligible:** Effects would be undetectable by visitors.
 - **Minor:** Effects would be detectable, but would only impact areas that are not highly visible.
 - **Moderate:** Effects would be noticeable and would impact highly visible areas.
 - **Major:** Effects would be clearly detectable and would impact outstanding vista points identified by the Merced River Plan.
- **Duration.** The duration of the impact considers whether the impact would occur in the short term or the long term. A short-term impact would be short-lived or temporary, usually due to construction, restoration, or demolition activities. A long-term impact would have a permanent and continual effect.
- **Type.** Impacts are evaluated in terms of whether they would be beneficial or adverse to scenic resources in the Merced River corridor. Impacts are considered beneficial if the quality of the visual experience would be improved and adverse if the quality of the visual experience would be diminished.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 1 (No Action)

All River Segments

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), riprap and abandoned infrastructure would remain in the river channel and meadow floodplains. Informal trails in meadows would remain and conifers would continue to encroach in meadows. In addition, localized riverbank erosion and scouring effects associated with bridges would remain. This would continue to result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources. In addition, traffic congestion would continue to affect scenic views where seen in the foreground of the river and scenic views. Scenic vista management actions would not be implemented. Regional haze, as discussed in the “Air Quality” subsection, could adversely affect scenic vistas in the project area seasonally.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

As discussed in the natural resources analysis topic subsection, Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in increased park visitation compared with existing conditions, based on projected population increases. Ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, such as the creation of informal trails, trampling of vegetation, and increased bank erosion, would continue similar to existing conditions and result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), high levels of bare ground and trampling associated with administrative pack stock grazing and informal trails would remain. This would result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources. These conditions would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources in Segment 1.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Scenic resources and views from the Merced River and its banks in Segment 1 are largely uncompromised, with the exception of human use areas that affect the scenic quality of the segment (e.g., Merced Lake High Sierra Camp and associated stock corral, the Little Yosemite Valley Campground and associated composting toilet, the Little Yosemite Ranger Station, the Moraine Dome Backpackers Campground, and the Merced Lake Backpackers Campground). Under Alternative 1 (No Action), these facilities would continue to be present, consistent with existing conditions. Since park visitation could increase over existing levels, Segment 1 could experience a higher concentration of visitors than existing levels. In the absence of a comprehensive planning effort to manage increased

visitation, increased vegetation trampling, erosion, and other damage to resources could occur (as discussed in the natural resources impact subsections of this chapter), which would affect the scenic quality of Segment 1 where damaged resources are visible from scenic viewpoints or are in the foreground of a scenic viewpoint. It is not expected that access to historically important viewpoints would change or that changes in the visibility of a viewpoint would occur. Alternative 1 would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

In summary, under Alternative 1 (No Action), scenic resources and views from the Merced River and its banks in Segment 1 would continue to be largely uncompromised. However, the continued presence of human-made structures and areas of disturbance continue to detract from the scenic quality of views and increased visitation could result in impacts on the scenic quality of Segment 1. No changes in access and visibility would occur under this alternative. Alternative 1 would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Segment 1 Impact Summary. Implementation of Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impact on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), the Merced River could continue to widen in certain areas as a result of human-caused erosion, loss of bank vegetation, and trampling. Constrictions of the free-flowing condition of the Merced River would continue to result in acceleration of water velocity at bridges with openings too small to accommodate spring floods, resulting in continued erosion. The bridges themselves contribute to the landscape character of the area. Abutments and abandoned infrastructure associated with the former bridge at Happy Isles and the gage base, and Pohono Bridge gaging station would remain. Abandoned infrastructure would remain at many meadows and riparian areas. This would result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources, and these impacts could continue to occur similar to existing conditions.

The park would proceed with restoration projects at Bridalveil, Cook's, and El Capitan meadows, as well as riverbank restoration at North Pines Campground. The park would also continue invasive species control and conifer removal from some meadows. These projects and activities would improve the scenic quality of these areas. As noted above, the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* describes vegetation changes that have resulted in intrusions on scenic viewpoints, ranks the quality of viewpoints, and defines limits on management actions based on ecological conditions. There are approximately 50 scenic vista points identified within Segment 2 or near Segment 2 that provide views of the segment with recommended vegetation management to improve scenic view quality. These vegetation management actions would not be implemented under Alternative 1 (No Action). Alternative 1 (No Action) would therefore result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Change in access to historically important viewpoints is not expected to occur under Alternative 1 (No Action). Because park visitation is anticipated to increase 3% annually over existing levels, Segment 2 could experience a higher concentration of visitors than existing levels. Though applicable throughout the park, human-caused erosion and other resource damage is likely to be much more of a concern in Yosemite Valley than in the Wilderness, El Portal, or Wawona because of the Valley's much higher concentration of visitors. In the absence of a comprehensive planning effort to manage increased visitation and improve banks or bridges in areas where they currently constrict the free-flowing condition of the river, increased damage to resources would occur. These actions affect direct views of the river and long-range iconic views where the river is visible in the foreground.

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), facilities that are visible within the foreground of views of the river or other scenic viewpoints (including roads and traffic through Ahwahnee, Stoneman, and other meadows when viewing Half Dome from the Valley floor, NPS and concessioner maintenance and warehouse facilities, and Housekeeping Camp) would continue to be present, consistent with existing conditions. Design and construction of new structures and renovation of existing structures would be subject to the design guidelines requirements of *A Sense of Place*. Alternative 1 (No Action) would therefore result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segment 2 Impact Summary. Under Alternative 1 (No Action), scenic resources and views of and from the Merced River and its banks in Segment 2 would continue to retain high aesthetic value. However, the continued presence of visual intrusions, some structures and facilities, and increased visitation could result in impacts on the scenic quality of Segment 2. Some meadow restoration and riverbank restoration projects, and invasive species removal would improve scenic quality and the visibility of a number of scenic viewpoints. Overall, there would be no change in access under Alternative 1. Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Scenic resources and views from the Merced River and its banks in the Merced River Gorge include short- and long-range views of the river. Abandoned infrastructure and human-made structures would continue to be present at in El Portal, as described in Regional Scenic Context. This would result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources, and these impacts could continue to occur similar to existing conditions.

As noted above, the Scenic Vista Management Plan describes vegetation changes that have resulted in intrusions on scenic viewpoints, ranks the quality of viewpoints, and defines limits on management actions based on ecological conditions. The quality of viewpoints was scored based on vividness, uniqueness, and intactness of the viewpoints. There is one scenic vista point identified within Segment 3, and more than 10 that provide views to the segment. The plan includes recommendations

for vegetation management to improve scenic view quality. These vegetation management actions would not be implemented under Alternative 1 (No Action). Consequently, Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 3 and 4.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Because park visitation is expected to increase over existing levels, Segment 3 could experience a higher concentration of visitors than existing levels. In the absence of a comprehensive planning effort to manage increased visitation, increased vegetation trampling, erosion, and other damage to resources could occur. Access from the El Portal Road and Highway 140 to the river is largely via informal trails, some of which are eroding into the river and would continue to erode with increased visitation. Damage to resources would affect the scenic quality of Segments 3 and 4 where the resources are visible from scenic viewpoints or are in the foreground of a scenic viewpoint.

The El Portal Administrative Site was established by Congress in 1958 to allow relocation of operations and maintenance utilities, facilities, and services out of the park. Roadside parking and river access are largely informal, and while river use levels are low enough such that informal access is acceptable, increased visitation could result in bank erosion and vegetation trampling, which would affect the overall scenic quality of the area. Alternative 1 (No Action) would therefore result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 3 and 4. In summary, under Alternative 1 (No Action), scenic resources and views from the Merced River and its banks in Segments 3 and 4 would continue to be largely uncompromised. However, the continued presence of human-made structures would continue and increased visitation could result in impacts on the scenic quality of Segments 3 and 4. Increased park visitation could result in damage to resources that would affect the scenic quality of these segments. Implementation of the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* would not occur. Overall, there would be no change in access under Alternative 1. Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 3 and 4.

Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary. Implementation of Alternative 1 would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 3 & 4.

Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Scenic resources and views from the river and its banks along the South Fork Merced River are largely natural and undisturbed and have high aesthetic value. However, there are existing structures and facilities in the Segment 7 viewshed, including the Wawona maintenance yard, Wawona RV dump station, and abandoned metal pipes in South Fork Merced River side channels. These structures and facilities would continue to be present under Alternative 1 (No Action). In addition, vegetation trampling and bank erosion has occurred in the vicinity of campgrounds and picnic areas. This would result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources, and these impacts could continue to occur similar to existing conditions.

As noted above, the *Scenic Vista Management Plan* describes vegetation changes that have resulted in intrusions on scenic viewpoints, ranks the quality of viewpoints, and defines limits on management actions based on ecological conditions. The quality of viewpoints was scored based on vividness, uniqueness, and intactness of the viewpoints. There are approximately 9 scenic vista points identified within these segments or near Segment 3 that provide views of the segment. The *Plan* recommends vegetation management to improve scenic view quality at these locations. These vegetation management actions would not be implemented under Alternative 1 (No Action). The resulting impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5, 6, and 7 would continue to be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Since park visitation could increase over existing levels, Wawona could experience a higher concentration of visitors than existing levels, which could result in further trampling of vegetation and damage to resources. Damage to resources would affect the scenic quality of the segments where the resources are visible from scenic viewpoints or are in the foreground of a scenic viewpoint. Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary. Under Alternative 1 (No Action), scenic resources and views from the South Fork Merced River and its banks would continue to be largely uncompromised. However, the presence of human-made structures would continue and increased visitation could result in impacts on the scenic quality of the segments. Overall, there would be no change in access under Alternative 1. The resulting impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5, 6, and 7 would continue to be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Summary of Alternative 1 (No Action) Impacts

In the absence of a comprehensive planning effort to manage increased visitation, reduce human-made structures, and restore areas of natural resource damage, scenic resources impacts would continue. These effects would be most pronounced in areas with concentrated facilities that intrude on the landscape character of the river segments and visitor use (e.g., Yosemite Valley and Wawona) that result in vegetation trampling, erosion, and other resource damage that affects the scenic quality of the segment where the resources are visible from scenic viewpoints or are in the foreground of a scenic viewpoint. NPS administrative requirements do afford some protection to the river from future actions, but no comprehensive or unified plan exists to protect the scenic resources of the Merced River. Alternative 1 (No Action) would have a local, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impact on scenic resources.

Cumulative Impacts of Alternative 1 (No Action)

The discussion of cumulative impacts on scenic resources is based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the Yosemite region in combination with the potential effects of Alternative 1 (No Action). The projects identified below include those projects that have the potential to affect the scenic resources of the Merced River.

Past Actions

Past actions have resulted in a range of beneficial and adverse impacts. Beneficial impacts of past actions include removal of structures and restoration of natural drainage features and meadow restoration and removal of vegetation that blocked scenic views. Specific examples of past projects include the following:

Restoration/Removal: Cascades Housing Removal, Cascades Diversion Dam Removal, Happy Isles Gauging Station Bridge Removal, Cook's Meadow Ecological Restoration, Fern Springs Restoration, Happy Isles Fen Habitat Restoration Project, Merced River Ecological Restoration at Eagle Creek Project, Wawona Tunnel View Project, Lower Yosemite Fall Project

Facility Development: Bridges provide scenic viewing opportunities and are viewed by some visitors as scenic features.

Adverse impacts from past actions include the introduction of obstructions in the Merced River channel, which results in bank erosion, and the introduction of facilities that intrude on the scenic quality of the river. Specific examples of such past projects include the following:

Modified Hydrological Features: Previous development of bridges, riprap, dikes, flood walls, impoundments, dams, and facilities in the river channel or floodplain.

Facility Development: Curry Village Employee and Temporary Housing and Showerhouse

Present Actions

Present actions contribute to similar beneficial and adverse impacts as described for past actions.

Beneficial impacts for present actions are similar to those discussed for past actions. Specific examples of present projects include the following:

Management and Planning: *Half Dome Trail Stewardship Plan*, 2004 *Fire Management Plan/EIS*, upcoming *Yosemite Wilderness Stewardship Plan/EIS*

Adverse impacts from present actions are similar to those discussed for past actions. Specific examples of present projects include the following:

Facility Development: *East Yosemite Valley Utilities Improvement Plan/EA*, Wauhoga Indian Cultural Center, Parkwide Communication Data Network, Yosemite Environmental Education Campus

Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

Impacts from future actions would be similar to those discussed for past and present actions. The Yosemite Wilderness Stewardship Plan/EIS (Management and Planning) is an example of a future projects with beneficial impacts.

Overall Cumulative Impact

Overall development and recreational uses in the Merced River watershed have resulted in localized, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on scenic resources. A number of past, present, and future projects have limited or would limit visitor uses through planning (which decreases the potential for secondary scenic resources effects), or restore vegetation and river banks, though the overall impact remains adverse. Alternative 1 (No Action) would contribute to worsening localized, adverse conditions in areas with concentrated visitor use and through the continued presence of facilities and infrastructure that are visible within scenic views, and presence of vegetation that is blocking scenic views. Cumulatively, the scenic resources impacts would be local, long term, minor to moderate, and adverse.

Environmental Consequences Common to Alternatives 2–6

All River Segments

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Actions that would take place throughout the Merced River corridor under Alternatives 2–6 include removal of riverbank riprap and abandoned infrastructure in the river channel where possible. Denuded vegetation and informal trails would be restored in several meadows, and beach access and trails would be defined and delineated. In addition, areas of riverbank erosion would be repaired (see Appendix E). Selected scenic vista points would be improved by thinning of conifers and other trees that encroach on views (see Appendix H). Restoration activities would result in short-term, temporary intrusions into views when construction and restoration activities and equipment would be visible from area trails and visitor use areas. However, implementation of these actions would remove areas of resource damage that detract from the scenic quality of the river corridor and adjacent areas. Upon completion of restoration activities, restored areas would be more natural in appearance. Regional haze could adversely affect scenic vistas in the project area seasonally. The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternatives 2–6, the Merced River and its banks in Segment 1 would remain largely uncompromised. Implementation of these alternatives would include restoration of informal trails and other denuded areas at Merced Lake meadow and shoreline. Implementation of these actions would remove areas of resource damage that detract from the scenic quality of the Merced Lake area. Upon completion of restoration activities, the Merced Lake area would be more natural in appearance, as viewed from the Merced Lake Trail and the visitor use areas that would be retained. Views of Merced Lake shoreline and meadows would be improved where restoration areas are in the foreground, as well as views of peaks where restored areas are in the foreground. The resulting impact on the scenic resources of Segment 1 would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Segment 1 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities within Segment 1 would have local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on scenic resources of Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

In the Happy Isles area, the former Happy Isles footbridge footings and river gage base would be removed from the bed and banks of the Merced River; informal trails would be revegetated; and wayfinding between Happy Isles and the Mist Trail from the shuttle stop would be improved to discourage further formation of informal trails. In addition, bank improvements would be installed downstream of the Happy Isles road bridge. These actions would improve the scenic quality of the area by reducing the number of human-made structures in the area and restoring vegetation, as seen from the Mist Trail, and would improve the scenic quality of the river in the area of the riverbank improvements, including views from the road bridge and the bicycle path on the downstream side of the bridge. The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

In the Lower Pines and North Pines campground areas, campsites would be removed. Riverbank conditions would be improved downstream of Clark's and Ahwahnee bridges. In addition, river access would be improved to direct visitors to access points at sandy beach areas, which would reduce riparian vegetation and riverbank damage. River general restoration activities would be conducted as applicable, including riprap removal, removal of informal trails, and riverbank restoration in the area between Clark's and Stoneman bridges. These actions would reduce the number of human-made structures in the area and improve the condition of riparian vegetation and riverbanks, which would improve views of the river from the Clark's Bridge (Scenic Vista point 7), beach areas, and trails that cross the area. The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

In the Housekeeping Camp area, lodging units and associated structures would be removed and restored, including removal of riprap upstream of the Housekeeping footbridge and downstream of the camp. In addition, general restoration activities would be conducted as applicable, including removal of informal trails and revegetation. These actions would reduce the number of human-made structures in the area and improve the condition of riparian vegetation and river banks, which would improve views of the river from the Housekeeping footbridge (Scenic Vista point 92), Housekeeping Beach (Scenic Vista point 26), Housekeeping Bridge Trail, Southside Drive, and the adjacent bicycle path. Views of North Dome, Glacier Point, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, and Cathedral Rocks from the scenic vista points with the restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Bank restoration downstream of Sentinel Bridge would be implemented. In addition, roadbed and roadside parking improvements would be implemented adjacent to Cook's Meadow. Roadside parking improvements would also be implemented along Sentinel Drive crossover. Improvements would also be made to areas of Sentinel Meadow and the boardwalk. These actions would improve the scenic quality and appearance of the meadows as seen from the boardwalk, trails, and Northside Drive, and also

improve views of north Valley wall scenic features as seen from the Sentinel Meadow boardwalk vista point (24). The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

A number of restoration actions are proposed in the area between Swinging Bridge and El Capitan Picnic Area, in addition visitor use facility improvements that would focus visitor use away from sensitive resource areas. Riverbank restoration would occur downstream from Swinging Bridge. The Swinging Bridge and Sentinel Beach picnic areas and day use areas would be improved and nearby sensitive habitat would be restored. Informal trails would be removed from Leidig Meadow, bicycle path areas would be improved, and additional meadow restoration activities would be implemented. In addition, general restoration activities would be conducted as applicable, including removal of informal trails and revegetation. Bank conditions and riparian vegetation restoration would improve the scenic quality of the river, including views from Swinging Bridge beach and Swinging Bridge, and of the bridge itself (Scenic Vista points 22 and 23) and of the Swinging Bridge Picnic Area. Views of restored meadows as seen from these areas, as well as vista points on the west end of Leidig Meadow, would also be improved (Scenic Vista points 31). In addition, views of Yosemite Falls, North Dome, Sentinel Rock, Cathedral Rocks, Washington Column, and other iconic vistas with the river and/or meadows in the foreground would be improved. The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

A number of restoration actions are proposed in the area between El Capitan Picnic Area and the Bridalveil parking lot, in addition to visitor use facility improvements. Bridalveil Meadow would be restored in an area near El Capitan moraine, in addition to Eagle Creek Meadow and Slaughterhouse Meadow. River access points would be improved and nearby sensitive habitat would be restored. In addition, general restoration activities would be conducted as applicable, including removal of informal trails and revegetation. Improved bank and meadow would improve the quality of views, particularly as seen from Northside Drive and the Valley Loop Trail. In addition, views of El Capitan and Cathedral Rocks, with restoration areas in the foreground, would be improved.

In the Bridalveil Meadow area, the riverbank and meadow would be restored, and conifers encroaching on the meadow would be removed. The park would remove one and pave and formalize five other roadside pullouts for river access between Pohono Bridge and the intersection of the Big Oak Flat Road. The former sewer plant area would be restored and an abandoned gaging station at Pohono Bridge would be removed and the area restored. In addition, general restoration activities would be conducted as applicable, including removal of informal trails and revegetation. These actions would generally reduce human-made structures and/or reduce ongoing disturbance within these areas by improving riverbank, riparian vegetation, and meadow conditions, which would improve the quality of views of the river and meadows. Conifer removal would open view of the meadow, particularly as seen from Northside Drive and the Valley View roadside turnout (Scenic Vista point 146). The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Throughout Segment 2, there are several isolated restoration and resource protection measures that would result in improvement in the scenic quality of the immediate area. However, these restorations are in heavily wooded areas that are not in the vicinity of the river, meadows, or other scenic resources. The impacts of these actions would be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternatives 2–6, an interpretive nature walk would be constructed through the Lower River area that emphasizes river-related processes, and the Upper Pines dump would be moved away from the river. Yosemite Lodge concessioner housing would be removed, several picnic areas would be improved, and use areas would be directed away from sensitive resource areas. Several other structures would be removed or relocated away from the river. Creation of an interpretive nature walk would result in a small increase in human-made structures in the area. However, these changes would be minor and would not substantially affect views of the river where the trail is in the foreground. Furthermore, an interpretive nature walk could improve visitor understanding and appreciation of the scenic resources and vistas in this area. These actions would improve the scenic quality of the area by reducing the number of human-made structures in the area, providing educational opportunities focused on scenic view opportunities, and protect the riverbank and riparian vegetation. Views of the river with the restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. Design and construction of new structures and renovation of existing structures would be subject to the design guidelines requirements of *A Sense of Place*. The resulting impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Curry Village and Campgrounds. The park would remove the Happy Isles Snack Stand at Curry Village. At The Ahwahnee, the park would remove the swimming pool and tennis courts; redesign, formalize, and improve drainage within the existing parking lot; and construct a new 50 parking space lot east of the current parking area. These actions would generally improve the scenic quality of the area by reducing the number of human-made structures. Parking expansion would increase human-made structures, but these would not be expected to impact scenic views. The resulting impact would be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Camp 6 and Yosemite Village. The park would remove from Yosemite Village the Concessioner General Office, Concessioner Garage, and the Arts and Activities Center (Bank Building), and repurpose the Village Sports Shop for public use. It would also construct a new maintenance building near the Government Utility Building. The park would remove roadside parking along Sentinel Drive and expand Camp 6 parking into the footprint of the Valley Garage. To improve visitor access between the Camp 6 area and Village, the park would construct a pathway connecting the new Camp 6 parking lot with the repurposed Village Sports Shop. The repurposing and replacement of structures within already developed areas would not be expected substantially increase the number of human-made structures or impact scenic views. The resulting impact would be local, long-term, negligible, and adverse.

Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would remove the NPS Volunteer Office, post office, swimming pool, and snack stand. It would also remove old and temporary employee housing (Thousands Cabins and Highland Court) and replace it with new housing. In addition, the park would relocate the Yosemite Lodge maintenance and housekeeping facilities and repurpose the food court. These actions would reduce the number of human-made structures in the area, thereby improving the natural character of these areas. The resulting impact would be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Segment 2 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in segment-wide, long-term moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources in Segment 2. Actions to manage

user capacities, land use, and facilities would have local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on scenic resources within Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternatives 2–6, the abandoned infrastructure and imported fill would be removed at the Cascades Picnic Area, Abbierville, and Trailer Village. Management actions proposed for Segment 3 include restoration activities would be conducted as applicable, including removal of informal trails, riverbank restoration, riparian zone protection, and revegetation. Management actions proposed for Segment 4 include riverbank protection and trail, road, and structure removal and restoration. In addition, general restoration activities would include removal of informal trails, bank restoration, riparian zone protection, and revegetation. The Greenemeyer sand pit would be restored to natural conditions. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas and views of the river in the vicinity of these areas, as seen from Highway 140 and El Portal Road. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 4 would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternatives 2–6, 31 employee housing units would be constructed in the El Portal area, increasing the number of human-made structures in Segment 4. However, the new structures would be in areas of existing development and would not substantially affect the scenic quality of the river corridor and adjacent areas. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 4 would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in segment-wide, long-term minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources in Segment 4. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would have local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on scenic resources within Segment 4.

Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternatives 2–6, the Wawona RV dump site would be relocated away from the river, and river access and picnicking would be delineated at the South Fork Merced River Picnic Area to focus public use away from areas subject to riverbank erosion. Restoration activities would result in short-term, temporary intrusions into views when construction and restoration activities and equipment would be visible from area trails and visitor use areas. However, implementation of these actions would remove areas of resource damage that detract from the scenic quality of the river corridor and adjacent areas, and views of the river with restoration areas in the foreground. Upon completion of restoration activities, restored areas would be more natural in appearance. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternatives 2–6, an operations building and grounds facility would be constructed, thus increasing the number of human-made structures in this area. However, the new structures would be in areas of existing development and would not substantially affect the scenic quality of the river corridor and adjacent areas. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Wawona. The park would redesign the bus stop at the Wawona Store to accommodate increased visitor use. However, the new structures would be in areas of existing development and would not substantially affect the scenic quality of the river corridor and adjacent areas. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, negligible, and adverse.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in segment-wide, long-term minor, beneficial impacts on scenic resources in Segment 7. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would have local, long-term, negligible, adverse impacts on scenic resources within Segment 7.

Summary of Impacts from Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6

The alternatives include several common restoration actions that would improve the appearance of riverbanks, meadows, and riparian vegetation, and a number of actions that would result in removal of human-made structures and paved/graded areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas and views of the river and meadows in the vicinity of restoration areas. In addition, views from scenic vistas with restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. New facilities or structures included in management actions are proposed in existing developed areas, would adhere to the park's design guidelines, and would not result in reduced scenic quality. Overall, with implementation of MM-VEX-2, as appropriate, (see Appendix C), actions common to Alternatives 2-6 would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: Self-Reliant Visitor Experiences and Extensive Floodplain Restoration**All River Segments*****Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities***

As discussed in the natural resources impact subsections of this chapter, Alternative 2 would result in reduced park visitation compared to Alternatives 2–6, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, such as creation of informal trails, trampling of vegetation, and increased riverbank erosion, which results in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Implementation of Alternative 2 would include conversion of the Little Yosemite Valley and Merced Lake Backpackers Camping Areas to dispersed camping, and the Moraine Dome Camping Area would be discontinued, along with general restoration activities as applicable in the Little Yosemite Valley area. Grazing of the Merced Lake East Meadow would be prohibited. Implementation of these actions would remove human-made structures and restore areas of resource damage that detract from the scenic quality of the area. Upon completion of restoration activities, the Little Yosemite Valley area would be more natural in appearance, as viewed from the Merced Lake Trail and the visitor use areas that would be retained. Views of the river would be improved where restoration areas are in the foreground, as well as views of peaks where restored areas are in the foreground.

Little Yosemite Valley Wilderness zone capacity would be decreased, which would substantially reduce trail use in the area between Little Yosemite Valley and Merced Lake. This action, in addition to reducing the number of overnight units available in Segment 1, would reduce overall visitation to the area compared to existing conditions. Therefore, the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of Segment 1, as well as secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area would be reduced. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 2 would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Merced Lake High Sierra Camp. Under Alternative 2, the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp would be removed and restored. Implementation of these actions would remove human-made structures that detract from the scenic quality of the Merced Lake area. Upon completion of restoration activities, the Merced Lake area would be more natural in appearance, as viewed from the Merced Lake Trail and the visitor use areas that would be retained. Views of Merced Lake shoreline and meadows would be improved where restoration areas are in the foreground, as well as views of peaks where restored areas are in the foreground. The resulting impacts on the scenic character of Segment 1 would be local, long-term, moderate, and beneficial.

Segment 1 Impact Summary: Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 2 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternative 2, in addition to actions common to Alternatives 2–6, Stoneman, Sugar Pine, and Ahwahnee bridges would be removed and the riverbank areas would be restored. Additional meadow and riparian restorations would be implemented, including areas of Housekeeping Camp, Upper and Lower Rivers Campgrounds, Stoneman Meadow, El Capitan Meadow, and other highly visible meadow areas. All campgrounds and infrastructure in the 100-year floodplain would be removed, and

the floodplain and habitat would be restored. Implementation of these actions would remove areas of resource damage that detract from the scenic quality of the river corridor and adjacent areas, and views of the river with restoration areas in the foreground. Upon completion of restoration activities, restored areas would be more natural in appearance. However, it is noted that the bridges contribute to the scenic quality of the area and provide opportunities to view scenic areas, including the river. Implementation of management actions related to protecting and enhancing river values under Alternative 2 (including actions common to all alternatives) would result in local, long-term, moderate to major, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternative 2, lodging units and would be reduced at Housekeeping Camp. Yosemite Village would be substantially retained, with some structures repurposed and several structures removed. Yosemite Lodge would be converted to day use, with some visitor uses repurposed and a campsite developed northwest of the lodge area. Several lodge buildings would be removed. Restoration activities would improve the scenic quality in the immediate vicinity of building removal and restoration areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of the area by reducing the number of human-made structures in the area and restoring vegetation, and would improve the scenic quality of the river, including views from scenic viewpoints.

In addition, visitor use would be substantially reduced from existing conditions in Segment 2. This action, in addition to the above actions, would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area that could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 2 (including actions common to all alternatives) would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Curry Village and Campground. The park would construct 78 new hard-sided units in Boys Town, bringing the total number of new and retained units at Curry Village to 433. The park would remove campsites from Lower Pines (32), North Pines (86), and Upper Pines (24). New structures would be constructed in an already developed area, generally within previously developed sites. These actions would collectively result in a reduction in human-made structures in the Curry Village and Campground areas, and a return to more natural conditions. The impact on scenic resources would, therefore, be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Camp 6 and Yosemite Village. The park would reroute Northside Drive to the south of the Yosemite Village day-use parking area, reconfigure the lot to accommodate a total of 550 parking spaces north of the road, and install walkways leading to Yosemite Village. As these actions would occur within already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, negligible, and adverse.

Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would move on-grade pedestrian crossing between Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would convert the Highland Court area to a walk-in campground; reconfigure pedestrian crossing of Northside Drive and Yosemite Lodge Drive, and redevelop an area west of Yosemite Lodge to provide an additional parking for 150 automobiles and 15 tour busses.

Conversion of the Highland Court area would have a beneficial impact by reducing the number of human-made structures in the area and return it to more natural conditions. Additional parking at Yosemite Lodge would have the opposite effect as it would increase the development footprint and bring more vehicles and visitors into this area. However, as these actions would occur within already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Segment 2 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in segment-wide, long-term moderate to major, beneficial impacts on scenic resources within Segment 2. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, moderate to major, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Within Segment 4, the park would establish a 2.25-acre oak recruitment zone in the vicinity of Odger's fuel storage area and adjacent parking lots. Parking would be prohibited within the trees' drip lines, and new building construction would be prohibited within the oak recruitment zone. These measures would have a local, long-term, minor, beneficial impact on scenic resources in the vicinity of the former fuel station.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternative 2, employee housing would be added to the Abbieville and Rancheria Flat, along with parking for these areas. These actions would increase the number of human-made structures in the area. However, these areas are currently developed, and the addition of these structures would not substantially decrease the scenic quality of the area. Overall, visitor use would be reduced from existing conditions, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary: Implementation of actions to protect and enhance river values would have a local, long-term, beneficial impact on scenic resources within Segment 4. Actions to management visitor use and facilities under Alternative 2 would result in local, long-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River.

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Under Alternative 2, a portion of the maintenance yard would be restored and other structures would be removed. The Wawona Golf Course and tennis courts would be removed. Implementation of these management actions would improve the scenic quality of the restoration areas. In particular, the restored golf course restoration area would be visible from Chowchilla Road, Highway 41, and vista

points along that road. The impact on scenic resources of Segment 7 would be local, long-term, moderate, and beneficial.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Visitor- and facilities-related actions that would occur within Segments 6 and 7 involve the removal of campsites, changes to visitor and administrative facilities, and various visitor access and transportation improvements within Segment 7. These actions would be expected to decrease overall visitation within this Segments 5-8.

As a result, the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of Segments 5–8, and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of these segments would be reduced.

Implementation these actions would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Wawona Campground: Under Alternative 2, the park would reduce the size of the Wawona Campground. Thirty-two campsites, or 33% of all campsites within Wawona, would be removed from the floodplain. These actions would further reduce visitation and the number of human-made structures in the vicinity, and restore the area to more natural conditions. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary: Overall, implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 2 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Summary of Impacts from Alternative 2: Self-Reliant Visitor Experiences and Extensive Floodplain Restoration

Alternative 2 includes a substantial number of restoration actions that would improve the appearance of riverbanks, meadows, and riparian vegetation and a number of actions that would result in removal of human-made structures and paved/graded areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas and views of the river and meadows in the vicinity of restoration areas. In addition, views from scenic vistas with restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. New facilities or structures included in management actions are proposed in existing developed areas and would not result in reduced scenic quality. In addition, visitor use capacity management would be implemented, resulting in visitor use that is substantially lower than existing levels, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources that could result in secondary effects on scenic resources. Overall, with implementation of MM-VEX-2, as appropriate, (see Appendix C), Alternative 2 would result in local, long-term, moderate to major, beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Cumulative Impacts from Alternative 2: Self-Reliant Visitor Experiences and Extensive Floodplain Restoration

The discussion of cumulative impacts to scenic resources is based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the Yosemite region in combination with the potential effects of

Alternative 2. The projects identified below include those projects that have the potential to affect the scenic resources of the Merced River. See Appendix C for a full list of cumulative projects.

Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions that would contribute towards cumulative effects towards scenic resources under this alternative are the same as those listed for Alternative 1.

Overall Cumulative Impact

Overall development and recreational uses in the Merced River watershed have resulted in localized, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on scenic resources. A number of past, present, and future projects have beneficially limited uses through planning or restored vegetation and riverbanks, and management of vegetation that is blocking scenic views, although the overall impact remains adverse. Alternative 2 would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources related to restoration activities throughout the planning area, removal of human-made structures, and reduced visitor use capacity, which result in overall improvement in the scenic quality of the planning area. Cumulatively, the impact on scenic resources would be local, long term, moderate, and beneficial.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 3: Dispersed Visitor Experiences and Extensive Riverbank Restoration

All River Segments

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

As discussed in the natural resources impact subsections of this chapter and similar to Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would result in reduced park visitation compared to Alternative 1 (No Action), which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, such as creation of informal trails, trampling of vegetation, and increased bank erosion. These visitor use impacts result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternative 3, the Little Yosemite Valley Campground would be reduced and portions of the designated camping area would be restored, rather than restoration of the entire designated camping area and conversion to dispersed camping under Alternative 2. Merced Lake Backpackers Camping Area would be expanded. Grazing of the Merced Lake East Meadow would be regulated. Restoration activities and reduced visitor capacity would improve the scenic quality of Segment 1, and reduce ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area and associated secondary impacts on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use

management and facilities under Alternative 3 would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Merced Lake High Sierra Camp. The park would close the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp and removal all infrastructure, convert the area to designated Wilderness, and use the former camp area for a temporary stock camp. Upon completion of restoration activities, despite the continued use of the area as a stock camp, the Merced Lake area would be more natural in appearance, as viewed from the Merced Lake Trail and the visitor use areas that would be retained. Views of Merced Lake shoreline and meadows would be improved where restoration areas are in the foreground, as well as views of peaks where restored areas are in the foreground. The resulting impacts on the scenic character of Segment 1 would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Segment 1 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities within Segment 1 would have local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources in Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Actions under Alternative 3 would be similar to Alternative 2 and would also result in an overall improvement in the scenic quality of Segment 2. For many actions, the meadow or riverbank restoration approach proposed under Alternative 3 would be different than that proposed for Alternative 2; however, the scenic quality of the restoration areas following restoration activities would be similarly improved. Implementation of management actions related to protecting and enhancing river values under Alternative 3 (including actions common to all alternatives) would result in local, long-term, moderate to major, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

A greater number of campsites would be retained and less restoration would occur under Alternative 3 than under Alternative 2. In addition, a recreational vehicle (RV) campground would be developed. However, the proposed expanded campground is in a heavily wooded area that could be seen from the bicycle path adjacent to the river and Happy Isles Loop Road. Views of the Merced River with the campground areas in the foreground would not be improved to the same degree as under Alternative 2, including views from Happy Isles bridge (Scenic Vista point 14), Clark's Bridge (Scenic Vista point 7), Housekeeping Camp footbridge (Scenic Vista point 92), Housekeeping Beach (Scenic Vista point 26), Housekeeping Bridge trail, Southside Drive, and the adjacent bicycle path and trails that cross this area. In addition, views of North Dome, Glacier Point, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, and Cathedral Rocks from the scenic vista points with the campground areas in the foreground would not be improved to the same degree under Alternative 3 as under Alternative 2.

In Curry Village, a greater number of lodging units and parking spaces would be retained at the Curry Orchard Parking Area, than under Alternative 2. In the Yosemite Village area, some structures would be retained, rather than removed as under Alternative 2. Yosemite Lodge would be retained, rather

than converted to day use with a campground to the west as under alternative 2. However, these areas are in existing developed areas.

While Alternative 3 would retain more campground and overnight accommodations compared with Alternative 2, restoration activities and reduced visitor capacity would improve the scenic quality of Segment 2 and reduce ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area that could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 3 would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Curry Village and Campground. The park would retain 355 guest units at Curry Village. The park would remove campsites from Lower Pines (15), North Pines (34), and Upper Pines (2). In addition, the park would discontinue commercial day rides from the Curry Village Stables. These actions would collectively result in a reduction in human-made structures in the Curry Village and Campground areas, and a return to more natural conditions. The impact on scenic resources would, therefore, be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Camp 6 and Yosemite Village. The park would reroute Northside Drive to the south of the Yosemite Village day-use parking area, reconfigure the lot to accommodate a total of 550 parking spaces north of the road, and install walkways leading to Yosemite Village. As these actions would occur within already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, negligible, and adverse.

Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would move on-grade pedestrian crossing to west of the Northside Drive and Yosemite Lodge Drive, relocate the existing bus drop-off area to the Highland Court area to accommodate loading/unloading for 3 busses, and redevelop an area west of Yosemite Lodge to provide an additional parking for 150 automobiles and 15 tour busses. Additional parking at Highland Court and Yosemite Lodge would bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. In the latter case, the proposed actions would increase the development footprint within the area. However, as these actions would occur within already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Segment 2 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term moderate to major, beneficial impacts on scenic resources within Segment 2. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Within Segment 4, the park would establish a 2.25-acre oak recruitment zone in the vicinity of Odger's fuel storage area and adjacent parking lots. Parking would be prohibited within the trees' drip lines, and new building construction would be prohibited within the oak recruitment zone. These measures

would have a local, long-term, minor, beneficial impact on scenic resources in the vicinity of the former fuel station in Segment 4.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

New low- and medium-density housing and parking would be constructed as infill development in Rancheria, outside the 100-year floodplain. These actions would increase the number of human-made structures in the area. However, these areas are currently developed, and the addition of these structures would not substantially decrease the scenic quality of the area. Overall, visitor use would be reduced from existing conditions, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area.

Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, negligible to minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 3 & 4.

Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Actions to protect and enhance river values within Segment 7 include removal of the Wawona Golf Course. Implementation of these management actions would improve the scenic quality of the restoration areas. In particular, the restored golf course restoration area would be visible from Chowchilla Road, Highway 41, and vista points along that road. The impact on scenic resources of Segment 7 would be local, long-term, moderate, and beneficial.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Visitor- and facilities-related actions that would occur within Segments 6 and 7 involve the removal of campsites, changes to visitor and administrative facilities, and various visitor access and transportation improvements within Segment 7. Reduced visitor capacity would improve the scenic quality of the segments and reduce ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area, and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of these management actions would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Wawona Campground. Under Alternative 3, the park would reduce the size of the Wawona Campground. Twenty seven campsites, or 28% of all campsites within Wawona, would be removed from the floodplain. These actions would further reduce visitation and the number of human-made structures in the vicinity, and restore the area to more natural conditions. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5-8. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Summary of Impacts from Alternative 3: Dispersed Visitor Experiences and Extensive Riverbank Restoration

Alternative 3 would include a substantial number of restoration actions that would improve the appearance of riverbanks, meadows, and riparian vegetation, and a number of actions that would result in removal of human-made structures and paved/graded areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas and views of the river and meadows in the vicinity of restoration areas. In addition, views from scenic vistas with restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. New facilities or structures included in management actions are proposed in existing developed areas and would not result in reduced scenic quality. In addition, visitor use capacity management would be implemented, resulting in visitor use substantially lower than existing levels, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources that could result in secondary effects on scenic resources. Overall, with implementation of MM-VEX-2, as appropriate, (see Appendix C), Alternative 3 would result in local, long-term, moderate to major, beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Cumulative Impacts from Alternative 3: Dispersed Visitor Experiences and Extensive Riverbank Restoration

The discussion of cumulative impacts to scenic resources is based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the Yosemite region in combination with the potential effects of Alternative 3. The projects identified below include those projects that have the potential to affect the scenic resources of the Merced River.

Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions that would contribute towards cumulative effects towards scenic resources under this alternative are the same as those listed for Alternative 1.

Overall Cumulative Impact

Overall development and recreational uses in the Merced River watershed have resulted in moderate localized, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on scenic resources. A number of past, present, and future projects have beneficially limited uses through planning or restored vegetation and riverbanks, and management of vegetation that is blocking scenic views, although the overall impact remains adverse. Alternative 3 would result in local, long-term, moderate to major, beneficial impacts on scenic resources related to restoration activities throughout the planning area, removal of human-made structures, and reduced visitor use capacity which result in overall improvement in the scenic quality of the planning area. Cumulatively, the impact on scenic resources would be local, long-term, moderate, and beneficial.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 4: Resource-based Visitor Experiences and Targeted Riverbank Restoration

All River Segments

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

As discussed in the natural resources impact sections and similar to Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would result in reduced park visitation compared to Alternative (No Action), which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, such as creation of informal trails, trampling of vegetation, and increased bank erosion. These visitor use impacts results in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources. However, visitor use numbers would only be slightly reduced compared with Alternative 1 (No Action) and more visitation would result compared with Alternative 2. Visitor use management strategies would result in higher visitation than would occur under Alternative 2. Therefore, secondary impacts on scenic resources would not be improved to the same degree as Alternative 2 but could be improved compared to existing conditions.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternative 4, the Little Yosemite Valley Campground would be retained, rather than restoring the entire designated camping area and converting it to dispersed camping as under Alternative 2. Restoration and prohibitions on grazing of Merced Lake East Meadow, along with other general restoration activities would improve the scenic quality of the area, but not to the degree as would occur under Alternative 2. Therefore, improvement in scenic quality in Segment 1 would be less under Alternative 4 than under Alternative 2 because areas of barren ground, designated camping areas, and other human-made structures would be retained (and expanded at the Merced Lake Backpackers Camping Area), and therefore less restoration would be implemented. While more campground sites would be retained with Alternative 4 than with Alternative 2, restoration activities and reduced visitor capacity would improve the scenic quality of Segment 1 and reduce ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area, which could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 4 would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1. Merced Lake High Sierra Camp. The park would close the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp and removal all infrastructure, convert the area to designated Wilderness, and restoration of the former camp area to natural conditions. Implementation of these actions would remove human-made structures that detract from the scenic quality of the Merced Lake area. Upon completion of restoration activities, the Merced Lake area would be more natural in appearance, as viewed from the Merced Lake Trail and the visitor use areas that would be retained. Views of Merced Lake shoreline and meadows would be improved where restoration areas are in the foreground, as well as views of peaks where restored areas are in the foreground. The resulting impacts on the scenic character of Segment 1 would be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Segment 1 Impact Summary: Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 4 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Actions under Alternative 4 in Segment 2 would be similar to Alternative 2 and would also result in an overall improvement in the scenic quality of this segment. For many actions, the meadow or riverbank restoration approach proposed under Alternative 4 would be different than that proposed under Alternative 2. In addition, slightly less road and trail removal/relocation would occur. However, the scenic quality of the restoration areas following restoration activities would be similarly improved. Implementation of management actions related to protecting and enhancing river values under Alternative 4 (including actions common to all alternatives) would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

A greater number of units would be retained under Alternative 4 than under Alternative 2. In addition, a recreational vehicle campground and a walk-in campground would be developed. However, riverbank, riparian, and other restoration actions would be implemented as under Alternative 2. The proposed expanded campground is in a heavily wooded area, but could be seen from the bicycle path adjacent to the river and Happy Isles Loop Road. The riverbank downstream of Stoneman Bridge would be restored; however, the bridge would be retained. Views of the Merced River with these areas in the foreground would not be improved under Alternative 4 to the same degree as Alternative 2, including views from Happy Isles bridge (Scenic Vista point 14), Clark's Bridge (Scenic Vista point 7), Housekeeping footbridge (Scenic Vista point 92), Housekeeping Beach (Scenic Vista point 26), Housekeeping Bridge Trail, Southside Drive, and the adjacent bicycle path and trails that cross the area. In addition, views of North Dome, Glacier Point, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, and Cathedral Rocks from the scenic vista points with the campground areas in the foreground would be not be improved to the same degree under Alternative 4 as under Alternative 2.

In Curry Village, a greater number of lodging units and parking spaces would be retained under Alternative 4 than under Alternative 2. Yosemite Lodge would be retained, rather than converted to day use as under Alternative 2, and a campground would be developed. However, these areas are in existing developed areas.

While Alternative 4 would retain more campground and overnight accommodations compared with Alternative 2, restoration activities and maintained visitor capacity would improve the scenic quality of Segment 2 and maintain ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area that could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of Segment 2. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 4 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Curry Village and Campground. The park would retain 355 guest units and construct a new 40 site campground at Curry Village. The park would remove campsites from Lower Pines (15), North Pines (34), and Upper Pines (2). New structures would be constructed in an already developed area, generally within previously developed sites. These actions would collectively result in a reduction in human-made structures in the Curry Village and Campground areas, and a return to more natural conditions. The impact on scenic resources would, therefore, be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Camp 6 and Yosemite Village. The park would improve the configuration of and on-grade pedestrian crossing at the Northside Drive-Yosemite Village Drive intersection, shift the parking area north and redevelop a portion of the former administrative footprint to accommodate 750 parking spaces, and install a new three-way intersection connecting the parking lot to Sentinel Drive. Additional parking at Camp 6 would bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. However, as the project would occur within the footprint of an already developed area, and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would design a pedestrian underpass, relocate the existing bus drop-off area to the Highland Court area to accommodate loading/unloading for 3 busses, and redevelop an area west of Yosemite Lodge to provide an additional parking for 150 automobiles and 15 tour busses. Additional parking at Highland Court and Yosemite Lodge would bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. In the latter case, the proposed actions would increase the development footprint within the area. However, as these actions would occur within already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Segment 2 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources within Segment 2. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Within Segment 4, the park would establish a 1-acre oak recruitment zone in the vicinity of Odger's fuel storage area and adjacent parking lots. Parking would be prohibited within the trees' drip lines, and new building construction would be prohibited within the oak recruitment zone. These measures would have a local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impact on scenic resources in the vicinity of the former fuel station in Segment 4.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

New high-density housing and parking would be constructed as infill development in Rancheria, outside the 100-year floodplain. These actions would increase the number of human-made structures in the area. However, these areas are currently developed, and the addition of these structures would not

substantially decrease the scenic quality of the area. Overall, visitor use would be reduced from existing conditions, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. **Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary:** Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Visitor- and facilities-related actions that would occur within Segments 6 and 7 involve the removal of campsites, changes to visitor and administrative facilities, and various visitor access and transportation improvements within Segment 7. These actions would be expected to decrease overall visitation within this Segments 5-8. As a result, the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of Segments 5–8, and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of these segments would be reduced. Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Wawona Campground. Under Alternative 4, the park would reduce the size of the Wawona Campground. Twenty-seven campsites, or 28% of all campsites within Wawona, would be removed from the floodplain. These actions would further reduce visitation and the number of human-made structures in the vicinity, and restore the area to more natural conditions. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, minor, and beneficial.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Summary of Impacts from Alternative 4: Resource-based Visitor Experiences and Targeted Riverbank Restoration

A substantial number of restoration actions under Alternative 4 would improve the appearance of riverbanks, meadows, and riparian vegetation and a number of actions would result in removal of human-made structures and paved/graded areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas and views of the river and meadows in the vicinity of restoration areas. In addition, views from scenic vistas with restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. New facilities or structures included in management actions are proposed in existing developed areas and would not result in overall reduced scenic quality. In addition, visitor use capacity management would be implemented, resulting in visitor use being maintained at slightly less than or similar to existing levels, which would maintain the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, which could result in secondary effects on scenic resources. Overall, with implementation of MM-VEX-2, as appropriate, (see Appendix C), Alternative 4 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Cumulative Impacts from Alternative 4: Resource-based Visitor Experiences and Targeted Riverbank Restoration

The discussion of cumulative impacts on scenic resources is based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the Yosemite region in combination with the potential effects of Alternative 4. The projects identified below include those projects that have the potential to affect the scenic resources of the Merced River.

Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions that would contribute towards cumulative effects towards scenic resources under this alternative are the same as those listed for Alternative 1.

Overall Cumulative Impact

Overall development and recreational uses in the Merced River watershed have resulted in localized, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on scenic resources. A number of past, present, and future projects have beneficially limited uses through planning or restored vegetation and riverbanks, and management of vegetation that is blocking scenic views, although the overall impact remains adverse. Alternative 4 would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources related to restoration activities throughout the planning area, removal of human-made structures, and reduced visitor use capacity, which result in overall improvement in the scenic quality of the planning area. Cumulatively, the impact on scenic resources would be local, long term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 5: Enhanced Visitor Experiences and Essential Riverbank Restoration

All River Segments

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

As discussed in the natural resources impact subsections of this chapter, Alternative 5 would result in similar park visitation compared to Alternative 1 (No Action) and ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, such as creation of informal trails, trampling of vegetation, and increased bank erosion, which result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources, and these visitor use impacts could continue similar to existing conditions.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Under Alternative 5, the Merced Lake Backpackers Camping Area would be retained. In addition, the Little Yosemite Valley and Moraine Dome Camping Areas would be retained, rather than being

restored and converted to dispersed camping as under Alternative 2. Wilderness zone capacity would be maintained at existing levels. Restoration and restrictions on grazing at Merced Lake East Meadow, and other general restoration activities would be implemented. As such, the scenic quality of the area would be improved, but not to the degree as would occur under Alternative 2 because the designated camping areas would be retained. Therefore, improvement in scenic quality in Segment 1 would be less under Alternative 5 than under Alternative 2 because areas of barren ground, designated camping areas, and other human-made structures would be retained; therefore, less restoration would be implemented. Maintenance of existing wilderness permit numbers could result in ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area, and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area, similar to existing conditions. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 5 would result in local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Merced Lake High Sierra Camp. The park would reduce the capacity of the Merced Lake High Sierra Camp to 42 beds and replace the flush toilets with composting toilets. Continued operation of the facility, albeit at reduced capacity, would result in impacts similar to those of Alternative 1 (No Action) as the major components of the facility and its visitors would remain. The resulting impact would be local, long-term, negligible, and adverse.

Segment 1 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities within Segment 1 would have local, long-term, negligible, adverse impacts on scenic resources in Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Segment 2 actions under Alternative 5 would be similar to actions under Alternative 2 and would also result in an overall improvement in the scenic quality of this segment. For many actions, the meadow or riverbank restoration approach proposed under Alternative 5 would be different than under Alternative 2. In addition, slightly less road area would be removed at Ahwahnee Meadow. However, the scenic quality of the restoration areas after restoration activities would be similarly improved. Implementation of management actions related to protecting and enhancing river values under Alternative 5 (including actions common to all alternatives) would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Impacts of Actions to Manage User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

A greater number of campsites would be retained under Alternative 5 than under Alternative 2. In addition, an RV campground and a walk-in campground would be developed. However, riverbank, riparian, and other restoration actions would be implemented as under Alternative 2. The proposed expanded campground is in a heavily wooded area, but could be seen from the bicycle path adjacent to the river and Happy Isles Loop Road. Restoration would occur at the former Upper River and Lower River campgrounds; however, due to the addition of campsites at Upper River, the total acreage of restoration would be less than that of Alternatives 2 through 4. The riverbank downstream of Stoneman Bridge would be restored; however, the bridge would be retained. Views of the Merced

River with the these areas in the foreground would not be improved to the same degree as with Alternative 2, including views from Happy Isles bridge (Scenic Vista point 14), Clark's Bridge (Scenic Vista point 7), Housekeeping footbridge (Scenic Vista point 92), Housekeeping Beach (Scenic Vista point 26), Housekeeping Bridge Trail, Southside Drive, and the adjacent bicycle path and trails that cross the area. In addition, views of North Dome, Glacier Point, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, and Cathedral Rocks from the scenic vista points with the campground areas in the foreground would be not be improved under Alternative 5 to the same degree as under Alternative 2.

In Curry Village, most lodging units and parking spaces would be retained. Yosemite Lodge would be retained, rather than converted to day use as under Alternative 2. However, these areas are in existing developed areas.

Valley visitor capacity would be maintained at the same level as existing conditions. While Alternative 5 would retain more campground and overnight accommodations compared with Alternative 2, restoration activities and maintained visitor capacity would improve the scenic quality of Segment 2 and maintain ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area that could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 5 would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Curry Village and Campground. The park would construct 98 hard-sided units at Boys Town, bringing the total number of new and retained units at Curry Village to 453. The park would remove campsites from Lower Pines (5), North Pines (14), and Upper Pines (2). New structures would be constructed in an already developed area, generally within previously developed sites. Campsite removal would reduce human-made structures in the Curry Village and Campground areas and return them to more natural conditions. The impact on scenic resources would, therefore, be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Camp 6 and Yosemite Village. The park would construct a pedestrian underpass and a traffic circle at the intersection of Northside and Yosemite Village Drives, shift the parking area north and redevelop a portion of the former administrative footprint to accommodate 850 parking spaces, and install a new three-way intersection connecting the parking lot to Sentinel Drive. The traffic circle, new intersection, and additional parking at Camp 6 would increase the development footprint and bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. However, as these projects would occur largely within the footprint of an already developed area, and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would redevelop the disturbed footprint of the former Yosemite Lodge units removed after being damaged by the 1997 flood, design a pedestrian underpass, relocate the existing bus drop-off area to the Highland Court area to accommodate loading/unloading for 3 busses, and redevelop an area west of Yosemite Lodge to provide an additional parking for 300 automobiles and 15 tour busses. Additional parking at Highland Court and Yosemite Lodge would bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. In the latter case, the proposed actions would increase the development footprint within the area. However, as these actions would occur within

already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Segment 2 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources within Segment 2. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Within Segment 4, the park would establish a one-acre oak recruitment zone in the vicinity of Odger's fuel storage area and adjacent parking lots. Parking would be prohibited within the trees' drip lines, and new building construction would be prohibited within the oak recruitment zone. These measures would have a local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impact on scenic resources in the vicinity of the former fuel station in Segment 4.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

New high-density housing and parking would be constructed as infill development in Rancheria, outside the 100-year floodplain. These actions would increase the number of human-made structures in the area. However, these areas are currently developed, and the addition of these structures would not substantially decrease the scenic quality of the area. Overall, visitor use would be reduced from existing conditions, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would have local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Visitor- and facilities-related actions that would occur within Segments 6 and 7 involve the removal of campsites, changes to visitor and administrative facilities, and various visitor access and transportation improvements within Segment 7. These actions would not be expected to substantially change overall visitation within Segments 5-8. As a result, the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of Segments 5-8, and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of these segments would be similar to those of Alternative 1 (No Action). Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5-8.

Wawona Campground. Under Alternative 5, the park would reduce the size of the Wawona Campground. Thirteen campsites, or 13% of all campsites within Wawona, would be removed from the floodplain. These actions would reduce overnight visitation and the number of human-made structures in the vicinity, and restore the area to more natural conditions. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5–8.

Summary of Impacts from Alternative 5: Enhanced Visitor Experiences and Essential Riverbank Restoration

Alternative 5 includes a substantial number of restoration actions that would improve the appearance of riverbanks, meadows, and riparian vegetation, and a number of actions that would result in removal of human-made structures and paved/graded areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas and views of the river and meadows in the vicinity of restoration areas. In addition, views from scenic vistas with restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. New facilities or structures included in Alternative 5 management actions are proposed in existing developed areas and would not result in overall reduced scenic quality. In addition, visitor use capacity management would be implemented, which would maintain in visitor use at existing levels and therefore maintain the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources that could result in secondary effects on scenic resources. Overall, with implementation of MM-VEX-2, as appropriate, (see Appendix C), Alternative 5 would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Cumulative Impacts from Alternative 5: Enhanced Visitor Experiences and Essential Riverbank Restoration

The discussion of cumulative impacts on scenic resources is based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the Yosemite region in combination with the potential effects of Alternative 5. The projects identified below have the potential to affect the scenic resources of the Merced River.

Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions that would contribute towards cumulative effects towards scenic resources under this alternative are the same as those listed for Alternative 1.

Overall Cumulative Impact

Overall development and recreational uses in the Merced River watershed have resulted in localized, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on scenic resources. A number of past, present, and future projects have beneficially limited uses through planning or restored vegetation and riverbanks, and management of vegetation that is blocking scenic views, although the overall impact remains adverse. Alternative 5 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources related to restoration activities throughout the planning area, removal of human-made

structures, and reduced visitor use capacity, which could result in overall improvement in the scenic quality of the planning area. Cumulatively, the impact on scenic resources would be local, long term, minor to moderate, and beneficial.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 6: Diversified Visitor Experiences and Selective Riverbank Restoration

All River Segments

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

As discussed in the natural resources impact subsections of this chapter, Alternative 6 would accommodate an increase in park visitation compared with Alternative 1 (No Action) and ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources, such as creation of informal trails, trampling of vegetation, and increased bank erosion. These visitor use impacts would result in secondary scenic resources impacts where affected natural resources areas are in scenic views or are the foreground to scenic resources and could continue similar to existing conditions.

Segment 1: Merced River Above Nevada Fall

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

The Merced Lake Backpackers, Little Yosemite Valley, and the Moraine Dome Camping Areas would be retained, rather than being restored and converted to dispersed camping as under Alternative 2. Wilderness zone capacity would be maintained at existing levels. Restoration and grazing restrictions at Merced Lake East Meadow, and other general restoration activities would be implemented. As such, the scenic quality of the area would be improved, but not to the degree as would occur under Alternative 2 because of the retention of designated camping areas. Therefore, improvement in scenic quality in Segment 1 would be less under Alternative 6 than under Alternative 2 because areas of barren ground, designated camping areas, and other human-made structures would be retained and, therefore, less restoration would be implemented. Maintenance of existing Wilderness permit numbers could result in ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of Segment 1 that could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area, similar to existing conditions. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 6 would result in local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 1.

Merced Lake High Sierra Camp. Continued operation of the facility would result in impacts similar to those of Alternative 1 (No Action). The resulting impact would be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Segment 1 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities within Segment 1 would have local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on scenic resources in Segment 1.

Segment 2: Yosemite Valley

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Segment 2 actions under Alternative 6 would be similar to Alternative 2 and would also result in an overall improvement in the scenic quality of Segment 2. For many actions, the meadow or riverbank restoration approach proposed under Alternative 6 would be different than under Alternative 2. In addition, slightly less road area would be removed at Ahwahnee Meadow. However, the scenic quality of the restoration areas after restoration activities would be similarly improved. Implementation of management actions related to protecting and enhancing river values under Alternative 6 (including actions common to all alternatives) would result in local, long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

A greater number of campsites would be retained under Alternative 6 than under Alternative 2. In addition, an RV campground and a walk-in campground would be developed. However, riverbank, riparian, and other restoration actions would be implemented, as under Alternative 2. The proposed expanded campground is in a heavily wooded area but could be seen from the bicycle path adjacent to the river and Happy Isles Loop Road. The riverbank downstream of Stoneman and Sugar Pine bridges would be restored; however, the bridges would be retained. Restoration would occur at the former Upper River and Lower River campgrounds; however, approximately half the acreage of restoration would be implemented compared to Alternatives 2 through 4. Views of the river with these areas in the foreground would not be improved under Alternative 6 to the same degree as under Alternative 2, including views from Happy Isles bridge (Scenic Vista point 14), Clark's Bridge (Scenic Vista point 7), Housekeeping footbridge (Scenic Vista point 92), Housekeeping Beach (Scenic Vista point 26), Housekeeping Bridge Trail, Southside Drive, and the adjacent bicycle path and trails that cross this area of Segment 2. In addition, views of North Dome, Glacier Point, Yosemite Falls, El Capitan, and Cathedral Rocks from the scenic vista points with the campground areas in the foreground would be not be improved under Alternative 6 to the same degree as under Alternative 2.

In Curry Village, most lodging units and parking spaces would be retained. Yosemite Lodge would be retained, rather than converted to day use as under Alternative 2. These areas are in existing developed areas.

The Valley visitor capacity would increase compared with Alternative 1 (No Action). Alternative 6 would retain more campground and overnight accommodations compared with Alternative 2, and ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of the area could result in secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area could increase compared to Alternative 2. However, extensive meadow and riverbank restoration would be implemented. Implementation of management actions related to visitor use management and facilities under Alternative 6 would result in local, long-term, minor beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Curry Village and Campground. The park would construct 98 hard-sided units at Boys Town, bringing the total number of new and retained units at Curry Village to 453. The park would remove campsites from Lower Pines (5), North Pines (14), and Upper Pines (2). New structures would be

constructed in an already developed area, generally within previously developed sites. Campsite removal would reduce human-made structures in the Curry Village and Campground areas and return them to more natural conditions. The impact on scenic resources would, therefore, be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Camp 6 and Yosemite Village. The park would expand the Concessioner Warehouse Building to accommodate Concessioner General Office functions, construct a pedestrian underpass and two roundabouts, shift the parking area north and redevelop a portion of the former administrative footprint to accommodate 850 parking spaces, and install a new three-way intersection connecting the parking lot to Sentinel Drive. The administrative facilities expansion, roundabout, new intersection, and additional parking at Camp 6 would increase the development footprint and bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. However, as these projects would occur largely within the footprint of an already developed area, and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Camp 4 and Yosemite Lodge. The park would design a pedestrian underpass, relocate the existing bus drop-off area to the Highland Court area to accommodate loading/unloading for 3 busses, and redevelop an area west of Yosemite Lodge to provide an additional parking for 300 automobiles and 15 tour busses. Additional parking at Highland Court and Yosemite Lodge would bring more visitors and vehicles into these areas. In the latter case, the proposed actions would increase the development footprint within the area. However, as these actions would occur within already developed areas and not obstruct scenic vistas, the impacts upon scenic resources would be local, long-term, minor, and adverse.

Segment 2 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on scenic resources within Segment 2. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would have local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 2.

Segments 3 and 4: Merced River Gorge and El Portal.

Impacts of Actions to Protect and Enhance River Values

Within Segment 4, the park would establish a 1-acre oak recruitment zone in the vicinity of Odger's fuel storage area and adjacent parking lots. Parking would be prohibited within the trees' drip lines, and new building construction would be prohibited within the oak recruitment zone. These measures would have a local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impact on scenic resources in the vicinity of the former fuel station in Segment 4.

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

New high-density housing and parking would be constructed as infill development in Rancheria and Abbieville, outside the 100-year floodplain. These actions would increase the number of human-made structures in the area. However, these areas are currently developed, and the addition of these structures would not substantially decrease the scenic quality of the area. Overall, visitor use would be reduced

from existing conditions, which would reduce the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of the area. Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 3 & 4 Impact Summary: Actions to protect and enhance river values would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4. Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, minor, adverse impacts on the scenic resources of Segment 4.

Segments 5, 6, 7, and 8: South Fork Merced River

Impacts of Actions to Manager User Capacity, Land Use, and Facilities

Visitor- and facilities-related actions that would occur within Segments 6 and 7 involve the removal of campsites, changes to visitor and administrative facilities, and various visitor access and transportation improvements within Segment 7. These actions would not be expected to substantially change overall visitation within Segments 5-8. As a result, the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on the natural resources of Segments 5-8, and associated secondary effects on the scenic quality of these segments would be similar to those of Alternative 1 (No Action). Implementation of these actions would result in local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5-8.

Wawona Campground. Under Alternative 6, the park would reduce the size of the Wawona Campground. Thirteen campsites, or 13% of all campsites within Wawona, would be removed from the floodplain. These actions would reduce overnight visitation and the number of human-made structures in the vicinity, and restore the area to more natural conditions. The resulting impact on scenic resources within Segment 7 would be local, long-term, negligible, and beneficial.

Segments 5-8 Impact Summary: Actions to manage user capacities, land use, and facilities would also have local, long-term, negligible, beneficial impacts on the scenic resources of Segments 5-8.

Summary of Impacts from Alternative 6: Diversified Visitor Experiences and Selective Riverbank Restoration

Alternative 6 includes a substantial number of restoration actions that would improve the appearance of riverbanks, meadows, and riparian vegetation, and a number of actions that would result in removal of human-made structures and paved/graded areas. These actions would improve the scenic quality of restoration areas, and views of the river and meadows in the vicinity of restoration areas. In addition, views from scenic vistas with restoration areas in the foreground would be improved. New facilities or structures included in management actions are primarily proposed in existing developed areas and would not result in overall reduced scenic quality. Visitor use capacity management would increase, which could increase the potential for ongoing visitor use impacts on natural resources of that could result in secondary effects on scenic resources. Overall, with implementation of MM-VEX-2, as appropriate, (see Appendix C), Alternative 6 would result in local, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts on scenic resources.

Cumulative Impacts from Alternative 6: Diversified Visitor Experiences and Selective Riverbank Restoration

The discussion of cumulative impacts on scenic resources is based on analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the Yosemite region in combination with the potential effects of Alternative 6. The projects identified below include those projects that have the potential to affect the scenic resources of the Merced River.

Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions that would contribute towards cumulative effects towards scenic resources under this alternative are the same as those listed for Alternative 1.

Overall Cumulative Impact

Overall development and recreational uses in the Merced River watershed have resulted in localized, long-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts on scenic resources. A number of past, present, and future projects have beneficially limited uses through planning or restored vegetation and riverbanks and management of vegetation that is blocking scenic views, although the overall impact remains adverse. Alternative 6 would result in local, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impacts on scenic resources related to restoration activities throughout the planning area, removal of human-made structures, and reduced visitor use capacity, which result in overall improvement in the scenic quality of the planning area. Cumulatively, the impact on scenic resources would be local, long term, minor, and beneficial.

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