

Yosemite National Park

Merced Wild & Scenic River

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Overview of Alternatives for the Merced River Plan

My overall perspective is that the NPS should be developing an overall comprehensive plan for managing Yosemite that actively balances the twin needs to preserve and protect the Park and to provide an environment where all the resources (the Merced River as well as rocks, scenery, geology, falls, trails, meadows, flowers, forests, mountains, cliffs, and wildlife) are available for enjoyment by their owners: the people of the U.S.

—Public Comment Spring 2012 Planning Workbook

What is the history of the Merced River Plan?

The 81 miles of Merced and South Fork Merced Rivers that flow through Yosemite National Park were included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1987. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires the National Park Service (NPS) to protect and enhance the Merced River's free-flow conditions, high water quality, and regionally or nationally significant features for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Act further requires that the National Park Service document how it will protect and enhance the river and its values in a comprehensive management plan.

The National Park Service has completed two previous Merced River Comprehensive Management Plans in 2000 and 2005, and both were challenged in court. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals found the plan to be deficient in specific areas in both instances. In 2009, the National Park Service and plaintiffs reached a settlement agreement that provided a path forward to develop a new comprehensive management plan.

What is the status of the plan?

The *Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) is available to the public during a 90-day review and comment period. The DEIS contains a no-action alternative (required by law) and five action alternatives that present a reasonable and feasible range of management actions the park could undertake to protect and enhance river values and provide appropriate visitor access. The range of action alternatives reflect public comments that the NPS received throughout the planning process. The document also contains an analysis of potential impacts to the natural and cultural environment, visitor experience, and the economy that could result from each of the respective alternatives. Feedback received during this comment period will help to further refine the alternatives and analysis before release of the final environmental impact statement and record of decision.

What are the various alternatives and how do they differ from each other?

Extensive scientific research and interdisciplinary collaboration formed the foundation of all draft alternatives. Public comments received during scoping and outreach efforts helped further refine the range of alternatives. The alternatives differ primarily in the maximum daily visitation, which subsequently affects the types of facilities and services required to meet visitor experience and restoration objectives. Though the alternatives provide a range of actions, each alternative was developed to ensure the protection of river values.

Alternative 1: No-Action

This alternative would continue the current management direction and level of intensity in the Merced River corridor. Lodging, camping, infrastructure, and parking would remain in the same locations and configurations. There would be no comprehensive approach to protect and enhance river values. Daily visitation for East Yosemite Valley would remain similar to existing conditions (up to 20,900 people per day).

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

The guiding principles of Alternative 2 would include maximizing the restoration of the 100-year floodplain

What are the various alternatives and how do they differ from each other? (cont.)

by removing infrastructure not essential to resource-related recreation, and creating a more self-reliant visitor experience, where fewer commercial services would be available. Visitor-use levels would be managed to allow for visitor experiences free of crowding or congestion. Given the conditions in this alternative, peak visitation to East Yosemite Valley would be approximately 13,900 people per day over a 24-hour period.

Alternative 3: Dispersed Visitor Experiences and Extensive Riverbank Restoration

The guiding principles of Alternative 3 would include restoration of large portions of the floodplain and the riparian area within 150 feet of the river. This alternative would accommodate much lower maximum visitor-use levels than today, and would offer fewer commercial services and facilities. Visitor-use levels would be managed to allow for dispersed visitor experiences free of crowding or congestion. Given the conditions in this alternative, peak visitation to East Yosemite Valley would be approximately 13,200 people per day over a 24-hour period.

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

The guiding principles of Alternative 4 include restoration of portions of the floodplain and the riparian area within 150 feet of the river. This alternative focuses on only providing those commercial services and facilities that facilitate resource-based visitor experiences. It accommodates lower maximum visitor use levels than today, with large increases in overnight camping capacity, and moderate decrease in the overnight lodging capacity. Given the conditions in this alternative, peak visitation to East Yosemite Valley would be approximately 17,000 people per day over a 24-hour period.

Alternative 5: Enhanced Visitor Experiences and Essential Riverbank Restoration (Preferred)

The guiding principles of Alternative 5 would include significant restoration within 100 feet of the river and in meadow and riparian areas, maintaining daily visitation in Yosemite Valley to accommodate peak levels similar to those observed in recent years, reducing unnecessary facilities and services, and converting facilities from administrative use to public use where feasible. Given the conditions in this alternative, peak visitation to East Yosemite Valley would be approximately 19,900 people per day over a 24-hour period. The NPS has identified Alternative 5 as the “preferred alternative,” or the course of action the agency believes best fulfills our statutory mission and responsibilities.

Alternative 6: Diversified Visitor Experiences and Selective Riverbank Restoration

The guiding principles of Alternative 6 include limited restoration within 100 feet of the river and in meadow and riparian areas, infrastructure improvements to accommodate growth in peak daily visitation in Yosemite Valley, and expansion of facilities and services to allow for diversified visitor experiences. Given the conditions in this alternative, peak visitation to East Yosemite Valley would be approximately 21,300 people per day over a 24-hour period.

Find Out More

If you’re interested in learning more about the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, you can download the entire document at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp-deis.htm. For those that have the time, reading the entire document will convey the fullest understanding of the plan. For those interested in an overview of the Merced River Plan, park staff suggest you begin with:

- Summary Guide for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan/ DEIS
- These sections of Chapter 8: Alternatives:
 - Actions Common to Alternatives 2-6
 - Overview section of Alternatives 2-6 (includes map series for each alternative)
 - Full narrative for Alternative 5 (Preferred Alternative)

Tell Us What You Think

Comment on this draft environmental impact statement by visiting the Merced River Plan Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/mrp_deis. Electronic comment submittal through PEPC saves resources and allows for direct entry to the NPS comment analysis system. Comments can also be submitted by email to yose_planning@nps.gov or by U.S. mail at the following address:

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