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To: <YOSE_Planning@nps.gov>
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 Subject: MRP Scoping Comments

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 MRP-SEIS-44
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 P. 18/14
 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

June 6, 2007

Yosemite National Park
 Attn: Merced River Plan
 [Redacted]
 Yosemite, CA 95389

To Whom It May Concern:

In response to your call for scoping comments on what is supposed to be a new comprehensive management plan for the Wild & Scenic Merced River, we submit the following. We are less than enthusiastic about this exercise since you've made it clear you'd rather appeal the decision of the U.S. District Court than develop a plan that would truly protect the Merced River. In the past we've spent days, even weeks, analyzing and researching information in an effort to provide meaningful comments with the hope that the planning process would be conducted with integrity and that Park officials really were interested in guaranteeing protection for the River. We no longer believe that.

When the 1997 flood occurred and Park officials conned Congress into front-loading Yosemite with \$200 million—plans approved or not—all in the feel-good name of flood repair, the planning process was permanently corrupted. With so much money burning a hole in the Park's pocket, officials admittedly gathered their special interest friends (i.e., Johanna Wald, Jay Watson, etc.) and together they redesigned Yosemite to fit their vision—the public be damned. Unfortunately (for them/you), the best laid plans hit a pesky snag when in 1999 the U.S. District Court found the Park in violation of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act for failing to develop a comprehensive management plan for the Merced River. And for the past 8 years, it's been more about how to get this River Plan thing over with and to get on with the bigger plans of spending all that money to remake Yosemite Valley.

Ms. Mayer, and before her Ms. Rylands and Ms. Schneckenburger perhaps had all the best intentions but without support from the powers that be, intentions are meaningless. Now we have the Chief of Planning openly stating there is no intent to revisit the Yosemite Valley Plan. Yet the River Plan is supposed to provide direction and guidance for managing visitor use, development of lands and facilities, and resource protection within the Merced River corridor while providing a "template against which future implementation plans are judged." So once again, it appears we will have a pre-determined River Plan designed to accommodate the already existing Valley Plan and its tiering EAs. Quite obviously, protection of revenue-generating facilities/activities is far more important than protection of the river.

Previous Plans fail to connect the dots

- The ORVs are poorly defined. They are supposed to be rare, unique, or exemplary in a regional or national context and must be river-related. The previous plans use the buzz words—scenic, geologic, biological, cultural, recreation, scientific, and hydrologic processes. What do these words actually mean on the ground, what protection needs to occur, and how will that happen?

For example, biological—"riparian areas and low-elevation meadows are the most productive communities in Yosemite Valley. The high quality and large extent of riparian, wetland, and other riverine areas provide rich habitat for a diversity of river-related species, including special status species, neotropical migrant songbirds, and numerous bat species." Should it be assumed from reading this that biological is only about special status species?? Is habitat for special status species the only value of the riparian areas and low-elevation meadows? Am also unclear as to

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the uniqueness in terms of regional or national context. What scientifically objective method is used to decide which of these areas to protect and not protect? What constitutes protection and how do you plan to do that?? How do boundaries fit into that? Reviewing the indicators and standards: How does counting vehicles and parking spaces protect riparian/meadow habitat for special status species? How does 95% or greater compliance with food storage regulations in selected campgrounds and parking areas protect riparian/meadow habitat for special status species? Am assuming you are concerned about bears, squirrels, raccoons, etc—but are they the special status species the biological ORV is designed to protect? What does finding an open table at concession food service have to do with protecting riparian/meadow habitat for special status species? Your indicators and standards appear meaningless in light of how inadequately you've defined the biological ORV. You've then imposed a set of possible management actions; because you haven't connected the dots between the ORV, its current condition, why it needs to be protected, plans for protection and how the management elements (e.g., classification, boundaries, RPO, zoning, etc.) guarantee that protection, the public views this charade as just a bunch of arbitrary rules and regulations with no real purpose

Another example: Cultural ORV. You made the case that El Portal may contain the best-preserved archeological resources from the protohistoric and early historic periods associated with American Indian cultural change; the area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places containing 17 known sites; and more. Yet you turned around and zoned most of the area 3C. Even the EPA objected to that. And your indicator/standard for protection of the cultural ORV in 3C is number of parking spaces occupied?? It makes no sense. The entire valley is culturally rich, but it is unclear exactly what needs to be protected and how it will be protected? Again, parking seems to be the primary indicator along with Usability of Ethnobotanical Resources. WHY does the cultural ORV always take the hit when it comes to development—e.g., Yosemite Falls project, Yosemite Lodge, campground expansion, utilities, etc. Again, you have failed to connect the dots between the ORV, the zoning, and the indicator/standards and your decisions appear arbitrary and self-serving.

- Management zones appear to be based on transportation and development plans rather than based on protection of ORVs. For example, it is no secret that the 1994 Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study recommended closure of all campgrounds north of the Merced River for purposes of consolidating traffic circulation in preparation for mass transit. You claim this 175-acre area will be "restored," yet you turn around and zone it for day use. NPS Director Fran Mainella testified at an April 22, 2003 Congressional subcommittee hearing: "Mr. Chairman, on replacement of campsites in the Lower Pines, Lower River, and Upper River campground areas in the valley. ...using these areas for campgrounds that serve a limited number of overnight visitors would preclude making them available for greater numbers of day visitors to enjoy for hiking, picnicking, bicycling, and other activities." It is unclear how removing campsites serving a "limited number" of campers to instead make the area available for "greater numbers of day visitors" fits with ecological restoration. In the meantime, you are using this area as the source of all your environmental "net gain" as the other construction projects destroy the Valley—only to ultimately turn it into day use serving "greater numbers." Meanwhile, plans call for the dismantling of long-established North Pines Campground to create some RV and walk-in sites across the street—a transfer of impacts to a currently undeveloped area. There is no discussion as to how this decision relates to ORVs or to visitor capacity. The 1982 WSRA Federal Register Guidelines states that "studies should be conducted during preparation of the management plan...to determine the quantity and mixture of recreation and other public use which can be permitted without adverse impact on the resource values of the river area" Where are these studies and what options with respect to quantity and mix of recreation did they offer?? Could campgrounds be rotated? What about an area set aside for auto-based tent camping separate from RVs and trailers as was suggested in the 1980 GMP? What about pockets of auto-based camping dispersed throughout the area as opposed to stuffing as many campers as possible in one spot as happens at Upper Pines? What about mixing uses—some pockets for camping, some pockets for solitude, etc.? The Park autocratically closed this area down and then zoned it for day use. In a gesture of arrogance, you rushed to tear the utilities out ASAP to further dismantle the area—as if day visitors won't have to go to the bathroom?? The public has never had a chance to consider

other options or a mix of options that would still protect the nebulous ORVs. Why not??

As stated earlier, another example is the 3C zoning in El Portal with respect to the Cultural ORV. Documents indicate it was more about accommodating the pre-existing Valley Plan than about protection. And there are numerous other examples where the zoning is tied to previously planned infrastructure development. Yet you want to rezone low amenity, low impact picnicking opportunities (e.g., Swinging Bridge, Church Bowl) while imposing restrictions on other area (e.g., Cathedral Beach, Sentinel Beach)—less about preserving the River than preserving your busing plans and rafting concession. You haven't connected the dots to any of this with respect to preserving/enhancing ORVs, capacity, zoning, RPO, etc

An observation based on your current land-use zoning: Seems you need to consider a couple of new ORVs as justification. One might be Revenue Generating Facilities/Activities for the Concessioner—especially since Delaware North/Yosemite enjoys "the richest single contract in the national park system" (*LA Times*, 5/26/07). Such an ORV would legitimize the destruction caused by the commercial raft concession, the upscale lodging development at Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village, elimination of Valley campgrounds to facilitate the busing scheme, expanded restaurant seating, the utilities expansion, etc Another ORV might be Fundraising/Public-Private Partnerships—enabling the Yosemite Fund to continue to leave its imprint on the Valley Such an ORV could justify the destruction that occurred with the Lower Yosemite Fall project with the cutting of hundreds of trees, building the mini-lodge bathroom, and construction of the outrageous bus stop. \$12 million in exchange for eradication of Native American heritage—what a trade-off!! And now the Fund wants to raise another \$12 million to rebuild the Happy Isles Bridge (after Superintendent Tollefson raved about the benefits to the River with respect to its removal) and redo the Valley Loop trail enabling Yosemite Valley to look more and more like Central Park in New York City. Do we sound cynical—you bet!! But that's about as much sense as your current land use zoning makes. User capacity should determine types and levels of use, rather than allowing types and levels of use (management zoning) to define user capacity.

Cause and effect

- It might be interesting to study who exactly is your "day visitor." Did you actually manipulate increased day visitation by removing 60+% of overnight accommodations? And won't your plans to develop campsites outside of the Valley end up creating even more day visitors?
- You are concerned about the trampling impacts on the banks of the Merced from residents of the new employee dorms across the street from the River; you are concerned Southside Drive might fail as a result of the tremendous amount of digging for the utilities as part of the placement under the road should the river rage at some point... Now you have to build fences everywhere to stop what you have created while the River and the visitors bear the brunt of your decisions
- Why is there a commercial rafting concession? Do the profits justify destruction of Sentinel Beach? Again, the NPS is allowing the concession and the oversized diesel pickup vehicles knowing full well that the "effect" will be destruction of the riparian area and the solitude of this tucked away low amenity family picnic facility.
- You want to put visitors on buses as a way of ensuring open-ended visitation. But the "effect" of that decision means over-engineering the roads with increased asphalt, widening/realigning the roads to accommodate oversized vehicles, and the creation of centralized and expanded infrastructure; how many more natural and cultural resources will be destroyed Does a 22-bay transit depot belong in the heart of Yosemite Valley?? You are changing the visitor experience from one of individualized exploration to assembly-line tourism as individuals are hurried from profit center to profit center.

This is the third time we've participated in scoping. Though you've indicated our earlier comments will be considered, we've pasted in our 2005 comments anyway since they deal in depth with the subject of user capacity.

Sincerely,

MRP-SEIS-44
P. 4/8/16

Jeanne and Lou Aceto

September 8, 2004

Michael Tollefson, Superintendent

ATTN: "New and Improved" Merced River Plan/SEIS

P.O. Box 577

Yosemite, CA 95389

Superintendent Tollefson:

We are pleased to provide scoping comments to be used in developing a new and improved Merced River Plan/SEIS. We trust that the National Park Service (NPS) will enthusiastically embrace this unique opportunity by designing a plan with specific measurable goals and objectives that will truly protect the Merced River and its environs.

In the spirit of John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else..." And so it is with user capacity and boundaries at El Portal According to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Interagency Guidelines (1982), *user capacity* is defined as:

- the quantity of recreation use which an area can sustain without adverse impact on the outstandingly remarkable values and free-flowing character of the river area,
- the quality of recreation experience, and
- public health and safety.

As a foundational element that impacts every other management element, determination on user capacity cannot be made in isolation and simply plugged into the invalid Merced River Plan. Instead such determination must be integrated in combination with other management elements such as land-use management zoning—elements that, in and of themselves, will most certainly require revision. The new and improved Merced River Plan must be more than just a cursory effort to shave off square corners to enable it to squeeze into a round hole. It must embrace the larger vision and responsibility of the Park Service to protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) of the Merced River corridor.

...without adverse impact on the ORVs and free-flowing character of the river area

As stated in Section 10(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA), the "primary emphasis shall be given to protecting [the River's] esthetic, scenic, historic, archaeologic, and scientific features." The Federal Guidelines go on to state that "each component will be managed to protect and enhance the values for which the river was designated, while providing for public recreation and resource uses which do not adversely impact or degrade those values." This is referred to as the nondegradation standard. WSRA then provides examples of possible River values such as scenery, recreation, fish and wildlife, geology, history, culture, and other similar values—but the primary emphasis still rests with the esthetic, scenic, historic, archaeologic, and scientific features.

1. Document Baseline Resource Conditions and Monitoring Program. A recent (2002) technical assistance paper published by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Interagency Commission states as a

management directive: "To achieve a nondegradation standard, the river-administering agency must document baseline resource conditions and monitor changes to these conditions." Such a scientific base of information would need to document the resources that are to be protected and preserved in the park; the condition of those resources; any changes in condition over time; and actions needed to ensure preservation (Natural Resource Challenge Action Plan, 1999). And though park documents have referred to an aggressive Inventory and Monitoring Program within five years of a 2000 Record of Decision—such a program needs to be in place FIRST to provide information critical to the planning process. Now in 2004, it still appears little progress has been made.

For example, an ecological restoration report was released by the Park in June of 2003 which included details of a workshop held in November of 2002. Some very honest random comments by workshop participants included:

"Have monitoring plan in place before start of restoration. 1. Need adequate baseline information; a) Monitor migration of in-stream woody material; b) Soil compaction bulk density measurements"

"... park should collect reference data on existing conditions now for Tenaya and Merced, so have reference for future monitoring. Work on Tenaya Creek should be performed within first five years of project, so work can progress from upstream through downstream areas"

"... noted that she doesn't feel it's possible to restore Valley to pre-Euro American contact because of the extent to which the landscape has changed"

"Don't want to keep doing what we've been doing just in case we are going on the wrong path"

"Experiment with small plots in every area. Monitor over 1 year and then proceed with area that does best"

Such comments clearly imply that baseline information on condition of resources as well as a monitoring program are lacking.

Meanwhile, the Park just released categorical exclusions to proceed with data collection studies that include installation of 110 ground water monitoring wells and soil pits; collection of tree coring samples; geotechnical subsurface exploration and wetlands delineation; and debris flow research. At a recent meeting [attended by Jeanne on May 3], Chief of Natural Resources and Science Dr. Niki Nicholas revealed that the reason these studies were so important was that the park has "no baseline information;" that in order to proceed with restoration, her staff needs "a place to start." We applaud Dr. Nicholas' honesty and her efforts to begin the process of gathering baseline data.

However, the above-mentioned comments validate our concerns with respect to the lack of a sound scientific base of information with respect to resource conditions and monitoring. How can the Park hope to achieve the nondegradation standard mandated in WSRA without such documentation? How will this lack of information imperil the planning process?

2. **Outstandingly Remarkable Values.** In reviewing various WSRA guidance documents, it is acknowledged that there is no "official" definition of ORV. However, there is common agreement that an ORV should constitute the very best of the best and that it be river related or river-dependent. Is there anything regionally or even nationally to compare—and what was used as the basis for comparison? Do visitors travel great distances specifically because of a particular ORV—something not available anywhere else? In some cases, other plans have weighted ORVs to assist in carrying out goals and objectives.

According to the 1982 WSRA Guidelines, management plans must state the kinds and amounts of public use which the river area can sustain **without impact to the values** for which it was designated. And though specific management strategies will vary according to classification they will always be designed to protect and enhance the values of the river area. The very definition of user capacity mandates no adverse impact on the ORVs.

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Recognizing the importance of ORVs, the WSRA Interagency Commission (2002) provided another management directive: "Thoroughly define the ORVs to guide future management actions and to serve as the baseline for monitoring." Though the invalid Merced River Plan made a feeble attempt to define ORVs, it fell far short in justifying selection, denoting goals for protection, and specifying how management prescriptions would achieve stated objectives.

It is also interesting to note (according to WSRA guidance documents) that "classification is often confused with outstandingly remarkable values." For example, a river classified as recreational does not imply that the river will be managed or prioritized for recreational use or development. It is understandable that the Merced River segment in East Yosemite Valley was classified as "recreational" by virtue of the evidence of human impact along its shorelines. However, it is not clear why "recreation" is considered to be a river-related world-class ORV. For instance, from the standpoint of rafting, it is easily understandable why the Kern River or even the Grand Canyon's Colorado River would include recreation as an ORV; visitors come from all over to participate in whitewater rafting not available elsewhere. It's a recreational activity in and of itself. Though floating down the Merced is enjoyable and certainly something to do, we question whether it's rare, unique, or exemplary; and yes, it's beautiful but is that not because of the inspiration drawn from the scenic or geologic ORV. Our concern is that by declaring recreation as an ORV, it will be used as justification for prioritizing recreational use or development (e.g., raft rental facility, RV hook-ups along the river corridor, etc.), often to the detriment of other ORVs. Recreation at Yosemite is no-doubt enjoyable—but does it result in an activity not available anywhere else; that may be the case with big-wall rock climbing—but floating, hiking, fishing, picnicking, etc.?

This leads to the discussion as to whether the National Park Service (and by extension, the concessionaire) should be in the business of "marketing" recreation (e.g., raft rentals, bicycle rentals, tent rentals, fishing/backpacking rentals and sales) or merely "accommodating" recreational activities for those who supply their own equipment. The ready availability of Park rentals, pandering to impulse decision-making by visitors, serves to increase activity in sensitive areas, resource "wear and tear," and potential safety issues. Conversely, if rentals are *not* available, visitors self-select their participation in a recreational activity based on whether or not they've chosen to go through the hassle of bringing/supervising their own equipment. The visitors themselves voluntarily reduce the impacts as opposed to the Park issuing more restrictions. We are reminded of being in the vicinity of the raft rentals and nearly run over by excited rafters racing down to Stoneman Bridge to put their raft in the water; we then watched the gigantic blue diesel bus followed by a box truck drive through sensitive Sentinel Beach picnic area every half hour to pick up rafters and bring them back to the rental facility. The invalid River Plan spoke of ORVs being in conflict. We have a difficult time understanding why the NPS would allow the concessionaire to operate a busy raft concession that accelerates severe erosion of the river bank alongside Stoneman Bridge; drive huge diesel vehicles through peaceful Sentinel Beach wiping out picnickers enjoying natural quiet (guess they aren't of the same financial priority to the concessionaire) while ultimately degrading the entire area. Though the concessionaire may profit from rentals, concessionaire profits should not determine park policy. And we fear that now the NPS will use these areas as examples of damage caused by visitors and why more restrictions must be implemented—when it's really a situation of "cause and effect" as initiated by the Park's own concessionaire.

Another example: WSRA mandates 'Scenic' and 'Esthetic' as *primary emphasis* elements. 'Scenic' is also an ORV for the segment of the Merced River corridor in East Yosemite Valley. That being the case, WHY was the Yosemite Fund allowed to construct a restroom that looks more like a mini-lodge, and an outrageously oversized bus stop structure that looks like a monument to the Fund's private architect? One would think "fundraising" was the ORV rather than preserving the scenic value of Yosemite Falls and the Merced River corridor. Shuttle bus stops should be understated so as not to interfere with the scenic value of the river corridor, yet we have learned from the NPS that other bus stops will now take on the character of their location (e.g., the LeConte bus stop will have the same roof design as the LeConte Lodge); this sounds more like

the cutesy bus stops at Disney World than the rustic, unobtrusive design one would expect at a national park.

Another area of concern is the Park's convoluted definition of what constitutes the Cultural ORV, a definition so hollow that it results in a lack of protection and an excuse to degrade The WSRA mandates that 'Archaeologic' and 'Historic' are *primary emphasis* elements, while the Main Stem of the Merced River designates 'Cultural' as an ORV. Yet project after project (e.g., Lower Yosemite Fall EA, Curry EA, Utility EA, Yosemite Lodge EA, etc) trumps the cultural ORV in favor of something else. There are no clear goals, objectives, or management prescriptions to clearly protect the archaeological, historic, or cultural values of the Merced River Corridor We suggest the following explanation of the Cultural Resources ORV as defined in a plan for the Hanford Reach

The Native American perspective of cultural resources contrasts with the generalized EuroAmerican view as presented by state/federal law and pursued in academia (adapted from SOR, 1995). The Native American perspective is characterized by a broad, holistic view which treats virtually all elements and features of nature as cultural resources; while the EuroAmerican perspective defines cultural resources as finite, unique, non-renewable examples of past human lifestyles, emphasizing scientific identification and evaluation of physical sites and artifacts (USACE, 1996).

The predominant view of the non-Indian may be one of physical preservation and site specific. But the Indian perspective is more toward preservation of the remembrance of the individual and a feeling of what was used by people before as utilitarian. The preservation of an object, simply for preservation, is secondary.

-- Louie Wynne, Spokane Tribe

Objectives

To protect, monitor, and interpret cultural resources in accordance with relevant legislation and protocol. Also, to secure and/or maintain fishing access for treaty tribes. Both will require cooperation and coordination with federal, state, and tribal entities

Cultural Resources per the IAP

For management purposes, cultural resources, which include EuroAmerican "historical resources" are broken into three categories (as adapted from the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area):

Archaeological Resources: *Physical evidence of human activity that predates the 20th Century. Examples of archaeological resources include: villages and fishing sites; rock art (pictographs and petroglyphs); tools (such as arrowheads, knives) and tool fragments; and middens, graves, or human remains.*

Historical Resources: *Primarily associated with EuroAmerican settlement, historical resources are essentially buildings and structures of the 20th Century. Examples of historical resources include: cabins; canals, flumes, and pipelines; roads; ferry landings; and townsites. At Hanford, such would also include specific infrastructure and facilities marking the history and legacy of the Hanford Site.*

Traditional Cultural Properties: *These are the most vague and difficult for Euro-Americans to understand; and therefore, are often a source of contention and controversy. Traditional cultural properties include locations, structures, objects, vistas, and biota that are associated with a community or population and linked with its customs or beliefs, are rooted in its history, and are important to maintaining its cultural identity. Examples of traditional cultural properties include: hunting/gathering locations and the biota associated with those sites; ceremonial, spiritual, or*

artistic sites; and objects or structures such as rock outcrops and cairns, trees, or islands

The above-referenced Plan then explains specifically how the agency will protect these values with each project. The Native American presence along the Merced River corridor is an integral part of the rich Yosemite Valley tapestry. Such superficial activities as selling Indian trinkets in the gift shops, Indian decorating themes in the expensive hotels, or recreating an Indian Village as an 'attraction' appear to be more about enhancing revenue for the concessionaire. Native American values must be embraced by the Park and embedded in park plans; tribal representatives must be included as a critical part of the planning team—not as window-dressing but as a highly valued resource.

- We urge the NPS to present thorough documentation and justification of ORVs. The often-repeated statement that ORVs may be in conflict appears to be a barrier to providing adequate protection for any of them—are there too many; do they need to be weighted; what are the specific measurable goals and objectives for each ORV that will guarantee their protection within each project and plan. Currently, it appears that the decision as to which ORVs are protected and which are pushed aside using the "net gain" argument is made in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner by the NPS to advance a predetermined agenda; there is no clear and objective methodology that is consistently applied. The issue of ORVs needs to be reexamined.
3. Redo Land-Use Management Zoning. The invalid Merced River Plan implements a complex list of zones with an array of activities that are permitted in the various zones. And though Park releases insist that the invalid Plan's management zoning program will not be revisited in the new planning effort—we believe such a position is a grievous error. With respect to user capacity, WSRA Guidelines specifically state that "studies will be made during preparation of the management plan and periodically thereafter to determine the quantity and mixture of recreation and other public use which can be permitted without adverse impact on the resource values of the river area. Management of the river area can then be planned accordingly." The amount of use an area can sustain is inextricably linked to how the resource is to be managed. Adhering to hollow zoning delineations that were developed without resource and monitoring information coupled with a lack of user capacity research renders any 'new' Plan fatally flawed. Current land-use management zoning appears to have been designed to accommodate predetermined development projects rather than protection of natural resources as the primary focus. We urge the planning team to broaden the scope of this effort and redo the land-use management zoning.

...without adverse impact on the quality of recreation experience

1. Define the visitor experience. The visitor experience and its intrinsic relationship to the esthetic, scenic, historic, archaeological, and scientific features or "core values" of Yosemite Valley and the Merced River corridor must be clearly defined. *Resource-focused* opportunities unique to a national park setting, based on resource preservation as opposed to resource exploitation, provide the framework for such a definition (e.g., camping as a resource-based activity that requires minimal permanent infrastructure vs. the multitude of services and facilities required to support upscale lodging and bus touring). It is impossible to objectively evaluate/measure any adverse impact on the quality of the visitor experience (as required in establishing user capacity) if that experience has never been defined. To declare that the visitor experience is whatever the visitor wants it to be is unacceptable and will continue to facilitate the special interest feeding frenzy taking place in Yosemite Valley. Concessionaires have carried on the 'want' versus 'need' debate for more than a century; the Merced River Plan can finally provide the foundational backbone that will guarantee true protection and preservation of Yosemite.
2. Resort Experience or National Park Experience. Is there a difference??

Enjoy magic from dawn to dusk. Make yourself at home in a cabin, or stay in secluded campsites for tents and all types of RVs. Hike winding paths, explore nature trails on horseback and have the time of your life in the great outdoors among hundreds of acres of natural beauty. Savor a variety of dining options including sit-down meals, cool drinks and quick snacks to go. Have some rustic fun in the great outdoors with recreational activities for the entire family. Escape to

the rustic charm of a Resort that recalls the majesty of the grand National Park Service lodges from the Great American Northwest with a soaring splitlog lobby, eight stories high, honoring American craftsmanship and artistry. Pools, beach, banking services, camera rental, guest services desk, children's activities, credit cards accepted, dining, snack bar, laundry facilities, lounge/bar, kennel, shopping, water rentals, bike rentals, fishing, horseback riding and pony rides, campfire sing-a-long. Buses (Motor Coach) service the resort both internally taking guests to the attractions and externally transporting guests to the Ticket and Transportation Center.

The previous description promotes Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground at Walt Disney World. And now from DNC at Yosemite...

Encompassing 1,170 square miles, an area the size of the state of Rhode Island, this unique destination offers both expansive wilderness as well as the guest services and amenities you would find at a year-round resort. This site is managed by Yosemite's primary concessionaire, Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc (DNC at Yosemite), which provides the majority of visitor services in Yosemite National Park, including lodging, food and beverage, retail operations, transportation, tours and recreation services

*There's so much to do at Curry Village, you might find it hard to leave to explore the rest of Yosemite! **Food and Beverage Services** - the Curry Village Pavilion serves all-you-can-eat buffet style breakfast and dinner service daily. Other seasonal options include Taqueria, Pizza Patio and Bar, Curry Ice Cream Stand and Curry Coffee Corner. **Gift Shop** - Sundries, newspapers, gift items, magazines, books, posters, snacks and ATM machine. **Swimming Pool** - Outdoor swimming pool with showers and changing rooms. **Amphitheater** - Ranger/naturalist programs, slide presentations and scenic movies. **Yosemite Mountain Shop** - Offers extensive inventory of camping, hiking, and climbing goods, dehydrated food and snacks. **Tour & Activities Desk** - Obtain information or arrange for tours, transportation, Yosemite Mountaineering School classes, horseback or mule rides and other activities. **Curry Recreation Center** - Standard bicycles in all sizes may be rented for the day or by the hour. Rafts may be rented from mid-May to mid-July. **Yosemite Mountaineering School** - Rock climbing instruction, guided hiking and backpacking and rental equipment are available. Cross-country skiing instruction and rental equipment are available November to April.*

***Transportation** - Free Valley shuttle service to various locations in the park is accessible, including winter service to the Badger Pass Ski Area. **Ice Skating Rink** - Open daily from late November to early March, the outdoor ice rink also offers skate rentals and instruction.*

***Nearby Activities** - Guided tours, stable rides, rock climbing, hiking, fishing, photography and ranger/naturalist programs, snowshoeing, downhill skiing and cross-country skiing are all located nearby.*

Is the goal of the visitor experience to encourage the public to spend TIME in direct interaction with the resource or spend MONEY at the resource? Recalling a 1997 article:

"In 1993, Delaware North landed a 15-year contract to manage food and lodging at America's oldest national park. The government and Delaware North negotiated a deal that gives the concessionaire a little more freedom in the park in exchange for a higher percentage of revenue being returned to the park. Under the new contract as much as 20 percent of revenue Delaware North derives will go to the government. However, much of that money will be funneled directly back to the park to improve facilities. "We see this as a win-win situation," Jacobs says. "It is an opportunity for us to 'exploit' the natural assets of the park in a way that actually complements the park, instead of harming it."

("Jeremy M. Jacobs: Delaware North's Intrepid Captain Loves 'The Thrill of the Deal'", by Paul King, Nation's Restaurant News, January 27, 1997.)

And there's the rub. "Exploit the natural assets." "Improve facilities." "...gives the concessionaire a little more freedom in the park in exchange for a higher percentage of revenue returned to the Park."

Defining the visitor experience is the first step in deciding what facilities are needed. There is a direct correlation between facilities and revenue generation; the concessionaire claims to want to "improve facilities" (which of course facilitates higher prices and increased profits), but the question should be does the Park even need those facilities. Once upon a time there was a goal that "visitors can step into Yosemite and find nature uncluttered by piecemeal stumbling blocks of commercialism, machines, and fragments of suburbia" (1980 GMP). Do swimming pools, pizza parlors, bars/liquor outlets, gift shops, equipment sales/rentals, 22-bay bus depot with expanded restaurant seating, never ending streams of buses, in-room TV, RV hook-ups, etc. contribute to the uniqueness of Yosemite Valley or are they intrusive "fragments of suburbia"? What is the base level of services to be provided in the Valley and what is the base level of employees required? Each employee needs housing, food, water, parking place, HR services and more, requiring an increased development footprint while adding to the capacity in the park. At present, it appears that 80% of the development footprint in the Valley is in support of the 20% of visitors who stay overnight in the park.

A resort is usually privately owned and challenges the manager to design activities that will enable the enterprise to stay in business. Resorts are not subsidized by the taxpayer but must generate their own revenue based on what the market will bear; if visitors don't come, the resort goes under. National parks are publicly funded by taxpayers and owned by the American people; regardless of the number of visitors, the parks will always be funded. Transforming our national parks into concessionaire resorts creates inherent conflicts of interest ranging from capacity issues to preservation to revenue generation. What do Bracebridge Dinners at \$300, Chef's Holidays, Vintner Holidays, etc. have to do with the central mission of a national park—other than increase revenue for the concessionaire. Why is Yosemite promoted as a place to hold conferences—other than to increase revenue for the concessionaire. And all the while the increased level of services, employees, and infrastructure required to support such resort-style activities takes its toll in wear and tear on Park resources—frequently during the off-season when the Park needs time to regenerate from busy summer use. If a visitor is desirous of resort-style services and activities, there are facilities in the gateways outside the Park that can accommodate that lifestyle. The interpretation of legislation that declares that the concessionaire must be allowed to make a reasonable net profit needs to be reexamined; acquiring one park contract after another, it appears that Delaware North has greatly expanded its influence and is redirecting the mission and policies of the National Park Service toward a more elitist, commercialized, and homogenized experience rather than the more traditional back-to-nature experience associated with a National Park.

2. Camping in Yosemite. There has been a significant public outcry over the 40% reduction by the NPS in family camping opportunities in Yosemite Valley. At the Subcommittee Hearing held in the Park on April 20, 2003, Paul Minault of The Access Fund provided an excellent analysis on the value of camping as a resource-focused activity.

National Park Service management policy is to "encourage visitor activities that . . . foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, park resources and values, or will promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to park resources" Management Policy 2001- 8.2 Visitor Use (emphasis added). In our comments to the Valley Plan, we listed the ways in which camping enhances the visitor experience, furthers park values, and promotes the enjoyment of Yosemite National Park through a direct association with park resources

- *First, we pointed out that camping is a form of recreation, unlike lodging in developed accommodations, which is a form of leisure*

- *Second, camping promotes a closer relationship to park resources than any other form of overnight accommodation.*
- *Third, camping distances the visitor from the commercial values of comfort and convenience and the expression of social status through consumption that pervade American society. Camping brings the visitor closer to nature, the simple necessities of daily life, and the way people lived in the past*
- *Fourth, camping is democratic. In campgrounds, social distinctions account for little, and camping has the potential to bring people together in shared appreciation of their natural surroundings in a manner that reduces social barriers. The nation's great parks present an opportunity to be a force for social equality. Unfortunately, the lodging picture in Yosemite preserves the social distinctions of the greater society, rather than leveling them, which we believe should be a goal of the parks*
- *Fifth, camping is inherently communal. Campers have an enhanced opportunity to associate with other people, develop new relationships, and broaden their social horizons. Unfortunately, the Valley Plan largely ignored these values, with the result that camping suffered the loss of 300 campsites in the Valley. Instead, the park now emphasizes exclusive and expensive lodging over traditional camping accommodations that are more in line with NPS management policies*

Camping and its place in Yosemite have largely been left out of the zoning and visitor experience debates. The Rivers Campgrounds were closed by administrative mandate. Meanwhile, more and more campers are being squeezed into smaller and smaller sites at Upper and Lower Pines Campgrounds creating increased human-bear conflicts, law enforcement conflicts, and greater opportunities for environmental degradation. It's as though the NPS is attempting to create such a negative situation that ultimately it will become the justification to get rid of camping in the Valley altogether—as being more trouble than its worth.

The Rivers Campgrounds as well as North Pines Campground are now lumped into a project misnamed "Ecological Restoration." The area is zoned for Day-Use: *"The Day Use zone enhances opportunities for visitors to enjoy more intensive recreational activities near the Merced River and supports a range of active recreational opportunities such as swimming, picnicking, and rafting, which contributes to the diversity of experiences specified in the recreation Outstandingly Remarkable Value. Visitors can expect moderate to high numbers of encounters with other park users and crowding on certain peak days. Large groups can use these areas." "...due to the larger volume of visitors, the Day Use zone will be managed with moderate tolerance for resource degradation from visitor use in specified areas." "By encouraging higher visitor use in the Day Use zone, adjacent Open Space and*

Discovery zones will experience the desired lower visitor use for these areas" It is not clear how larger volumes of visitors and a moderate tolerance for resource degradation fits with "ecological restoration" and why such a designation is environmentally preferable to a well-designed campground—unless the ONLY motivation is closing the road between the Rivers Campground as part of implementing the busing system, all other things not to be considered. And to add insult to injury, the plans are to remove the bathrooms and ultimately, the utility infrastructure from the area; how can a large volume of visitors be directed to an area with no restroom facilities? We've been told by the NPS that restrooms are available at Housekeeping and Curry; show us the young mother with multiple children who is going to walk a child any distance to a bathroom. The Merced River will become the public toilet.

As alternatives are developed in the new Merced River Plan, we hope that the Park will present choices with respect to the quantity and mix of recreation the land can sustain. Larger campsites? Tent only campsites rather than RV hookups for up to 65' RVs/extra vehicle (why isn't there a length limit considering the fragility of the resources)? Expanded camping opportunities (Rivers, North Pines) but possibly rotating campgrounds annually giving the land an opportunity to recover? Replace Ahwahnee cottages with camping opportunities? Reduce Yosemite Lodge development and replace with camping opportunities? Campers need to be actively involved in the debate as to the role of camping as an integral part of the visitor experience in Yosemite Valley.

4. Social Equity. Any discussion of user capacity, which as defined includes the quantity of recreation an area can sustain without adverse impacts on the quality of the recreation experience, MUST include an in-depth examination of the recreational patterns of low income and non-Anglo populations. According to the Valley Plan, "It is generally believed that low-income and minority visitors to the park are underrepresented in the total visitor population. However, the overnight accommodation and recreation patterns of low income and minority park visitors have not been studied in detail. As a result, the impacts on low-income and minority overnight and day visitors cannot be analyzed quantitatively. It may be assumed that visitation patterns of low-income visitors tend toward the more inexpensive methods: day visits, camping, housekeeping, tent cabin rentals..." And yet with minimal socioeconomic data, the Valley Plan's most significant changes are with respect to day visits, camping, and rustic tent cabin rentals.

The Plan also states "the largest percentage of visitors to Yosemite National Park (26%) have an annual household income greater than \$100,000. The smallest proportion of visitors (5%) have an annual household income of less than \$20,000. By contrast, in the State of California the largest percent of the population (37%) has an annual income below \$20,000. The data illustrate that people from low-income households are largely underrepresented in the population of visitors to Yosemite.. This is true on both a statewide and regional basis."

For example, picnicking is a low-cost, resource-focused activity that can be enjoyed by families of all economic levels. The invalid Merced River Plan zoning closes some popular picnic areas completely while making the remainder only accessible by bus—a major inconvenience for families. In fact, the Valley Plan acknowledges "the style of picnicking is...likely to change for many visitors from car-based (grills, coolers, etc.) to daypack or box lunch picnics, with major adverse impacts. Some visitors might find it more convenient [and costly] to purchase food at food service facilities, losing the picnic experience"

With respect to overnight accommodations (camping/lodging), the Valley Plan touts a reduction of 1,037 opportunities since 1980. Approximately 89% of that reduction is the result of eliminating campsites (470 drive-in sites) and tent cabins (453)—the most affordable (and close to nature) options for spending a night in Yosemite Valley. Meanwhile rustic accommodations at Camp Curry will be upgraded (and more expensive) while plans for new facilities at Yosemite Lodge call for a more upscale experience

As an aside: there was much press with respect to a recent NPS outreach effort to underrepresented populations in the Fresno area encouraging them to visit Yosemite and Sequoia. Though such efforts can be valuable—it would seem that by virtue of what is on tap for Yosemite, outreach in this situation was extremely misleading. The Park is downsizing affordable overnight options, making reservations for what remains that much more difficult to obtain; picnicking appears to be a thing of the past; and the vision for the future involves packing the family onto a bus, all for an additional cost. Though the NPS can surely benefit from such photo-ops as they compete for funds from Congress, was it on the backs of low-income citizens who could truly benefit from a long-lasting relationship with a national park—a park that welcomes them in words AND in actions/policies? (Adding insult to injury, it is disappointing to see the NPS invest critical funds to send Yosemite representatives to a Hong Kong travel expo to recruit high-paying international visitors while Americans who pay taxes to fund the national parks find them increasingly unaffordable.)

As a publicly funded entity, the national parks must serve ALL Americans. It appears that many of the plans and policies now advocated in Yosemite are resulting in economic discrimination—especially for the day visitor. One can't help but recall another Delaware North quote: "I think we would be looking at full-service kinds of parks. I don't think we would be so interested in day-tripper kind of parks." ("A Sharper Focus;" Buffalo News, 10/3/99) By controlling the manner in which day visitors access the Park (buses), separating these visitors from their rolling storage lockers (i.e., their personal vehicle), has the concessionaire found a way to make "day trippers" more profitable? (The Valley Plan acknowledges that bus passengers spend more money.)

Quantitative studies with respect to recreational patterns of low-income and non-Anglo populations are critical to future land-use management zoning and user capacity determinations and should inform any

decisions presented in the new Merced River Plan

...without adverse impacts on public health and safety

1. Geologic Hazards/rockfalls. Any discussion of user capacity also includes discussion of the quantity of recreation use that can be sustained without adverse impacts on public health and safety. Such a discussion should include an in-depth study of rockfalls, talus zones, and shadow zones as they relate to management zoning along the River Corridor. It is irresponsible to dismiss rockfalls as a common occurrence in the Park when geologists are fully aware of areas where the dangers are greatest.

For example, rockfall activity in the vicinity of Glacier Point has been significant over the past several years. Yet the Curry Village EA states that "redevelopment of facilities within the common area of Curry Village (which includes Curry Pavilion, the historic visitor registration, retail facilities, and employee facilities such as housekeeping, maintenance, and employee lounge facilities) would be within the rockfall zone. All of these facilities are considered standard occupancy [nonessential structures], except the Curry Pavilion... The retention of Curry Pavilion in the rockfall zone would result in a local, long-term, moderate, adverse impact to public health and safety." The EA goes on to state that "tent and wood cabins remaining within these hazard zones would continue to be a risk to public health and safety and would remain a local, longterm, moderate, adverse impact to public health and safety." Meanwhile, the Park is moving forward with plans to locate concession employee housing in an area immediately adjacent to the latest rockfall activity last Christmas.

In a narrow valley where nearly all land is classified as a highly valued resource, it would seem that any structure determined to be "nonessential" should be removed altogether. But that would impact the concessionaire's "right" to make a net profit—yet it is unconscionable to place profit ahead of safety. Again, the discussion reverts back to defining the visitor experience in a national park. At the very least, detailed, updated rockfall studies should occur throughout the Valley and be coupled with development of user capacity requirements (which explicitly state no adverse impact on public health and safety) in advance of any management zoning decisions.

2. Evacuation/Emergency Plans. East Yosemite Valley is a box canyon. User capacity determination is directly related to health and safety should a major emergency occur. Plans to bus untold numbers of visitors into a box canyon, plans to close Northside Drive and convert Southside Drive to a 2-way, plans to close the road between the Rivers Campgrounds, plans to overnight concentrated numbers of visitors in the easternmost, least accessible part of the Valley (campgrounds, RV loops, employee housing, and Curry Village)—all directly impact the ability of the Park to evacuate huge numbers of visitors in a very short period of time. User capacity must be considered in concert with management zoning to ensure the safety of visitors in an emergency situation.

Transportation Component

Both the invalid Merced River Plan and the tiering Yosemite Valley Plan (invalid?) support and implement the NPS vision of converting the Valley from auto-touring to mass transit tourism.

The foundational element of transportation system design is user capacity. In a recently released (11/15/02) report, "National Park Service: Opportunities to Improve the Administration of the Alternative Transportation Program," a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation substantiated that each NPS busing proposal is supposed to address non-construction alternatives (i.e., simple remedies such as traffic management that would not involve road widening/realignment, bus depots, etc.). Additionally, each proposal must mandate park capacity data (i.e., user capacity) to guarantee that a bus won't bring in more people than what the user capacity will allow.

Returning to the basic definition of user capacity as the quantity of recreation which an area can sustain without adverse impact on 1) the outstandingly remarkable values and the free-flowing character of the river area, 2) the quality of the recreation experience, and 3) public health and safety—the concept of

mass transit tourism adversely impacts all three

With respect to the outstandingly remarkable values and the free-flowing character of the river area—already irreparable environmental damage has been done with the widening and realignment of El Portal Road and the cutting of hundreds of trees in anticipation of the realignment of Northside Drive. More damage would occur with the widening and realignment of Segment D, Southside Drive as well as the construction of a 22-bay transit center followed by other changes in infrastructure required to accommodate 500 roundtrip shuttles daily during peak season, one arriving every 1.4 minutes (per YVP)—more asphalt pavement, more sprawl parkwide, more crowding. The radiating impacts of busload after busload of visitors loading/unloading as well as overwhelming stops along the shuttle route, not to mention the LAX-style congestion at the transit center, will result in trampling and further environmental degradation. The Park has already allowed a despicably oversized bus stop structure adjacent to Yosemite Falls—clearly not in keeping with the 'scenic' ORV—to accommodate increased bus traffic to the Falls (or so that's how it's being rationalized). As stated in a 1994 Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study: "potentially higher levels of particulate and nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions would be generated by high volumes of bus travel on park roads;" "increased noise levels on park roads and in the Valley would be associated with high volumes of bus travel." Those facts are validated in the Yosemite Valley Plan. So many negatives—and still the vision of mandatory busing lives on. Since the concept of busing was originally proposed in the '70s, a host of environmental regulations have ensued targeting vehicle emissions. It makes no sense to replace cleaner cars with oversized dirty buses—buses that will only amplify the noise, the smell, and the glare, qualities that the 1980 GMP sought to reduce. With responsible traffic management solutions coupled with user capacity determination informing management zoning decisions—the entire issue of busing needs to be reexamined from an environmental perspective based on facts.

The adverse impacts of mass transit tourism on the quality of the visitor experience are well documented. "Because of the serious drawbacks of remote staging for valley access," the 1994 Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study discarded the concept as a viable option because "the cost, visitor confusion, visitor delay, information challenges, and management difficulties associated with operating remote valley staging areas would be substantial. In return, the benefits would be minor, consisting of moderate decreases in vehicle traffic along sections of park road that are not congested. Perhaps the greatest drawback of remote staging would be the loss of visitors' personal freedom to experience portions of Yosemite at their own pace and in their own way." As far back as the 1988 "Feasibility Study Relating to Increased Bus Traffic in Yosemite," then-Superintendent John Morehead warned Congress that "increasing the number of...buses in the park would increase the number of bus passengers who represent an older, slightly wealthier, and a non-family unit, and would cause a resulting decrease in the number of traditional families, especially those with children, who rely upon an automobile to travel." Additionally, the Yosemite Valley Plan and subsequent project EAs document at great length the adverse impact busing will have on the quality of recreation experience for day visitors. The entire issue of busing needs to be reexamined from a visitor experience perspective.

And finally, as discussed above—there are emergency concerns with respect to mass transit tourism from both an evacuation perspective as well as a single accident perspective. A bus going over an embankment can require life-or-death medical attention for 40 or more people all at one time. What, if any, medical facilities are available in the gateway communities or the Park to handle large numbers of people; are there airlift capabilities beyond 1 or 2 helicopters; how many ambulances are available; will emergency vehicles even be able to access an accident competing for space on 2-lane mountain roads.

Additional Comments

1. There needs to be a clear and objective methodology used to determine user capacity and how those decisions relate to management zoning and ultimately the guaranteed protection of the ORVs.
2. Decisions made by the Park concerning user capacity also affect the surrounding gateway communities. Once user capacity in the Valley has been determined, the new Merced River Plan should also include an analysis as to how those numbers differ from historical visitor use as well as the socioeconomic impact on the surrounding region. Whether it's 10 million visitors or 3

million visitors—all must travel through one of the four corridors into the park, utilizing the services and infrastructure (e.g., water and sewer) within the gateway communities. The Park has a responsibility to evaluate prospective policy changes in light of how those changes might actually advance sprawl and environmental degradation outside its boundaries. Should buses become the primary mode of access to the Park, counties will be "forced" to consider infrastructure changes from the standpoint of road safety and maintenance, economic survival, fire and emergency measures as well as other perspectives. Local communities and governments need to be intimately involved in the decision-making process as adjacent Federal land use policy is developed.

3. There is significant focus on the Merced River as it flows through Yosemite Valley. An equal amount of energy must be focused on the South Fork of the Merced River as it flows through Wawona. Of particular concern is the large maintenance yard within the River Protection Overlay as well as plans for employee housing within the river corridor. Are NPS decisions directly responsible for advancing commercial sprawl and environmental degradation within the historical community of Wawona?
4. Though many planning team members who developed the invalid Merced River Plan have been promoted or transferred to other parks, there is concern that the previous project manager Amy Schneckeburger has been assigned to direct this new planning effort. Additionally, her husband Mike Reynolds will be intimately involved as Park Planning Program Manager. Meanwhile, Mike is the son of retired Pacific Regional Director, John Reynolds. We recall the statement by John Reynolds as he testified at the March 27, 2001 subcommittee hearing in Washington, DC: "... I have been, as you know, involved in the planning and decision making for the Yosemite Valley for 25 years." It would appear there exists the possibility of multiple conflicts of interest—especially with the "legacy" of John Reynolds seemingly in the mix. Development of the new and improved Merced River Plan needs a planning team with the freedom to take a fresh and unbiased approach to enacting the mandated full protection for the Merced River corridor.
5. Scoping meetings were only held in the Bay Area (1) and in Mariposa County along Highway 140 (2). Even scoping meetings for the invalid River Plan held in 1999 were only in the Bay Area (1), Modesto (1), and Mariposa County (4). It would seem that for a Park of national significance developing a plan of this magnitude, that a more concerted effort would be made to host scoping meetings in locations more representative of the state of California. At the very least, Southern California should have received consideration.
6. We have grave concerns with respect to how narrowly and isolated the Park Service has interpreted the "scope" of scoping as opposed to the Appeals Court ruling.

"The Court's decision upheld the other elements of the plan, including boundaries for other segments of the river; classifications for all river segments; Outstandingly Remarkable Values; the River Protection Overlay; the Section 7 determination process, and the plan's management zoning program. As a result, these five elements are not being revisited in the SEIS." (official NPS press release)

Yet, according to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals:

"While we remanded to the district court to enter an appropriate order requiring the [National Park Service] to remedy these deficiencies [user capacity and El Portal area boundaries] in the CMP [Merced River Plan] in a timely manner, id. At 803, we did not 'otherwise uphold the [CMP].'"

Even if public comments result in a broadening of the scope, the public has already been confined in their thinking by virtue of the park releases. We urge the Park planning team to reevaluate the scope of this planning effort and that any broadening of that effort be included in an extension of the scoping comment period.

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7. Recently, the NPS approved Director's Order 75-A (11/14/02 to 11/14/07), Civic Engagement and Public Involvement. According to the document: "This DO will clarify and strengthen our commitment to legally required public involvement." "Public involvement (also called public participation) is the active involvement of the public in NPS planning and decision-making processes. Public involvement is a process that occurs on a continuum that ranges from providing information and building awareness, to partnering in decision-making. The NPS role is to provide opportunities for the public to be involved in meaningful ways, to listen to their concerns, values, and preferences, and to consider these in shaping our decisions and policies."

We challenge the Park planning team to depart from "business as usual" and incorporate opportunities for ALL stakeholders to actively participate in scoping, planning, decision-making, and monitoring with respect to developing and implementing a plan that will truly protect the Merced River and Yosemite

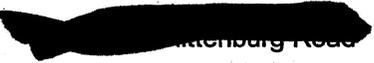
In closing, we're including an excerpt from "Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness," by Alfred Runte:

For Yosemite to remain distinctive, management must practice—not just preach—those forms of behavior ensuring that distinctiveness. Every landscape shared differences; few rose to such uniqueness. That uniqueness, in 1864, allowed Americans to herald Yosemite as a symbol of national pride. ...the gift of preservation is still essential to every future opportunity. Each succeeding generation, like Yosemite's first, must pass the park along, "inalienable for all time." Yosemite is too important to be just another place. Civilization has many undeniable advantages, yet even the most inventive civilization has never built a Yosemite. Yosemite by every imaginable standard is one of a kind. In that perception, and no other, lie the only tried and true principles for guiding the future of the park's natural heritage.

We call on the planning team to seize this opportunity to develop a new and improved Merced River Plan that will establish the foundation for truly protecting the Merced River Corridor and Yosemite Setting politics aside and putting protection of Yosemite first, *this* planning team can leave no greater legacy.

Sincerely,

Jeanne and Lou Aceto


Oakhurst, CA 93644

cc: Supervisor Gary Gilbert, Madera County-District 5

U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, California

U.S. Representative George Radanovich, California-19th District