

Yosemite National Park

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visit us on the web at www.nps.gov/yose/planning



PARTICIPANT GUIDE: PLANNING IN TUOLUMNE

Initial questions and issues for public consideration for the

*Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan
& Tuolumne Meadows Plan /
Environmental Impact Statement*

Summer 2006





AN INTRODUCTION TO *TUOLUMNE*

Here the mountains seem to have been cleared away or set back, so that wide-open views may be had in every direction.... This is the most spacious and delightful high pleasure-ground I have yet seen. The air is keen and bracing, yet warm during the day; and though lying high in the sky, the surrounding mountains are so much higher, one feels protected as if in a grand hall.

---John Muir, describing Tuolumne Meadows in *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1868)

Blanketed in deep snow and solitude for most of the year, Tuolumne Meadows transforms in the summer into John Muir's idyllic mountain retreat and an outpost to High Sierra wilderness.

Many people have been drawn to these broad, subalpine meadows. American Indians have camped and traveled through for thousands of years. Their bedrock mortars and obsidian chips are scattered across the landscape. Since 1852, miners, shepherders, U.S. Cavalry, Chinese laborers, researchers, artists, naturalists, hikers, climbers, and many others have also stayed a while or traveled through.

In 1869, John Muir walked a flock of sheep from the western foothills to this summer meadow range and fell in love with the place. Twenty years later, he and Robert Underwood Johnson conceived the idea of Yosemite National Park over a campfire at Soda Springs.

Generations of visitors continue to return summer after summer. For many, a year is not complete without a trip to the meadows, the river, and the surrounding mountains.

All these people and their stories are woven into this place, like the overlapping voices in an orchestral piece—or, better yet, the Tuolumne River that winds through these meadows.

Planning for the Tuolumne area is now underway. The two plans in process, the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan and the Tuolumne Meadows Plan, will define the area for years to come. Share your passion for this place by helping to shape its future.

How to Use this Guide

On the pages that follow you will find background information on some of the issues and concerns that may be addressed in the plans, presented in a question-and-answer format. *Many of these questions do not have answers*—they are there for you to “fill in the blanks” with your ideas, impressions, concerns, and knowledge. This is the beginning of the process, and this document is meant as an informational resource and an instrument to provoke thought and discussion. Your comments and ideas will help flesh out these issues as the process unfolds.

The document is organized into the following sections:

1. Schedule of Meetings (page 3)
2. How to Get Involved (pages 4-5)
3. Tuolumne Planning Basics (pages 6-10)
4. Tuolumne Environment (page 11)
5. Visitor Use (page 12)



SCHEDULE of MEETINGS

CALENDAR OF PUBLIC SCOPING EVENTS for the Tuolumne River Plan and Tuolumne Meadows Plan

All meetings will be held from 4pm to 8pm unless otherwise noted.

Wednesday, July 12 Modesto

Modesto Jr College West Campus
Student Center Lounge
(2201 Blue Gum Ave)

Thursday, July 13 San Francisco

Fort Mason, 1st Floor Conf Room
Building 201
(Bay & Franklin Streets)

JULY

Tuesday, July 18 Tuolumne Meadows

Parsons Memorial
Lodge

Wednesday, July 19 Lee Vining

Lee Vining
Community Center
(296 Mattly Ave)

Wednesday, July 26 Yosemite Valley

Visitor Center
Auditorium
1pm to 5pm

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

AUGUST

Monday, August 7 Mariposa

Mariposa Government
Center
(5100 Bullion Street)

Thursday, August 17 Groveland

Groveland Library
(18990 State Hwy 120)

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	28	29	30			

Monday, August 14 Oakhurst

Oakhurst Community Center
(Road 425-B)

Tuesday, August 15 Sonora

Columbia College
(11600 Columbia College Drive)



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Why is commenting important?

Although park planners and resource managers often have very specialized knowledge of an area, it would be impossible for them to know all the issues of importance to the hundreds of thousands of visitors to that area — this information needs to come from the visitors themselves. Park plans are more thorough because of the members of the public who have chosen to participate in them... **one comment CAN make a difference.**

What is my role in the planning process?

Public comments are sought for major planning efforts to help identify the range of issues that should be addressed. Public scrutiny of proposed actions helps to ensure that actions are consistent with the National Park Service mission, enabling legislation, and other relevant laws and policies.

Each planning process provides at least two formal opportunities for the public to become involved, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act. First, when a planning effort is announced, public scoping takes place. At that time, the public is asked to raise issues and concerns to help park staff identify issues to be addressed. The questions and issues presented in this document serve only as a starting point; we encourage you to add your own.

Once a draft document is released, the public is provided the opportunity to examine sets of proposals (known as “alternatives”) and submit comments. The comments are then analyzed and often contribute to revisions in the final plan.

At Yosemite, we are also working to provide more opportunities for engagement throughout the planning process, through public meetings, the Internet, and monthly public Open Houses. For the Tuolumne process, there will be a new series of hands-on workshops after public scoping (when the planning team is working to develop plan alternatives), where the public will be asked to become park planners for a day. This new opportunity is being developed in response to the public’s desire to participate more during this stage of plan development.

When is public scoping for the Tuolumne plans?

Public scoping will be held through late August. This deadline will be set for 60 days after the notice is published in the *Federal Register*. This notice—and the resulting deadline date—will be published on the park’s website (www.nps.gov/yoseiplanning).

What kind of scoping comments are most useful?

This beginning stage involves fact-finding, information gathering, and uncovering all the various issues that will need to be addressed in planning for the future of Tuolumne. Anything that helps define the scope of that process will be useful. In particular, consider the following:

What do you love about the Tuolumne River and Tuolumne Meadows?

What do you do while you’re there?

What would you like to see protected?

What kind of services or facilities would you like to see offered, improved or removed?



HOW TO GET INVOLVED

What happens to my scoping comment once I submit it?

Public comments made during scoping directly inform the draft plan. Park staff are continually reviewing your comments as they work to define the scope of what the plan will cover and develop alternatives to address the issues. Overviews of comments are often a formal part of planning meetings; at times comments are even posted during those meetings, so that the public concerns are a constant presence and an active part of the discussion.

As a formal part of the planning process, National Park Service staff reads and analyzes all comments submitted, and written responses are developed to overall concerns. The park's Management Team reviews and evaluates all responses, which will be available once the draft plan is released. Comment letters will also be posted on the park's website (www.nps.gov/yose/planning).

Will I get to see other people's comments?

We encourage all those who are interested and able to attend one of our public meetings and participate in discussions with other members of the public. Additionally, all comments received will be published on the park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/planning.

How can I get more information?

For more information on park plans and how you can stay involved, visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/planning. You can also subscribe to the *Planning Update* newsletter and/or the electronic newsletter by contacting us through any of the means listed below.

How do I submit comments?

You can submit comments by the following means:

- in person at Open Houses and public meetings
- by email to yose_planning@nps.gov
- by fax to (209) 379-1294
- or by mail to:

Superintendent
Yosemite National Park
Attn: Tuolumne Planning
PO Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389





TUOLUMNE PLANNING BASICS

Why plan in Tuolumne?

Without planning, the future of this exceptional area is left to reactive, piecemeal management measures to respond to the growing pressures and effects of human activity. A plan is an opportunity to develop and implement a vision for the future of Tuolumne that integrates protection of special areas with the appropriate types, levels and locations of visitor and park operations activities.

Two factors contribute to the timing of this planning effort. First, the National Park Service is mandated by Congress to create a management plan for the Wild and Scenic River corridor. Second, there are facilities issues (such as an aging sewer system) and resource issues (such as trampling in the meadow) that need attention in the area of Tuolumne Meadows. Before making the decision to repair, restore, upgrade, or remove infrastructure, the National Park Service is looking to the public to provide input into defining the management goals for the area. This way, all of the on-the-ground issues that are calling for attention can be decided with a larger vision in mind.

What kind of planning is taking place in Tuolumne?

Two plans will be developed for the Tuolumne area: 1) a comprehensive management plan for the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River ("Tuolumne River Plan"), and 2) an implementation plan for Tuolumne Meadows ("Tuolumne Meadows Plan"). Alternatives and ultimate decisions for both will result from an Environmental Impact Statement that evaluates the benefits and drawbacks of different management approaches, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act.

What is a Wild and Scenic River?

During the 1960s, the citizens of the United States recognized a need to protect entire river systems and their immediate environments from degradation caused by industrial and municipal pollution, pesticides, dams, dikes, and diversions. In October 1968, Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System through the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The designation of a river as Wild and Scenic is intended to preserve the character of a river, allowing for uses that are compatible with the management goals of the river so long as they do not compromise its free flow and its unique and exceptional characteristics.

What is the difference between the Tuolumne River Plan and the Tuolumne Meadows Plan?

The purpose of the Tuolumne River Plan is to establish the overall goals and vision for the river corridor. It will provide broad, conceptual-level management objectives that may amend the park's *General Management Plan* for the river corridor. The Tuolumne River Plan will NOT discuss the specifics of how to implement these goals; rather, these types of strategies will need to be developed either through implementation-level plans or on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate.

The Tuolumne Meadows Plan is an implementation-level plan. Thoroughly informed by the vision established in the Tuolumne River Plan, it will describe and map on a much more specific level the types, levels and locations of visitor services and facilities to be offered in the vicinity of Tuolumne Meadows, as well as delineate which areas should be targeted for restoration.





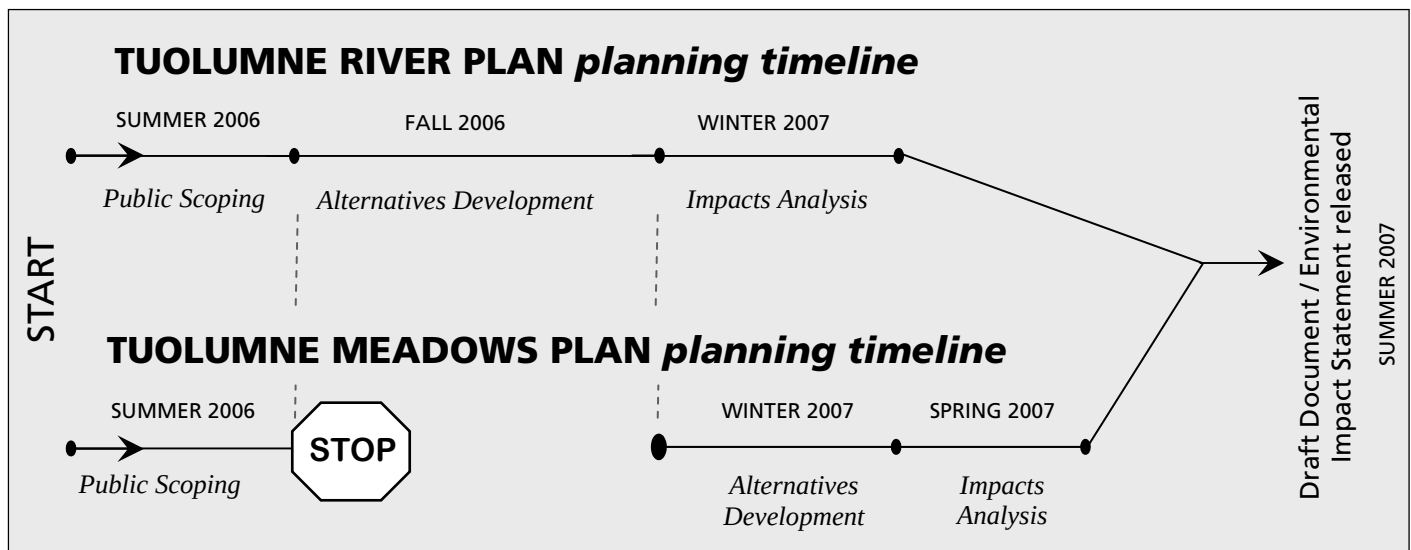
TUOLUMNE PLANNING BASICS

How do the processes for the Tuolumne River Plan and Tuolumne Meadows Plan plans relate?

The decisions made in both of these plans will be informed by the ideas, values and priorities for the Tuolumne area expressed by those members of the public who choose to participate in the process. Public scoping for these plans will be conducted concurrently to capitalize on people's participation and the natural overlap of ideas on these subjects.

Because the Tuolumne River Plan provides the broader vision for the entire river corridor, elements of it will precede specific planning for the Meadows. It will then be used to guide the decisions made by the implementation-level Tuolumne Meadows Plan. Once public scoping is finished, the Tuolumne River Plan will move forward and alternatives will be developed for elements such as management zones and user capacity (more information on these elements follows). Once these are complete, the Tuolumne Meadows Plan will be develop alternative approaches to management of the meadows area based on the guidance established in the Tuolumne River Plan management zone alternatives.

The draft planning document and Environmental Impact Statement will include the alternatives developed through both of these planning processes; that is, everything will be included in one document.



Once the draft plans and Environmental Impact Statement are completed, they will be presented to the public for comments and suggestions (summer 2007). These ideas will then be used to revise the draft, which will then be released as a final plan and Environmental Impact Statement in 2008.





TUOLUMNE PLANNING BASICS

What is a Comprehensive Management Plan?

One of the stipulations of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is that a management plan must be developed for each river in the system. The main goals of the management plan are to:

- Maintain the free-flowing condition of the river, and
- Protect and enhance what the Act calls the river's "outstandingly remarkable values."

The Act also states that the management plan must establish the following, which will all be a part of the Tuolumne River Plan:

- Desired conditions
- River corridor boundaries and classifications, based on the level of development at the time of designation
- A user capacity program
- Section 7 Determination Process (a process for assuring that projects within the bed and banks of the river protect the river's free-flowing condition)

What is an outstandingly remarkable value?

Outstandingly remarkable values (or ORVs) are defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as the unique, specifically river-related characteristics that make a river stand apart from all other rivers in the country. Along with preserving the free-flowing character of a river, these values are what drive the process for designating a Wild and Scenic River. They are the superlative qualities—recreational, biological, cultural, scenic, hydrologic, geologic, scientific—that will be protected for the benefit of present and future generations. Along with possessing a free-flowing character, a waterway need only contain one such river-related value to be eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation.

How is an Outstandingly Remarkable Value defined?

ORVs for the Tuolumne River were first outlined in the 1979 during the Wild and Scenic designation process for the river. Since then, interagency guidance regarding the criteria for establishing ORVs has changed. The current guidance states that in order for a river to be considered an ORV, it must pass a two-pronged test:

- 1) Is the value river-related or river-dependent? (i.e. does it owe its existence to the river?), and
- 2) Is the value rare, unique, or exemplary in a regional or national context?

In order to be considered an ORV, a value **MUST** satisfy both questions.

In keeping with this new guidance, the ORVs first established in the 1979 report will be refined through the Tuolumne River Plan process. One of the first steps taken in defining Outstandingly Remarkable Values for the Tuolumne River area has been to consult with government specialists—biologists, hydrologists, geologists, archeologists, landscape architects, recreation managers and others from National Park Service staff and other agencies—to identify what, from their perspective, is unique or exemplary about the area. At the same time, local Indian tribes have been consulted to ensure that their traditional cultural sites are taken into account in the ORV identification process. This has resulted in the Draft ORV Report available during the scoping period.

This is labeled *draft* because it is only a starting point. Park planners and resource experts have valuable, specialized knowledge of the area, but it cannot substitute for the collective knowledge and experience of the thousands of visitors to the area. In developing the Tuolumne ORVs, the National Park Service is turning to you to participate in identifying those river-related sites, activities and attributes that should be protected in the plan. Letting us know what value about Tuolumne—including recreational activities as well as natural and cultural features of the area—will help make the management plan truly comprehensive. **What river-related values are important to you?**



TUOLUMNE PLANNING BASICS

How do the two plans relate to the park's Wilderness Management Plan?

Much of the area around the Tuolumne River is federally designated as Wilderness and, as such, it falls under the park's Wilderness Management Plan. Like the Tuolumne Meadows Plan, the Wilderness Management Plan is an implementation plan. It directs specific projects as well as ongoing management activities. The general guidance and direction for the Wilderness Management Plan currently come from the park's *General Management Plan*, the Wilderness Act of 1964, and National Park Service policy. When the Wilderness Management Plan is updated in a few years, it will also be informed by the new guidance and direction established by the Tuolumne River Plan.

While the Tuolumne Meadows Plan will be focused primarily on the immediate non-wilderness part of the Tuolumne Meadows area, it will have some effect on wilderness. For example, if decisions are made about the size of parking lots in the Tuolumne Meadows Plan, activities and levels of use in the adjoining wilderness could be affected. **What other wilderness issues can you identify that would be relevant to the Tuolumne planning process?**

What is User Capacity?

In managing user capacity (also referred to as carrying capacity) the National Park Service is managing the effects of human activity upon an area, minimizing impacts to the resources while still providing for a quality visitor experience. Certain impacts—for example, trampled vegetation in a sensitive habitat as a result of frequent off-trail use—may cross the threshold of being acceptable; when that point is reached, park managers must take action to change that pattern of use or find some other way to protect the resource.

However, in order to determine what is or is not an acceptable impact, the *desired condition* of the area must first be defined. Questions such as the following are considered in defining the vision for an area:

- What level of protection do natural and cultural features and processes require? How sensitive are they to the effects of human activity? What areas are in need of restoration?
- Are facilities such as stores, lodges, and/or campgrounds needed for the area? In what locations and at what size? Do facilities currently exist that should be removed?
- What kind of visitor experience should this area provide? Is it more suited to a solitary experience, or would it be acceptable to encounter many other visitors in this environment?

Taken as a whole, the answers to these questions will then be used to guide decisions related to visitor activities, location of facilities, and other capacity-related issues.

An area with its own set of desired conditions is also referred to as a "management zone." For example, the desired conditions for a particular wilderness zone might be a solitary visitor experience, largely undisturbed habitat conditions, and little human development. In contrast, the desired conditions in other zones may provide for visitor services or park operations, complete with facilities and some acceptable level of environmental impact.

Managing visitor and operational activities so that these desired conditions are achieved is at the core of managing user capacity. This type of process includes monitoring actual conditions to see if they match the desired conditions. When they do not, managers must take appropriate actions to correct the situation. In the National Park Service, this process is referred to as "VERP," the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection program.

As a first step toward defining and managing user capacity in these areas, please consider the following:

What kind of environmental conditions and recreational activities you would like to see for various areas along the river and in Tuolumne Meadows?



TUOLUMNE PLANNING BASICS

Will the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir and the O'Shaughnessy Dam be addressed as a part of the Tuolumne River Plan?

The section of the Tuolumne River that contains the reservoir and dam was not included as part of the 1984 Wild and Scenic designation by Congress (it was ineligible under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, since it did not meet the criteria of being free-flowing). Therefore it will not be included in the Tuolumne River Plan. The six miles of river below the dam are a part of the Wild and Scenic river designation, and will be addressed in the plan.

While the Wild and Scenic designation does not include the reservoir, the Raker Act of 1913 provides sanitary regulations for the reservoir's watershed. In order to meet their common management objectives, the National Park Service and the City of San Francisco jointly manage the area and work as partners to keep the watershed pristine and provide recreational opportunities for visitors.

What role do Indian Tribes have in the planning process?

Indian people have inhabited lands now encompassed by Yosemite National Park for thousands of years. The foundations of their cultural heritage are grounded in park resources. On-going cultural traditional practices and religious ceremonies perpetuate traditional knowledge about resource uses and management. Plan management and use strategies can be informed by American Indian participation in the planning process.

What role do gateway communities have in the planning process?

Gateway Communities are those communities that surround the park and serve as entryways for visitors. Tourism is an important driver in these communities' economies. As a result, they have a vested interest in how issues within the park are managed. Likewise, the park is dependent on these communities to serve park-bound visitors and enhance their experience. Together the park and its neighbors must address such trans-boundary issues such as transportation, fire management and invasive species management.

While it is the National Park Service's responsibility to address and incorporate to the extent possible all public concerns in a planning process, it recognizes the special relationship that exists between a park and its immediate neighbors. For this reason the Tuolumne plans will include a socioeconomic analysis of the impacts of its alternatives on these communities. The economic profiles and subsequent analysis of these areas will be developed in a joint effort between the National Park Service, the non-profit Sonoran Institute, and gateway community representatives.





TUOLUMNE ENVIRONMENT

What is outstanding about the natural environment in the Tuolumne area?

In preparing the *Draft ORV Report* for the Tuolumne River corridor, park managers, scientists, partners from other agencies, and tribe members identified many characteristics related to the area that are outstanding and merit special protection. They include: meadow habitat and dynamics; soundscape; geology and landscape formations; biology; dark night sky; and snowpack dynamics. More information on all of these can be found in the draft report. However, your thoughts and feedback are needed in the process. **What do you find outstanding about the natural environment in the Tuolumne area?**

What is unique about the cultural environment in the Tuolumne area?

The Tuolumne area has been a crossroads for thousands of years and is infused with history and significance. The *Draft ORV Report* identifies many cultural values, including: American Indian traditional uses; historic districts; archaeological sites; and cultural landscapes. However, once again, your input is needed to make this list complete. **What do you find outstanding about the cultural environment in the Tuolumne area? How would you describe the current culture of Tuolumne?**

What resource issues need to be addresses as a part of the Tuolumne planning process?

Here are a few issues we anticipate will need special consideration in the planning process. *However, this list is neither exhaustive nor set in stone.* It is meant only to initiate thought and comment; we are looking to you for input.

- Ecological restoration
- Lodgepole pine encroachment
- Invasive plants
- Stock-use impacts
- Nitrogen deposition
- Meadow health
- Water withdrawal
- Rare and special-status species

- Impacts to river processes
- Vista management
- Resource monitoring
- Human/wildlife interface
- Habitat protection
- Ecosystem integrity
- Cultural landscape degradation





VISITOR USE

Why are we looking at visitor activities in Tuolumne Meadows?

Tuolumne Meadows is a popular destination and experiences heavy day use in the summer. Ease of access to the Yosemite Wilderness makes Tuolumne Meadows a major “jump off point” for hikers, backpackers and stock users. In addition, the Tioga Road provides a travel corridor across the Sierra Nevada which funnels hundreds of thousands of park visitors through Tuolumne Meadows annually.

As with any human activity, all of these uses have an impact to the environment. The Tuolumne Meadows plan must strike the balance between the activities that occur in the area and those features of the natural or cultural environment in need of protection. **What activities do you think are appropriate for the Meadows area? What are the impacts of these activities?**

What will happen to facilities in the Tuolumne area?

The heart of the Tuolumne Meadows Plan process will be to reexamine the “footprint” of human development in the meadows, and based on what services are decided to be appropriate there, to redesign the layout. This may result in the removal or addition of certain facilities. Some of the facilities under consideration will be employee housing; maintenance facilities (including stock operations, water collection and waste water treatment facilities, and storage and staging areas); and the Tuolumne Meadows Visitor Center, Campground, Store, Grill, Mountaineering Shop and Gas Station. In addition, day use and overnight parking will need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner for the Tuolumne Meadows area. **What facilities would you like to see added, rehabilitated, relocated or removed in the Tuolumne Meadows area? Why? Where should they go? What are the impacts of these decisions?**

Will the Tuolumne plans affect the High Sierra Camps?

The Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp and the Tuolumne Lodge are both within the Tuolumne River corridor. The Tuolumne River Plan will provide general guidance about visitor facilities in the river corridor, which will inform decisions about the scope and appropriateness of the camps. The Wilderness Management Plan will implement this guidance for Glen Aulin, which falls inside designated wilderness. The Tuolumne Meadows Plan will implement it for Tuolumne Lodge. **What is your vision for the High Sierra Camps?**

When is a picnic table not just a picnic table?

For every visible park activity, there are less visible issues and impacts. For instance, for every parking space or picnic table added to an area, services such as bathrooms—and in turn, the sewer infrastructure needed to support them—need to be considered.

The sewer infrastructure and treatment plant for the Tuolumne area is currently over thirty years old, and sections are in need of repair or replacement. However, before this type of action is taken, decisions must be made on what type, level and location of park operations and visitor use should be supported—an answer which will be determined through the Tuolumne River Plan. The Tuolumne Meadows Plan will then address the specifics of a facility.

Other examples of less visible impacts that need to be considered are parking, traffic congestion, and trash removal. Decisions need to be made on what kinds of activities are appropriate for a given area, but all the effects of those activities and the infrastructure needed to support them need to be considered first. **What other “hidden issues” can you identify that will need to be considered?**