



Restoration of the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias

Yosemite National Park celebrated the sesquicentennial anniversary of the protection of the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley on June 30, 2014, by kicking off a bold restoration project that will prepare the Grove for its next 150 years of inspiring visitors. The Mariposa Grove restoration project aims to restore ecological processes and improve the visitor experience. In June or July 2015, the project will enter a new phase that will require the temporary closure of the Grove for up to 24 months.

The Mariposa Grove

The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, the largest of three relict groves within Yosemite National Park, contains approximately 500 mature giant sequoia trees. Giant sequoias are an iconic species, being among the rarest, oldest and largest living organisms in the world. The big trees so inspired early visitors that in 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, Congress passed landmark legislation to permanently preserve both the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley “for public use, resort, and recreation” and were the first federally protected scenic areas in the country.

Preparing for the Future

The Mariposa Grove restoration project aims to restore dynamic ecological processes and increase the resiliency of this treasured grove to withstand emerging stressors such as climate change and altered fire regimes. The last 150 years of human intervention in the Grove has been brief in comparison to the lifespan of the giants, but during this time, development within the Grove has had a profound impact on their vitality. Likewise, the timeframe for the restoration project is relatively brief, but it too can have a profound impact—this time, in catalyzing regeneration and enhancing the long-term resiliency of the giant sequoias.

The Plan

Highlights of the plan include:

- Restoring giant sequoia and associated wetland habitat.
- Constructing a transit hub at the South Entrance which will allow for the relocation of the current parking area from the Grove.
- Adding shuttle service between the South Entrance and the lower Grove area during peak use periods.
- Building accessible trails to allow for improved access without impacting the sequoia trees and other sensitive areas.
- Restoring natural hydrology.

This plan also enhances protection for a special status species, the Pacific fisher, which is affected by vehicles in the vicinity. The plan also reduces traffic congestion and improves the visitor experience by establishing a new parking and transportation hub near the South Entrance station that includes a visitor contact area with information and orientation to the Grove. During peak season, visitors will park and travel the two miles to the Grove by shuttle bus or hike on a new trail. Accessible pathways will be

constructed within the lower Grove and Grizzly Giant areas, and will include new signs and displays to interpret the story of the giant sequoias.

The Work So Far

Yosemite National Park began developing a plan in 2010, including preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS), to restore giant sequoia habitat within the Mariposa Grove. During the summer of 2014 crews conducted wildlife surveys. In fall 2014 trail crews made accessibility improvements on the trail near the Grizzly Giant and the California Tunnel trees. Crews also began repairing historic masonry at Wawona Point. Preparation for a new leach field began near the South Entrance. Ecologists collected seeds and plants for future restoration work. The Mariposa Grove remained open while this work occurred.

Next Steps

While the park is striving to accomplish as much of the restoration work as possible while the Mariposa Grove is open to visitors, some of the work will require closing the Grove for visitor safety. Heavy equipment will be needed to remove roads that are affecting the hydrology. Improvements to the access road and the construction of a bypass road around the lower Grove will relieve areas where roads are encroaching on giant sequoias. Construction of the new shuttle stop in the lower Grove area and the South Entrance transit hub will also require temporary closures to protect visitors.

The park is carefully scheduling the work in the Grove to minimize the impact on visitors. Current estimates are that the Grove will remain closed for up to 24 months. However, the park will re-evaluate the closure as restoration work progresses. Temporary access to Grove may be possible if it safe to do so. The closure is anticipated to begin around June or July 2015.

For a copy of the plan and the Record of Decision, please visit the park's website at (<http://www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mgrove.htm>).