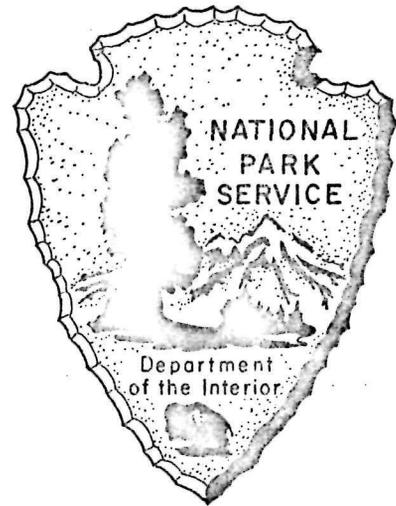


# BACKCOUNTRY PLAN



# YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

● CALIFORNIA

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## INTRODUCTION

The Backcountry Use and Operations Plan applies to those roadless areas within the Park as outlined in the Yosemite National Park Wilderness Proposal. The plan directs itself primarily to the interpretation and visitor services function, but includes maintenance aspects since its successful implementation is mutually dependent.

### OBJECTIVES

The Backcountry Unit of Yosemite National Park will be managed to insure maximum resource perpetuation and protection while providing a quality wilderness experience for as many users as possible.

### AUTHORIZATION

Authority for the various aspects of this plan is found in the enabling legislation for Yosemite National Park, the National Park Service Management Policies, Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (specifically Section 2.6), and the Directives of the Superintendent of Yosemite National Park.

### REVIEW

The plan will be reviewed as necessary by the Park staff, selected experts in aspects of backcountry use and management, and the public.

## ORGANIZATION

The Backcountry Unit is presently organized within the Division of Visitor Protection Services.

### BACKCOUNTRY UNIT OFFICE

#### Backcountry Unit Manager:

The Backcountry Unit Manager is responsible for the supervision of the Backcountry Rangers and Backcountry Information Specialists. He reports directly to the Chief Ranger and may make recommendations through him to other divisions involved in related backcountry operations. The Backcountry Unit Manager is also responsible for the implementation of the Backcountry Use and Operations Plan. He will see that the public is informed in all aspects of the Backcountry Visitor Protection function. Problems affecting the use, preservation, or operations of the backcountry will be identified by backcountry personnel, researchers, letters from the public, or any other source and resolved as expeditiously as possible.

### Backcountry Information Coordinator:

Those areas of the Plan involving coordinated efforts among backcountry personnel and adjoining U. S. Forest Service issuing stations (re issuance of wilderness permits and implementation of trailhead quotas) will be the responsibility of the Backcountry Information Coordinator. This person will directly supervise the Backcountry Information Specialist Supervisors and will answer to the Backcountry Unit Manager.

The Backcountry Information Coordinator will supervise the Park's reservation system for backcountry permits. These reservations will be accepted by mail only during the period February 1 to May 31.

### BACKCOUNTRY PATROL

The objectives of backcountry patrols are to range areas of assigned responsibility to insure maximum backcountry resource protection with visitor services and information. There are three methods of patrol deployment: Mounted (with horse and mule), foot, and skis or snowshoes in winter. Numbers of people, terrain, cross-country routes, seasons of year, are among the factors which determine the type of patrol utilized, the general emphasis being placed on those areas with the most visitor use.

### Resource Protection:

All Backcountry Patrolmen will be familiar with and enforce all aspects of the Backcountry Management Plan. They will report on conditions that show resource deterioration, i.e., trail erosion, campsite overuse, litter problems, fisheries information and wildlife sightings, and other backcountry user impacts on Park resources.

### Visitor Information Services:

Backcountry Rangers are responsible for informing the backcountry user of trail conditions, distances, safety hazards, and Park rules and regulations. The Rangers will take corrective action (in conformance with Park Law Enforcement Policies) where visitor infractions of regulations occur. They will assume initial leadership in search and rescue activities and will request additional help when needed.

### Training:

All Backcountry Rangers will attend a training session on all aspects of backcountry use, the operations plan, law enforcement, search and rescue,

first aid, stock use, coordination with permit issuance personnel, and, where applicable, Nordic ski training and winter survival techniques.

#### PERMIT ISSUANCE

##### Backcountry Information Specialists:

The objectives of the Backcountry Information Specialists are to issue Park wilderness permits and to disseminate accurate and up to date information about trail conditions, distances, weather conditions, safety hazards, and Park rules and regulations. The Information Specialists will be supervised by two senior Backcountry Information Specialist personnel. These persons will be selected by the Backcountry Unit Manager. An important aspect of the Information Specialist position is the assignment of two and three day patrols to supplement Backcountry Ranger patrols and to teach familiarity of the Park's backcountry.

##### Wilderness Permit Issuance:

All Backcountry Information Specialists will be familiar with all aspects of the Backcountry Use and Operations Plan. They will issue wilderness permits in conformance with the Backcountry Use and Operations Plan. An important aspect of their duties is to suggest alternate or little known routes to visitors who had planned to start their trips at trailheads already at capacity on a trailhead quota system.

##### Monitoring of Travel Zone Use:

It is the responsibility of the Backcountry Information Specialists in the Valley and at Tuolumne Meadows to monitor the number of overnight stays originating at each trailhead in conjunction with the Backcountry Patrolman. Once a trailhead has reached its capacity, no additional permits will be issued for overnight stays in that area. All contact stations will be informed of trailhead closures. Parties requesting a permit for overnight stays in closed areas will be asked to alter their planned route by starting their trip the next day, choosing an alternate route, or entering the backcountry via a different trailhead.

##### Emergencies:

All personnel will be versed in first aid and will be prepared to make initial contact and facilitate the handling of all injuries, illnesses, and evacuations.

### Training:

All personnel will attend a training session in permit issuance, coordination with Backcountry Patrolman, first aid, law enforcement, and all other aspects of the Backcountry assignment.

### RELATED BACKCOUNTRY OPERATIONS

This section of the Backcountry Use and Operations Plan deals with those intra-Park organizational units that conduct or support activities within the Park's backcountry. They are alphabetically:

#### CORRAL OPERATIONS

The backcountry unit utilizes 14 head of horses and mules. All stock operations, including requests for animals and logistical support, will be coordinated through the Animal Packer Foreman. In addition, the Backcountry Unit Manager will consult with the Animal Packer Foreman on horse to man assignments, full utilization of the animals, and about operational policies concerning all aspects of stock use in the Backcountry Management Unit.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING

The Environmental Engineering Division is responsible for the maintenance and operation of public water systems and wastewater collection, treatment and disposal facilities; for the cleaning, dumping, and recharging of chemical toilets; and for the packing out of toilet sludge to the frontcountry for disposal. The Division also provides foot laborers and packers for trail-side and camp site litter pick-up and pack-out in the Yosemite Falls and Happy Isles to Little Yosemite Valley frontcountry areas. Pit type toilets and/or jet johns are currently limited to the High Sierra Camp areas and Little Yosemite Valley.

The Backcountry Unit will advise the Sanitary Officer of water quality control, concession food service sanitation, and other environmental health problems when they arise. The Sanitary Officer will make any necessary arrangements for the assistance of the Public Health Service consultant.

#### FIRE MANAGEMENT

Backcountry Rangers will immediately report all fires to the Fire Management Office and will take instructions from the Fire Dispatcher concerning initial action to be taken. Helicopters may be used in the backcountry for suppression of wildland fire and, in some cases, the monitoring of natural fire or conditional fire.

#### FRONTCOUNTRY DISTRICTS - INTERPRETATION

The Backcountry Information Specialist staff is operational from June 15 to September 15. Members of the Park Interpretive Staff assume permit issuance responsibilities (along with other frontcountry personnel) during the fall, winter, and early spring months. They also assist in the issuance of permits during summer months.

The Backcountry Unit Manager works closely with the three District Interpreters in interpretive efforts involving backcountry visitor use themes, backcountry travel, trail safety, and minimum impact programs.

#### FRONTCOUNTRY DISTRICTS - VISITOR SERVICES

The current backcountry organization involves close coordination with the other Ranger Districts. The Frontcountry Districts are generally delineated by the distance that can be covered from a trailhead on a day patrol basis (See Figure 1). The Mather and Wawona Districts have permit issuance responsibilities. Coordination on scheduling of frontcountry personnel in the issuance of Park Wilderness Permits is continuous. Uniformity of the application of Park Backcountry Policies and Procedures within the Ranger Districts is the responsibility of the Backcountry Unit Manager under the authority of the Chief Park Ranger.

#### HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

Helicopters within the Park's backcountry may be utilized in the suppression of wildland fire and in search and rescue operations. No administrative use of the helicopter will be permitted between June 15 and September 15 without the approval of the Park Superintendent.

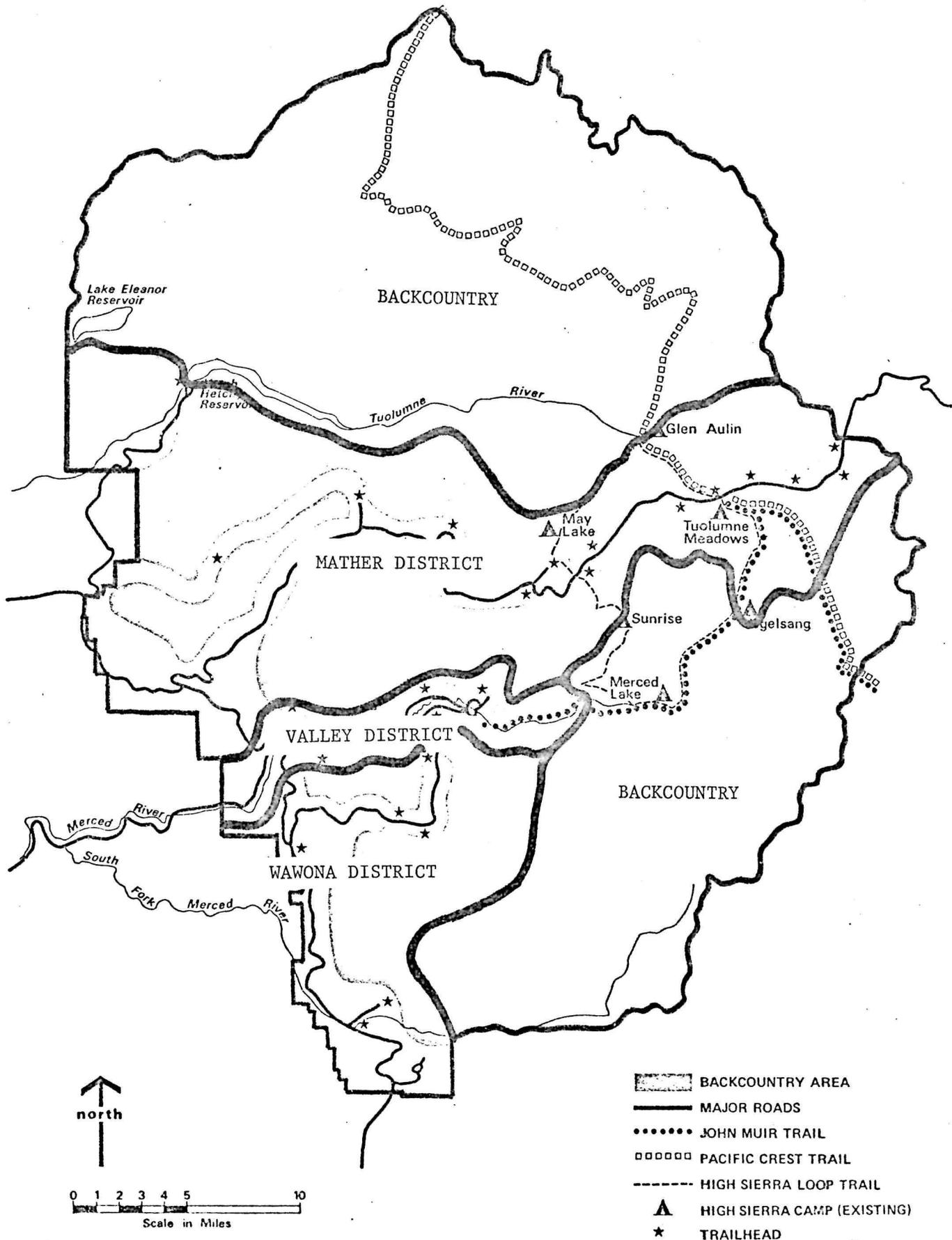
#### RESCUE OPERATIONS

Backcountry Rangers will initiate action on all search and rescue operations if they are closest to the scene. Helicopters may be used in the backcountry for search and rescue operations.

#### RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Assistance in gathering data for ongoing research programs is an important service which the Backcountry Unit will continue to provide to the Research Scientist's Office. Research information as it is received should help the Backcountry Unit to better implement its programs.

Figure 1. MAP OF FRONTCOUNTRY AND BACKCOUNTRY PATROL RESPONSIBILITIES, 1975.



-  BACKCOUNTRY AREA
-  MAJOR ROADS
-  JOHN MUIR TRAIL
-  PACIFIC CREST TRAIL
-  HIGH SIERRA LOOP TRAIL
-  HIGH SIERRA CAMP (EXISTING)
-  TRAILHEAD

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The Backcountry Unit will coordinate its activities with the Division of Resources Management to insure full cooperation in bear and other wildlife programs and in natural and conditional burning programs.

## TRAILS MANAGEMENT

Backcountry patrolmen are useful for reporting trail conditions, safety hazards, and visitor use. The data collected by the Patrolman is important information for setting trails maintenance planning priorities. The Backcountry Unit should continue to advise and work with the Maintenance Division to upgrade backcountry trails and related maintenance problems like trailside litter, drift fences, and campsite rehabilitation. It is important from an ecological standpoint that the trail maintenance plan and specific camping locations of trail crews be reviewed by the Backcountry Office. Signing of trails is the responsibility of the Trails Department. Assistance in reporting lost signs, straightening or replacing signs, and light sign maintenance will be accomplished by the Backcountry Rangers as time allows.

## VOLUNTEER WORK GROUPS

All projects involving volunteer work groups in the backcountry will be discussed with the Backcountry Unit Manager, who is, in turn, responsible only for those projects directly under the Unit's supervision.

## BACKCOUNTRY UNIT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Visitor use affects the backcountry and is subject to control by management. The following sections deal with specific visitor uses and include controls where applicable:

### GENERAL

#### Permits:

A wilderness permit is required for all overnight stays in the backcountry, but no permit is required for day use. A brochure on minimum impact will accompany each permit to inform the public of this requirement and other Park regulations.

#### Number of People:

A tentative carrying capacity for each trailhead quota has been determined. Once this capacity is reached, no new permits for that day will be issued

for that trailhead. Capacities will be determined on the basis of research recommendations and approved by the Park Superintendent. Trailhead quotas will be evaluated periodically to accommodate data acquisition and changes in use patterns.

Group Size:

The maximum group size allowed is 25 until research indicates otherwise. All organizations conducting Yosemite trips must be informed of this limit. Groups of 15 or more are asked to make reservations 10 days in advance. This is desirable in order to avoid having two large groups in the same area at the same time.

Length of Stay:

Camping is permitted in the backcountry for not more than a total of 30 days in any calendar year, provided that during the period from June 1 to September 1, inclusive, camping is limited to not more than a total of 14 days.

Reservations:

Reservations for backcountry trips may be made between February 1 and May 31 by writing to Backcountry Office, Yosemite National Park, California 95389. Up to fifty percent of the capacity of each trailhead for any one night will be available for reservation. The remaining unreserved capacity of each trailhead will be issued on a first come, first served basis no more than 24 hours prior to trailhead departure. Groups larger than 15 must use the reservation system or apply for a permit at least 10 days prior to their planned departure date. Reservations for backcountry trips will be validated at either the Tuolumne Meadows or Yosemite Valley permit issuing stations. Reservations will be held until 12 noon on trailhead departure dates. Those reservations that are "no shows" will then be released on a first come, first served basis.

Camping Sites:

In order to disperse use, camping is permitted anywhere in the backcountry, except within four trail miles of Tuolumne Meadows, Glacier Point, Wawona and the rim of Yosemite Valley, or within one mile of any road. Camping is not recommended in meadows or other fragile vegetative sites. Camping is not permitted within 25 feet of any body of water or trail. Where possible, camping 100 feet from any body of water or trail is recommended. No permanent camp structures are to be built. The cutting of branches from standing trees, dead or alive is prohibited. (Use of wood that is dead and down is permitted.)

### Fires and Wood Utilization:

Due to the adverse effects of fuel wood gathering in the higher elevations of the Park, wood fires are not permitted above 9,600 feet. Areas closed to wood fires will be posted in high use areas. Each party obtaining a Wilderness Permit will be informed of the no wood fire areas (Figure 2). Parties that use stoves may camp anywhere in the backcountry unit. Those parties building wood fires may do so only below 9,600 feet. The construction of new rock fire rings is prohibited. Only dead and down wood may be used as fuel.

### Solid Waste:

Everything that is packed in must be packed out. All trash, including paper, cans, bottles, metal foil, orange peelings, and unused foodstuffs, must be packed out.

### Drinking Water:

Drinking water taken from lakes and streams must be disinfected by either boiling or chemical treatment. Vigorous boiling of water for one full minute will kill any disease-causing bacteria present in the water. When boiling is not practical, chemical disinfection should be used.

### Sanitation:

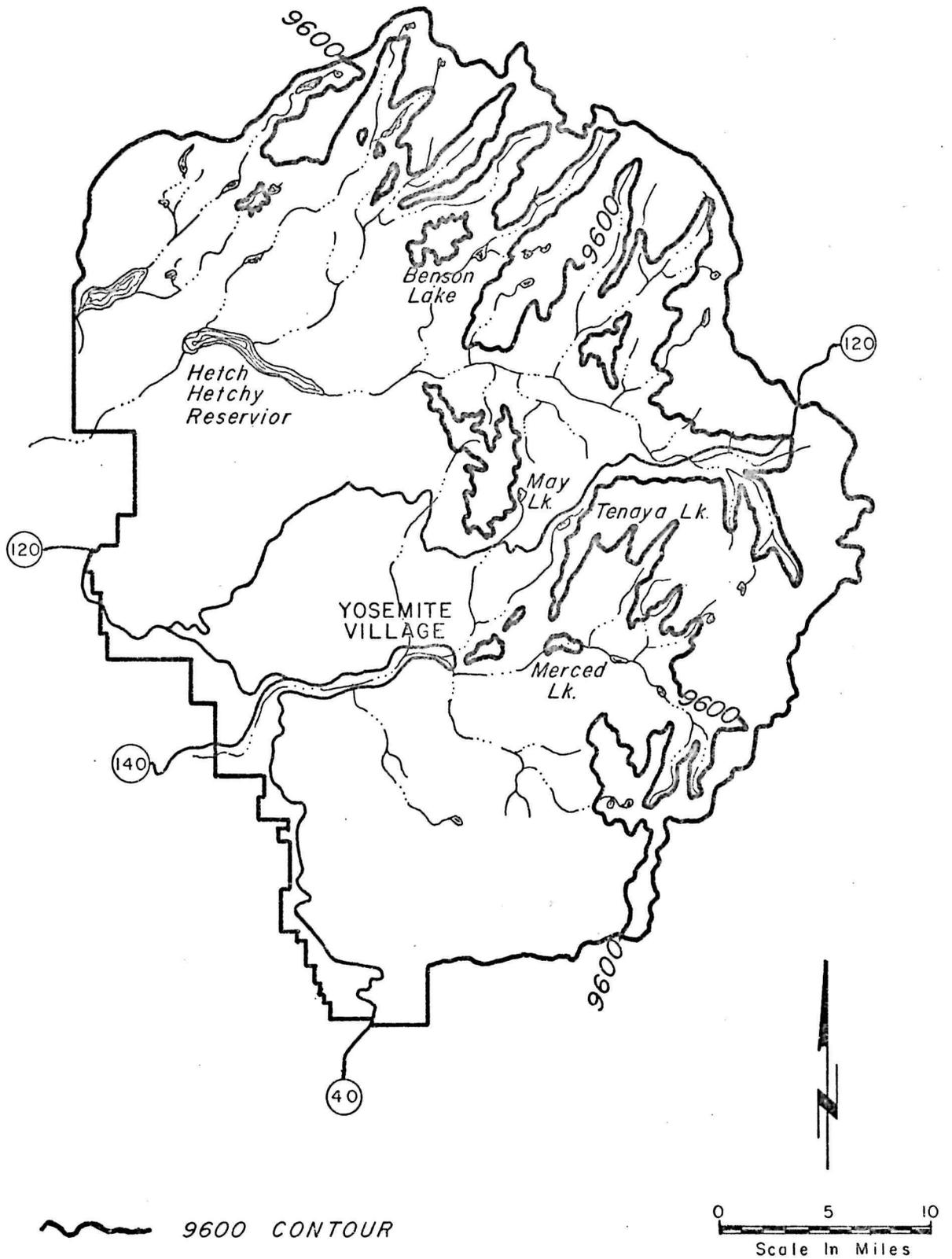
Improper waste disposal is a serious problem in some backcountry areas. It can adversely affect the environment and the health and safety of the wilderness user. Soaps, biodegradable or otherwise, are prohibited in lakes and streams, as is dishwashing and the washing of clothes. Cleaning of fish is prohibited in lakes and streams. It is recommended that washing be done out of a container and the waste water dumped at least 100 feet from the stream.

To dispose of human waste:

1. Select a screened spot at least 150 feet from any trail, camping area, stream, dry stream course, or lake.
2. Dig a hole 5 inches to 6 inches deep and 8 inches to 10 inches across. The littering problem is reduced if the paper is burned.
3. After use, cover hole tightly, making it indistinguishable from the surrounding area.

Participants in group trips should take the responsibility for disposing of their own wastes in the manner outlined above.

Figure 2. FIRES AND WOOD UTILIZATION



## TRAIL USE

### Shortcutting:

Cutting across switchbacks causes erosion and degradation of the trails and may roll rocks down on people on the switchback below. Shortcuts through meadows can cause irreparable damage to the fragile vegetation. Shortcutting of trails and switchbacks is prohibited.

### Right-of-Way:

Pack outfits and saddle stock have the right-of-way on trails and bridges. Hikers should stand off the trail in plain view and remain quiet until the stock have passed.

## STOCK USE

### Grazing:

Although grazing is not a serious problem in the backcountry, some areas have suffered trampling damage. This is due to early use in the season when meadows are wet or to confining animals in too small an area. Practices such as staking out stock in meadows or tying stock to trees in meadows is not recommended. A picket line stretched between trees is recommended. Open grazing will be permitted except in areas immediately surrounding the High Sierra Camps. Grazing is not permitted in Long Meadows. Grazing for commercial purposes is prohibited, "except that grazing incidental" to recreational use of the Park.

### Drift Fences:

Drift fences will be repaired and maintained by the Trails Department after approval by the Backcountry Unit Manager.

### Trail Use:

Horses and other saddle or pack animals are permitted on all Park trails unless specifically prohibited by the Park Superintendent. Loose herding is prohibited except when conditions are deemed dangerous by the Packer. Riders will slow their horses to a walk or slow trot when passing hikers.

### Group Size:

Overnight stock parties will be limited to 25 horses and/or mules.

## OTHER RESTRICTIONS

### Pets:

Dogs, cats, and other pets are not allowed on trails or in the backcountry.

### Collecting:

Collecting by permit is possible, subject to the approval of the Superintendent.

### Firearms, traps, and other weapons:

The use of a trap, seine, spear, firearm, bow and arrow, sling shot, or any other implement designed to discharge missiles is prohibited.

### Fishing:

A valid California fishing license is required of all fishermen. Digging for bait is prohibited.

## COMMERCIAL USES

Concession inputs to the backcountry are primarily from the High Sierra Camps. Additional inputs come from commercial stock parties.

## HIGH SIERRA CAMPS

### Supply:

All supplies for the High Sierra Camps will be brought in by concessioner stock.

### Water and Wastewater:

The operation and maintenance of High Sierra Camp water and wastewater systems is the responsibility of the Environmental Engineering Division.

### Solid Waste:

The Concessioner transports all solid waste generated by Camp operations to the frontcountry for disposal. Solid waste is packaged and stored in bearproof bins until transport can be arranged; animal feeding and landfill disposal are no longer allowed.

Coordination:

Currently the actual coordination of the High Sierra Camp activities is the responsibility of the Mather District Ranger.

COMMERCIAL STOCK PARTIES

Stock Parties:

Commercial stock operators will obtain a Special Use Permit to operate within the Park boundary from the Superintendent and will adhere to all conditions of the Permit. The Backcountry Unit Manager will act as liaison with the commercial pack operators and all permits should be reviewed by him before final approval. The permits are administered through the Fiscal Office.