



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, California 95389

IN REPLY REFER TO:
A3823 (YOSE-PM)

Dear Friends of Yosemite National Park:

We are pleased to provide you with a copy of the Finding of No Significant Impact for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. This document records the decision of the National Park Service to repair, rehabilitate, and repave Northside and Southside Drives, as described under Alternative 2 in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*. Sentinel Drive and El Capitan Crossover will also be rehabilitated as part of this project.

Please note that this packet contains Errata Sheets for the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* and that these Errata Sheets should be kept with your copy of that document.

The National Park Service has determined that implementation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project will not have a significant effect on the environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

We thank you for your comments regarding the project. Public participation is a key element in the environmental review process at Yosemite National Park. Your participation helps to ensure that the National Park Service fully understands and considers your values and concerns.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Superintendent

Yosemite National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project

Finding of No Significant Impact
February 2006

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Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

Yosemite National Park

Lead Agency: National Park Service

February 2006

Background

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the decision of the National Park Service to adopt a plan for the rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road and the determination that no significant impacts on the human environment are associated with that decision. The National Park Service plans to resurface the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, rehabilitate drainage features associated with the road, and formalize some roadside parking along approximately 12.5 miles of roadway. The plan proposes rehabilitation of the associated drainage structures in a manner that will maintain the historic properties' integrity and character, improve visitor safety, enhance protection of resources, and minimize the potential for future environmental impacts.

The Yosemite Valley Loop Road is a historic feature in Yosemite National Park, first built as a stage coach road in 1872. The initial pavement was laid in 1909, and culverts were first installed a year later beneath stretches of Southside Drive. Spot repairs have been made along the roadway as required over time. However, much-needed comprehensive maintenance and repair of the roadway and associated drainage structures has not been performed for many decades.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is to repair and resurface existing roadway pavement, rehabilitate or replace adjacent drainage features (e.g., culverts, diversion ditches, and retaining walls) and improve the condition of adjacent roadside parking along approximately 12.5 miles of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road in Yosemite Valley. No roadway

widening (outside of the original road prism width of 22 feet), realignment, or changes to vehicular or pedestrian circulation patterns will be undertaken. This project not tiered to or a part of the *Yosemite Valley Plan*.

The need for this project is evidenced by the fact that the existing road surface and associated drainage features are in poor condition because major maintenance repairs have not been undertaken for many years. Numerous existing culverts are undersized, in disrepair, and/or are ineffectively located to capture peak seasonal run-off. In addition, some informal roadside parking along stretches of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road present resource impact concerns due to continued expansion in the size of these locations.

Selected Alternative and Alternatives Considered or Analyzed

The *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* (EA) analyzed three alternatives; Alternative 1: No Action represented continuing the existing operation and maintenance of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road; Alternative 2: Rehabilitation of and Improvements to the Roadway, Drainages, and Roadside Parking; and Alternative 3: Resurfacing the Roadway Only with Improvements. These alternatives were developed by the National Park Service based on the project purpose and need, issues raised during internal and public scoping, and other public comments on the project. The EA disclosed potential environmental consequences that may result from implementation of each alternative. Comments received during the public review and comment period on the EA resulted in some changes to the proposed action, Alternative 2.

The National Park Service identified Alternative 2, Rehabilitation of and Improvements to the Roadway, Drainages, and Roadside Parking, as the preferred alternative. This alternative succeeds in protecting sensitive natural and cultural resources, enhancing the visitor experience, and complying with the mandates of the *2005 Revised Merced River Plan*. No serious issues were raised by the public or other agencies during review periods which were not already addressed in the EA or clarified in this FONSI. None of the changes to the Selected Action are substantive enough to change the environmental analysis.

Alternative 1: The No-Action Alternative

Under the No-Action Alternative, long-needed roadway maintenance repair would not occur. This alternative would result in:

- Implementation of Yosemite National Park's Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) management program, as outlined in the Merced River Plan
- Continued need for pothole and shoulder patchwork
- Restriction of natural hydrologic flow beneath the road in numerous locations due to collapsed, poorly maintained and/or improperly sized or placed culverts
- Impeded hydrologic connectivity from one side of the road to the other in regions where the roadway transects meadows and wetland areas
- Hindered culvert function and compromised historic feature integrity due to encroachment of brushy vegetation into culverts and headwalls

- Expansion of informal roadside parking, resulting in a steadily increasing number and size of roadside turnouts, and associated impacts to previously undisturbed areas
- Continued deterioration of river embankment adjacent to the Valley View parking area and near Pohono Bridge

In addition to the above, this alternative would not provide needed improvements to facilities adjacent to many roadside turnouts to better accommodate people with disabilities. Figure II-1 presents a project area map with key locations and a typical cross-section of the existing Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

Alternative 2: Rehabilitation of and Improvements to the Roadway, Drainages, and Roadside Parking

Alternative 2 proposes repaving the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, improvements to roadside parking areas, and rehabilitation of the existing culverts, and addition of new culverts. The following actions are elements of Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative, and reflect the changes to the proposed action due to public comment:

- The existing roadway will be pulverized and re-surfaced to a standard base width of 22 feet where possible (10 foot width lanes and 1 foot shoulders), which is consistent with the original 1927 roadway width.
- In-place roadway pulverization methods will be utilized to recycle existing pavement and road base materials to adaptively reuse as new road base prior to repaving the roadway.
- The project may locate an asphalt batch plant in Yosemite Valley to support resurfacing activities. The batch plant will be located at Pohono Pit. The batch plant will be removed when resurfacing activities are completed.
- Roadside shoulders will be reinforced at select locations of vehicle ingress and egress to and from the roadway. A reinforced shoulder will protect the new road bed from deterioration.
- The majority of culverts along the roadway will be replaced with larger sized pipes. Additional culverts will be placed along the roadway in select areas where they are needed to facilitate improved drainage. These actions are reflected in figure II-3, which can be viewed in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*.
- Improvements to roadside drainage facilities (e.g. ditches and culverts) will be made along Southside Drive between Housekeeping Camp and the intersection of Northside and Southside Drives at Curry Village. This segment of the project area will be resurfaced and repaved as part of the ongoing East Valley Utilities Improvement Project.
- Existing stonework of culvert headwalls (both stone-mortar and dry laid) that have been determined to be contributing features of the Yosemite Valley Historic District will be salvaged and reused to construct new headwalls. In locations where culvert pipe size will be increased, the headwalls will be reconstructed in a masonry pattern consistent with the original style. Any additional stone, mortar, and/or masonry used will be consistent with the original materials of the headwalls in terms of color, texture, depth, width, and pattern.
- For stone headwalls that have been determined not to be contributing features to the Yosemite Valley Historic District, concrete headwalls with stone veneer will be constructed in locations where culvert pipe size will be increased. The size and type of stone used for the veneer will be compatible in size, color and texture of existing headwalls.
- Channel outlets of select culverts will be enhanced with the placement or repair of energy dissipaters. Large box culverts with damaged channel outlets will be rehabilitated.

- Surface damage caused by past and recent high-water events will be repaired on the El Capitan Bridge.
- Four trees (with a diameter greater than 12”) that are directly adjacent to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road will be removed because they compromise proper culvert function, or they are directly located within areas that require grading for culvert rehabilitation and construction.
- The National Park Service will not remove any California black oak trees along the roadway.
- The National Park Service will pave the Theodore Roosevelt turnout, Wosky Pond turnout, and turnouts #47, #48, #49, #51 all of which are currently unpaved. These actions, in addition to improvements to other roadside turnouts, are reflected in figure II-6 and table II-1 which can be viewed in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*.
- The National Park Service will reduce the width of Fern Spring Turnout by 4 feet, as well as reducing the length by two vehicles. This will result in a capacity of six vehicles at this turnout. Impacts to resources associated with the proposed placement of a larger culvert will be avoided by constructing a swale that will channel water to an existing culvert to the west of Fern Spring.
- The National Park Service will remove the 13 parking spaces at turnout #29, due to the inadequate site distance preceding the Curry Village stop sign, the heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and rafting access in that area, the National Park Service will proceed with the removal of this parking through the placement of curbing alongside the roadway. The National Park Service will maintain turnouts #11, #64, #65 and #30. Roadside parking numbers 64 and 65 will be re-graded and graveled. The National Park Service has revised the proposed action to now retain four of the five turnouts originally proposed for removal under the Preferred Alternative. Turnouts #11, #64, #65, and #30, as identified in figure II-6 and table II-1, will remain and be replaced in kind. These changes are reflected in figure II-6 (Revised) which can be viewed on page E6 of the Errata Sheets for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.
- Selective brush clearing at some locations along the roadway will take place to improve visibility and visitor safety, preserve the integrity of the roadbed, accommodate culvert placement and rehabilitation, and reduce obstructions associated with snow removal operations.
- Needed accessibility improvements will take place (e.g., citing of wayside exhibits, crosswalks, handicap parking spaces, and curb-cutting) to facilities adjacent to many roadside turnouts in order to better accommodate people with disabilities.
- Installation of an integrated utility corridor beneath Southside Drive from Pohono Bridge to Wawona Road intersection will take place. This utility corridor will include a high voltage and communications duct bank, as well as a pipe conduit for future use. This action is part of the Wawona Tunnel and Turtleback Dome Communications Improvement Project but is proposed to coincide with construction activities on the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project to prevent disruption of the new Yosemite Valley Loop Road shortly after it has been repaired and resurfaced. For additional information about this element of the project, refer to pages 2-9 and 2-10 of the Public Comment and Response Report.

Alternative 3: Resurfacing the Roadway Only with Drainage Improvements

Alternative 3 proposes resurfacing of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road and rehabilitation and addition of culverts. Alternative 3 differs from Alternative 2 because roadside parking areas would be replaced in-kind without any formalization or removal of areas in order to enhance resource protection. There would be no selective improvements to heavily used or popular turnouts. This would result in:

- Roadway shoulders would be reinforced in areas of vehicle ingress and egress to protect the road edge.
- Current curbing and roadside barriers would remain or be replaced at existing locations. No additional roadside barriers would be constructed along the roadway or at roadside turnouts.

Actions Considered but Dismissed

The National Park Service considered a range of actions when developing possible alternatives for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. These actions were analyzed, considered and dismissed because they did not fully satisfy the objectives of this planning effort. These actions were dismissed for one of the following reasons:

- The action did not satisfy the project's purpose and need.
- Less environmentally damaging options are available.
- The action will cause unacceptable environmental, cultural, or social impacts.
- The action presents unacceptable engineering risks or constraints with an associated increase in costs.
- The action conflicts with the guidance and direction provided in the *Revised Merced River Plan*.

Widen Southside Drive (between Sentinel Bridge and Curry Village)

The *Yosemite Valley Plan* calls for the widening of Southside Drive from its existing width to 26 feet (in order to safely accommodate two-way traffic) between Sentinel Bridge and the intersection of Northside and Southside Drives at Curry Village. Because the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance and repair project, actions called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan* are considered beyond the purpose and need for this project. Therefore, the widening of Southside Drive from Sentinel Bridge to the intersection of Northside and Southside Drives at Curry Village was dismissed from further consideration.

Formalize all Roadside Parking with Pavement and Curbing

All roadside turnouts that the National Park Service sanctions at specific locations along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road would be formalized by pavement and curbing. All unwanted parking would be removed.

This action would be more appropriately evaluated after the Yosemite Village Interim Parking Improvements Project (a project that will evaluate the number of day-use parking spaces at the primary day-use parking lot in Yosemite Valley) determines how many roadside parking spaces could be relocated and accommodated within the Yosemite Village Day-Use Parking Area. In addition, other planning efforts such as the West Valley Loop Trail Project and the potential for a West Valley shuttle, could inform locations where existing roadside turnouts should be formalized. Therefore, this action was dismissed from further consideration because it is beyond the purpose and need for this project.

Installation of Foundations for Future West Valley Shuttle Bus Stops

The *Yosemite Valley Plan* calls for expanded shuttle service to the West Valley. During the summer of 2005, the National Park Service and the Concessioner piloted a West Valley shuttle route for a two week period in order to evaluate potential ridership.

Installation of foundational infrastructure (e.g., concrete pads) for West Valley shuttle bus stops was determined to be beyond the purpose and need for this project. This project is not designed to implement aspects of the *Yosemite Valley Plan* and, therefore, this action was dismissed from further consideration.

Change in Road Elevation

Increasing the existing road elevation at select locations to reduce road closure during periods of seasonal runoff was considered but dismissed because less environmentally damaging options are available to reduce operational challenges during periods of high seasonal run off. Changes to roadway elevation would require a substantial roadway reconstruction effort resulting in the widening of the road prism in order to support an effective elevation change. Often areas that receive heavy seasonal inundation are areas either adjacent to the Merced River or wetland meadow complexes.

Exclude portions of Northside Drive from the Project Area

The exclusion of rehabilitating segments of Northside Drive (e.g., Stoneman Bridge to Yosemite Village and Yosemite Lodge at the Falls to El Capitan Straight) from the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project was considered.

The *Yosemite Valley Plan* prescribes the removal or adaptive reuse of the above mentioned sections of Northside Drive. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a road maintenance and rehabilitation project and is not designed to implement actions called for in the Yosemite Valley Plan. As a result, this action was dismissed as it is beyond the purpose and need for this project.

Formalize Directed Parking Areas

The National Park Service considered formalizing roadside parking in overflow parking areas along Northside Drive near the entrance to the Yosemite Village Day Use Parking Area (Camp 6). This would involve the use of pavement, curbing and striping.

The condition and location of overflow directed parking areas would more appropriately be evaluated as part of the Yosemite Village Interim Parking Improvements Project. Therefore, this action was dismissed as it is beyond the purpose and need for this project.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA and the National Park Service NEPA guidelines require that “the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable” be identified (CEQ Regulations, Section 1505.2).

Environmentally preferable is defined as “the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources” (CEQ 1981). Section 101 of NEPA states that:

“It is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to ... (1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; (2) assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; (3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or

other undesirable and unintended consequences; (4) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice; (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and (6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources."

Section 101 Requirement 1. *"Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations."*

Conformance: Alternative 2 will best fulfill the responsibility of the National Park Service as a trustee of the environment for succeeding generations in that the proposed actions associated with this alternative will provide for the:

- Enhancement of the long-term maintainability of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road through improvements to drainages and the paved surface, thereby reducing roadway deterioration
- Preservation of historic properties along the roadway through standards prescribed for stone masonry when rehabilitating culvert headwalls and wingwalls
- Improvement to the condition and safety of adjacent roadside turnouts from which much of Yosemite Valley is experienced during scenic auto touring
- Reestablishment of natural drainage patterns through the placement of additional drainage culverts in select locations
- Improvement to the ecosystem function of El Capitan Meadow through the placement of a permeable sub-grade designed to improve hydrologic connectivity of the meadow
- Repositioning of existing wayside exhibits along Bridalveil Straight to better accommodate persons with disabilities thereby improving the visitor experience in the area

Alternative 1 would not provide any of these benefits. Alternative 3 is similar to Alternative 2 with respect to improvement of culverts and overall roadside drainages and enhancement of the visitor experience through improved accessibility for disabled people. However, Alternative 3 would not include installation of the permeable sub-grade beneath portions of Southside Drive near Sentinel Creek and along El Capitan Straight which would improve hydrologic connectivity in those areas. Alternative 3 would also not address the unsafe condition and encroachment of some roadside parking on sensitive natural and cultural resource areas and historic properties.

Section 101 Requirement 2. *"Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings."*

Conformance: Alternative 2 will best fulfill the responsibility of the National Park Service to assure safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings for all Americans in that the proposed actions associated with this alternative will provide for:

- A standard roadway width, where possible, of 22 feet (10 foot lanes, 1 foot shoulders) in order to provide for a more predictable road width thereby increasing visitor safety
- Repositioning of existing wayside exhibits along Bridalveil Straight to better accommodate persons with disabilities thereby improving the visitor experience and safety in the area

- Preservation of historic properties along the roadway through standards prescribed for stone masonry when rehabilitating culvert headwalls and wingwalls will provide for aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings through the replication of historic rock work
- Placement of parking controls such as boulder stones or curbing at select roadside turnouts will provide for aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings by reducing the radiating impacts such as vegetation loss and soil compaction in these areas

Alternative 1 would not provide any of these benefits. Alternative 3 would not provide curbing and/or barrier stones to help prevent the continued proliferation of roadside turnouts, or the encroachment of vehicles into sensitive natural and cultural resource areas and historic properties.

Section 101 Requirement 3. *“Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.”*

Conformance: Alternative 2 will best fulfill the responsibility of the National Park Service to attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences in that the proposed actions associated with this alternative will provide for:

- Improved visitor access to some roadside areas, while protecting and restoring others. For example, the turnout at Wosky Pond will be widened and paved to encourage visitor enjoyment of the viewshed there, while the turnout at Fern Spring will be reduced to promote greater restoration and protection of this sacred area.
- Enhanced visitor safety and natural, cultural, and historic property resource values through the placement of curbs and/or barrier stones to prevent the proliferation and continued expansion of roadside turnouts into adjacent areas.
- Improved drainage and natural hydrologic processes in areas adjacent to the roadway will contribute to an array of beneficial uses ranging from visitor access to areas previously prone to seasonal flooding, enjoyment of restored wetland and meadow complexes, and appreciation of riverside areas previously affected by erosion due to poor roadside drainage.

Alternative 1 would not provide any of these benefits. Alternative 3 is similar to Alternative 2 with respect to improving overall roadside drainage, but it would not include installation of a permeable sub-grade beneath portions of the road at Sentinel Creek drainage and El Capitan Straight to improve the overall hydrologic connectivity in those areas. Alternative 3 would also not curtail the encroachment of roadside parking into sensitive natural and cultural resource areas and historic properties.

Section 101 Requirement 4. *“Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice.”*

Conformance: Alternative 2 will best fulfill the responsibility of the National Park Service to preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice in that the proposed actions associated with this alternative will provide for:

- Rehabilitated culverts along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, many of which have been determined to be contributing elements of the Valley Loop Road component of the Yosemite Valley Historic District due to their historic stonework. These headwalls will be rehabilitated in

a manner that will maintain their historic integrity through salvage of culvert head stones to the extent feasible and maintenance of existing masonry patterns and styles consistent with original designs.

- Enhanced protection and restoration of Fern Spring, an area of cultural and religious significance to groups of American Indian people.
- Improved roadside turnouts to allow visitors with disabilities greater access to adjacent trails and interpretive exhibits.
- Improved condition of roadside turnouts allows for a continued variety of choices for visitors to experience Yosemite Valley.

Alternative 1 would not provide any of these benefits. Alternative 3 would not provide curbing and/or barrier stones to help prevent the continued proliferation of roadside turnouts, or the encroachment of vehicles into sensitive natural and cultural resource areas and historic properties.

Section 101 Requirement 5. *“Achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities.”*

Conformance: Alternative 2 will best fulfill the responsibility of the National Park Service to achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities in that the proposed actions associated with this alternative will provide for:

- Improvements to culverts and the installation of a permeable sub-grade at Sentinel Creek drainage and El Capitan Straight will improve drainage in wetland and meadow areas bisected by the roadway, reduce damaging impacts to the road and visitor safety related to seasonal flooding, and contribute to a reduction in riverbank erosion without compromising the integrity of the roadway. While some culverts will be increased in size to achieve these goals, all historic rockwork related to headwalls and other elements of the historic landscape will be preserved.
- Installation of the permeable sub-grade specifically represents use of available technological advancements in order to both maintain the roadway and promote restoration of natural hydrological processes in meadow and wetland areas.
- Improvements to turnouts and placement of curbs and/or barrier stones will enhance the visitor experience and allow visitors with disabilities greater access to interpretive exhibits, while also protecting sensitive cultural and natural resource areas adjacent to the roadway.

Alternative 1 would not provide any of these benefits. Therefore, Alternative 2 will best achieve a balance between population and resource use, and permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities.

Section 101 Requirement 6. *“Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.”*

Conformance: Alternative 2 will best fulfill the responsibility of the National Park Service to enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources in that the proposed actions associated with this alternative will provide for:

- Recycling and reuse of the existing roadway pavement through the pulverization process to form a new base layer upon which new asphalt will be laid provides an approach which maximizes attainable recycling methods.
- All rocks associated with headwalls and wingwalls will be reused within the project area.
- Improvements to roadside drainage structures will include rehabilitation of existing culverts and rockwork, including salvage of culvert head stones to the extent feasible.

In these ways Alternative 2 will best enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach maximum recycling of depletable resources. Alternative 1 would not provide any of these benefits.

In conclusion, upon full consideration of the elements of Section 101 of NEPA, Alternative 2 represents the environmentally preferable alternative for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Why the Selected Alternative Will Not Have a Significant Effect on the Human Environment

The National Park Service analyzed the significance criteria provided in the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations (Section 1508.27) to determine if the Selected Alternative would have a previously undisclosed significant adverse effect on the human environment. The Selected Alternative results in improvements to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road between Pohono Bridge and Curry Village. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is designed to repair and resurface existing roadway pavement, rehabilitate or replace adjacent drainage features (e.g., culverts, diversion ditches, and retaining walls) and improve the condition of adjacent roadside parking along approximately 12.5 miles of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road in Yosemite Valley. These actions will provide enhanced visitor safety, greater accessibility to roadside attractions, and protection of resources adjacent to the roadway corridor. Proposed improvements address upgrading and rehabilitating the roadway and drainage structures to meet currently accepted engineering standards for safety and longevity. This project is not designed to modify existing traffic circulation patterns or speed limits, nor will visitation volume to Yosemite Valley likely change as a result of this project.

The Selected Alternative results in improved hydrologic flow in areas adjacent to the roadway, enhancing connectivity of wetland and meadow areas and minimizing damage to resources as a result of poor drainage and erosion. Additionally, the Selected Alternative will help to protect sensitive natural and cultural resources along the roadway that have been vulnerable to encroachment at or near roadside turnouts. Although there will be short-term construction-related adverse effects associated with rehabilitation of the road corridor and drainage structures, the long-term ecological benefits of the Selected Alternative will more than compensate for the short-term adverse effects of construction. Short-term impacts will occur intermittently during periods of intensive construction. Related impacts to noise and air quality, soils, vegetation, hydrology, floodplains and water quality, wetlands, wildlife, special-status species, archeological resources, Yosemite Valley's cultural landscape, traditional cultural properties, scenic resources, visitor experience and recreation, and park operations are described in Chapter III, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences of the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*.

Public safety will be enhanced under the Selected Alternative with improvements to accessibility and roadside turnouts along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Similarly, visitor experience and park operations will be improved with the completion of a travel corridor that complies with Federal Highways Administration safety standards and design specifications. Natural resources will be enhanced through improvements to hydrologic features adjacent to the roadway and formalization of roadside parking areas.

The environmental impacts of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project are not highly uncertain nor does the Selected Alternative involve unique or unknown risks. No elements of precedence for future actions with significant effects have been identified, and implementation of the Selected Alternative will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local environmental protection laws.

Yosemite National Park implements the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) during all construction activities. In addition, the National Park Service has identified actions necessary prior to, during, and after construction activities to ensure the protection of natural, cultural, and social resources. A list of these mitigation measures is presented in table 1 on page 15 of this document.

Soils

Under the Selected Alternative, there will be a localized, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impact to soils, particularly in areas where the road passes through resilient and/or highly valued resource soil types. Improved drainage and rehabilitation of the river bank in areas would help minimize localized soil loss, a long-term, negligible, but beneficial impact to soils in that area.

Hydrology, Floodplain and Water Quality

Improvements to the roadway and adjacent roadside drainages under the Selected Alternative will provide a localized, long-term, moderate, beneficial impact to surface and near-surface hydrologic processes and the overall functional value associated with important meadow and floodplain areas. Improvements to roadside parking areas will help reduce continued expansion and encroachment into sensitive resource areas, providing a localized, long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial impact along sections of the road. In addition, reinforcement of river embankment adjacent to the roadway will enhance the ‘free flowing condition’ of the Merced Wild and Scenic River and provide a localized, long-term, minor, beneficial impact to Merced River water quality.

Wetlands

The improvements to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road called for under the Selected Alternative will result in long-term, beneficial impacts to wetland and aquatic habitats through restoration of more natural subsurface water flow between areas bisected by the roadway. Overall, these impacts will be local, long-term, minor to moderate, and beneficial to wetlands in Yosemite Valley.

Vegetation

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will reduce encroachment into sensitive resource areas, improve hydrologic connectivity of meadow, riparian and wetland areas, and restore more natural surface and near-surface hydrologic processes. Overall, improvements called for under

the Selected Alternative will result in localized, long-term, minor, beneficial impacts to vegetation communities along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

Wildlife

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will contribute to the restoration of wildlife habitat areas by enhancing natural surface and subsurface hydrologic processes through culvert improvements and formalization of roadside parking areas. Habitat areas most critically impacted as a result of these improvements are meadow, riparian, and California black oak communities, which are considered among the most highly valued habitats in Yosemite Valley. Overall, actions under the Selected Alternative would result in localized, long-term, negligible to minor, beneficial impacts to wildlife throughout Yosemite Valley.

Special Status Species

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will contribute to the restoration of vegetation communities and habitat areas potentially supporting special status species in Yosemite Valley. Enhancement of natural surface and subsurface hydrologic processes and protection of sensitive resource areas adjacent to the roadway will result in long-term, negligible to minor, and beneficial impacts to special status species.

Air Quality

Under the Selected Alternative impacts to air quality will relate primarily to construction equipment emissions and dust generated during construction activities along the roadway, resulting in localized, short-term, negligible, adverse impacts to overall air quality in Yosemite Valley.

Noise

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will impact noise levels in Yosemite Valley in the vicinity of construction activities. Noise levels are expected to be loudest immediately adjacent to the construction area, and due to generally low background sound levels in Yosemite Valley, these noises may be audible a long distance from the source. Overall, the Selected Alternative will result in noise levels that comprise local, short-term, minor to moderate, adverse impacts to park visitors, residents, and contractors in the vicinity of maintenance activities. The Selected Alternative will not result in any long-term impacts to ambient noise levels in Yosemite Valley.

Historic Properties

A National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 review was conducted in accordance with the 1999 Programmatic Agreement, identified in the Preservation Agreement Form (YOSE XXX 2005-026. Pursuant to CEQ 1502.25 (a) and 1508.27 (b) (8) context, intensity and type of impact to historic properties is measured in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800.4 through 5 and 8, in terms of the effect on characteristics making the property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Duration and type of impact to historic properties is considered long-term permanent. A beneficial impact would be measured under NHPA as “no adverse effect”. Impact to historic properties would be considered significant only if an adverse effect could not be resolved in consultation with the federal agency, State Historic Preservation Officer, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Archeological Resources

The entire Yosemite Valley is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as an archeological district of statewide significance, consisting of over a hundred known archeological sites. Individual archeological resources include historic debris scatters, historic structural remains, and prehistoric American Indian village sites and settlements. Many Yosemite Valley roads and other facilities were originally constructed prior to the enactment of NEPA, NHPA, and Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), so many known sites, as well as potential unknown buried archeological resources, were impacted by the placement of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Between 35 and 40 known archeological sites are located with the Area of Potential Effect. Most actions proposed under Alternative 2 would result in “no effect” to archeological sites because they occur in areas of previously imported fill or in areas where there are no archeological resources. The potential for “adverse effects” to archeological sites where construction activities require ground disturbance outside of the current road prism and road fill, would be mitigated through development of detailed design specifications, through efforts to avoid or minimize impact, and by implementing provisions in the 1999 Programmatic Agreement, as stipulated in the Preservation Assessment Form (YOSE XXX 2005-026). Overall, the implementation of Alternative 2 is expected to result in no adverse affect, and no significant impact to archeological resources.

Traditional Cultural Properties

The entire Yosemite Valley is a proposed Traditional Cultural Property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places with numerous resources protected by the confidentiality clause in Section 304 of the NHPA. The proposed improvements to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road and associated drainage facilities are expected to have “no adverse effect” impacts on areas containing traditional cultural resources. This would be achieved through the restoration of more natural hydrologic processes, and through continued consultation with and participation by American Indian cultural resource specialists, as stipulated in the Preservation Assessment Form (YOSE XXX 2005-026). Overall, the implementation of Alternative 2 will result in no significant impacts to Traditional Cultural Properties.

Cultural Landscapes

The Yosemite Valley Loop Road is a contributing element to the Yosemite Valley Historic District (YVHD) which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Many of the culverts and pullouts have historic value as elements of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road and are listed on the National Park Service List of Classified Structures (LCS; 482672 Valley Loop Road - S Side Drive Dry Laid Headwalls; 483882 Valley Loop Road - N Side Drive Dry Laid Headwalls; 485083 Valley Loop Road - N Side Drive Mortared Headwalls; 483828 Valley Loop Road - S Side Drive Mortared Headwalls). Detailed design specifications, and construction activities will be coordinated with the park Historic Landscape Architect to ensure that the integrity of the historic culverts and pullouts is preserved. All actions associated with Alternative 2 would be carried out in accordance with the guidelines set forth in *Yosemite Valley Loop Road: Historic Character, Culverts and Pullouts*, *Yosemite National Park, A Sense of Place: Design Guidelines for Yosemite Valley*, the 1999 Programmatic Agreement, and the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties as stipulated in the Preservation Assessment Form (YOSE XXX 2005-026). Overall, the implementation of Alternative 2 is expected to have “no adverse effect” and will result in no significant impact to the cultural landscape.

Scenic Resources

Overall, minor, long-term, beneficial impacts to scenic resources would be expected due to improvements associated with the Valley View turnout as well as improved hydrologic flow, resulting in more restored landscapes. Improved accessibility to key turnouts and parking areas adjacent to viewpoints would also contribute to long-term, minor, beneficial impacts to scenic resources.

Visitor Experience and Recreation

Overall, actions proposed as part of Alternative 2 would be expected to have long-term, minor to moderate, beneficial effects on visitor experience and recreational activities. Beneficial impacts would be attributed to improved accessibility of turnouts at select areas (e.g., Wosky Pond and Bridalveil Meadow), providing better access to recreational activities and enhancement of the visitor experience. Visitor safety would be beneficially impacted due to improved visibility, more predictable roadway conditions, and in select areas, greater accessibility to trails and bike paths. Improvements to drainage structures would contribute to a reduction in the likelihood of road closures due to seasonal flooding.

Park Operations

The Selected Alternative will result in local, short-term, minor to moderate, adverse effects on circulation and traffic delays within Yosemite Valley during construction activities. However, decreased operational costs of maintaining the Yosemite Valley Loop Road and associated drainages due to the reduced need for major annual repairs will be a beneficial impact. Overall, impacts to park operations will be long-term, moderate, and beneficial under the Selected Alternative.

Non-Impairment of Park Resources

Based on the analysis provided in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*, the National Park Service concludes that implementation of the Selected Alternative will not impair a resource or value whose conservation is:

- Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of Yosemite National Park
- Key to the natural or cultural integrity of Yosemite National Park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park
- Identified as a goal in the park's General Management Plan or other relevant National Park Service planning documents.

The Selected Alternative will cause short-term adverse construction-related impacts and negligible or minor adverse impacts to certain resources. The magnitude of these impacts is not sufficient to impair park resources. Consequently, implementation of the Selected Alternative will not violate the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916.

Merced Wild and Scenic River

The Selected Alternative is consistent with all of the elements of the *2005 Revised Merced River Plan*. The Selected Alternative will not result in any changes to the current level of protection and enhancement of the scientific, scenic, geologic, recreational, biological, cultural or hydrologic processes ORVs. As a result, implementation of the Selected Alternative is expected to allow the National Park Service to continue to protect and enhance the river's ORVs in Yosemite Valley consistent with the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the National Park Service must carry out a Section 7 determination on all proposed projects that affect the bed and banks of the Merced River to ensure that they do not affect free flow and do not directly and adversely impact the ORVs for which the river was designated. A full Section 7 analysis was conducted and is included in Appendix C of the EA. The Selected Alternative has elements that would improve the natural hydrologic flow along a portion of the road in the area immediately adjacent to the Pohono Bridge by minimizing the potential for non-natural river bank erosion, providing bank stabilization and restoration to the eroded area, and matching existing bank elevations with placement of stone. In addition, the Selected Alternative will repair approximately 150 feet of embankment immediately adjacent to the Valley View turnout along Northside Drive. The Valley View parking area is currently paved and striped, and can accommodate approximately 10 parked vehicles. The parking area is very popular, and is considered to be a Category A scenic vista, providing visitors with a magnificent view of the Merced River, the Bridalveil Meadow area, and Bridalveil Fall itself. The embankment repair in this area will help maintain the integrity of the parking area and adjacent pedestrian walkway, improve visitor safety in this area, and continue to allow visitors to stop and enjoy the views of the river, meadows, and Bridalveil Fall prior to leaving Yosemite Valley.

As a result of the Section 7 analysis, the National Park Service concluded that the Selected Alternative would not adversely affect the river's free flow and would not directly and adversely impact the Outstandingly Remarkable Values for which the river was designated; therefore, the National Park Service will not carry out a Section 7 determination for this project.

The Selected Alternative will not impair the National Park Service's ability to address user capacities within the Merced River corridor. The goal of the user capacity mandate of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is to ensure that the types and levels of use within a river corridor are protective of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The Selected Alternative will not result in changes in the types or levels of use within the river corridor. Nor will the Selected Alternative lead to changes in the levels of day or overnight use of this segment of the river corridor. As part of the user capacity program, the *2005 Revised Merced River Plan* also adopted a series of interim limits on use, including limits on parking spaces in Yosemite Valley. The Selected Alternative will provide for a minor decrease of 15 roadside parking spaces in the current roadside parking capacity.

Mitigation

To ensure that implementation of the proposed action protects natural and social resources, Outstandingly Remarkable Values, and the free-flowing condition of the Merced Wild and Scenic River, and that it minimizes and mitigates adverse effects to cultural resources, a consistent set of

mitigation measures would be applied. As part of the environmental review, the National Park Service would avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to the extent practicable. As such, the project shall avoid or minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources and historic properties and be designed to work in harmony with the surroundings. The following mitigation measures presented in table 1 have been adopted by this project and will be incorporated into the construction contractor requirements.

Table 1 Impact/Mitigation Matrix			
Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
Prior to Construction			
The National Park Service will apply for and comply with all federal and state permits required for construction-related activities that will include, but are not be limited to: ▪ U.S Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide permit for activities affecting jurisdictional waters of the United States. ▪ A Water Quality Certification issued by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board for monitoring construction-related activities affecting the Merced River	Federal and State Permit Requirements	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
Supervisory construction personnel shall attend an Environmental Protection briefing provided by the park prior to working on site. This briefing is designed to familiarize supervisors with statutory and contractual environmental requirements and the recognition of and protection measures for archeological sites, sensitive habitats, water resources, and wildlife habitats.	Construction Supervisor Training	Contractor	Prior to project activities
Provide a project orientation program for all construction workers to increase their understanding and sensitivity to the challenges of the special environment in which they will be working.	Construction Personnel Training	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
Prepare a Health and Safety Plan to address all aspects of Contractor health and safety issues compliant with OSHA standards and other relevant regulations. The Plan shall be submitted for park review and approval prior to construction.	Construction Personnel Health and Safety	Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Develop an Emergency Notification Plan that complies with park, federal, and state requirements and allows contractors to properly notify park, federal, and/or state personnel in the event of an emergency during construction activities. This plan will address notification requirements related to fire, personnel, and/or visitor injury, releases of spilled material, evacuation processes, etc. The Emergency Notification Plan will be submitted to the park for review/approval prior to commencement of construction activities.	Emergency Notification Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
The park shall develop a Communications Strategy Plan to alert necessary park and Concessionaire employees, residents and visitors to pertinent elements of the construction work schedule. This will include a visitor outreach and communication plan that addresses means for effectively communicating Valley construction and road, trail, recreation uses, and other visitor facility closure, relocation, and detour schedules to the public.	Communications Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to and concurrent with project activities

Table 1
Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
Notify the Underground Services Alert and National Park Service maintenance staff 72 hours prior to any ground disturbance to verify utility locations. Construction-related activities will not proceed until the process of locating existing utilities is completed (water, wastewater, electric, communications, and telephone lines). An emergency response plan will be required of the contractor.	Utilities Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Observe California Department of Health Services standards in designing utility systems.	Utility Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
Develop and implement a comprehensive Spill Prevention/Response Plan that complies with federal and state regulations and addresses all aspects of spill prevention, notification, emergency spill response strategies for spills occurring on land and water, reporting requirements, monitoring requirements, personnel responsibilities, response equipment type and location, and drills and training requirements. The spill prevention/response plan will be submitted to the park for review/approval prior to commencement of construction activities.	Spill Prevention/Response Measures	Contractor	Prior to project activities
Develop and implement a comprehensive waste management plan that complies with federal and state regulations and addresses all aspects related to the transportation, storage, and handling of construction-related hazardous and nonhazardous liquid and solid wastes and submit the plan to the park for review/approval prior to the commencement of construction activities.	Waste Management Measures	Contractor	Prior to project activities
A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) shall be prepared by the Construction Contractor and implemented for construction activities to control surface run-off, reduce erosion, and prevent sedimentation from entering water bodies during construction. The SWPPP shall be submitted for park review and approval prior to construction.	Pollution Prevention Measures	Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
An Oil and Hazardous Materials Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure Plan shall be prepared by the Construction Contractor for the project to address hazardous materials storage, spill prevention and response. The Plan shall be submitted for park review and approval prior to construction.	Hazardous Materials Measures	Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
A qualified biologist will determine the type and number of vulnerable species that may be affected by construction activities; schedule construction activities with seasonal consideration of wildlife lifecycles to minimize impacts during sensitive periods (i.e., bird nesting and breeding seasons, periods of bat breeding, rearing and hibernating, etc).	Wildlife	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
Limit the effects of light and noise on wildlife habitat through controls on construction equipment and timing of construction activities.	Wildlife	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities

Table 1
Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project area provides nesting habitat for special-status species of birds. Whenever feasible, perform construction-related activities outside the breeding season (typically from March to August). If construction activities are expected to take place during the breeding season, a qualified biologist will conduct preconstruction surveys for individuals no more than two weeks prior to construction in March through August. If any special-status species is observed nesting, a determination will be made as to whether or not the proposed action will affect the active nest or disrupt reproductive behavior. If it is determined that the action will not affect an active nest or disrupt breeding behavior, work will proceed without any restriction or mitigation measure. If it is determined that construction activities will affect an active nest or disrupt reproductive behavior, then avoidance strategies will be implemented. Project activities could be delayed until a qualified biologist determines that the subject birds are not nesting or until any juvenile birds are no longer using the nest as their primary day and night roost.	Special-Status Species of Birds	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Install temporary barriers to protect natural surroundings (including trees, plants, and root zones) and highly sensitive sites, such as creek edges and wetlands, from damage. Make every effort to protect wetlands from damage caused by construction equipment, erosion, siltation, and other ground-disturbing activities. Avoid fastening ropes, cables, or fences to trees and install signs as needed to direct use to more appropriate areas.	Vegetation	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Implement a noxious weed abatement program. Standard measures include the following elements: ensure construction-related equipment arrives on site free of mud or seed-bearing material, certify all seeds and straw material as weed-free, identify and treat areas of noxious weeds prior to construction, and revegetate with appropriate native species and monitor the restored site annually for three years to ensure absence of noxious weeds, successful revegetation, plant maintenance, and replacement of unsuccessful plant materials.	Non-Invasive Plant Management	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to, concurrent with and following project activities
Prior to entry into the park, steam-clean heavy equipment to prevent importation of non-native plant species, tighten hydraulic fittings, ensure hydraulic hoses are in good condition and replace if damaged, and repair all petroleum leaks.	Construction Mitigation Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Inspect the project area to ensure that impacts stay within the parameters of the project area and do not escalate beyond the scope of the EA. Additionally, ensure that the project conforms with all applicable permits or project conditions. Store all construction equipment within the delineated work limits. Confine work areas within creek channels to the smallest area necessary.	Project Area Conditions	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities

Table 1
Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
Undertake all treatments within cultural landscapes in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and recommendations in the CLR/DOE. Design all new construction within historic districts and landscapes or adjacent to historic sites to be compatible design specifications, including architectural elements, scale, massing, materials, and orientation. Mitigation measures for cultural landscape resources include development design to be compatible with surrounding historic resources, and screening of new development from surrounding historic resources. Standard mitigation measures, as defined in the Programmatic Agreement (VIII.A.1 [b] and VIII.A.3), include photo documentation and interpretation.	Historic Architecture and Landscapes	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
Mitigate impacts to American Indian traditional resources through actions developed in consultation with culturally associated American Indian tribes (i.e., continuing to provide access to traditional and spiritual locations and, where appropriate, screening new development from traditional use areas). Continued consultation with culturally associated American Indian tribes throughout the site-specific design process and project implementation will provide guidance to avoid or mitigate damage to American Indian traditional resources.	American Indian Traditional Resources	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to project activities
Sites containing archeological resources will be avoided through project design, or recovery of information at sites eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. According to Stipulation VII (C) of the Programmatic Agreement, impacts to archeological resources are not considered adverse for purposes of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act if data recovery is carried out in accordance with the <i>Archeological Synthesis and Research Design</i> .	Archeological Resources	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Although not expected, should previously unknown American Indian burial sites be discovered during construction, provisions outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and its implementing regulations will be followed. Prepare a plan of action in accordance with the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act for procedures and treatment.	American Indian burials, funerary and associated objects and object of cultural patrimony	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
If deemed necessary, demolition/construction work on weekends or federal government holidays may be authorized, with prior written approval of the Superintendent.	Timing of Construction Activities	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager;	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
A construction work schedule shall be prepared by the Construction Contractor for the project that minimizes effects on wildlife in adjacent habitats, peaks in visitation, and noise levels near residential housing and visitor lodging areas. The work schedule shall be submitted for park review and approval prior to construction.	Timing of Construction Activities	Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Submit a construction work plan/schedule that minimizes construction-related noise in noise-sensitive areas for park review/approval prior to commencement of construction activities.	Timing of Construction Activities	Contractor	Prior to project activities
Schedule construction activities that will interrupt operations at visitor facilities to the least extent possible.	Timing of Construction Activities	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities

Table 1
Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
Provide proper and timely maintenance for vehicles and equipment used during construction to reduce the potential for mechanical breakdowns. Conduct maintenance and fueling in an area outside of the River Protection Overlay for the Merced River.	Maintenance	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
Develop and implement a comprehensive traffic control and visitor protection plan for park review/approval that: - Complies with necessary U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways, Part VI-Traffic Control for Construction and Maintenance Operations, and California Department of Transportation Standard Specifications, Section 12 - Provides procedures for preparing and submitting specific street closure, traffic control, and detour plans for each specific area of project construction not less than three weeks before commencement of construction activities in each area - Provides procedures for managing staging areas to restrict public access and maintain site safety - Ensures that visitors are safely and efficiently routed around construction areas in the Valley - Outlines measures to largely offset the potential for public exposure to noxious materials or contaminants that may be present during construction in the project area (i.e., by providing established and maintained walkways and bridges across the site, covering walking paths with clean soil and asphalt, and providing barrier fencing along trails)	Traffic Control and Visitor Protection Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Prior to and concurrent with project activities
During Construction			
Implement a revegetation plan that conforms to the requirements outlined in the park's <i>Vegetation Management Plan</i> and Executive Order 13122 – Invasive Species. Specific components of the plan will include, but not be limited to, the following: soil salvage/reuse, plant salvage, soil preparation, selection, use, and treatment of new soil; use of native plants of native genotypes; seeding mixtures/sources; use of fertilizers; noxious and invasive weed control; supplemental revegetation if initial revegetation fails; repair/replacement of damaged trees; and mulching.	Revegetation/ Restoration	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Concurrent with and following project activities
Complete work activities in wetlands during periods of low flow.	Wetlands	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Provide adequate education and enforcement to limit visitor and construction worker activities that are destructive to wildlife and habitats.	Wildlife	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Concurrent with and following project activities
Snags will not be removed as identified in the <i>Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment</i> .	Wildlife	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Require construction personnel to adhere to park regulations concerning food storage and refuse management. Provide adequate cleaning of areas and garbage pickup to limit wildlife access to human food. Dispose of refuse at least weekly, and do not burn refuse inside the park.	Food Storage and Refuse Management Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Concurrent with project activities

Table 1
Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
Provide bear-proof containers in the camping and picnic areas.	Food Storage Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Concurrent with and following project activities
Use approved siltation and sediment control devices in construction areas to reduce erosion and surface scouring.	Erosion Control Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Use approved siltation and sediment control devices appropriate to the situation in grading areas to capture eroding soil before discharge to riparian channels.	Erosion Control Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Conserve and salvage topsoil for reuse. Materials will be reused to the maximum extent possible.	Soil Conservation Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
A qualified archeologist, as directed by the Secretary of the Interior and National Park Service standards, will monitor construction activities identified as having the potential to affect previously unrecorded cultural resources.	Cultural Resources	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Concurrent with project activities
When previously unknown cultural resources are encountered during construction, temporarily suspend work in the immediate area to document discovered resources according to National Park Service standards.	Cultural Resources	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Cover and/or seal truck beds and stockpiles to minimize blowing dust or loss of debris.	Dust Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent to project activities
Maintain adequate dust suppression equipment using clean water to control excess airborne particulates at staging areas, active construction zones, and unpaved roads leading to/from active construction areas.	Dust Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Store equipment and materials away from all waterways. No debris shall be deposited within the River Protection Overlay of the Merced River.	Construction Activities	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Limit truck and related construction equipment speeds in active construction areas to a maximum of 15 miles per hour and strictly adhering to park regulations and posted speed limits in other areas while inside park boundaries.	Construction Activities	Contractor	Concurrent to project activities
Use silt fencing at the Merced River and associated drainages to prevent construction materials from escaping work areas.	Construction Activities	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Store and use all hazardous materials in compliance with federal regulations. All applicable Materials Safety Data Sheets will be kept on site for inspection.	Hazardous Materials Use	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Hazardous or flammable chemicals shall be prohibited from storage in the staging area, except for those substances identified in the Oil and Hazardous Materials Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure Plan. Hazardous waste materials shall be immediately removed from project site in approved containers.	Hazardous Materials Storage	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities

Table 1
Impact/Mitigation Matrix

Mitigation Measure	Impact Topic	Responsibility	Critical Milestones
To minimize the possibility of hazardous materials seeping into soil or water, check equipment frequently to identify and repair any leaks. Standard measures include hazardous materials storage and handling procedures; spill containment, cleanup, and reporting procedures; and limitation of refueling and other hazardous activities to upland/nonsensitive sites. Provide an adequate hydrocarbon spill containment system (e.g., absorption materials, etc.) on site, in case of unexpected spills in the project area. Ensure equipment is equipped with a hazardous spill containment kit. Ensure that personnel trained in the use of hazardous spill containment kits are on site at all times during construction activities.	Hazardous Materials Handling Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Ensure that all construction equipment has functional exhaust/muffler systems.	Noise Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Use hydraulically or electrically powered construction equipment, when feasible.	Noise Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Locate stationary noise sources as far from sensitive receptors as possible.	Noise Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Limit the idling of motors except as necessary (e.g., concrete mixing trucks).	Noise Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
To the extent possible, perform all on-site noisy work above 76 A-weighted decibels (dBA) (such as the operation of heavy equipment) between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to minimize disruption to nearby park users.	Noise Abatement Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Consolidate construction equipment and materials to the staging areas at the end of each work day to limit the visual intrusion of construction equipment during nonworking hours.	Scenic Resources Protection Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Direct and shield night lighting associated with construction equipment to minimize light scatter effects.	Night Sky Measures	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Provide lights in developed areas for safety where pedestrians cross busy intersections.	Construction Lighting Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Concurrent with and following project activities
Provide protective fencing enclosures around construction areas, including utility trenches, to protect public health and safety.	Public Health and Safety	Contractor	Concurrent with project activities
Install appropriate traffic signs.	Transportation Measures	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager	Concurrent with and following project activities
Post Construction			
Remove all tools, equipment, barricades, signs, surplus materials, and rubbish from the project work limits upon project completion. Remove all debris from the project site, including all visible concrete, timber, and metal pieces.	Construction Clean-Up	Yosemite National Park, Project Manager; Contractor	Upon completion of project activities

Public Involvement and Coordination

Public Scoping

The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project proposal was released for public scoping on May 2, 2005, and the National Park Service accepted scoping comments through June 1, 2005. Written public scoping comments were received by fax, email, and U.S. mail. During the scoping period, 11 public comment letters were received resulting in over 50 individual comments. Formal consultation with American Indian communities also resulted in specific comments. The analysis of these comments generated 39 concern statements, which were categorized and considered for this planning process.

The National Park Service made available to the public the 30% Design Drawings for this project at the May, 2005 Open House, hosted in the Auditorium in Yosemite Valley. Consequently, many scoping comments the park received call for specific actions related to schematic concepts outlined in these 30% Design Drawings. However, comment authors were aware those schematic concepts were subject to change based on public scoping comments received for this project.

Some of the main public scoping concerns requested the National Park Service to consider for this project include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Paving and/or removal of specific turnouts along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road
- Reducing the size of the Fern Spring turnout in order to alleviate impacts to sensitive resources in the vicinity
- Revegetating areas that are disturbed by grading activities during construction
- Considering the use of different types of roadside barriers (e.g., barrier stones or curbing) to reduce impacts to areas adjacent to roadside turnouts
- Maintaining and preserving historic rock work associated with headwalls and wingwalls of culverts
- Coordinating of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project with the goals identified in the Yosemite Valley Plan with regard to proposed future traffic circulation patterns in Yosemite Valley

Public Review and Comment Period

On December 5, 2005, the National Park Service released the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* (EA) for public review and comment. In addition to mailing copies of the EA to individuals on the park's mailing list, the National Park Service also posted the document on its website.

As a result of initial comments received, the National Park Service identified the need to provide clarification on a few issues addressed in the EA, as well as respond to requests for an extension of the public comment period. A *Factsheet* was released and distributed to individuals on the park's mailing list and posted on the park's website on December 29, 2005 to clarify proposed tree removal and two graphics presented in the EA depicting existing and proposed roadway widths. The public review and comment period was extended by 14 days, closing on January 20, 2006. This 45-day public review period is consistent with NEPA requirements and Director's Order 12.

Comments received during the formal public comment period consisted of 23 letters representing 4 organizations, 2 American Indian tribes, 1 government agency, and 16 individuals. From these letters, 189 individual comments were identified and 64 concern statements generated. Some of the main concerns generated from the Public Comment Period are:

- The relationship of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project to the *Merced River Plan* with regard to validity of the Comprehensive Management Plan.
- The relationship of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project to the *Yosemite Valley Plan* with regard to transportation elements called for in the plan.
- The level of development in Yosemite Valley in relation to the mission of the National Park Service.
- Providing a more thorough depiction of existing conditions and rationale for the placement of a Utility Corridor between Pohono Bridge and the Wawona Road intersection.
- Concern regarding the National Park Service's consultation process with American Indian groups.
- Cumulative impacts on the Visitor Experience due to continued construction activities in Yosemite Valley.
- Requests for additional provisions for people with disabilities (e.g., handicap parking spaces).
- Requests for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.
- Requests for clarification on existing and proposed roadway widths.
- Requests for an extension of the public review and comment period due to delays in receiving EAs in the mail and due to confusion over roadway widths.
- Requests that the National Park Service engage the public earlier in the public involvement process.
- Requests for third-party monitors during construction activities.
- Concern over vegetation removal activities and invasive plant introduction.
- Suggestions provided on areas where revegetation activities should occur.
- Suggestions to construct causeways and wildlife passages.
- Proposed locations for new wayside exhibits and interpretive displays along roadway.
- Concern over safety hazard and the need for signage in certain areas.
- Use and disposal of asphalt and concern for locating an asphalt batch plant in Yosemite Valley to support construction activities.
- Proximity of parking to concession operations and the desire to comment on the Concessions Management Plan and concessioner contracting process.

Coordination

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The National Park Service has initiated formal consultation with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding jurisdictional waters of the United States within Yosemite Valley that the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project has the potential to impact. The Army Corps of Engineers issues General and Nationwide Permits conditions, under which construction activities associated with this project are likely to occur. If the Army Corps of Engineers determine that an Individual

Permit is required for construction activities, a public notice would be posted in the Federal Register, followed by a Public Hearing.

The National Park Service has scheduled a site visit with the Army Corps of Engineers during spring 2006 (when conditions are the wettest) in order to discuss project components on site. Progress with the Army Corps of Engineers on behalf of this project will be documented and available to the public upon request.

Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

The National Park Service will continue coordination with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. Prior to construction, a Water Quality Certification will be obtained for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 USC 1531 et seq.) requires all federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by the agency does not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or critical habitat. The National Park Service obtained a list of federally listed endangered and threatened species that may be present in the Yosemite Valley area in early August of 2005 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website. This list, in consultation with the park wildlife biologist, was used as the basis for the special-status species analysis in this EA. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will continue, as defined by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as environmental compliance for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is finalized.

California State Historic Preservation Officer/Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

A Programmatic Agreement among the National Park Service at Yosemite, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regarding Planning, Design, Construction, Operations and Maintenance was developed in consultation with American Indian tribes having cultural association with Yosemite National Park and was executed in October 1999. Pursuant to Article VI of the Programmatic Agreement, the review process for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, a Cultural Landscape Report and Determination of Eligibility (DOE) was prepared for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road culverts, headwalls, and pullouts that are contributing elements to the Yosemite Valley Historic District. The California State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the DOE on January 26, 2006. In accordance with the 1999 Programmatic Agreement, the section 106 review process for historic properties including archaeological and traditional cultural resources is documented on the NPS Preservation Assessment Form (YOSE XXX 2005-026), and attached here.

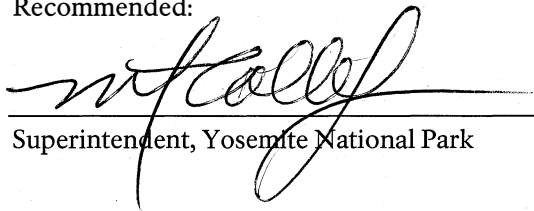
American Indian Consultation

Yosemite National Park initiated consultation with American Indian tribes having cultural association with Yosemite Valley on February 24, 2005, and continued through internal scoping and public scoping periods. Tribes consulted include the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk, the Mono Lake Kutzadika Paiute Indian Community, and the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, Inc. (Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation). Consultation and information sharing has continued throughout preparation of this document, and will continue throughout the planning and implementation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Conclusion

Based on the information contained in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* as summarized herein, the nature of comments of agencies and the public, and the incorporation of the mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, it is the determination of the National Park Service that the Selected Alternative is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. All foreseeable connected actions were considered in arriving at this determination. No additional structures or facilities, aside from culverts, will be added to floodplains and/wetlands as a part of this project. Therefore, a wetland and floodplain Statement of Findings was not required. No long-term adverse impacts to floodplains or wetlands will occur from the Selected Alternative. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The Selected Alternative as detailed in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* may be implemented as soon as possible.

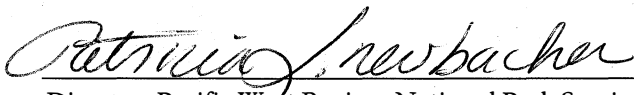
Recommended:



Superintendent, Yosemite National Park

2/14/06
Date

Approved:



Director, Pacific West Region, National Park Service

2/22/06
Date

Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project

Yosemite National Park

Errata Sheets

The EA was available for public review and comment for a 45-day period from December 6, 2005 through January 20, 2006. The National Park Service received 23 letters from 16 individuals, 4 organizations, 2 tribes, and 1 government agency. From these letters, 189 individual comments were coded and analyzed. These comments were screened to determine if any new issues, reasonable alternatives, potential for significant impacts, or mitigation measures were suggested. Comments in favor of or against the proposed action or alternatives, or comments that only agree or disagree with National Park Service policy are not considered substantive (i.e., they did not challenge the accuracy of the analysis, dispute information accuracy, suggest different viable alternatives, and/or provide new information that makes a change in the proposal). The analysis of these comments generated 65 concern statements, which were categorized and responded to. All received concerns and the National Park Service's response to these concerns, can be reviewed in the Public Comment Response Report for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Comments received on the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* resulted in 1) Changes to the Selected Alternative as a result of public comment, and 2) Technical corrections and changes to the text and graphics of the EA. Changes to the Selected Alternative as a result of public comments are summarized below:

- The California black oak tree proposed to be removed will now be retained.
- An additional reduction in the size of the Fern Springs turnout will take place.
- Four of the five roadside turnouts along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road proposed for removal will now be retained.

Technical Corrections and Comments Requiring Changes to the Text and Graphics of the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*

1. All tables in Appendix C are incorrectly numbered.

On pages C-6 through C-11, the table entitled *Section 7 Evaluation for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project* is numbered as Table D-1. The National Park Service changes the number to Table C-1 to correctly reflect association with Appendix C.

On pages C-13 and C-14, the table entitled *Effects of the Proposed Action on Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Valley Segment of the Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor* is numbered as Table D-2. The National Park Service changes the number to Table C-2 to correctly reflect association with Appendix C.

2. A list of references will be added to Chapter VIII: Bibliography

The National Park Service adds the following references to Chapter VIII: Bibliography:

Carter Burgess

2005 Valley Loop Road (Southside-Northside Drive) Yosemite National Park
Final Hydraulics Report, Mariposa County, California. October.

Townsend, Timothy G., et. al.

1998 Leaching Characteristics of Asphalt Road Waste. Report No. 98-2.
Florida Center for Solid and Hazardous Waste Management, Florida.
June.

United States Environmental Protection Agency

2000 Hot Mix Asphalt Plants Emission Assessment Report. Office of Air
Quality. December.

3. Request for additional terms to be included in Chapter VII: Glossary and Acronyms.

The National Park Service adds the following terms and definitions to Chapter VII: Glossary and Acronyms:

Paved apron: A 4 foot wide paved area that protects the edge of the roadway
shoulder at locations where roadside parking is unpaved. Paved aprons are an
extension of the shoulder and are designed to help protect the edge of the
pavement as vehicles are coming into and out of the turnout.

Road prism: The driving surface of a road (including constructed roadbed),
shoulders, ditches including back slopes, fill slopes, curbs, gutters, storm drainage
facilities and sidewalks including back slopes.

4. Table II-1 and Figure II-6 incorrectly identify existing conditions and proposed actions to road side turnouts numbered 53 and 54 near the El Capitan Bridge.

On page II-17 of table II-1, Alternative 2 Parking Actions, the existing condition of roadside turnout #53 was labeled as unpaved, however, this turnout is partially paved. Approximately 20ft immediately west of El Capitan Bridge is paved before the turnout turns to gravel in the area where emergency vehicles park during Search and Rescue efforts. Roadside turnout #53 will be re-graded and graveled. The existing condition of roadside turnout #54 was incorrectly labeled paved, when in fact it is unpaved. Roadside turnout #54 will be re-graded and graveled.

On page II-17, the Condition of Existing Roadside Parking for #53 will be replaced with the following sentence.

“Partially paved turnout, north of bridge, west side of roadway”

On page II-17, the Proposed Roadside Parking Condition for #53 will be replaced with the following sentence.

“Regrade and supplement with gravel as necessary, following existing footprint

On page II-17, the Condition of Existing Roadside Parking for #54 will be replaced with the following sentence.

“Unpaved turnout, north of bridge, east side of roadway”

On page II-17, the Proposed Roadside Parking Condition for #53 will be replaced with the following sentence.

“Regrade and supplement with gravel as necessary”

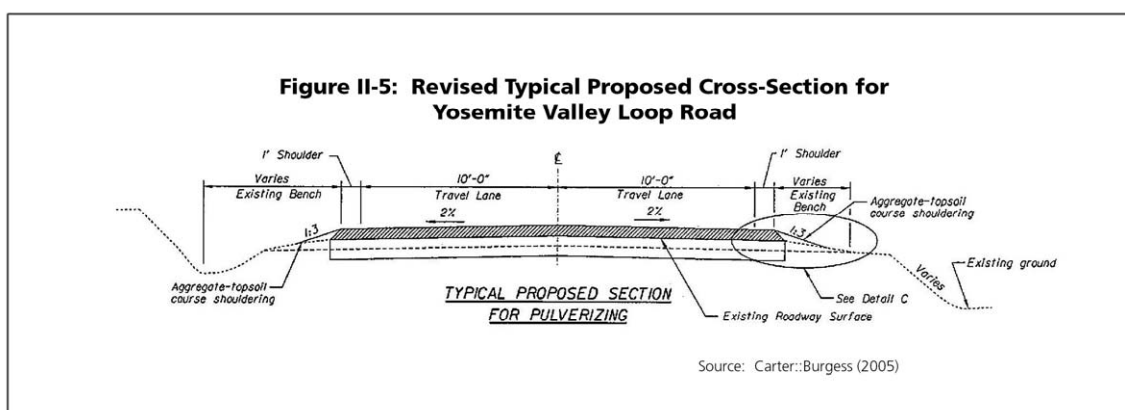
On page II-13, figure II-6 - Yosemite Valley Loop Road Alternative 2: Proposed Parking Actions will be replaced with Figure II-6 (Revised) Yosemite Valley Loop Road Alternative 2: Proposed Parking Actions (page E6 of this document). Figure II-6 (Revised) reflects the changes to turnouts #53 and #54 made in table II-1.

5. Requests for clarification of language and graphics that depicted both typical and proposed cross-sections of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

Figures II-1 and II-5 in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* have been replaced with more accurate depictions of roadway cross-sections. Figure II-1 shows a *typical existing* cross-section of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road as well as a base map of the project area. Figure II-5 shows *proposed* cross-sections of different sections of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Public comment indicated that both of these figures unclearly presented information pertaining to existing and proposed road widths for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

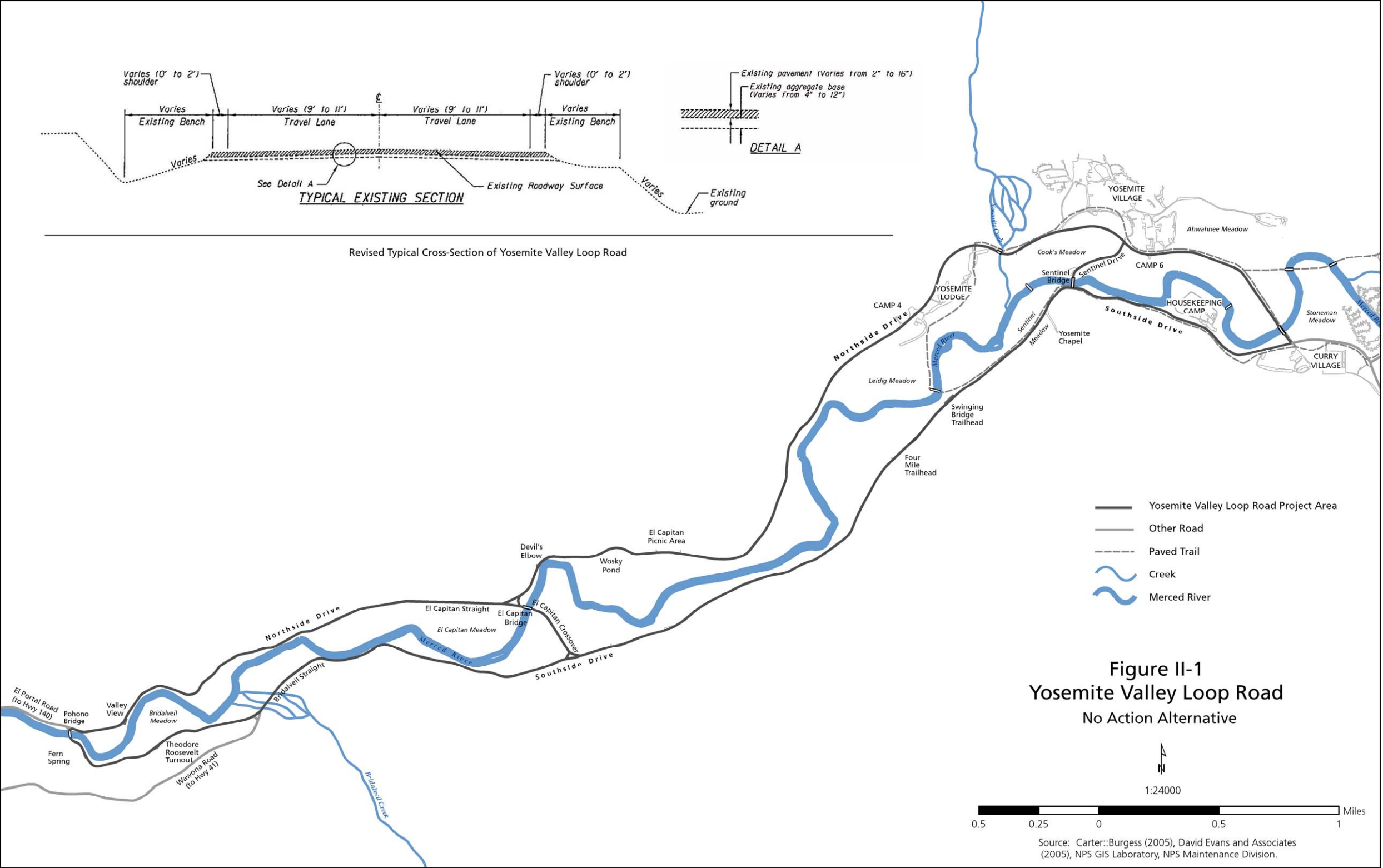
On page II-3, the National Park Service replaces figure II-1 – Yosemite Valley Loop Road No Action Alternative with figure II-1 (Revised) Yosemite Valley Loop Road No Action Alternative, which can be reviewed on page E5 of this document.

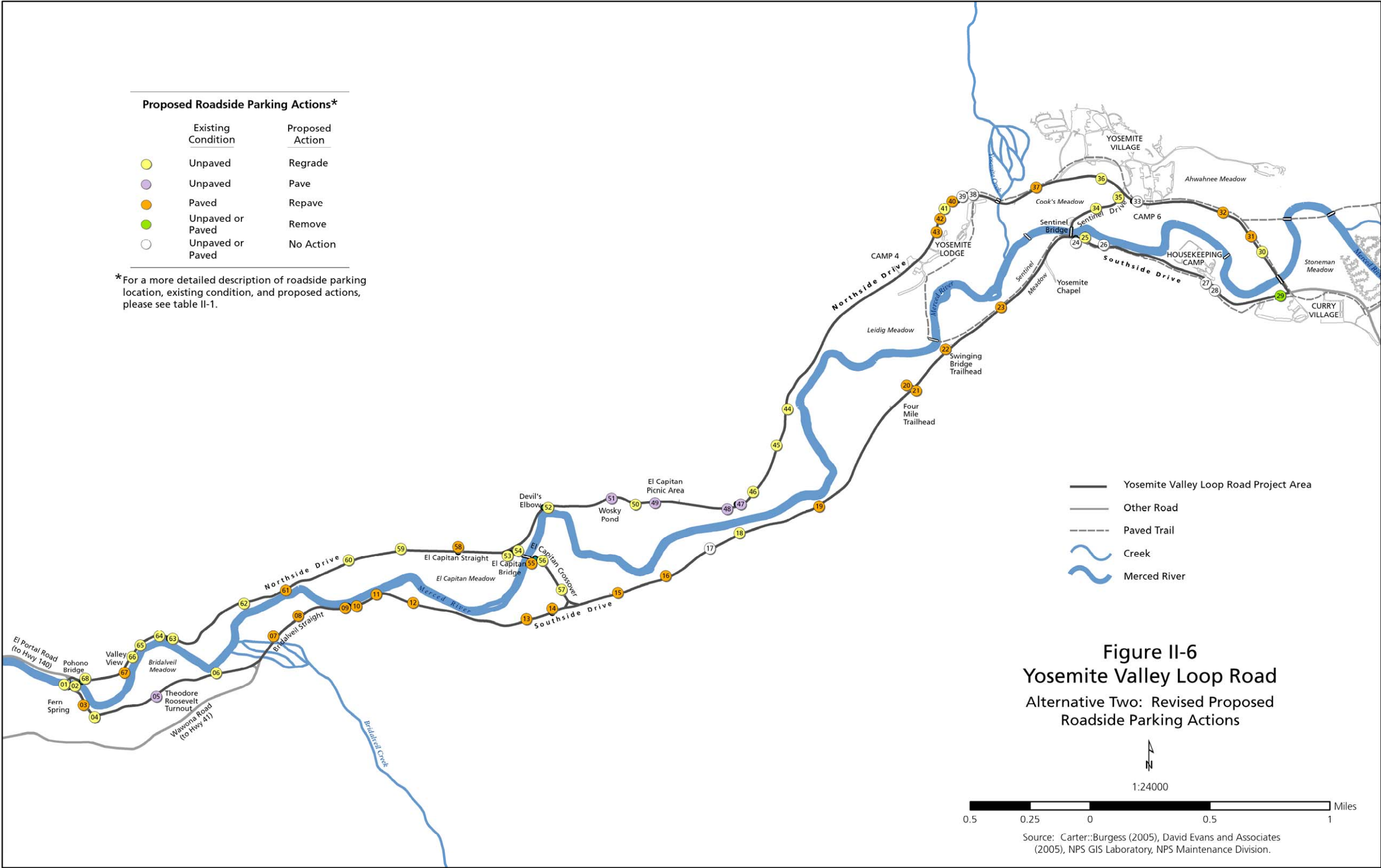
On page II-12, the National Park Service replaces figure II-5 – Typical Proposed Road Improvement Cross-Sections with the following figure II-5 (Revised) and text.



“Figure II-5 depicts proposed changes to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Travel lane and shoulder widths would be made consistent, where possible, to a standard width of 10 foot travel lanes and 1 foot shoulders. No trees would be removed to achieve these proposed standard travel lane and shoulder widths, nor would the existing road bench be widened to achieve these standard widths. In some locations, the existing roadway width could be made narrower.”

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6. Requests for the National Park Service to provide reasoning for the proposed removal of roadside parking as part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

The National Park Service proposed the removal of turnouts #11, #29, #30, #64, and #65 in the EA. As a result of public comment, four of the five turnouts will now be retained. However, the National Park Service will move forward with plans to remove turnout #29. The National Park Service considered the request to maintain the 13 parking spaces at turnout #29, however, due to the inadequate site distance preceding the Curry Village stop sign, the heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and rafting access in that area, the National Park Service will proceed with the removal of this parking through the placement of curbing alongside the roadway. Public safety outweighs the need for parking in this general vicinity.

The National Park Service proposed the removal of five roadside parking locations. The National Park Service adds the following information on page II-11 at the end of the description of *Alternative 2: Rehabilitation of and Improvements to the Roadway, Drainages, and Roadside Parking (Preferred Alternative)*. Location identification numbers can be found on figure 11-6 on page II-13 of the EA as follows:

Removal of Roadside Parking

Roadside Turnout # 11 – This turnout is located on the outside of a curve along a windy portion of the roadway. A roadway width of 22 feet could be achieved in the section of road by using the existing width of the roadway and roadside turnout #11 combined. As a result of the proposed width, the pullout would no longer safely accommodate a vehicle.

Roadside Turnout # 29 – Roadside turnout #29, as identified in figure II-6 and table II-1 is proposed for removal in the Selected Alternative. These 13 parking spaces precede the stop sign at the intersection of South Side Drive and Northside Drive at Curry Village.

This is a particularly congested intersection in Yosemite Valley. Eastbound vehicles on Southside Drive that are approaching this intersection need to get in the proper lanes for turn options. Once vehicles are stopped at this stop sign, drivers are faced with three turning choices. They can turn right into the Curry Village entrance area, left onto Northside Drive to return to Yosemite Village, or they can continue straight along Stoneman Meadow. In busy summer months, many visitors are engaged in recreational activity in this vicinity. The paved bicycle path borders the roadway on the south lane preceding the stop sign and many pedestrians and bicyclists use this path. Four crosswalks in this intersection accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists and rafters who are crossing traffic to access the river. Curry Village Parking Lot is often congested so informal parking along the roadways has become a common practice, especially in the East Valley. Turnout #29 was created by several years of informal use, however, public safety concerns arise because of its proximity to the stop sign and heavily congested pedestrian areas in addition to its encroachment on the adjacent bicycle path..

Roadside Turnout # 30 – This turnout is located along a stretch of road where the existing bike path is within close proximity of the roadway. During congested periods, vehicles have begun parking on the bike path. Curbing has been

proposed along this segment of the road to curtail future parking on the bike path.

Roadside Turnouts # 64 and #65 – These two turnouts are located on the inside of a curve, directly adjacent to the Merced River. Informal use over the years has widened the turnout, essentially allowing for vehicles to park on top of the river bank. In addition, visibility from the turnouts onto the roadway is screened by vegetation creating a hazardous condition when drivers are entering and exiting the turnouts. Finally, this section of road can be confusing for drivers attempting to get into the proper lane in anticipation of Pohono Bridge.

The National Park Service considered the request to maintain the 13 parking spaces at turnout #29, however, due to the inadequate site distance preceding the Curry Village stop sign, the heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and rafting access in that area, the National Park Service will proceed with the removal of this parking through the placement of curbing alongside the roadway. Public safety outweighs the need for parking in this general vicinity.

7. Requests for the National Park Service to provide reasoning for the placement of the Utility Corridor in the roadway from Pohono Bridge to Wawona Road.

The National Park Service adds the following paragraphs on page II-6, Actions Common To All Action Alternatives, at the end of the bulleted paragraph:

“The proposed utility duct bank along Southside Drive between Pohono Bridge and the intersection of Wawona Road will provide for one sewer line, one telecommunication line, and one high voltage power line to meet the existing sanitary, safety and emergency response needs at Bridalveil Falls parking area and the Wawona Tunnel Vista Point.

Power and Telecommunication Background Information

The current ventilation system in the Wawona Tunnel is dangerously inadequate. The power supply through the tunnel is insufficient and currently there is no backup power generator. When power outages occur, no ventilation is provided to the tunnel, nor is there any lighting through the tunnel.

The Wawona Tunnel ventilation system, designed and constructed in the 1930’s, fails to meet current vehicle tunnel standards. The ventilation system is no longer capable of adequately removing smoke, posing a high risk of death in the event that any of the traffic accidents occurring in the tunnel were to involve fire. The automated fan controls no longer function, so park utility staff must manually switch the fans on and off, keeping one in operation at all times to provide some ventilation, and turning the others off for monthly maintenance and to keep the motors from wearing out. There is no fire detection system in the tunnel. The carbon monoxide monitoring system no longer works, so no determination can be made about accumulated contaminant levels. Shafts in the tunnel were found to contain dust with lead, asbestos, and other contaminants in a report by the U.S. Public Health Service dated March 1993.

Significant drops in voltage level are common in the Wawona Tunnel electrical distribution system, and therefore it cannot provide the reliable power supply required for proper operation of a new tunnel ventilation system. The electrical distribution system is also the only commercial power source for the current park telephone and radio communications hub on nearby Turtleback Dome. The unreliable power it delivers jeopardizes the park's ability to provide timely response to fire, medical and law enforcement emergencies. The existing electrical distribution system transects two miles of mountainside, providing a visual intrusion and disturbing the natural condition of the area.

Sewer Background Information

The construction of a sewer line in Southside Drive from Pohono Bridge, 2.5 miles to Bridalveil Falls will connect the sewer system from the Bridalveil Falls restrooms to the force main sewer line in Northside Drive. Bridalveil Falls is a prime area to be interactive with Yosemite National Park features. By encouraging visitors to stop and experience this scenic vista, the National Park Service has created a need to provide appropriate facilities capable of handling the needs of the visitor and protecting natural resource from impacts. At Bridalveil Fall, a vault toilet was installed in the early 1990's to replace pit toilets. It is undersized and fails to ventilate properly causing noxious odors throughout the parking lot all year long. The sewer line that will be placed in this section of Southside Drive will accommodate future improvements to the Bridalveil Fall restrooms."

The National Park Service adds the following paragraph on pages III-75 and III-76, under the heading **Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2** and **Environmental Consequences of Alternative 3**:

If this project were not implemented, visitors would continue to face health and safety risks. Should a fire occur during a vehicle accident within the tunnel, visitors could die due to inhalation of toxic gases that the ventilation system cannot remove. There is no fire detection system within the tunnel. Without a reliable power source for a primary park communications hub, timely emergency dispatch for fire, medical and law enforcement emergencies is compromised and could result in the loss of life or property. Thus, long-term, moderate to major, adverse impacts could take place to park operations if this action were not implemented.

Changes to the Selected Alternative as a Result of Public Comment

1. Requests for the preservation of the California black oak that was proposed for removal in the Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment.

After receiving public concern over the proposed removal of a California black oak that leans over the roadway, the National Park Service reassessed the necessity of removing this tree. The National Park Service found that it was not necessary to remove the black oak from a safety

standpoint; therefore, the tree will not be removed as part of this project. This change of action does not result in changes to the impacts analysis.

2. *Requests for a further reduction in parking capacity at the Fern Springs turnout due to sensitive cultural and natural resources at this site.*

The Selected Alternative proposed to reduce the width of the Fern Spring Turnout, which would accommodate the same amount of vehicles but in a more narrow space (current turnout width is approximately 22 feet wide and the proposed width is 18 feet). Public concern as well as consultation with a culturally associated American Indian tribe called for further reduction of this turnout due to the sensitive ecological and cultural resources in this area. The National Park Service will move forward with plans to reduce the width of Fern Spring Turnout by 4 feet, as well as reducing the length by two vehicles. This will result in a capacity of six vehicles at this turnout. Impacts to resources associated with the proposed placement of a larger culvert will be avoided by constructing a swale that will channel water to an existing culvert to the west of Fern Spring.

3. *Requests for the National Park Service to preserve the roadside parking that was proposed for removal in the Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment.*

In response to public concern over the 1% reduction in parking spaces as a part of this project, four of the five roadside parking areas proposed for removal will now be maintained. This change of action does not result in changes to the impacts analysis.

- Roadside turnout #11 is a paved turnout that could accommodate three vehicles. The National Park Service proposed its removal due to concerns over the narrowness of the travel lanes in this area and the turnout width. The original objective was to create a more consistent width of 22 feet in this particularly narrow section of roadway. However, due to public concern over reducing roadside parking and the impact to the visitor experience due to the turnout's proximity to the El Capitan glacial moraine, the National Park Service now proposes to maintain the three spaces that turnout #11 provides.
- Roadside parking turnout #30 is a gravel turnout bordered by Northside Drive and a bicycle path. It precedes the entrance to the River Campground. The National Park Service proposed removing turnout #30 because of safety concerns regarding its proximity to both the campground entrance and the bicycle path. After further consideration, the National Park Service proposes to maintain this turnout by regrading and graveling this turnout, and placing barrier stones along the current footprint to deter vehicles from parking on the bicycle path.
- Roadside turnouts numbered 64 and 65, which accommodate three and two vehicles respectively, were proposed to be removed because of safety concerns and proximity to the Merced River. However, due to public concern over reducing roadside parking capacity, the National Park Service will maintain these turnouts. Roadside parking numbers 64 and 65 will be re-graded and graveled.

The National Park Service has revised the proposed action to now retain four of the five turnouts originally proposed for removal under the Preferred Alternative. Turnouts #11, #64, #65, and #30, as identified in figure II-6 and table II-1, will remain and be replaced in kind. These changes are reflected in figure II-6 (Revised) which can be viewed on page E6 of this document.

Yosemite National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project

Public Comment Response Report
February 2006

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Introduction

This report summarizes public comments submitted on the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* (EA). The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project EA was released for public review on December 6, 2005, and the National Park Service accepted comments through January 20, 2006. Written public comments were received by email, and U.S. mail. During the comment period, 23 public comment letters were received. This report provides (1) a summary of public concerns expressed in the public comments received; and (2) a specific response to each identified concern.

Methodology

Public comments received during the public comment period were reviewed and analyzed using the park's Comment Analysis and Response Database system. Analysis of public comment letters is performed in a series of stages which require review by staff and members of the Management Team during review and processing. Initially, each letter received is reviewed to determine the discrete points the author is expressing. Each sentence or paragraph in the letter is then "coded" in order to associate that comment with a particular resource topic or element of the plan (such as air quality or the plan's relationship to other projects).

Once all letters have been coded for individual comments, similar comments are grouped together and a "concern statement" is generated, which is intended to capture the main points of what the comments are addressing. Concern statements are worded in a way that affords the National Park Service the opportunity to respond to a requested action. Concern statements are then screened to determine whether or not further clarification is need to be made in the document or whether they call for a modification of the proposed action. In the case of the latter, these types of concerns would be brought to park management for deliberation. Finally, the planning team prepares responses presenting the National Park Service's reasoning as to how and why public concerns will be incorporated into the planning process.

As a direct result of public input, all comments are made available for review on the park's web site. The posting of public comments is a result of requests made during the scoping process for this planning effort, and will continue for future planning efforts. The Comment Analysis and Response Report generated through the comment analysis and response process is included in this report.

How To Use This Document

This Response to Public Comments summary is divided into sections based upon the topics identified in the Table of Contents.

Each section includes one or more statements of public concern. These public concerns present common themes identified from comments in a statement that captures what action the public feels the National Park Service should undertake. [Note: Because all public concerns are presented, oftentimes these statements may offer contradictory direction.] Each public concern is, in turn, followed by supporting quotes from public comments referenced to original letters.

Each supporting quote is followed by an attribute which identifies the number assigned to the original letter it came from, whether the comment was made by an individual or an organization, a

general description of the organization type, and a reference to the letter number and the comment number within the letter. This information appears as a parenthetical clause in the following format: organization or individual, city and state of letter – relevant planning effort – letter number. For example, “(Individual, Merced, CA - #7-3)” is a letter from an individual in Merced, California, and assigned the letter number 7; the supporting quote is from the third coded comment in the letter.

Finally, each public concern statement, and its supporting quote, is followed by the National Park Service Response.

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Planning Process and Policy

Acceptable/Desired Levels of Development

Concern #1: The National Park Service should cease new development in Yosemite Valley and preserve the area along historic lines.

“For Yosemite Valley, the time for new development is past, and it must be preserved along historic lines.”

(Individual, Comment #7-7)

Response: No new development will take place as part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project except in areas where new culverts are added to improve hydrology in relation to the existing roadway. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance project which aims to repair, restore and rehabilitate the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Additionally, measures will be taken to protect and restore historic features, such as stone headwalls of culverts, along the roadway.

Concern #2: The National Park Service should respect and protect Yosemite Valley in the same manner as the Yosemite Indian Nation has done for thousands of years.

“The Federal Government has been given this job as Superintendent to enact their mission statement as well as their policies on protection and preservation. We hope that you see in our ancestral homeland all the wonders and promise that has been entrusted to you by your higher authority and would respect and protect it in the same manner that we have for thousands of years. We pray that you... understand your responsibility and the role you play in all that is the Yosemite Valley. We pray for preservation for the future generations so that we will carry on.”

(Individual, Comment #9-7)

Response: The mission of the National Park Service is to conserve and protect natural and cultural resources for the benefit of future generations. The National Park Service is committed to this mission in Yosemite National Park and seeks input and assistance in this endeavor from many entities. The National Park Service respects the long history of American Indian groups who have inhabited and are continually connected to Yosemite Valley and the park regularly engages in consultation with American Indian tribes, other community individuals and groups that claim association and interest in park lands.

Concern #3: The National Park Service should be committed to fulfilling the original mission of the National Park Service to protect and preserve unimpaired historic and natural resources.

“In studying this and other documents, one gains the distinct impression, time and again, that the present Yosemite administration is primarily development oriented and not preservation oriented. If true, this is unfortunate, since the original mission of the NPS was the unimpaired preservation of these areas, and I believe this extends to historic as well as natural values.”

(Individual, Comment #7-5)

“Please preserve the Beauty and the Silence. This is what brings solace, and refreshes the soul.”

(Individual, Comment #22-14)

Response: The National Park Service’s mission statement requires that the natural, cultural and historic resources of a national park be protected and preserved for the benefit of future generations. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project fulfills this objective. Historic features along the roadway (e.g., stone rockwork, culvert headwalls) will be preserved and restored where needed. The roadway itself will be recycled using the pulverization process. By repairing the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, the National Park Service will ensure that visitor access to the park is safely sustained into the future.

Concern #4: The National Park Service should recognize the belief by native people the National Park Service holds illegal title to ancestral lands in Yosemite National Park and has developed this land for corporate advancement and financial interests.

“We concede that the United States Government holds illegal title to our ancestral lands and are using the Mother for the purpose of government/corporate advancements for financial interests. We recognize with protest, the United States Government, through its entity known as the National Park Service, has violently contracted much of our ancestral land, unearthed many of our ancestors, built lodges, restaurants, concessions, museums and housing over our ancestral villages destroying the sacred history of our people who lay underneath for eternity.”

(Individual, Comment #9-9)

Response: The National Park Service recognizes this concern, and realizes that local Indian tribes continue to have a strong relationship with this land today. It is for this reason that great progress has been made in recent years in providing for local tribal access to the park.

The National Park Service, as a government agency, is a not-for-profit entity. Our mission, as mandated by Congress, is to protect the natural and cultural resources within the park, and to provide for the visitor’s experience of these resources. It is for this latter requisite that we provide visitor facilities, such as roadways. When the visitor experience threatens to impair a resource, we are bound to consider the resource first and foremost, a policy that informs our daily management of the park as well as the planning processes that determine its future.

When planning for facilities, we not only welcome but solicit the input and participation of all interested parties, and greatly value the role of the tribes in our decision-making processes. Through our government-to-government relationship, local tribes legally have an even greater opportunity for involvement in these processes than the general public. We cannot take away the historical acts committed against Indian peoples; but through finding common ground in our shared values we wish to move forward together, as stewards of this land.

Planning Process

Concern #5: The National Park Service should consider a more in-depth environmental review for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

“An EIS needs to be done in order for this project and its corresponding document to be legally compliant. This project would be a huge undertaking for the Park, involving a lot of ground disturbance, new asphalt and concrete. There would be a massive new impact on the resources as well as on the visitors, on top of the impacts that are already occurring to the visitor experience due to ongoing construction projects. Cumulatively, the impacts are becoming unacceptable. A project of this size, with its potential impacts, logically would call for an Environmental Impact Statement instead of an EA. According to DO-12, a National Park Service park planning document, “If something your park is proposing might have a significant impact on the human environment, you must prepare an EIS.” These impacts must be gauged by several specific criteria, including: “Any unique characteristics of the area (proximity to historic or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, wetlands or floodplains, and so forth) . . . Whether the action is related to other actions that may have individual insignificant impacts but cumulatively significant effects. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or breaking it down into small component parts . . . Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment “(<http://www.nature.nps.gov/protectingrestoring/DO12S-t/O4-EISs/042-criteria.htm>). The above criteria in DO-12 seem to seem to agree with our view that an EIS is required.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno CA, Comment #18-6)

“If the Project reduces the visitor experience rather than enhance it, it is my understanding that a different and more widespread project and environmental process is warranted.”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-18)

“The magnitude of this project points to the need for an EIS. Any project of this magnitude -- involving massive project impacts, and affecting the hydrology of a vast segment of a protected river --requires an EIS pursuant to NEPA. Massive disruptions to visitor experience, noise, and tons of asphalt produced on site in the Valley, as well as the construction impacts themselves are of very large scale. These should be-- but have not been - taken in the context of massive ongoing construction impacts. These factors argue for the redrafting of any proposal for the Loop Road in the form of an EIS. Any proposal of this magnitude in a Wild and Scenic River Corridor requires an EIS.”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-3)

Response: The National Park Service is required, under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Department of the Interior Director's Order 12, to prepare the appropriate level of environmental review and analysis for all proposed projects and planning actions. NEPA (sec. 102(2)(C)) requires that an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared if the National Park Service, "proposes or approves an action whose impacts on the human environment may be significant."

The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance project that aims to rehabilitate the existing roadway and associated drainage features. Actions proposed under the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project were analyzed for impacts to natural, cultural, and social resources in the EA. Natural, cultural and social resource experts provided guidance for the development and analysis of alternatives for this project. Moreover, a thorough review of the impacts analysis was carried

out by qualified park personnel. No significant impacts to resources were identified. As a result, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is not necessary.

Timeframe for Planning

Concern #6: The National Park Service should extend the public comment period on the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project by 30 days.

"I am requesting an extension of the comment period on the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Rehabilitation Project EA. In order to provide time for the necessary clarification to be written and distributed, and then for there to be a suitable comment period, we are requesting an extension of the original thirty-day comment period. It is especially awkward, both for your staff and for the public, that this problem has arisen in the middle of the holiday period, and it is all the more reason to grant an extension. We are suggesting a thirty-day extension (until February 6), but that is based on the assumption that you can provide the needed clarification fairly soon. If you will need more time, then the comment period should be extended further with that in mind."

(Conservation Organization, Comment #8-1)

Response: As a result of requests from the public, the National Park Service extended the public comment period for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project by 15 days. The Public Comment period began December 6, 2005 and closed at the end of business on January 20, 2006.

Concern #7: The National Park Service should ensure that the mailing list recipients receive planning documents in a timely manner to facilitate public review and comment.

"The writer did not obtain the document to be evaluated until 12-15-05 and only then because of last minute attendance (for which no direct notice was given) at a "Planning and Communication" meeting in Oakhurst, CA, on December 12, 2005, after another attendee made mention of the document, not withstanding that the writer is assumed to be on every planning mailing list for nearly a decade; after the meeting, the YNPS sent a copy."

(Individual, Comment #13-1)

Response: The National Park Service recognizes this concern and hopes that the additional review time provided by the extended comment period helped alleviate pressure on commenters who received the document late. Yosemite planning teams are eager to receive any feedback that will help the park continue to improve public involvement and outreach.

The National Park Service has a mailing list with over 8,000 physical addresses and over 3,000 electronic recipients. Prior to the Public Scoping Period for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project, postcards were distributed to members of the mailing list soliciting responses as to whom would like to receive hardcopy or CD versions of the both the EA and FONSI. The National Park Service requested responses by October 14, 2005, and only sent copies of the EA (either hardcopy or CD) to those who responded. The National Park Service submitted these names and addresses to the printer, who distributed the documents directly to interested parties. Document requests that were received after October 14th were processed and filled after the EA was returned to the National Park Service from the printer.

Clarity of Planning Documents

Concern #8: The *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* should clarify language and diagrams regarding existing and proposed changes to roadway width along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road corridor.

“[W]e have found the EA to be internally inconsistent, so much so as to render the intended action unclear. At this point it is totally unclear what the proposal is, so we find ourselves unable to comment in a meaningful way. We ask that you provide clarification, not only to us, but to everyone who has received or will receive the EA.”

(Conservation Organization, Comment #8-2)

“A ‘Typical Cross-Section’ drawing of the present road shows a pavement width of nineteen feet and ten inches. (This is consistent with a measurement we made on a straight section of South Side Drive.) ‘Typical Proposed Cross-Sections’ for the new road show a pavement width of twenty-two feet. (The twenty-two foot figure also appears in the text.) This clearly indicates a typical proposed widening of a little more than two feet...Discussion with staff also indicates that it was not intended to widen the road beyond the existing paved surface... So there is an internal inconsistency. And if you are not going to widen the road, then the EA should not indicate that you are going to do so.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno CA, Comment # 8-3)

Response: In response to this concern, the National Park Service issued a *Factsheet* clarifying both the language and the graphics regarding the existing and proposed roadway width in the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. This clarification is part of the Errata in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Figures II-1 and II-5 of the EA have been revised for clarity.

In the EA, figure II-1 depicts a typical cross-section of the existing roadway but did not clearly identify the varied widths of both the existing roadway and shoulder. This figure has been revised in response to public comment to better depict the varied nature of roadway and roadway shoulders. Figure II-1 of the EA has been replaced with figure II-1 (Revised) which can be found on page E5 of the Errata Sheets for the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*.

In the EA, figure II-5 depicts a proposed width of travel lanes and shoulders of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Figure II-5 (Revised) more clearly illustrates how travel lane and shoulder widths will be made consistent, where possible, to a standard width of 10 foot travel lanes and 1 foot shoulders. Figure II-5 (Revised) replaces figure II-5 of the EA in the Errata Sheets.

Proposed project actions will remain within the existing development footprint of the road corridor. While a more consistent roadway width will be achieved where possible, the National Park Service is not proposing the widening of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. The National Park Service would like to emphasize that attempting to achieve a more consistent width along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road will not compromise natural and cultural resources. The National Park Service is trying to rehabilitate the road to a standard road width; however there are various sections of road where this is not possible due to the location of existing trees, boulders, embankments, and other valued natural and cultural features. In these areas, the roadway will be repaved to its current extent. The National Park Service is committed to protecting the natural

and cultural resources along the roadway as well as providing a safe and maintainable roadway for the public.

Concern #9: The *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* should clarify language regarding tree removal along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road corridor.

“It is quite obvious from on-the-ground inspection that widening the existing paved surface by two feet would require the removal of a very large number of large trees. However, the text says that no more than five trees (greater than twelve inches) would be removed. So there is an internal inconsistency. You can’t widen the road, and still remove only five trees. Discussion with staff indicates that none of these trees would be removed because of a desire to widen the road, but rather it would be for other reasons.”

(Conservation Organization, Comment #8-4)

Response: In response to this concern, the National Park Service issued a *Factsheet* clarifying the language regarding tree removal along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. After receiving public concern over the proposed removal of a California black oak that leans over the roadway, the National Park Service reassessed the necessity of removing this tree. The National Park Service found that it was not necessary to remove the black oak from a safety standpoint; therefore, the tree will not be removed as part of this project. The National Park Service determined that it is necessary to remove the other four trees. Two alders are growing into the historic wingwall and outlet of a large box culvert, and compromising its proper function and historic integrity. One cedar and one pine are located at the inlet of a proposed box culvert along Bridalveil Straight and could negatively affect its proper function if they were retained.

Concern #10: The *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* should clarify information contained within table II-1, regarding existing conditions and proposed changes to roadside parking.

“Figure 1 1-6 is a brief and misleading illustration of the reductions of casual pull-over areas. Table 11-1 is more descriptive of the reductions and eliminations of casual pull-over reductions. The color coded dots on Figure 11-6 trivialize the reductions if the table is studied carefully and understood by the reader considerable reductions are expressed and implied in this table;”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-7)

“There is some confusion over turnouts 53 and 54 at the El Cap Y. Table 11-1 indicates 54 is presently paved. We did not observe pavement here.”

(Individual, Comment #15-10)

Response: In response to this concern, the National Park Service has made six clarifications to table II-1 and associated figure II-6, which appear in the Errata Sheets of the Finding of No Significant Impact and are described below:

The existing condition of roadside turnout #53 was labeled as unpaved; however, this turnout is partially paved. Approximately 20 feet immediately west of El Capitan Bridge is paved before the turnout turns to gravel in the area where emergency vehicles park during Search and Rescue efforts. Roadside turnout #53 will be re-graded and graveled. The existing condition of roadside

turnout #54 was incorrectly labeled paved, when in fact it is unpaved. Roadside turnout #54 will be re-graded and graveled.

In response to public concern over the 1% reduction in parking spaces as a part of this project, four of the five roadside parking areas proposed for removal will now be maintained.

Roadside turnout #11 is a paved turnout that could accommodate three vehicles. The National Park Service proposed its removal due to concerns over the narrowness of the travel lanes in this area and the turnout width. The original objective was to create a more consistent width of 22 feet in this particularly narrow section of roadway. However, due to public concern over reducing roadside parking and the impact to the visitor experience due to the turnout's proximity to the El Capitan glacial moraine, the National Park Service now proposes to maintain the three spaces that turnout #11 provides.

Roadside parking turnout #30 is a gravel turnout bordered by Northside Drive and a bicycle path. It precedes the entrance to the River Campground. The National Park Service proposed removing turnout #30 because of safety concerns regarding its proximity to both the campground entrance and the bicycle path. After further consideration, the National Park Service proposes to maintain this turnout by regrading and graveling this turnout, and placing barrier stones along the current footprint to deter vehicles from parking on the bicycle path.

Roadside turnouts numbered 64 and 65, which accommodate three and two vehicles respectively, were proposed to be removed because of safety concerns and proximity to the Merced River. However, due to public concern over reducing roadside parking capacity, the National Park Service will maintain these turnouts. Roadside parking numbers 64 and 65 will be re-graded and graveled.

Public concern also requested that the 13 parking spaces of roadside turnout #29 are maintained. The National Park Service considered this request; however, due to the inadequate site distance preceding the Curry Village stop sign, the heavy pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and rafting access in that area, the National Park Service still proposes to remove this parking through the placement of curbing. Public safety outweighs the need for parking in this general vicinity.

Concern #11: The National Park Service should clarify the need for the placement of a utility corridor in the roadbed from Pohono Bridge to Wawona Road.

"I can see why this project [installation of Utility Corridor] would be done in conjunction with the Yosemite Valley Loop Road project but I am not clear on the purpose of the utility improvements/expansion."

(Individual, Comment #21-7)

"It is proposed to install utility conduits under the roadbed between Pohono Bridge and the Wawona Road (Bridalveil) intersection. This appears to be related to something mentioned on page A-4 under "Multi-Use Trail to West Yosemite Valley" (a "Reasonably Foreseeable [future] Action"). Whatever this utility project is, it appears to be creeping up on us incrementally, without ever being discussed in a way which would make the public (including us) aware of it. It does seem that appropriate disclosure would mean an explanation of what the conduit is for, how it relates to a future project, and what level of compliance is planned for that project, whatever the project is."

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #18-8)

“An underground utility construction project is going to a new area west of Bridalveil intersection. Serving exactly what?”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-17)

Response: The proposed utility duct bank along Southside Drive between Pohono Bridge and the intersection of Wawona Road will provide for one sewer line, one telecommunication line, and one high voltage power line to meet the existing sanitary, safety and emergency response needs at Bridalveil Falls parking area and the Wawona Tunnel Vista Point.

The current ventilation system is dangerously inadequate. The power supply through the Wawona Tunnel is insufficient and currently there is no backup power generator. When power outages occur, no ventilation is provided to the tunnel, nor is there any lighting through the tunnel.

The Wawona Tunnel ventilation system, designed and constructed in the 1930s, fails to meet current vehicle tunnel standards. The ventilation system is no longer capable of adequately removing smoke, posing a high risk of death in the event that any of the traffic accidents occurring in the tunnel were to involve fire. The automated fan controls no longer function, so park utility staff must manually switch the fans on and off, keeping one in operation at all times to provide some ventilation, and turning the others off for monthly maintenance and to keep the motors from wearing out. There is no fire detection system in the tunnel. The carbon monoxide monitoring system no longer works, so no determination can be made about accumulated contaminant levels. Shafts in the tunnel were found to contain dust with lead, asbestos, and other contaminants in a report by the U.S. Public Health Service dated March 1993.

Significant drops in voltage level are common in the Wawona Tunnel electrical distribution system, and therefore it cannot provide the reliable power supply required for proper operation of a new tunnel ventilation system. The electrical distribution system is also the only commercial power source for the current park telephone and radio communications hub on nearby Turtleback Dome. Without a reliable power source for a primary park communications hub, timely emergency dispatch for fire, medical and law enforcement emergencies is compromised and could result in the loss of life or property.

In addition, the existing electrical distribution system transects two miles of mountainside, providing a visual intrusion and disturbing the natural condition of the area.

The construction of a sewer line in Southside Drive from Pohono Bridge to Bridalveil Falls, a distance of 2.5 miles, will connect the sewer system from the Bridalveil Falls restrooms to the main sewer line in Northside Drive. Bridalveil Falls is a spectacular area to view distinctive features in Yosemite National Park. By encouraging visitors to stop and experience this scenic vista, the National Park Service has created a need to provide appropriate facilities capable of handling visitor needs and protecting natural and cultural resources from impacts. At Bridalveil Fall, a vault toilet was installed in the early 1990's to replace pit toilets. It is undersized and fails to ventilate properly causing noxious odors throughout the parking lot all year long. The sewer line that will be placed in this section of Southside Drive will accommodate future improvements to the Bridalveil Fall restrooms.

Criteria for Selection of Planning Goals

Concern #12: The National Park Service should address needed improvements to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

“We concur that there is a need for the rehabilitation, restoration and resurfacing of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-1)

“The roads should be repaired and improved. The park needs good roads...”

(Individual, Comment #6-2)

“Accepting the fact that infrastructures eventually wear out, their maintenance over time is necessary.”

(Individual, Comment #7-1)

“Well, something needs to be done...”

(Individual, Comment #12-1)

“The need for drainage, surface, and grading improvements/maintenance are hereby agreed as a necessary infrastructure requirement and extensive rehabilitation is warranted;”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-2)

Response: The National Park Service will proceed with implementing the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 2, upon the signing of the Finding of No Significant Impact for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Yosemite Valley Plan

Concern #13: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project should be independent of the Yosemite Valley Plan.

“The project should not be used as an opportunity [implement] ingredients of the long term “Valley Plan,” which is currently regarded as void or at a minimum held in abeyance by either court order or other conditions...”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-4)

“I am concerned that the plans for widening Northside and Southside Drive and Segment D will drastically affect the ecology, ambiance and beauty that remains in Yosemite Valley.”

(Individual, Comment #22-1)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance repair and rehabilitation project that is independent of the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. The objective of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is to rehabilitate, repair, and resurface the Yosemite Valley Loop Road which has only received limited annual repairs for several years. The National Park Service needs to provide the public with safe, and consistent travel corridors. Widespread roadway widening is not part of this project, however, in select areas along the roadway, widening will take place within the existing road bench to achieve a safe and maintainable roadway. By implementing the Preferred Alternative, travel lane and shoulder widths will be made consistent, where possible, to a standard width of 10 foot travel lanes and 1 foot shoulders. No trees would be removed to

achieve these proposed standard travel lane and shoulder widths, nor would the existing road bench be widened to achieve these standard widths. In some locations, the existing roadway width will be made narrower.

Concern #14: The National Park Service should reconsider plans to close Northside Drive to vehicular traffic and convert one-way traffic along Southside Drive to two-way traffic, as called for in the Yosemite Valley Plan, due to concerns regarding visitor safety, access to viewpoints of the Valley and traffic congestion.

“Under Appendix A: Cumulative Projects List, page A-2, Reasonably Foreseeable Actions, Curry Village and East Yosemite Valley Campgrounds Improvements, mention is made of “Converting Southside Drive to two-way traffic”. I just can't conceive the elimination of one-way traffic in and out of Yosemite Valley. The vehicle backup, once in the Valley floor, could be unforgivable. I just don't understand the reasoning to eliminate one-way traffic.”

(Individual, Comment #4-2)

“[T]his writer objects to the elimination of the Northside Road in its entirety, due to the safety concerns and the opportunity for visitors to access the full and established viewpoints of the Valley; those visitors include lodge visitors, campers, day-use visitors, and climbers who access the many climbing routes in the West Valley area.”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-20)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does not propose any long-term changes in traffic circulation along Northside or Southside Drives. This project aims to rehabilitate, repair and resurface Northside and Southside Drives. During construction, it may be necessary to temporarily change traffic circulation patterns to better accommodate construction schedules and visitor access, however, after construction, one-way traffic on both Northside and Southside Drives will be restored. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance and rehabilitation project and does not aim to implement actions called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. When those actions are proposed, they will go through a planning process with full opportunity for public input and participation.

Concern #15: The National Park Service should move forward with plans to create a multi-use paved wheelchair accessible trail to El Capitan Bridge and Bridalveil Fall, as called for in the Yosemite Valley Plan.

“[T]he mention on page A4 (Multi-Use Trail to West Yosemite Valley) of a “new multi-use paved wheelchair accessible trail to El Capitan Bridge and Bridalveil Fall” would be a tremendous asset to the Park accessibility. It would eliminate the potential hazard of bike riding on the Northside Drive.”

(Individual, Comment #4-3)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does not propose any actions to create a multi-use trail system in the West Valley. This concern is out of scope for this planning effort. However, all current and future planning efforts in Yosemite National Park will address accessibility requirements and seek to provide uniform access for all park visitors.

Concern #16: The National Park Service should reconsider plans to create a multi-use trail in the west Valley.

“The Project falsely asserts that it does not tier from the YVP, while in major respects it does... The project serves the frightening – and frankly idiotic -- proposal to draw masses of self-propelled visitors (bikers, skaters, hikers) into the west valley's most sensitive and still natural areas along a “Multi Use Trail”. We object to this. The larger point is that the EA again hides the ball, while doing what it can to underpin the enactment of the Valley Plan in the future.”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-16)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does not propose any action to create a multi-use trail system in the West Valley. The project does propose to repair a 70 foot section of paved trail along Southside Drive in the west Valley because it has been damaged by water run-off from a culvert outlet. A Multi-Use Trail to West Yosemite Valley is listed in Appendix A of the EA, as a “reasonably foreseeable future project.” Appendix A provides a list of projects on which to base the cumulative effects analysis. Future planning efforts regarding the West Valley Loop Trail would be completed under a separate environmental compliance effort.

Concern #17: The National Park Service should reconsider the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan and how it may affect American Indian people with ancestral ties to Yosemite National Park.

“Your museum curators, and archeologists have also taken our history and changed it to suit the needs of your Park Service so that you can cleanly implement the Yosemite Valley Plan and all the destruction that will occur to our sacred sites and ethnographic areas which we still rely on and use to this day. We also know that these areas where our ancestors rest are being dug into and disturbing the spirit as well as unbalancing the medicine. We believe this is taking place so that the Yosemite Valley Plan can be implemented quickly and without more controversy than has already taken place. We also know that this Valley Plan is not for protection of our sacred valley as your service has stated in press and in Congress, but for expansion for tourism and the dollars it will bring for the National Park Service as well as the concessionaires in the Valley today.”

(Individual, Comment #9-4)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does not tier from the Yosemite Valley Plan, nor does it propose to implement any actions called for in the Yosemite Valley Plan. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance project that aims to repair, rehabilitate, and repave the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. This concern is out of scope for this planning effort; however, this concern has been passed on to appropriate National Park Service personnel who regularly consult with American Indian people with cultural affiliation with Yosemite National Park.

Merced River Plan

Concern #18: The National Park Service should not move forward with the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project until a valid Wild and Scenic River Plan is in place.

“First: we submit this comment letter under protest, as the Loop Road EA was prepared in the absence of a legally valid plan to protect the Merced River. We believe that any plan affecting the Merced River must tier from a legally valid River Plan. The Park Service has yet to prepare such a Plan.”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-1)

Response: The EA was completed in accordance with, and direction from, a valid and complete plan to protect the Merced River. The Revised Merced River Plan was issued in June 2005 and approved in July 2005.

With completion of the Revised Plan/SEIS and adoption of the Record of Decision for the Revised Plan, the National Park Service addressed and cured the deficiencies identified in the Ninth Circuit's October 2003 Opinion and the District Court's July 6, 2004 Memorandum Opinion and Order on remand. Therefore, the National Park Service has complied fully with the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, National Environmental Policy Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, and the Courts' orders regarding the requirement to prepare a plan for the protection of the Merced River.

Written Comments

Concern #19: The National Park Service should file, publish and respond to the public's written comments.

"I shall expect my comments to be published in the record for the Project."
(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-23)

Response: As a result of the public comment period for the EA, the park received letters from 16 individuals, 4 organizations, 1 government agency, and 2 tribes. Letters were coded and 189 individual comments were analyzed using the park's Comment Analysis Response Database. Over 60 Concern Statements were generated which encapsulate the individual comments of each letter. Park planning teams then formulated responses to these concerns. The Public Comment Response Report can be viewed on the Park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/planning and is also available upon written request.

Consultation with Tribal governments

Concern #20: The National Park Service should consult with members of federally recognized tribes.

"We also take issue with your recognition of the American Indian Council of Mariposa County: a.k.a. the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. We ask you now how you recognize this group as an Indian Nation who hold enough power within the eyes of a Federal Government agency such as the National Park Service, yet they are a federally unrecognized band of Indians who have little connection to ancestry by blood to the true Yosemite Indians. Most of these Indians have blood lines linking them to the Mariposa Miwuk only and these descendants you use as decision makers in our affairs do not have ancestral ties to the True Yosemite Indians. Most of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation have ties to Yosemite only by past employment to the National Park Service and are not true relations by blood to Tenaya or the Paiute Indians which inhabited Yosemite for thousands of years. We cite the fact that if these Mariposa Indians are NOT federally recognized, then it is your agency that has made illegal contract with this group (Programmatic Agreement signed by American Indian Council of Mariposa County in 1997 (MOU) and allow them to be decision makers in affairs that only are legal within recognized sovereign Indian Nations."

(Individual, Comment #9-6)

“Reading your report I noticed you had the American Indian Council of Mariposa (the Southern Sierra Miwoks) as a consulting group. It has also come to my attention that they are a nonprofit and not a federal recognized tribe. American Indian Council of Mariposa is also made up of employees, former employees, and volunteers of Yosemite National Park which many of them are on the board of this non-profit. The United States Park Service should not have gone into an agreement with a non-federally recognized tribe, especially if members of the American Indian Council of Mariposa are also employees of Yosemite National Park. The proper procedure would have been to have members of federally recognized tribes as consultants.”

(Individual, Comment #10-1)

Response: The National Park Service consults with federal recognized American Indian tribes, and interested individuals, parties, and groups in the community. The park has agreements with many entities in pursuit of our mission to protect and preserve park resources.

Concern #21: The National Park Service should consider the oral tradition of the Yosemite Indian Nation when working to preserve history and protect the traditions, culture, environment, animals and waterways of Yosemite Valley.

“You have also refused to take into consideration our oral history which has been carried with us for thousands of years. Our oral history states these areas of concern where we pray and where our ancestors have fallen and found their eternal resting areas.”

(Individual, Comment #9-3)

Response: As information is provided to the National Park Service regarding history of American Indians and others, it is deposited into Yosemite National Park’s Research Library for use and reference when updating and revising Yosemite National Park’s historical accounts and documents. These reference documents are available to both the public and park planning teams. If tribal members or members of the public are aware of particular documents relevant to a given project, we urge them to include those references with their comments, in order to make sure those sources are called to the planning team’s attention and incorporated into planning efforts.

Concern #22: The National Park Service should consult with and respond to attempts made by tribal governments to communicate with park staff.

“Since your assuming the position of Superintendent of Yosemite National Park, many attempts by us have gone unanswered by you and you staff. We have been denied consultation with you and your staff in areas of concern to us.”

(Individual, Comment #9-1)

Response: Yosemite National Park has personnel dedicated specifically to consultation with American Indian tribes, and other community individuals and groups that claim association and interest in park lands. Requests for consultation are forwarded to those personnel for response.

Concern #23: The National Park Service should dedicate the proposed Indian Cultural Center to a tribe that has met the criteria for federal recognition.

“You should not also dedicate the new proposed Indian Center to a group that has not met the criteria for federal recognition.”

(Individual, Comment #10-2)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does not propose any dedication of the Indian Cultural Center. This concern is out of scope for this planning effort.

Concern #24: The National Park Service should explain the basis for their recognition of the American Indian Council of Mariposa County.

“We also take issue with your recognition of the American Indian Council of Mariposa County: a.k.a. the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. We ask you now how you recognize this group as an Indian Nation who hold enough power within the eyes of a Federal Government agency such as the National Park Service, yet they are a federally unrecognized band of Indians who have little connection to ancestry by blood to the true Yosemite Indians. Most of these Indians have blood lines linking them to the Mariposa Miwuk only and these descendants you use as decision makers in our affairs do not have ancestral ties to the True Yosemite Indians. Most of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation have ties to Yosemite only by past employment to the National Park Service and are not true relations by blood to Tenaya or the Paiute Indians which inhabited Yosemite for thousands of years. We cite the fact that if these Mariposa Indians are NOT federally recognized, then it is your agency that has made illegal contract with this group (Programmatic Agreement signed by American Indian Council of Mariposa County in 1997 (MOU) and allow them to be decision makers in affairs that only are legal within recognized sovereign Indian Nations.”

(Individual, Comment #9-6)

Response: The National Park Service works with American Indian groups that are federally recognized and American Indian groups that are working to become recognized who claim ancestral association with park lands.

Public Involvement

Concern #25: The National Park Service should engage in public involvement earlier in the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project planning process.

“Even though we discussed this project with Park staff in earlier stages than has been customary, the inadequacies of the EA did not become apparent until it was actually published. Perhaps some of these problems could have been avoided if the public had seen portions of the document while it was still an internal draft. Perhaps the confusion over the road cross-section drawings (the subject of a previous communication) would have been detected and headed off. To your credit, you have been attempting to have public involvement in earlier stages of the planning processes. But it seems you still have a long way to go.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #18-3)

“[T]here are too many questions which should have been answered before presenting this project for public comment. By presenting it prematurely, the opportunity for meaningful public comment has been compromised...This is a chronic problem with Yosemite planning processes.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #18-2)

“Perhaps utilize a “review committee” of individuals who are removed from the planning process to review the document before its release, further raising and clarifying any questions or misinterpretations that the public may have. Another possible solution is to offer a planning process and/or plan reading class/guide for interested individuals. This could shed light on the figure interpretation issue and help explain the often-misunderstood language of various plans.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #20-6)

Response: The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the National Park Service to issue a press release announcing public scoping for an environmental assessment and to announce the availability of an environmental assessment for public comment. The National Park Service began public scoping for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project in April of 2005. As a result of the public scoping period, the park received over 50 individual comments from 8 individuals, and 2 organizations. These comments were categorized and considered for this planning process.

During the public comment period on the EA, the National Park Service received an official request to extend the public comment period. In response, the National Park Service extended the comment period for two weeks, from December 6, 2005 until January 20, 2006. The National Park Service received 189 individual comments that resulted in over 60 concern statements, to which the park responded.

In addition, the National Park Service made design drawings available for the public throughout the planning process and hosted members of the public during project site visits. In response to preliminary public comment, a *Factsheet* was immediately issued to clarify information in the EA so that the public could make informed comments on the information presented in the document.

As a result of public involvement in this planning process, actions presented in the preferred alternative have changed. The proposed removal of the California black oak that leans over Southside Drive generated significant public concern which prompted the National Park Service to reassess the necessity of its removal. The National Park Service now proposes to preserve this valued resource. Additionally, four of the five roadside turnouts proposed for removal will now be maintained because of concern the public raised over the possible negative impact to the visitor experience.

The National Park Service is committed to fostering clear communication with the public and appreciates both the positive and negative feedback to planning documents. In the future, the National Park Service will work to more closely articulate plan elements clearly, consistently, and accurately.

Alternatives

Range of Alternatives

Concern #26: The Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment should include an alternative that protects park resources.

“The EA illegally narrows the action alternatives to one; there are a series of obvious alternatives to develop in the vein of resource protection which are never mentioned. Why not a no-net-increase in asphalt alternative?”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-13)

“No alternative seriously considers the need to conform the project to resource conditions”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-15)

“Is this another “design-build” project where the parking pulloffs etc will be decided as the project proceeds? If so, I disagree. Over the past eight years I have lost all confidence that your agency's first consideration is the protection of the resource.”

(Individual, Comment #22-6)

Response: The EA analyzed a range of reasonably feasible alternatives appropriate for the project's purpose and need which is to rehabilitate, repair and resurface the existing roadway. The most prevalent difference between the two action alternatives is the management of roadside parking and the installation of a permeable sub-grade in sections of the roadway.

After full consideration of Section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act, Alternative 2 was determined to be the environmentally preferable alternative for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. Alternative 2 is also the National Park Service's preferred alternative.

Alternative 1

Concern #27: The National Park Service should adopt Alternative 1, No Action Alternative, because of asphalt waste disposal actions proposed as part of the action alternatives.

“Ifavor Alternative 1 since it does not involve the insitu disposal of waste asphalt as proposed by Alternatives 2 and 3.”

(Individual, Comment #17-1)

Response: The National Park Service supports recycling operational materials such as asphalt pavement. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project proposes to recycle the existing roadway by pulverizing the existing asphalt in-place and replacing it to create a new roadbed.

In construction projects where asphalt is not recycled, it is usually transported to a landfill and disposed of. Additionally, a large quantity of crushed virgin soil would have to be imported from a quarry site outside the project site to meet the structural needs of the road. This would result in hundreds of additional truck trips to and from the park, thereby adding to fuel consumption, exhaust gases, and additional wear and tear on the surrounding roads leading to and from the quarry site. The National Park Service wants to avoid this negative impact to park resources and the visitor experience and is therefore proposing to adopt the in-place asphalt recycling methods

presented in the Action Alternatives of the EA. The National Park Service's goal is to protect and conserve resources while maintaining a safe, efficient, high-quality road system.

Alternative 2

Concern #28: The National Park Service should adopt Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative, identified in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*.

"The NPS did a yeoman's job, as usual, in formulating alternative 2 - the preferred alternative - for the Loop Road Project; and I want to urge the adoption of alternative 2."

(Individual, Comment #2-1)

"Good report!"

(Individual, Comment #11-4)

"We endorse the Park's Preferred Alternative - Alternative 2."

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-2)

"I reviewed much of this publication and do agree with the consideration of Alternative 2 to meet the needs, both present and future, of the citizenry of our Country and the environment."

(Individual, Comment #4-1)

"Yes, #2 is best, but #3 is OK."

(Individual, Comment #6-1)

"Alternative 2 seems the longest lasting. We don't want to have to do this over again in a year, do we? And with all the buses, RV's and private vehicles that are continuing to congest the Loop Drive year after year after year, Alternative 2 will do the job. Until private vehicles are banned from the Valley, and all this asphalt is unnecessary, and Muir's dream a reality, this is the best that can be done."

(Individual, Comment #12-2)

"We welcome the proposed use of permeable sub-grades to allow more near-surface water flow in certain areas under Alternative 2."

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-9)

Response: After full consideration of Section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act, Alternative 2 was determined to be the environmentally preferable alternative and the National Park Service's Preferred Alternative. Upon the signing of the Finding of No Significant Impact, the National Park Service will implement Alternative 2.

Alternative 3

Concern #29: The National Park Service should adopt Alternative 3 identified in the *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment*.

"After careful review of the alternatives in the Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment, we find Alternative Three as the most desirable. This alternative allows for road improvement while securing the survival of the five turnouts proposed for removal in Alternative Two."

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment # 20-1)

“With that said, we have serious concerns with Alternative Three and the entire Environmental Assessment that we elaborate on below.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment # 20-2)

“We believe that all five turnouts should be left in place (Alternative Three), but that they should be repaired according to proposed turnout restoration actions presented in Alternative Two (e.g., repaving paved turnouts, regrading gravel turnouts, etc.)”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment # 20-14)

“Preservation of the 68 roadside turnouts is essential to visitor access and experience of park resources. Unless adequate public transportation can be provided, no turnouts should be removed. Therefore, I support Alternative Three of the Proposed Roadside Parking.”

(Individual, Comment # 21-2)

Response: The EA analyzed a range of reasonable and feasible alternatives that were appropriate for a maintenance project. While Alternative 3 meets the National Park Service’s project objects, Alternative 2 allows for more extensive improvements to roadside parking, and hydrology with the installation of the permeable sub-grade. Additionally, after full consideration of Section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act, Alternative 2 was determined to be the environmentally preferable alternative for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. Thus, Alternative 2 was selected as the National Park Service’s preferred methods of achieving the project’s goals.

Monitoring Management

Concern #30: The National Park Service should ensure third party monitors are part of mitigation measures during the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

“It seems that it would be prudent to have a 3rd party environmental monitor as part of the mitigation for a project of this magnitude.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #18-28)

Response: As part of mitigation measures for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project, qualified National Park Service natural and cultural resource experts will monitor construction activities to ensure that park resources are protected.

When requested, Native American monitors are also present during ground disturbing activities.

Environmental Consequences

Concern #31: The *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* should address the potential impacts on plants and wildlife of stabilizing agents used in resurfacing the road, and prohibit their use if found to be harmful.

“According to the Loop Road Project EA, the process used to pulverize the roadbed involves the injection of water and/or “fluid stabilizing agents” in the pulverizing machine, apparently to control dust (p. 11-6). If stabilizing agents are to be used, we ask that the Park determine whether these agents pose potential harm to plants and wildlife prior to their use. If there is a potential for harm to plants and wildlife from stabilizing agents, we ask that they not be used.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-3)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project will employ a pulverization process to recycle the existing asphalt into a new roadbed. The fluid stabilizing agent used during this process will be water. Water is utilized in the process to primarily achieve maximum compaction for the new roadbed; it is also used to control dust. All pulverization machinery will be subject to the mitigation measures outlined in table 1 of the Finding of No Significant Impact for the EA.

Water

Hydrology and Floodplains

Concern #32: The Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment should base hydrologic systems analysis in Yosemite Valley on scientific studies.

“The topic of hydrology illustrates this deficiency; nothing is given except blanket statements -- unsupported by documentation, study, or evidence, that the project will benefit hydrology. Yet the lack of a baseline study of the current and historic wetland and hydrologic system and function, and the impact of the road upon it, lead to a lack of focus.”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-5)

“The EA seems to proceed on the notion that ad-hoc addition of culverts where they seem to be needed most will improve hydrology. No detailed description of the interaction of wetlands, meadows, or side-flows (streams) with the road is given. This might be fine if the EA only proposed re-paving the existing road, but it confesses to a higher goal of hydrologic improvement but approaches it only with anecdotal or hunch-type of information.”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-6)

“We suggest that any future treatment of this topic [hydrology] should rely, as a starting point, upon the excellent study; 'The Influence of Modern Man on the Stream System of Yosemite Valley,' Milestone, 1978. Its omission here indicates the wrong approach taken by the engineers proposing the action under this EA.”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-7)

Response: A hydraulics report was completed for this project to address specific areas of hydrologic drainage concerns. The *Valley Loop Road: Final Hydraulics Report*, (Carter Burgess, October 2005) informed project design on culvert placement. In addition, the National Park Service hydrologic and botanical staff studied the project area on several site visits and provided formal recommendations for additional culvert placement and design based on expert knowledge of the hydrologic and ecologic systems in Yosemite Valley.

Concern #33: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project should consider the construction of causeways along sections of the roadway in lieu of culverts, to promote natural hydrologic processes.

“With the entire Yosemite Valley being essentially a drainage system, would not causeways through some very wet sections (such as Bridalveil section and Cook's Meadow by the Visitor Center and Yosemite Falls) be a valid consideration? This would allow for the free flowing of the water and avoid the channelization through culverts that has wrecked the natural systems.”

(Individual, Comment #22-5)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance project which aims to repair, rehabilitate, and repave the existing roadway. While the construction of causeways will not be a part of this project, several improvements to hydrologic processes are proposed as part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. The addition of 27 new culverts, the improvements to existing culverts, and the installation of a permeable sub-grade at select locations will largely improve the natural hydrologic process of water movement from one side of the road to the other.

Wetlands

Effects of Visitor Activities

Concern #34: The National Park Service should consider the use of signs or barriers to reduce visitor impacts to the wetland area at Wosky Pond

“Legitimate concerns for wetland intrusions and impacts [at Wosky Pond] could be controlled with signage or barriers prohibiting entry with “strictly enforced” or better perhaps “wildlife habitat in peril please keep off!””

(Individual, Comment #15-9)

Response: The Preferred Alternative, Alternative 2, proposes to pave and curb the Wosky Pond turnout to the extent of its current footprint. The addition of curbing to this turnout will prohibit informal expansion into the sensitive wetland area. The placement of interpretive signs will not be part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. However, in the future, park managers may consider this area appropriate for interpretive signs.

Vegetation

Effects of National Park Service/Concessioner Activities

Concern #35: The National Park Service should reassess the potential effects of construction activities outside the present footprint of the road, including direct and indirect negative impacts to soils and roadside vegetation.

“While we understand that the plan calls for minimizing construction activities outside of the original footprint of the road, this project will undoubtedly require some operation of heavy equipment on the periphery of the road. This will result in some direct disturbance of vegetation as well as compaction of soils, resulting in indirect and possibly long-term negative impacts to vegetation.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-7)

Response: The entire Yosemite Valley Loop Road corridor proposed for rehabilitation has been previously disturbed by transportation facilities and other development activities. Proposed project actions will remain within the existing development footprint of the road corridor. All heavy machinery used for trenching for culvert repair and placement will operate from atop the roadway. Therefore, impacts to vegetation and soils are expected to be short-term and minor and limited to areas within the existing road prism. The Revegetation Plan developed for the project will include de-compaction and restoration measures.

The removal of four trees and brush clearing of smaller woody vegetation along segments of the roadway will be necessary to accommodate repaving, improvements to culverts, and the installation of a permeable sub-grade in Sentinel Creek area and El Capitan Straight. However, the benefits of enhanced hydrologic flow would outweigh the effects of selective vegetation removal. Additionally, due to public concern over the removal of a California black oak along Southside Drive, the National Park Service will not remove this particular tree.

Resurfacing the roadway is not expected to adversely affect soils as the proposed construction activities will take place within the existing road prism. However, soils are currently being negatively impacted due to the proliferation of informal parking. Actions called for under the preferred alternative, would reduce the proliferation of informal roadside parking, thus beneficially impacting soils. The installation of the permeable sub-grade in two locations, coupled with the rehabilitation or replacement of existing culverts and the installation of new culverts in select areas would promote natural flow of surface water from one side of the road to the other. This action will encourage natural sedimentation processes and promote the development of a natural soil structure and profile.

In addition, several mitigation measures will be employed to ensure the protection of sensitive soils and vegetation. Several relevant mitigation measures are presented below and a more complete list of all mitigation measures is presented in table 1 of the Finding of No Significant Impact:

- Protective barriers shall be placed around areas adjacent to the project area that require special attention as identified by the park, such as specified staging areas, trees, plants, root zones, river edges, aquatic habitats, wetlands, sensitive wildlife habitats, cultural resource features, and infrastructure. Barriers shall be installed prior to construction and field inspected by natural and cultural resource personnel to verify proper placement.
- Construction Contractor shall ensure that any imported soils, fills or aggregates are free of deleterious materials. Sources of imported materials shall be compiled by Construction Contractor and submitted for park review and approval prior to construction.
- A Revegetation Plan shall be prepared by the park that prescribes seed collection, plant salvage, revegetation and post construction monitoring activities. The Park Botanist and Park Historic Preservation Officer shall review the Plan to verify compliance with the Vegetation Management Plan, A Sense of Place: Design Guidelines for Yosemite Valley and the protection of traditional-use plants.

Tree Removal

Concern #36: The National Park Service should avoid removing trees as part of their efforts to implement the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

“We do not object to removing four trees identified in the EA to accommodate culvert repair and construction at Bridalveil Straight. However, if during the construction phase it appears some of the trees can be saved efforts should be made to save them. The large Cedar tree growing in the wing wall of the western most culvert is the most significant of the four proposed for removal. An attempt should be made during construction to save this fairly large Cedar if it can be accomplished without compromising wing wall or culvert integrity. If the wing wall can't be repositioned it appears the tree will have to be removed.”

(Individual, Comment #15-2)

“The proposed removal of a large Black Oak overhanging the road between Bridalveil Straight and El Cap Cross for traffic safety concerns does not appear to be justified. On the ground measurements at the road edge indicates adequate vertical clearance of approximately 20 feet for even the largest vehicles. Infrequent past collisions with large vehicles appears to have occurred only when drivers allowed vehicles to go off the road colliding with not only the tree but with the elevated roadside bank as well. It is not necessary to remove large trees because errant drivers might run off the road and crash into them as appears to be the case with the infrequent collisions with this tree in the past.”

(Individual, Comment #15-5)

“Tree removal will need to be addressed especially the Black Oak trees though out the entire project. Proper tree trimming and removal of any fungus will be needed to insure the health of oak trees. Before removal of any oak trees the tribe would like Park Service to look at other alternatives before removal and consult Tribe for best action to take.”

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-6)

“Preserving trees should be a higher priority than preserving historic culverts. In addition, large vehicles likely to collide with trees such as the large black oak on Southside Drive should be restricted.”

(Individual, Comment #17-3)

Response: As a result of this concern and after a further safety assessment, the National Park Service has decided not to remove the California black oak that leans over Southside Drive.

Exotic Species

Concern #37: The National Park Service should take all appropriate measures to minimize the introduction or further spread of invasive plant species, or the introduction of additional root rot and other plant or animal diseases during activities associated with this project.

“[We] ask that all appropriate measures be taken to minimize the introduction or further spread of exotic-invasive plant species (weeds) in the process of rebuilding the loop road. Construction activities are one of the most common ways that weeds are introduced and become established in otherwise near-natural settings.,. Construction equipment is notorious for transporting weed seeds. All equipment should be cleaned and inspected by Park officials for any weed seeds or other propagules prior to entering the park.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-4)

“[T]he Park should consider requiring that all construction equipment be disinfected prior to entering the Park to minimize the risk of introducing additional root rot and other plant or animal diseases.”
(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-5)

Response: The National Park Service has developed several mitigation measures to ensure minimal introduction or further spread of invasive plant species and plant or animal diseases during construction activities. These measures include but are not limited to the following:

- The Construction Contractor shall import soils, fills or aggregates that are free of deleterious materials. The sources of imported materials shall be compiled by the Construction Contractor and submitted for park review and approval prior to construction.
- An Exotic Plant Management Plan shall be prepared by the park prior to the commencement of any ground disturbing activities (including hazard tree removal) that specifies the locations and methods for removing existing non-native species, directions and requirements for Construction Contractor equipment wash down and/or cleaning, prescriptions for monitoring activities post construction, and reporting requirements. The Plan shall be provided to the Construction Contractor prior to ground disturbing activities.
- All construction tools and equipment entering the park shall be cleaned by means of pressure washing and/or steam cleaning to arrive on-site free of mud or seed-bearing material. Each piece of equipment shall undergo inspections prior to entering the park.
- Topsoil shall be salvaged and reused in the proper location and depth. Wetland soils shall be salvaged and reused as fill in wetland areas. Stockpiles of soils infected with fungal pathogens (root rot) must not be moved and reused in non-infected areas of the park. Equipment buckets, tires and hand tools used in areas containing root rot shall be cleaned prior to removal.
- Soil and stump treatment prescriptions shall be executed according to the park’s Root Rot Management Guidelines and the park’s Forester. All stumps from excavations shall be disposed of in a legal manner outside of the Yosemite National Park boundary.

The National Park Service is committed to ensuring that these mitigation measures take place during activities associated with this project. For a complete list of mitigation measures, refer to table 1 in the Finding of No Significant Impact for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Protection/Restoration

Concern #38: The National Park Service should restore native vegetation to the strip between the Yosemite Valley Loop roadway and the paved trail at Chapel Straight.

“Maintaining the vegetation strip between the roadway and the paved trail at Chapel Straight should be given a high priority as discussed on the recent drive about on 12 January. Appropriate native vegetation/grasses should dominate.”
(Individual, Comment #15-6)

Response: The barrier stones along Sentinel Meadow/Chapel Straight on Southside Drive will be removed and curbing will be installed along the turnout and bicycle path. This vegetation strip will be revegetated and restored to a natural state as outlined in the project’s Revegetation Plan.

Concern #39: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project should employ deep tilling methods to de-compact soils impacted by heavy machinery as a post construction restoration measure in areas where machinery is driven off of the road and in staging areas.

“Rehabilitation following re-construction of the road should include deep tilling (where it will not cause further harm to tree roots, other vegetation, soil quality or hydrology) to de-compact soils, for all areas where machinery is driven off the road, and for staging areas.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-7)

Response: As part of mitigation measures for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project, the National Park Service will restore and revegetate areas impacted by construction equipment as prescribed by the Revegetation Plan developed for this project. Soil de-compacting methods, such as deep-tilling, may be employed as necessary and appropriate.

Wildlife

Terrestrial Animals

Concern #40: The National Park Service should consider the incorporation of passages for wildlife under the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, especially in locations with high incidences of wildlife mortality.

“Consider incorporating eco-passages into the reconstructed road. Just as hydrological conductivity is important to ecosystem function, so is wildlife conductivity. Roads make effective barriers to many species of wildlife, including insects, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. Road kill is a significant issue in Yosemite Valley. “More animals die from encounters with speeding vehicles than any other human-related incidents in Yosemite. Squirrels, deer, foxes, fishers and ring-tailed cats become road kill each year as more than 3 million visitors come through the park” (Fresno Bee - July 6,2004).Eco-passages can be as simple as a culvert connecting toad and salamander wetland breeding sites to their upland habitat. We’re not asking that the park erect 8-foot fences and construct 164-

footwide overpasses in Yosemite Valley. We are just suggesting that you might consider improving wildlife conductivity in re-building the Loop Road.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-8)

“In many cases new culverts are already planned and old ones are to be replaced. These should provide some conductivity for small animals along drainage courses. If there are stretches of road which are known by park staff to have remarkably high incidents of road kill, and new culverts are not already proposed for these areas, the park should consider culvert ecopassages for these sites. These conduits could be large enough to be used by mammals as large as fishers and coyotes.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-10)

“Low curbs could be constructed to discourage small animals such as frogs, toads, salamanders and snakes, from traveling over the road in these areas, and direct them to under-road conduits.”

(Conservation Organization, Twain Harte, CA, Comment #3-11)

“On page 2 of my public comment of 1/19/06 (yesterday) I suggested causeways through the wetland areas of Yosemite Valley. Permit me to clarify that I envision a kind of boardwalk for vehicles that is no higher off the ground than would permit deer and bears to pass underneath....If your planners' view of a causeway is a huge concrete structure resembling a freeway exit to support the present diesel buses and heavy construction vehicles now in use in the Valley, please disregard my suggestion.”
(Individual, Comment #23-1)

Response: Preliminary independent research conducted in Yosemite National Park indicates that road-related wildlife mortality is relatively evenly along the extent of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. Vehicular speed is the primary reason cited for higher incidents of wildlife mortality. Eco-passages (i.e., underground conduits for safe wildlife passage) could help reduce these unfortunate incidents of wildlife mortality.

The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project proposes the addition of 27 new culverts along Northside and Southside Drives. Many existing culverts will be enlarged, repaired, and cleared of debris. In addition to improving hydrologic connectivity from one side of the road to the other, these improvements are also expected to facilitate wildlife movement and habitat connectivity. Proposed new and replacement culverts range in size, but will generally be large enough to accommodate animals as large as foxes and coyotes. The proposed addition of a box culvert on the western end of Bridalveil Straight could serve as a conduit for deer and bears. This is an area of relative congestion and greater vehicle speed due to merging traffic from Southside Drive and Wawona Road. The National Park Service anticipates that the additional culverts will benefit hydrology, as well as wildlife health and safety.

Scenic Resources

Scenic Vistas

Concern #41: The National Park Service should remove or relocate barrier stones along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road to reduce their visually intrusive impacts on Yosemite's natural features and views.

“The existing stone boulders should be eliminated...between the roadway and the paved trail at Chapel Straight”
(Individual, Comment #15-7)

“Barrier stones along several sections of roadway and in unpaved turnouts are necessary to prevent vehicle encroachment into eco-sensitive roadside areas. They are however, obviously unnatural, visually intrusive, and significantly impact Yosemite's natural features and views. Where their use is necessary, mitigating measures might include partially burying them, using irregular shapes and setting them in irregular patterns to avoid the straight line look common to many current settings.”
(Individual, Comment #15-13)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road project proposes to remove barrier stones in two locations. The barrier stones along Sentinel Meadow/Chapel Straight on Southside Drive will be removed since curbing will be installed along the turnout and bike path. This vegetation strip will be revegetated and restored to a natural state. The sporadic barrier stones at Wosky Pond turnout will be removed as this turnout will be paved and curbed. In many other locations along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, barrier stones will be placed to contain the proliferation of informal

roadside parking. For a complete listing of where barrier stones will be placed, refer to table II-1, Alternative 2 Parking Actions in the EA.

Cultural Resources

Traditional Cultural Resources

Concern #42: The National Park Service should consider that American Indian representatives be present during all ground disturbance activities associated with this project to avoid disturbing ORVs of cultural importance, such as gathering areas and American Indian Village sites.

Some of the individual comments related to this concern have been omitted because they contain information regarding sensitive cultural resources, which are protected under Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-1)

“The Tribe would like to request that native American Monitors be present on all ground disturbance the duration of the project and for the park service to make every effort to avoid these ORV of cultural importance to the Tribe.”

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-2)

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-5)

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-7)

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-8)

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-11)

“Monitoring ground disturbance in this section of roadway will be necessary as with the entire project area.”

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-12)

Response: The National Park Service plans to have professional natural and cultural resource staff and American Indian expert representatives present during ground disturbing activities, as appropriate. The National Park Service is aware of sensitive areas to which American Indians attach cultural and religious significance, and will continue to consult with American Indian groups regarding their participation in the protection of resources..

Concern #43: The National Park Service should exercise caution during ground disturbing activities at Teddy Roosevelt Turnout to protect rare, unique, and culturally important resources at that site.

Comments related to this concern have been omitted because they contain information regarding sensitive cultural resources, which are protected under Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-4)

Response: The National Park Service recognizes this request and will exercise caution during ground disturbing activities in this area.

Concern #44: The National Park Service should protect areas of important cultural resources along the bike and foot path adjacent to Southside Drive from Sentinel Bridge to the intersection with Northside Drive at Curry Village.

Comments related to this concern have been omitted because they contain information regarding sensitive cultural resources, which are protected under Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Comment omitted

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-9)

Response: The National Park Service will continue to consult with American Indian tribes to protect the traditional cultural resources in the area of potential impact throughout the implementation of the project.

Conflicts with Natural Resources

Concern #45: The National Park Service should investigate and reconsider the naming of certain aspects, places and plans in Yosemite Valley.

“We want to file a complaint concerning the language and naming of certain areas as “Miwok”. We are making a formal complaint concerning these matters indicated below: Chapter 111. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences: Page 111-8, under Table 111-1 Soil Types in Yosemite Valley, Soil Types they are titled 501 Miwok Complex, 502 Miwok sandy loam, 503 Miwok sandy loam, 551 Miwok - Half Dome complex with a corresponding map with the same titles.”

(Tribal Organization, Comment #5-1)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is a maintenance project which aims to repair, rehabilitate, and repave the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. The names of certain aspects, places, and plans in Yosemite Valley will not be reconsidered as part of this planning effort. The United States Geological Survey is the federal agency responsible for the naming of soil types and the Natural Resources Conservation Service is the federal agency responsible for soil mapping. It is the understanding of the National Park Service that the soil classifications identified in the 1990 Soil Survey are being considered for renaming.

Visitor Experience

Cumulative Effects Analysis

Concern #46: The Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment needs to assess the cumulative impacts of this project and others on the visitor experience.

“[W]e believe that the massive impacts of this project, when added to the impacts of the various ongoing projects in the east end of Yosemite Valley, will be unacceptable. The entirety of Yosemite Valley, from one end to the other, will be torn up simultaneously. The impact on the visitor experience will be profound. It will not be good for Yosemite, nor will it be good for the gateway communities whose economies rely on Yosemite being a popular destination.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #18-7)

“I am a frequent visitor to the park. Last summer the traffic congestion as a result of ongoing construction projects was appalling. I hate to even imagine the traffic conditions resulting from a project of this size. How do you propose to accomplish this project without severely impacting the visitor experience?”

(Individual, Comment #21-1)

Response: Methods and procedures the National Park Service follows for addressing cumulative impacts are found in the 1997 publication by the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) entitled “Considering Cumulative Effects Under the National Environmental Policy Act.”

Cumulative impacts to the visitor experience as a result of this and other on-going construction projects in Yosemite Valley were analyzed in the EA. The National Park Service recognizes the short-term adverse effects to the visitor experience due to construction activities and plans to mitigate adverse impacts by implementing a construction communication plan, scheduling construction activities during off-peak visitation months, and temporarily adjusting circulation patterns on the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

Long-term impacts to the visitor experience are expected to be beneficial. The improvements to the Yosemite Valley Loop Road will provide safe access to Yosemite National Park for future generations. Improvements to roadside parking will provide visitors with needed parking facilities, and help protect the surrounding natural and cultural resources. As a result of public concern, four of the five turnouts originally proposed for removal will now be maintained, resulting in continued access to existing parking facilities, and benefiting the visitor experience.

Access

Special Populations Access

Concern #47: The National Park Service should make provisions for disabled persons in the alternatives for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

“As 77 million people will retire in the next nine years, senior citizen visitors will increase and they will have the need for the improvements mentioned herewith as they will fall into the disabled and the “near disabled” categories; most likely, they will drive and need access considerations around the park and adjacent to the Loop Roads..”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-15)

“The current alternatives make no provision of the disabled either by expressed or implied specifications; more caution and provisions should be provided in the Project as it is obvious that such has been omitted.”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-16)

“The Project should accommodate Universal Design (for the disabled) in a well spaced quantity of turnouts; consider the need of the disabled to pull over after the long drive into the Valley and the need to do this at, near, or beyond Bridalveil Creek; the same must be considered as they depart the Valley in places such as Bridalveil Meadow;”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-13)

“The needs of the disabled vary to such a degree that each has its own specific needs, resources, and necessities for care, most all of which preclude entrance on a “tour bus;””

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-14)

“[I]f the park is to be advertised as accommodating the disabled as done for the Yosemite Falls Project, this project should not be devoid of those accommodations; it is a standard policy nationwide that when new projects are undertaken, they qualify for total design considerations and this project does not carry a waiver to that standard;”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-17)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project proposes several improvements to accessibility for disabled persons. Handicapped parking spaces will be added to several of the formal turnouts such as Teddy Roosevelt, Bridalveil Straight, and El Capitan Straight. Curb-cut ramps and crosswalks will be installed in heavily used areas such as the Sentinel Bridge and Curry Village intersections. All current provisions for people with disabilities within the project area will be maintained.

Concern #48: The National Park Service should create parking spaces that could accommodate handicapped parking, but which are not exclusively reserved for handicapped access.

“Disabled spaces should not overpower nor exclude others from parking; an example is that if 4 spaces are possible, they all can accommodate a disabled vehicle but only one out of the four is designated in blue for the disabled, whereby not prohibiting others from parking but would allow more than one disabled vehicle to park if space is open;”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-12)

Response: Where possible, turnouts along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road will be rehabilitated to provide uniform access to all park visitors. Two new disabled parking spaces will be identified at Valley View turnout and Swinging Bridge Picnic Area, where roadside parking is presently striped, to improve visitor access. The National Park Service has and will continue to include uniform access for all park visitors as part of the final design and construction documents.

Visitor Services

Wayside Exhibits

Concern #49: The National Park Service should consider the installation of a new visitor interpretive plaque at the site of the largest terminal glacial moraine in Yosemite Valley.

“The removal of two fairly small Alder clusters at the existing turnout [Turnout #11] would provide additional space required for turnout expansion and the siting of a new visitor interpretive plaque pointing out this major geological feature. The removal of the two Alder cluster in this heavily canopied area would not be a serious loss compared to the advantages gained in acquiring an important new interpretive site for Valley visitors.”

(Individual, Comment #15-4)

Response: The addition of interpretive signs at points of interest in Yosemite Valley will not be a part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. However, by maintaining roadside turnout #11, with its close proximity to the El Capitan moraine, the National Park Service retains the opportunity to implement future interpretive exhibits at this site.

Transportation

Transportation Infrastructure and Services

Concern #50: The National Park Service should encourage smaller vehicles on Yosemite’s roadways instead of constructing the roadways to accommodate large vehicles.

“Banning large buses and RV’s from the park’s roads and having the vehicles fit the roads is more reasonable for the protection of Yosemite than enlarging all of the services to accommodate them.”

(Individual, Comment #22-7)

“In addition, my comments stressed making the vehicles fit the present roads, and banning the large buses, RVs. This would include heavy construction vehicles, large delivery trucks, etc.”

(Individual, Comment #23-3)

“I continue to urge that the small size 18-passenger gasoline shuttles that have been in use in Tuolumne Meadows for some time be the shuttle buses of choice for all of Yosemite, especially the Valley, These are nearly silent, and fit the roads.”

(Individual, Comment #23-4)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Project will repair, rehabilitate, and repave the existing roadway. While a more consistent roadway width will be achieved where possible, no widening of the existing road bench will take place. The proposed consistent width will contribute to smooth travel lanes and traffic flow along the roadway. The proposed width was selected based on an

evaluation of multiple concerns, such as protection of resources along the roadside edge, average size of vehicles using this road, and optimization of safety for drivers and pedestrians using the roadway.

Roads, Trails, and Bridges

Concern #51: The National Park Service should avoid rerouting or widening any road in Yosemite Valley in the interest of long-term preservation of the area.

“[I]n the case of roads in Yosemite Valley, certain actions must be avoided in the interest of long term preservation of the area. These include: The rerouting of any existing road.”

(Individual, Comment #7-2)

Response: The National Park Service aims to provide the public with safe and consistent travel corridors. The objective of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project is to rehabilitate, repair and repave the existing roadway. Roadway widening is not part of the purpose of this project. However, along some stretches of the roadway, widening will take place within the existing area of the road bench to achieve a safe and maintainable roadway width of 22 feet.

The current roadway width varies from 18 to 26 feet (travel lanes and shoulders, where present, included). By implementing the Preferred Alternative, travel lane and shoulder widths will be made consistent, where possible, to a standard width of 10 foot travel lanes and 1 foot shoulders. No trees would be removed to achieve these proposed standard travel lane and shoulder widths, nor would the existing road bench be widened to achieve these standard widths. In some locations, the existing roadway width will be made narrower.

As a result of public concern over roadway width presented in graphics in the EA, the National Park Service issued a *Factsheet* in late December 2005 to clarify this information. To review the clarified graphics, refer to pages E4, E5 and E6 of the Errata Sheets for the EA.

Concern #52: The National Park Service should grade and pave roads in compliance with California Department of Transportation specifications to enhance the visitor experience and traffic safety.

“[Roads] should be graded and paved to updated DOT specifications to enhance visitor experience and traffic safety to the level expected by visitors and the U.S. Taxpayer;”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-10)

Response: The National Park Service uses the Yosemite National Park Road Standards as a design guide when repairing, rehabilitating, or reconstructing all park roads. The California Department of Transportation (CDOT) does not fund, maintain, repair, rehabilitate, or reconstruct any of Yosemite National Park’s roads and, therefore, park roads are not designed to be in compliance with CDOT specifications. The design for this project is intended to provide park visitors and employees with an enjoyable and informative travel experience along a safe and efficient roadway, while at the same time carefully protecting important natural and cultural resources.

Concern #53: The National Park Service should consider that an Encroachment Permit from the California Department of Transportation will be required if the project area of this rehabilitation effort connects with State Route 140.

“If the rehabilitation effort requires a connection (with the western limit ending at State Route 140) an Encroachment Permit will be required for work (if any) done within the Department's right of way.”
(State Agency, Comment #14-1)

Response: The National Park Service is not required to obtain an Encroachment Permit from the California Department of Transportation because State Route 140 begins at the Yosemite National Park boundary, several miles away from the project area.

Concern #54: The National Park Service should reestablish the access road and associated drainage facilities to the Wauhoga Village (west of Camp 4) as it was in 1930 when the village was occupied.

“The Tribe would like to request that the access road entrance to the Wauhoga Village be reestablished as it was in 1930 when village was occupied. (Village west of Camp 4). The entrance will need a 24 inch culvert placed in drainage ditch with road base. And asphalt connected to North side drive roadway. Asphalt shall be placed to protect drainage from being damaged or filled with dirt from future traffic. Stone work for culvert retaining wall to match other culverts in this project”
(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-10)

Response: The commenter is requesting that access be established to the location of the proposed Indian Cultural Center as discussed in the September 2003, Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment EA. The National Park Service, in partnership with the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, will develop the Indian Cultural Center at the site of the last occupied American Indian village in Yosemite Valley. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project will only repair, rehabilitate and repave existing roadway portions of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road; no new roads will be built as a part of this project.

Parking

Concern #55: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project should not remove any roadside parking.

“The project should not be used as an opportunity to phase out or reduce day use or casual use pull-over sites/opportunities, ...especially as they relate to a reduction in visitor experience;”
(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-3)

“[K]eep [turnout] #11 [from Figure II-1] as is with a “repave.” The public deserves this close proximity with the Merced River.”
(Individual, Comment #11-2)

“Turnout 11, one of five turnouts proposed for removal is sited at the largest terminal glacial moraine in Yosemite Valley. This turnout provides an excellent view of the Merced River cutting through an important geological feature that was part of the fundamental geological processes that formed this Valley. It is a very important turnout site and it should be maintained.”
(Individual, Comment #15-3)

“On page 11-9, the plan states that “less than 1%” of parking capacity would be lost and that National Park Service “will look for opportunities to accommodate this loss . . . In other future projects.” Our main concern is where, when, and how much of this loss will be replaced?”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA Comment #20-10)

“On page 11-11, the plan states, “two roadside turnouts [64 and 65] would be removed and relocated to safer locations.” When asked...[National Park Service] replied that turnout 68-near Pohono Bridge-will “supplement” the loss of parking. However, will [National Park Service] definition of “supplement” fully make up for the loss at turnouts 64 and 65? “To supplement” normally means to add-we fail to see how retention of parking which already exists constitutes an addition.”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA Comment #20-11)

Response: In response to public concern over the proposed reduction in parking spaces as a part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project, four of the five roadside parking areas proposed for removal will now be maintained.

Roadside turnout #11 is a paved turnout that could accommodate three vehicles. The National Park Service proposed its removal due to concerns over the narrowness of the travel lanes in this area. The original objective was to create a more consistent width of 22 feet in this particularly narrow section of roadway. However, due to public concern over losing roadside parking, the National Park Service now proposes to maintain the three spaces that turnout #11 provides.

Roadside parking turnout #30 is a gravel turnout bordered by Northside Drive and a bicycle path. It precedes the entrance to the former Rivers Campgrounds. The National Park Service proposed removing turnout #30 because of safety concerns regarding its proximity to both the campground entrance and a bicycle path. After further consideration, the National Park Service proposes to maintain this turnout by regrading and graveling this turnout, and placing barrier stones along the current footprint to protect the bike path from the safety hazard of vehicles pulling off of the roadway

Roadside turnouts numbered 64 and 65, which accommodate three and two vehicles respectively, were proposed to be removed because of their informal nature and proximity to the river. However, due to public concern over losing roadside parking capacity, the National Park Service will maintain these turnouts. Roadside turnouts numbered 64 and 65 will be re-graded and graveled.

Public commenters also requested that the 13 parking spaces of roadside turnout #29 be maintained. The National Park Service considered this request, however, due to the inadequate sight distance preceding the Curry Village stop sign and the heavy pedestrian traffic in that area, the park will remove this turnout through the placement of curbing. Public safety concerns outweigh the need for roadside parking in this general vicinity.

Concern #56: The National Park Service should relocate roadside parking near El Capitan Bridge.

“If turnouts [#53 and #54 from table II-1 in the Environmental Assessment] are needed for emergency operations, maintain them as unpaved graded turnouts to be used for emergency purposes only. Parking eliminated at these two turnouts could be relocated at other turnout sites perhaps along NSD. The visual impacts of vehicles parked at these highly scenic sites are particularly problematic as one approaches on NSD from East Valley. Visitors are presented by a grand view punctuated with a very unsightly line of vehicles.”

(Individual, Comment #15-11)

“The entire parking issue at El Cap Straight should be addressed in a future effort to relocate parking away from the heavily impacted meadow and into nearby talus and trees to the north of the road.”

(Individual, Comment #15-12)

Response: The El Capitan Meadow is a highly valued resource area as well as a popular visitor destination. Many recreational activities take place in this area, such as enjoyment of scenic vistas, access to the Merced River, and rock climbing. In addition, the eastern edge of the meadow is often used as a staging ground for rescue operations. Because of the high concentration of visitor use in this area, facilities such as roadside parking experience heavy use must be maintained for operational access in cases of emergency. Roadside turnout #53 will be re-graded and graveled. The existing condition of roadside turnout #54 was incorrectly labeled paved, when in fact it is unpaved. Roadside turnout #54 will be re-graded and graveled.

Future planning efforts may analyze the removal of roadside parking in the El Capitan Straight area, however, this action will not be part of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Concern #57: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project should further reduce the size of the Fern Spring turnout.

“Turnout reductions to reduce visitor impacts at the small but ecologically sensitive Fern Spring area are positive improvements.”

(Individual, Comment #15-1)

“Fern Springs parking area needs to be made smaller because of the amount of visitor impact it is getting. The parking area needs to be reduced so busses cannot park in this turn out or large RV.”

(Tribal Organization, Mariposa, CA, Comment #16-3)

“While Fern Spring is addressed, why not one [alternative] which seriously considers real protection there. (Why doesn't NPS, for that matter, prohibit the unloading of tour busses there already?).”

(Conservation Organization, Yosemite Valley, Comment #19-14)

Response: Due to concerns generated through public scoping and comment periods, the National Park Service agreed that resource protection of this sensitive ecological and culturally significant area should be a priority when implementing the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. In addition to the Fern Springs Restoration Project, both the turnout width and length will be reduced, which will accommodate 6 vehicles in a significantly narrower space. This reduction will enhance restoration efforts in the area. The National Park Service currently restricts tour buses from stopping at the Fern Spring turnout.

Concern #58: The National Park Service should avoid adding any transportation structures in Yosemite Valley.

“[I]n the case of roads in Yosemite Valley, certain actions must be avoided in the interest of long term preservation of the area. These include: Adding any additional roadside or off-road parking, either paved or unpaved.”

(Individual, Comment #7-4)

“Please, I call upon you to reduce the structures, including roads and parking lots, in Yosemite.”

(Individual, Comment #22-2)

“As I pleaded with you, please reduce the structures in ethereal Yosemite.”

(Individual, Comment #23-5)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does not propose to add any transportation structures. Existing roadside parking will either be retained in its current condition or formalized to protect adjacent natural resources. With the exception of Fern Spring and the Curry Village Intersection, where turnouts will be reduced, the size and location of all roadside turnouts will be maintained. The designation of ADA-accessible parking spaces will not require the expansion of any turnouts or roadside parking areas.

Concern #59: The National Park Service should add roadside parking along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

“[Turnouts] should be expanded to better accommodate the current average fleet size of today's visitor vehicles (i.e.: SUV, minivans, vehicles with trailers, etc.) as this fleet has increased in size over the “decades.”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-9)

“If a more comprehensive plan is possible, the writer requests more casual pull-over sites, especially in the open areas of the Valley; this will also reduce the concentration of vehicles in the limited parking areas at Curry Village and the Visitor Center.”

(Recreational Organization, Comment #13-19)

Response: The National Park Service recognizes the interest in expanding parking opportunities along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road. This project will only repair, rehabilitate and repave the existing roadway and repave or regravels existing roadside turnouts; no new roadside parking spaces will be built as a part of this project.

Concern #60: The National Park Service should move forward with plans to pave the roadside turnout at Wosky Pond.

“Turnout 51, Wosky Pond. The proposal to improve this unpaved turnout with pavement is a good one that will allow visitors to view one of West Valley's most impressive view sheds without the problems associated with heavily used unpaved turnouts. This view site is depicted in the popular Rufus Graphics Map and Guide to Yosemite Valley as Cathedral Spires Vista. It is an impressive view and visitors should be provided with a turnout to view it.”

(Individual, Comment #15-8)

Response: Implementation of the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 2, will move forward with plans to pave and curb the turnout at Wosky Pond.

Traffic and Vehicle Management System

Concern #61: The National Park Service should install solar-powered lights and/or signs where possible safety hazards exist along to Yosemite Valley Loop Road.

“Add solar-powered caution lights/signs where possible safety hazards exist, i.e. the approach to turnouts.”

(Individual, Comment #11-3)

Response: The installation of solar-powered lights at certain locations along the Yosemite Valley Loop Road will not be a part of this project. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project does propose many improvements that will make the roadway safer for vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Park Operations

Roads, Trails, and Bicycle Paths

Concern #62: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project should incorporate use of a portable asphalt batch plant.

“Rather than introduce tons and tons of new asphalt (foreign material), the milled and pulverized existing asphalt should be recycled through a portable asphalt batch plant.”

(Individual, Comment #17-2)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project proposed that a portable asphalt batch plant be staged at Pohono Pit, just outside the project area. Existing asphalt will be pulverized in-place and recycled to create the new roadbed. These actions will reduce the need to import additional asphalt to the project site. The reduced need for additional construction traffic to and from the park will result in decreased fuel consumption, minimization of exhaust gases, and reduced wear and tear on the surrounding roads. The National Park Service wants to avoid these negative impacts to park resources and the visitor experience and is therefore proposing to adopt the portable asphalt batch plant and the in-place asphalt recycling methods presented in the Action Alternatives of the EA.

Concern #63: The *Rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project Environmental Assessment* should reconsider and re-analyze affects of asphalt and an asphalt batch plant on park resources.

“There may be a legitimate question as to whether asphalt is the best material. Should the turnouts be a different material?”

(Conservation Organization, Fresno, CA, Comment #18-22)

“Asphalt is known to be the single most toxic element to any waterway and yet the plan calls for grinding up existing asphalt to use as a base, with more new asphalt on top of that!”

(Individual, Comment #22-3)

“And an asphalt batch plant in Yosemite Valley! Benzene is one of the toxic by-products of an asphalt batch plant!”

(Individual, Comment #22-4)

Response: The National Park Service considered the use of different materials for the repair, rehabilitation and repaving of the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project. Because of the large amount of traffic on the Yosemite Valley Loop Road, a durable material must be utilized to endure the traffic loads. Asphalt and concrete are the two materials that would accommodate the current traffic loads. Concrete was dismissed from further consideration because of its high cost. Additionally, structural tests indicate that the current asphalt is adequate to uphold current traffic loads, thereby making it suitable material for the new road base. Maintaining the roadway by re-use of current materials was the most cost-effective approach to this project.

Several mitigation methods will be utilized during construction to help protect the negative impacts that could result from the use of asphalt. For example, contractors will be required to follow Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) recommendations and a hazardous material spill plan will be implemented.

Additionally, the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project proposed staging a portable asphalt batch plant at Pohono Pit, just outside the project area. Existing asphalt will be pulverized in-place and recycled to create the new roadbed. These actions will reduce the need to import additional asphalt to the project site. The reduced need for additional construction traffic to and from the park will result in decreased fuel consumption, minimization of exhaust gases, and reduced wear and tear on the surrounding roads. The National Park Service wants to avoid these negative impacts to park resources and the visitor experience and is therefore proposing to adopt the portable asphalt batch plant and the in-place asphalt recycling methods presented in the Action Alternatives of the EA.

Concessions Operations

Concern #64: The National Park Service should consider the effect concessions operations have on congestion in Yosemite Valley.

“The concessionaire advertises its resort-type facilities in Yosemite all over the world. Do you not consider that this, and their own infrastructures in Yosemite, add greatly to the use and congestion in the Valley?”

(Individual, Comment #22-8)

“For instance the Bracebridge Dinner was featured on the cover of the Sierra Heritage Magazine a couple of years ago and the number of “performances” is now three.”

(Individual, Comment #22-9)

Response: Yosemite National Park receives over 3.5 million visitors per year. Many factors contribute to congestion in Yosemite Valley, including concessions operations. The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project will repair, rehabilitate and repave the roadway, which will provide safe and efficient access to the park; however, alleviating the current congestion with the construction of additional parking facilities will not be part of this project. Construction activities associated with this project may contribute to short term periods of traffic congestion. These impacts to the

visitor experience would be mitigated by construction mitigation measures which are outlined in table 1 of the Finding of No Significant Impact for the Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project.

Concern #65: The National Park Service should allow the public to comment on future Concession Management Plans.

“When the present concessionaire's contract is up, I hope there will be another alternative to the providing of services in Yosemite that the public can consider and have input on.”

(Individual, Comment #22-13)

Response: The Yosemite Valley Loop Road Project will repair, rehabilitate, and repave the roadway and will not address elements of the Concession Management Plan. This concern is out of scope for this planning effort; however, the public will be given the opportunity to comment on future Concession Management Plans.