

104/D-1155  
Yosemite

# Yosemite Valley

A Vision  
for the  
Twenty-First  
Century

SCANNED 2/11/2002

An Overview of the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan

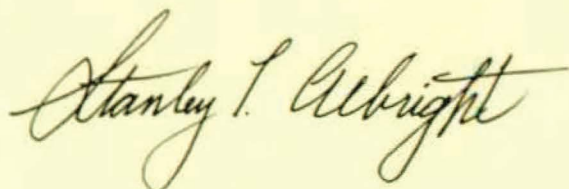
# A National Treasure Imperiled

Yosemite National Park is a place of exquisite scenic beauty, outstanding recreational opportunities and diverse Sierra Nevada environments, including sequoia groves, lush meadows and awesome granite domes. By establishing Yosemite as a national park in 1890, the people of the United States sought to preserve these unique resources and make them available for visitors to enjoy. Now, Yosemite attracts more than four million people annually—nearly double the number of visitors than in 1980.

In 1980, the National Park Service and the public engaged in a comprehensive process to develop a plan for the protection of Yosemite National Park's majestic Valley. The process resulted in the creation of a General Management Plan for the Park, which recommended actions for the Valley to reduce traffic congestion, restore substantial areas of the Valley to their natural condition, and relocate visitor and employee accommodations away from environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas.

Today, many of the challenges originally outlined in the General Management Plan remain. Traffic continues to be the greatest threat to enjoyment of the natural and scenic qualities of Yosemite. On some summer days, more than 7,000 cars travel to Yosemite's entrance gates. The congestion that results in the Valley threatens the overriding goals of protecting Park resources for future generations and providing visitors with a meaningful and enjoyable experience. In addition, many non-essential facilities remain in ecologically sensitive areas or in dangerous floodplains—as evidenced by the destruction of the 1997 New Year's flood.

Seventeen years have passed since the General Management Plan was finalized, and yet critical transportation, lodging and infrastructure problems have yet to be solved. The time to act is now.



Superintendent, Yosemite National Park



PHOTO BY MICHAEL STEIN COOPER

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## A Vision for the Valley

### Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan: The Blueprint for Positive Change

The draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan (VIP) presents a vision for the 21st century. It is a comprehensive blueprint for reducing traffic, restoring natural resources within the Valley, and improving visitor facilities and services.

The draft VIP assesses critical issues facing the entire Valley and proposes solutions that would affect transportation, housing and concession service.



PHOTO BY N. MONTARUS ©1997 YCS

Four "alternatives" are proposed in the draft VIP to accomplish goals originally set by the General Management Plan for Yosemite Valley. The draft VIP describes a preferred approach (the proposed action), two alternative actions and an option to maintain the status quo. The National Park Service strongly favors a departure from the status quo, and urges the public to provide input to help shape a plan that is responsive to the needs of the Valley and its visitors.

Summarized on the following pages are the primary features of the proposed action. It is important to note that throughout any changes made in the Valley, campsites and lodging will be available to the public.

## The Proposed Approach

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### A Thoughtful Solution with Immediate Benefits

The alternative that would be the most protective of the resources of Yosemite Valley would also be the most effective at enhancing the quality of the visitor experience for the millions of people who make the pilgrimage to Yosemite each year. Based on comments received from the public over the last 20 years, the National Park Service developed "Alternative 2," the "proposed action," in the draft VIP. This alternative is designed to greatly reduce traffic congestion, maximize conversion of currently developed areas within the Valley to natural open space, and minimize impacts to Valley resources by redesigning and relocating visitor and employee accommodations and facilities. The overriding goal of these efforts is to reduce the human footprint on the Valley. Specifically, the proposed action includes:



*Today: A heavily traveled ►  
roadway cuts through  
Ahwahnee Meadow.*

*The Vision: Ahwahnee Meadow is restored to its natural setting* ▶



### **Creating the Transportation System of the Future**

- Removing parking areas from the east end of the Valley.
- Expanding shuttle service with state-of-the-art, alternative fuel-powered buses.
- Implementing an in-Valley shuttle system that would facilitate and ultimately complement a regional transportation system.
- Creating and restoring hiking and biking trails throughout the Valley.

### **Restoring the Valley to its Natural Condition**

- Restoring 147 acres of land currently developed and riparian areas in the east end of the Valley through the removal of roads, bridges, parking facilities, and other structures.
- Relocating campsites from floodplains and other environmentally sensitive areas.
- Relocating the Park headquarters and other non-essential buildings to sites outside of the Valley.

### **Enhancing the Visitor Experience**

- Creating new or expanding existing visitor facilities, including a new visitor center.
- Increasing the number of bicycle and pedestrian trails.

## The Proposed Approach

### Creating the Transportation System of the Future



PHOTO BY BETH WALKEY © 1997 YCS

► *Quiet, no-emission electric buses like this one are part of the "proposed action".*

During the summer months, Yosemite Valley is plagued with traffic congestion which threatens Park resources and diminishes the visitor experience. From 1993 through 1996, the Park entrance was closed several times each year due to gridlock in the Valley. The preferred method of reaching the 1980 General Management Plan's goal of "markedly reducing traffic congestion" is to

institute a regional transportation system that would allow visitors to leave their cars outside the Park and travel by shuttle bus into and around Yosemite Valley. The Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy (YARTS) group — an organization consisting of representatives from local and state government and the National Park Service — is working to establish such a system by the summer of 2001.

Under the proposed action, an orientation/transfer facility would be constructed in the west end of the Valley known as the Taft Toe site. The facility would serve as the staging point for a visit to Yosemite Valley, a place where visitors can learn about the Valley's unique features, orient themselves to its sites and embark on their journey by way of state-of-the-art shuttle buses, foot or bicycle.

It is anticipated that visitors would arrive at the Taft Toe facility through the regional transportation system. In the event, however, that such a system has not been established upon completion of the orientation/transfer facility (scheduled to be no earlier than summer of 2001), visitors would leave their vehicles at an interim Taft Toe parking area and tour the Valley using a variety of options. As the regional system develops, the parking area would be phased out in proportion to the system's growing capacity, with the goal of eliminating all day-use visitor parking and restoring the site to its natural state.

By committing to this course of action, the National Park Service could proceed with the removal of 2,300 parking spaces and several roads located in the east end of the Valley that have caused the decline of natural ecosystems. In addition, by capturing day-use vehicles at the west end of the Valley, traffic congestion, air pollution and noise would be greatly reduced, enhancing the visitor experience.

One major goal of the General Management Plan is to greatly reduce traffic congestion. The best method to reach that goal is to institute a regional transportation system—a plan that will allow visitors to leave their cars outside the Park and travel by improved no- and low-emission vehicles into and around Yosemite Valley.

Alternative 2 of the draft VIP proposes several steps to address transportation issues:

- The National Park Service would continue to actively participate in the YARTS process and would collaborate with the gateway communities, local, state and federal government agencies, business and environmental interests, and other members of the public to assist in the development of a viable regional transportation system that addresses the problem of traffic congestion in Yosemite Valley.
- Day-use visitors would arrive at the west end of the Valley at Taft Toe using the regional transportation system. From Taft Toe, these visitors could explore the Valley by way of shuttle bus, foot or bicycle. If a regional transportation system has not been created by the summer of 2001, visitors will park their cars in an interim lot at Taft Toe.
- The Valley shuttle system would be updated and expanded and serviced by state-of-the-art, no/low emission vehicles. Transfer facilities would be constructed at Taft Toe and Yosemite Village, at the current location of the Village Store, and serve visitors using shuttle buses. Eventually, shuttle services would be expanded to other areas of the Park.
- Pedestrian and bicycle paths would be improved and expanded.
- Visitors staying overnight in the Valley would continue to drive to their accommodations but, once there, would leave their vehicles parked for the duration of their stay.
- The National Park Service anticipates that a day-use vehicle reservation system will be implemented in the near future to limit the number of vehicles that enter the Park during periods of heavy visitation. The day-use vehicle reservation system will be developed through a process separate from the draft VIP.

Artist's rendering of a proposed visitor transfer facility.

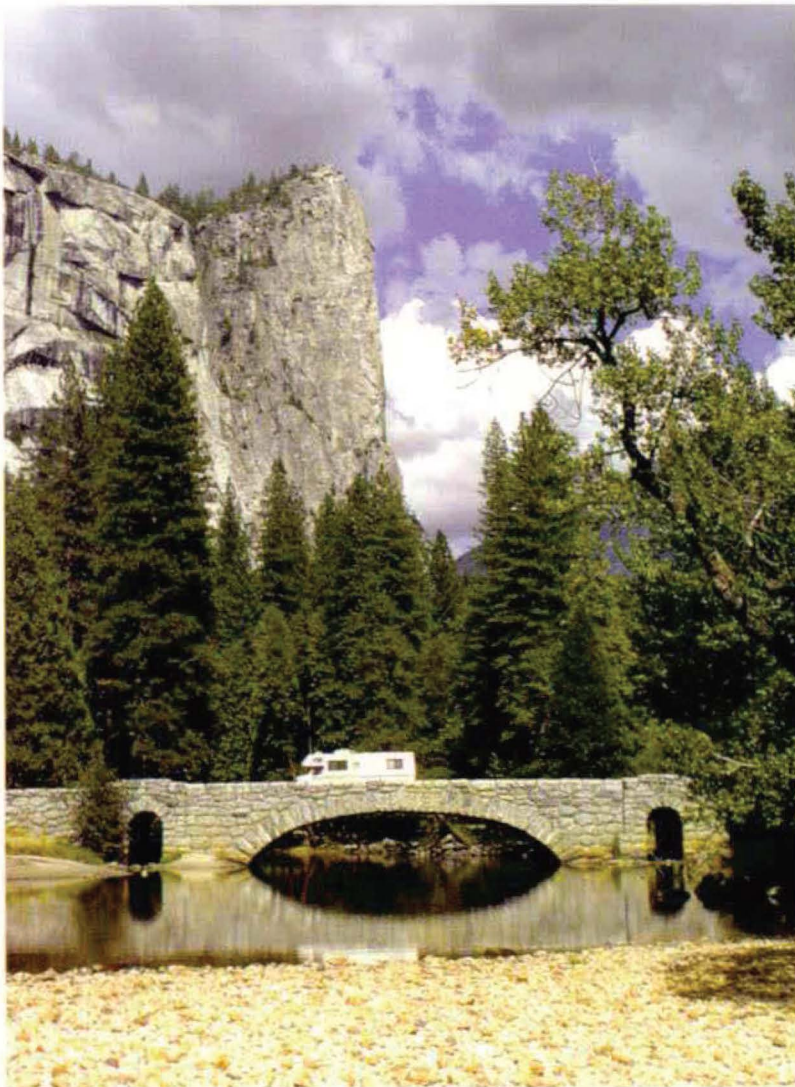


## The Proposed Approach

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### Restoring the Valley to its Natural Condition

Overdevelopment in the Valley has had a negative effect on its environmental well-being and on the quality of the visitor experience. The proposed action outlined in Alternative 2 calls for the restoration of 147 acres in the Valley—an area the size of more than 100 football fields. This effort would enhance the Yosemite Valley ecosystem by restoring meadows, river areas and woodlands. The restoration of these areas would be achieved by removing roads, bridges, employee housing, lodging facilities and other structures, as well as consolidating parking. Specifically, restoration projects would include:



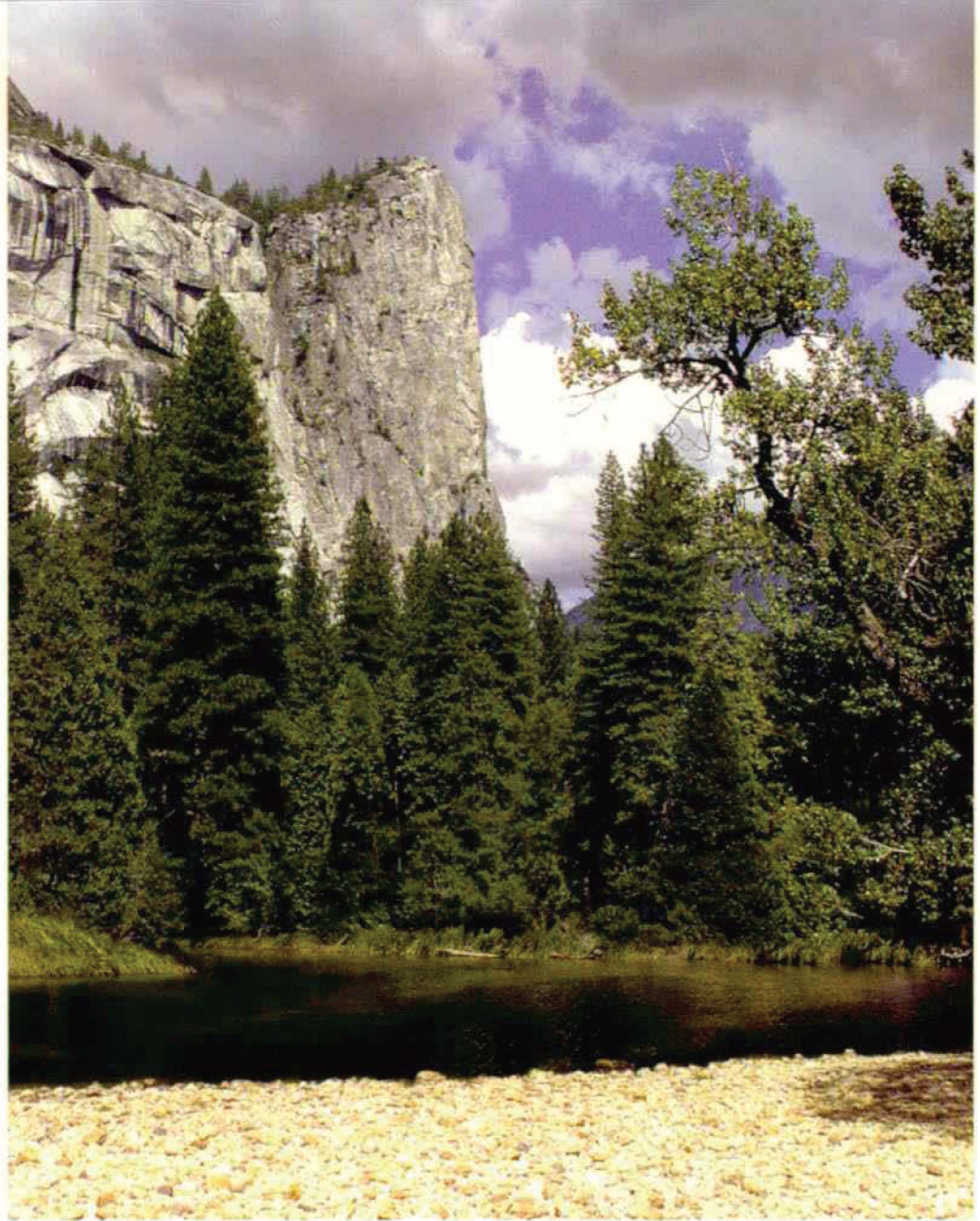
- Removing roads that cross the Ahwahnee, Stoneman and Cook's meadows and restoring riverbanks where the Stoneman, Ahwahnee and Sugarpine bridges are currently located. This will restore meadows and riverbank habitats, which have been adversely affected by restricted water flows.
- Removing current parking areas for 2,300 day-use vehicles and returning much of these areas to their natural condition.
- Establishing protective buffers 75-meters wide along the banks of the Merced River and 50-meters wide along the banks of Tenaya Creek (no development will take place within these buffer zones; although, beach and river access would continue to be available to visitors).

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◀ *Today: Stoneman Bridge impedes the natural flow of the Merced River.*



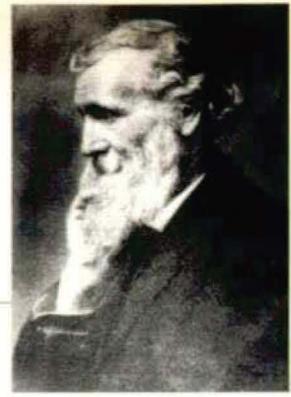
*The Vision: Stoneman Bridge is removed and the area restored, allowing the Merced River to follow a natural course.*



- Removing the Ahwahnee Hotel tennis courts and restoring the area.
- Removing Ahwahnee Row and Lower Tecoya housing to restore a black oak woodland area.
- Removing or relocating lodging and employee units out of sensitive or dangerous areas (currently being implemented as part of the Yosemite Lodge plan).

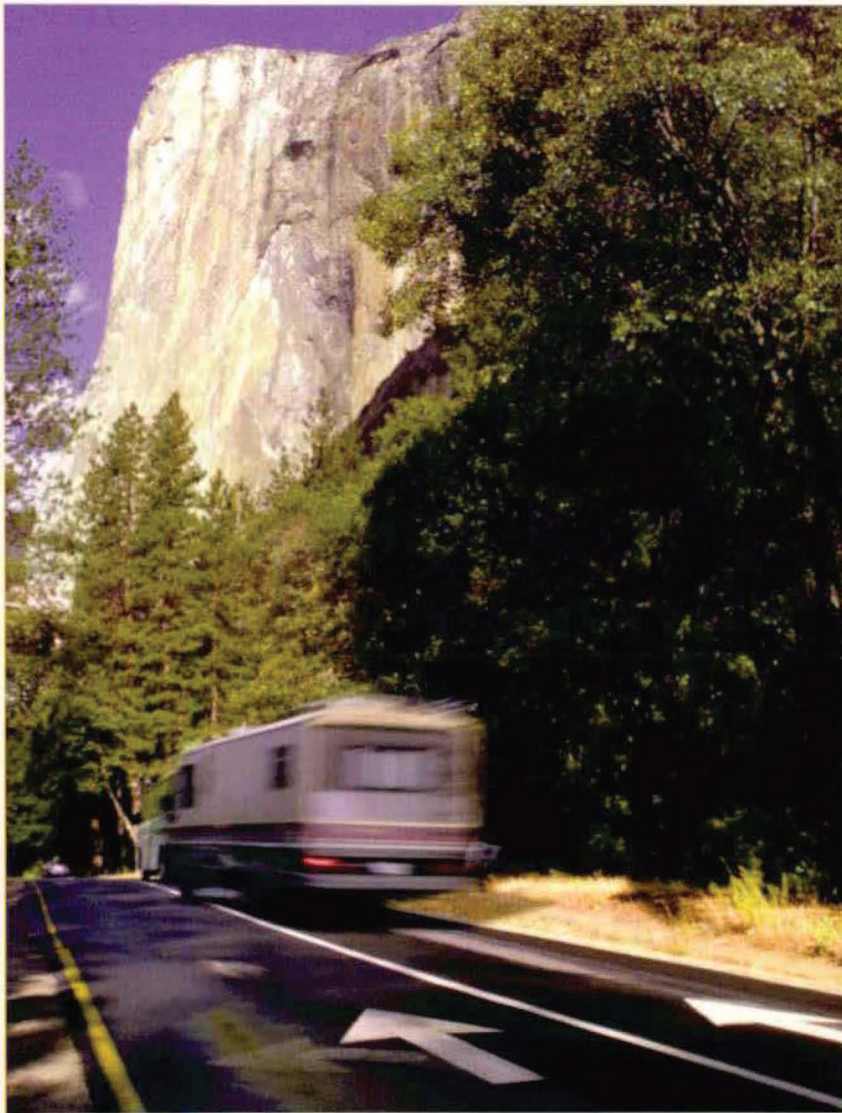
The proposed action, Alternative 2, provides for a total of 147 acres to be returned to nature. That's an area the size of more than 100 football fields. Restoration will be achieved by removing employee housing, lodging facilities, roads, bridges and other structures as well as consolidating parking.

## The Proposed Approach



### Enhancing the Visitor Experience

Conservationist John Muir once wrote that "...the true ownership of the wilderness belongs in the highest degree to those who love it most." The Yosemite Valley lures hikers, climbers, bicyclists and nature-lovers from around the world. Alternative 2 (the proposed action) in the draft VIP will reduce traffic and restore 147 acres, enhancing the visitor experience and safeguarding the Valley for future generations.

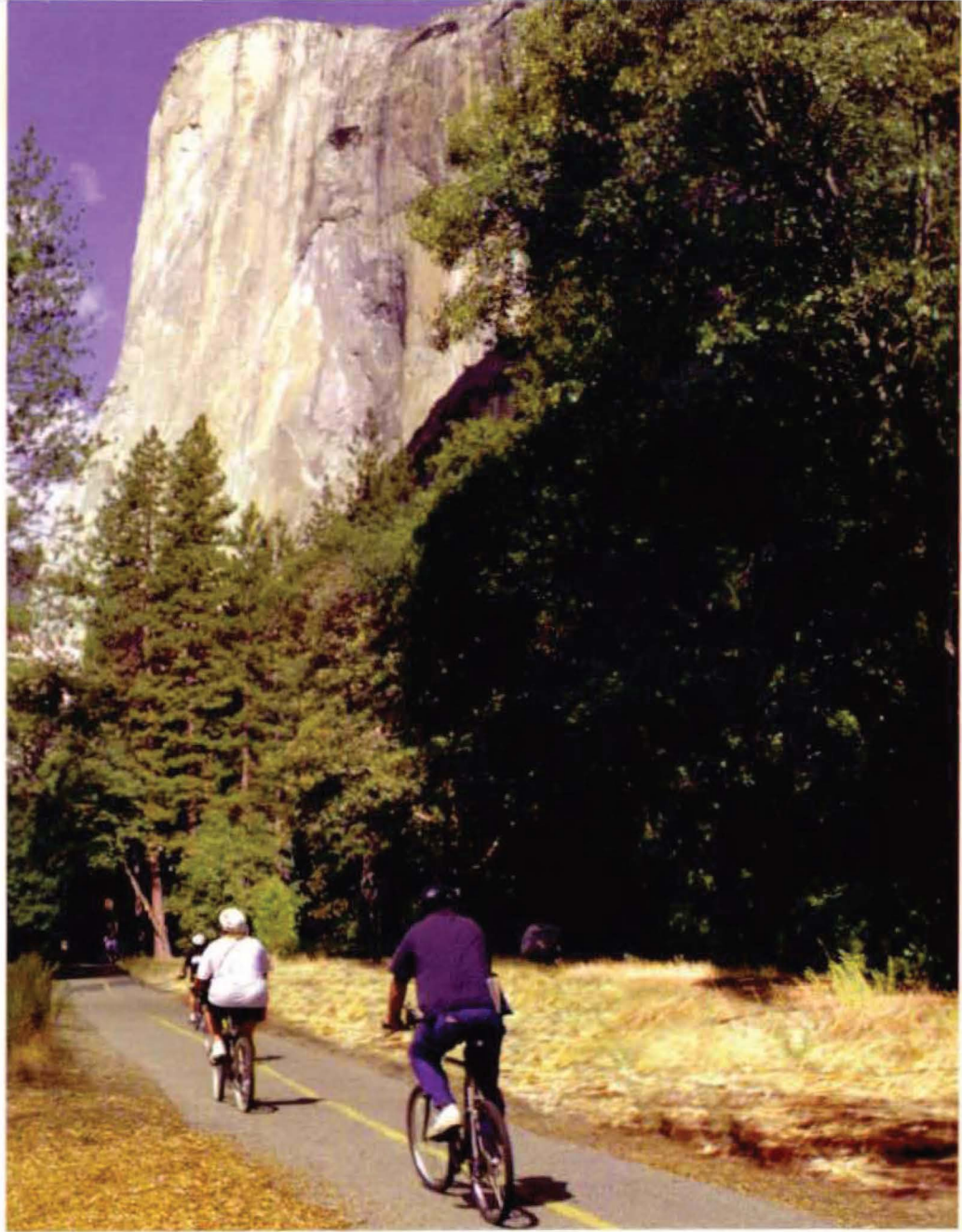


Visitor benefits of the proposed action are:

- The elimination of traffic congestion and noise pollution in the Valley by reducing the number of private and commercial vehicles.
- The creation of bicycle and pedestrian paths to Yosemite Falls that follow the route of the existing Northside Drive.
- The creation of bicycle paths around Yosemite Lodge and Yosemite Village.
- The establishment of a new visitor interpretation, information and transfer facility at the convenient and accessible location that is presently used for the Village Store.
- The remodeling of the Park's existing history museum and administration building with new museums that focus on Yosemite's human and natural history.

◀ *Today: Heavy traffic occurs on Northside Drive.*

*The Vision: Bike paths  
replace roadways, allowing  
for restoration.* ▶



- The expansion of facilities for disabled visitors and employees, including trails, parking, and overnight accommodations.
- The establishment of an Indian Cultural Center to be used by Native Americans for traditional cultural activities.
- The construction of two amphitheaters to accommodate ranger-led campfire programs.

## The Four Alternatives

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### A Side-by-Side Comparison

The draft VIP proposes four different alternatives for Yosemite Valley. These alternatives reflect different approaches to achieving the goals of the General Management Plan: reducing traffic congestion; restoring land in the Valley to its natural condition by removing man-made structures; and relocating visitor and employee accommodations away from environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas. The following provides a brief, side-by-side comparison of the alternatives.

### Alternative 1: The “No Action” Alternative

Under this alternative, projects would be undertaken in a piecemeal manner. Although a few elements of the other alternatives might still be implemented through this approach, changes would not move forward in a coordinated, comprehensive and integrated fashion, which is necessary to fully realize the goals of the General Management Plan.



PHOTO BY N. MONTARUS ©2007 YCS

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## Common Features of the Three Action Alternatives

- Reclaimed land would be restored to a natural state, although the acreage of restored land differs between the alternatives.
- Visitors would use a shuttle bus system to travel within the Valley.
- Overnight visitors would park their vehicles for the duration of their stay in the Valley.
- The Village Store would be redesigned to serve as a visitor center and provide a hub for the shuttle system.
- Visitor amenities, museums and amphitheaters would be located near the redesigned Village Store. A grocery store would be located at Curry Village.
- Many facilities would be relocated. Park headquarters would be moved out of Yosemite Valley and the existing building converted into a natural history museum. Other National Park Service facilities, the headquarters for the concessionaire, and some concession employee housing units would be moved outside the Valley. Houses along the edge of Ahwahnee Meadow would be removed.
- Improved traffic patterns, which vary with each alternative.
- A day-use vehicle reservation system would be implemented to alleviate congestion and avoid the need to close the Park during periods of heavy visitation (the reservation system is being developed separately from the draft VIP).

# The Four Alternatives

## Differences in the Action Alternatives

### Alternative 2

#### The Proposed Action

- Approximately 147 acres would be restored to natural conditions, 82 acres redesigned and 59 acres developed in the east end of Yosemite Valley.
- An orientation/transfer facility would be constructed near Taft Toe at the Valley's west end, in a location which would be out of major scenic viewing areas. The creation of interim parking would be dependent upon establishment of a regional transportation system. If parking is created, it would be removed as a regional transportation system is developed.
- Day-use parking areas in the east end of the Valley would be removed.
- Miles of new, safer and restored biking and hiking trails would be created.
- Sections of the roads through Stoneman, Ahwahnee and Cook's meadows would be removed and the meadows restored.



- Three bridges would be removed to restore the natural flow of the Merced River.
- National Park Service and concessionaire headquarters and other non-essential buildings would be relocated out of the Valley.
- Lower and Upper River campgrounds would be relocated to less environmentally sensitive areas of the Valley.

▲ Today: Famous Tunnel  
View would remain the same  
under Alternatives 1, 2 & 4.

*Under Alternative 3, ►  
a parking structure  
would be seen from  
Tunnel View.*



### Alternative 3

- An orientation/transfer facility and a parking structure would be located near Pohono Quarry (the creation of such a structure would be dependent upon establishment of a regional transportation system). If built, the parking structure would be visible from major scenic viewing points in the Valley. The structures under consideration for Pohono Quarry would be permanent and more expensive than the parking area at Taft Toe.
- Approximately 143 acres would be restored to their natural condition, 93 acres redesigned and 57 acres developed in the east end of Yosemite Valley.
- Day-use parking areas in the east end of the Valley would be removed.
- Sections of the roads through Stoneman and Ahwahnee meadows would be removed.
- Two bridges would be removed to restore the natural flow of the Merced River.
- Lower and Upper River campgrounds would be relocated to less environmentally sensitive areas of the Valley.

### Alternative 4

- Approximately 118 acres would be restored to natural conditions, 95 acres redesigned and 36 acres developed in the east end of the Yosemite Valley.
- Roads and day-use parking areas would be retained and consolidated, with a minor expansion to accommodate day-use vehicles which must be parked for the duration of a visitor's stay.
- Three bridges would be modified to restore the natural flow of the Merced River.



PHOTO ©1997 YCS

The draft VIP will significantly decrease traffic and congestion and restore the Valley to its primary role: a unique and protected wild area that serves as a natural sanctuary and source of inspiration for visitors from around the world.



## Additional Improvements

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### Valley Improvements Integrated with the Flood Recovery Program

On January 1-3, 1997, warm rainfall on a deep snowpack caused the highest levels of flooding ever recorded in Yosemite Valley. The floods caused substantial damage to the Park's infrastructure, washing out roads, flooding campsites and lodging units and destroying water systems and sewage lines. Yosemite Lodge was also severely damaged by the flood. Work to repair and improve the Lodge has proceeded independent of the draft VIP so that restoration efforts could be expedited. The 1980 General Management Plan, however, has provided guidance on all flood recovery activities.

Improvements to Yosemite Valley through the flood recovery program include:

- The removal of 252 lodging and cabin units from the floodplain to restore the area to natural habitat.
- The consolidation and removal of employee housing in the Yosemite Lodge area from the floodplain and the restoration of that area back to its natural condition.



## The Next Steps

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### Immediate Actions

#### to Preserve and Protect Yosemite Valley

The "action alternatives" proposed in the draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan will help solve significant problems facing Yosemite Valley. By taking action now, the National Park Service, working in partnership with the general public, can effectively preserve and protect one of the nation's most magnificent natural treasures for generations to come.

The draft VIP is open for public comment. After receiving all comments, a final plan will be developed and approved by the Park Superintendent in mid-1998.

Implementation of the final plan will begin shortly thereafter. Anyone wishing to comment on the draft plan should write to:

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





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