

March 13, 2014

Yosemite National Park Announces the Release of the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Final Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Yosemite National Park announces the release of the Final Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The plan is the result of using the best available science, resource stewardship, and public input to create a robust vision for the Tuolumne River Corridor for the next 15-20 years. The Tuolumne River flows through the northern portion of Yosemite National Park and is one of the two federally designated Wild and Scenic rivers within Yosemite.

"The final plan is a major achievement to ensure the long-term health of Yosemite's high country and provides a road map to preserve the area's fragile resources and accommodate quality visitor experiences," stated Don Neubacher, Yosemite Superintendent.

The final preferred alternative (Alternative 4: Improving the Traditional Tuolumne Experience) identifies a set of management actions that will work together to protect river values while accommodating existing amounts of day and overnight use and providing improved opportunities for day visitors at Tuolumne Meadows. This selected alternative responds to a range of public concerns by balancing desires to retain a traditional Tuolumne experience with desires to reduce development and make visitor use more sustainable. It also addresses the need to provide a meaningful introduction to the Tuolumne River for the growing number of short-term visitors.

The major focus of the plan is to restore the health of Tuolumne Meadows. Under the plan, the National Park Service (NPS) will implement a series of restoration actions to improve the meadow and riparian ecosystems along the river. These restoration projects will include restoring natural water flows into the meadows, replanting native vegetation, and removing informal social trails that are damaging resources.

"The restoration of the Tuolumne Meadows area and other critical resource protection actions are major cornerstones to the Tuolumne River Plan. Public input over the course of the planning process has been invaluable in shaping this key document that creates the future of Tuolumne Meadows. Throughout the process, the public has demonstrated their passionate connection to this phenomenal area," stated Mike Yochim, Project Manager for the Tuolumne River Plan.

An equally important part of the plan is to improve the visitor's experience in Tuolumne Meadows. Future visitors to Tuolumne Meadows will experience reduced congestion on trails and roadways, enjoy views of the meadows unobstructed by parked cars, camp at an improved campground, and see more clearly delineated parking areas and trailheads. Opportunities for day visitors to connect with the river will be improved by providing a new visitor contact station, picnic area, and trail connection to the river and to Parsons Memorial Lodge. Existing opportunities for traditional overnight use will be retained.

Public involvement was the cornerstone of the Tuolumne River planning process. Since the public involvement process began in 2005, the park has conducted over 120 public meetings. Many of the changes between the draft and final plan were the direct result of concerns raised during public meetings, agency and tribal consultation, and in public comments.

Specific Highlights of the Tuolumne River Plan include:

Protecting the Tuolumne River's Health and Other Resources:

- Restoring 171 acres of meadow and riparian habitat and 2 acres of upland habitat
- Directing river access to resilient areas and restoring native riparian vegetation
- Removing or mitigating the effects of trails and roads through meadows by re-routing trails, repairing culverts to improve hydrologic connectivity, and fencing restoration areas
- Removing roadside parking and replacing it with designated parking lots in more durable upland areas nearby
- Consolidating NPS and concessioner stables to minimize the development footprint
- Upgrading the wastewater treatment plant to tertiary treatment
- Implementing water conservation measures in Tuolumne Meadows, including upgrading water distribution lines and fixtures to be more efficient, installing water meters, and limiting water withdrawals from the river to 10% of low flows
- Relocating all development from within 100 feet of the river, including 21 campsites at the Tuolumne Meadows Campground
- Reducing the impacts of the Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp by reducing packstock resupply trips, limiting water consumption and associated wastewater production, and replacing flush toilets with composting toilets
- Reducing pack stock use and associated impacts on trails in the river corridor by discontinuing commercial day rides
- Designating stock campsites in Lyell Canyon and limiting stock access to times when meadows are "range-ready" based on snowfall and rain patterns

Preserving and Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

- The Tuolumne Meadows Campground will be reconfigured while remaining at its current capacity of 329 sites and 7 group sites. Primary improvements will include upgrading and adding restrooms, repairing the campground roads, delineating camping spots to reduce resource damage, relocating the entrance road and kiosk out of the floodplain, and relocating campsites away from the river
- The Tuolumne Lodge will remain at its current capacity with some facilities relocated away from the river and a new shower house provided for guests and members of the public
- A new visitor contact station and trailhead parking lot will be built in a central location on the south side of Tioga Road to replace the existing visitor center in Tuolumne Meadows. The new facility will offer easy access to the Parsons Memorial Lodge trail across the meadows. A new trail will be provided along Tioga Road to connect the visitor contact station with the campground, store and grill
- The existing visitor center will be converted to administrative uses and trailhead parking for Cathedral Lakes, with a connecting trail constructed
- The Glen Aulin High Sierra Camp will continue its operation at a slightly reduced capacity
- Private whitewater boating will be allowed on a trial basis through the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, from Pothole Dome to Pate Valley, within the current wilderness permit quota system
- Picnic areas will be improved and expanded at Lembert Dome and at the store and grill

Managing Visitor Use to Ensure High Quality Visitor Experience

- Visitation levels will be limited to those seen over the past several years with a maximum of 4,727 visitors to the Tuolumne River corridor. Day-use capacity will be managed by controlling parking supply and public transit use and through ongoing monitoring. Overnight-use capacity will be managed through wilderness permits, reservation systems for lodging and camping, and associated parking supply
- To improve scenic vistas, reduce congestion, and address safety hazards, roadside parking along

Tioga Road will be removed. Parking will instead be directed to designated parking lots in less visible and less sensitive upland areas nearby with a limited number of scenic viewing pullouts retained. The total amount of parking will increase slightly

- Commercial day rides will be discontinued from Tuolumne Meadows, significantly reducing the conflicts between hikers and stock users on trails

A draft EIS with four management alternatives was released for public comment from January 8, 2013 through March 18, 2013, and the park received over 1,200 comments.

The Tuolumne River was designated a Wild and Scenic River by the U. S. Congress in 1984 to preserve its free flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values. Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Yosemite National Park is required to develop a management plan to protect and enhance the 54 miles of the Tuolumne River that are within the park boundaries.

For a copy of the complete three-volume Plan and EIS (approximately 1,300 pages), please visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/trp.htm or http://parkplanning.nps.gov/trp_feis.

After a 30-day no-action period, the plan will be finalized and a Record of Decision will be prepared and signed.