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Revisiting the Park Prescriptions [Place Debate: Yosemite National Park - Prospects]

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● HODGDON MEADOW

- Back up site for 30 employee homes.
- Construct NPS office building.
- ▲ Increase camp sites from 110 to 200.

● MATHER STATION

- ▲ Build new 30-site campground.

● TAMARACK FLAT

- ▲ Increase camp sites from 50 to 100.

● CRANE FLAT

- ▲ Increase camp sites from 164 to 200.
- 🚗 Build 200-car Valley satellite parking lot.

● SMOKEY JACK

- ▲ Remove 25-site campground.

● WHITE WOLF

- ▲ Increase camp sites from 86 to 150.
- Increase cabins from 13 to 25.

● YOSEMITE CREEK

- ▲ Increase camp sites from 30 to 125.

● PORCUPINE FLAT

- ▲ Increase camp sites from 50 to 75.

● BADGER PASS

- ❄️ Keep ski facility.

● WAWONA

- Keep lodge, historical interpretation center, gas station, stores.
- Back-up site for 130 employee homes.
- ▲ Build new 200-site campground.

● MARIPOSA GROVE

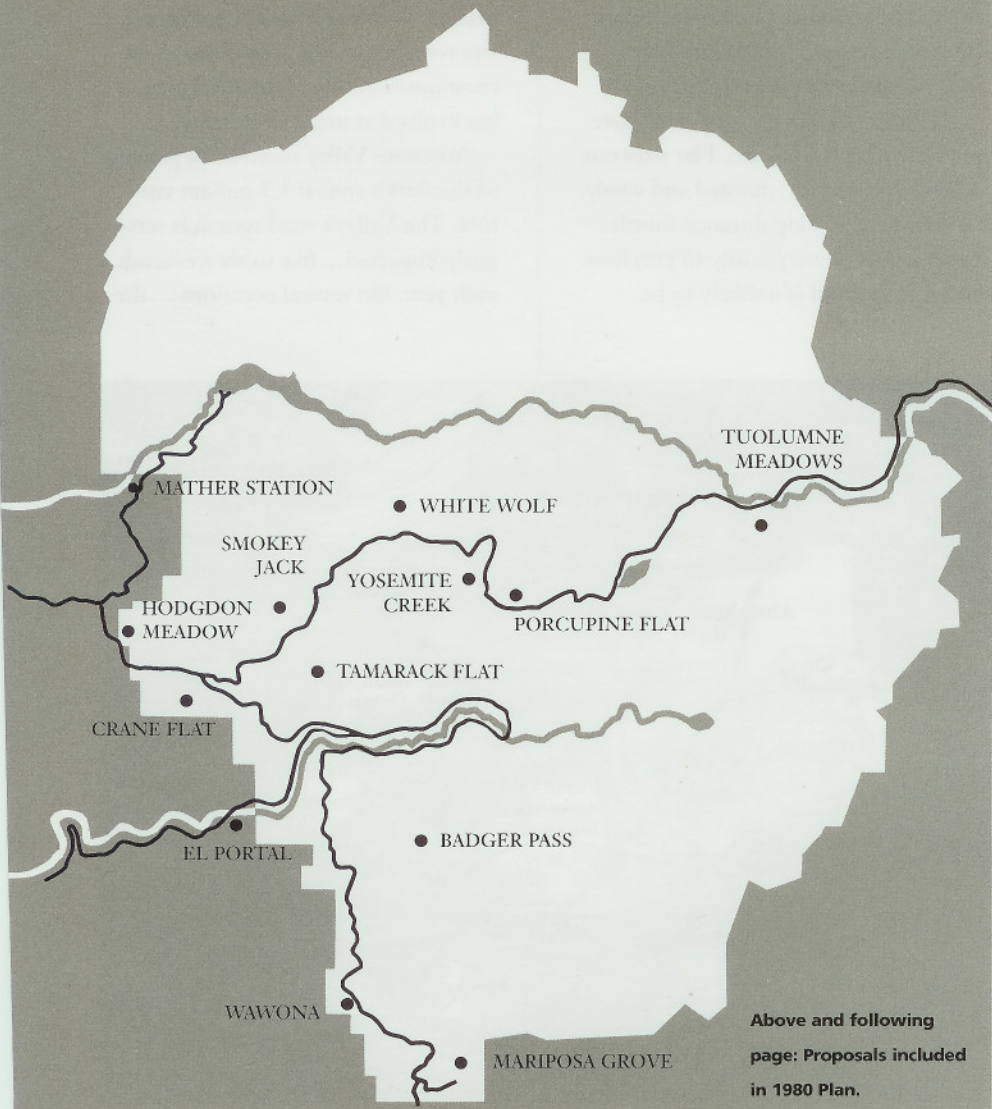
- 🚗 Relocate 200-car parking lot to main road.
- 🚗 Convert Grove road into a trail, extend trams.
- Remove gift shop, lodge.

● TUOLUMNE MEADOWS

- 🚗 Remove roads and trails from meadows, ranger station.
- Retain lodge, gas station, employee tent cabins, stores, restaurant.

● EL PORTAL

- Build NPS and YP&CC administrative, maintenance and warehousing facilities.
- Build 530 employee homes.
- 🚗 Build 150-car Valley satellite parking lot.
- Build shops, services, utilities for residents and visitors.



Above and following page: Proposals included in 1980 Plan.

Revisiting the Park Prescriptions

The 1980 GMP set a blueprint for Yosemite through 1990. The NPS is evaluating the success of the GMP in order to set goals for the future. The following excerpts are from last year's Draft Yosemite GMP Examination Report.

The National Park Service (NPS) constantly seeks to balance making parks accessible to visitors with protection of the natural and cultural resources which the park was established to protect.... At Yosemite, the balance had been shifted in favor of the resource....

We want to allow visitors...to experience the natural wonder of Yosemite.... We reach the Valley's carrying capacity on peak summer weekends [and] have limited additional capacity at most other times. We will...hold the line on existing levels by not increasing the number of overnight accommodations, parking spaces, or operational structures.... We will close the Valley to additional cars whenever the visitation exceeds these carrying capacity limits.

Despite an increase in [the number of visitors] from 2,583,000 in 1980 to 3,334,000 in 1988, Yosemite Valley today is...an improved resource offering a better visitor experience.

While the NPS has come a long way on the Yosemite Valley portion of the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP) recommended actions, we still have some tough choices to work out.

One thing is obvious—the Park prescriptions are interconnected....

● YOSEMITE VILLAGE

Remove NPS and YP&CC headquarters, service station, car rental, restaurant, deli, gift shop, bank, barber, beauty parlor, maintenance and warehousing facilities and most employee homes.

Create "museum of history" and "museum of man" in vacated buildings.

● YOSEMITE LODGE

Remove 101 cabin, cottage and lodge units, keep 364.

Remove 48 employee homes, keep 200.

● CURRY VILLAGE

Remove ice rink.

Remove 68 tents and cabins, keep 775.

● AHWAHNEE HOTEL

Remove golf course and tennis courts.

● YOSEMITE VALLEY SUMMARY

Remove 268 visitor units, keep 1,260.

Remove 1,242 parking spaces, keep 1,271.

Remove 116 campsites, keep 824.

Remove 1,030 employee homes, keep 480.

Ban cars from Happy Isles loop road.

Improve operation of Valley shuttle and provide 16-mile-long bike trail.

Build Native American cultural center.

The GMP called for a reduction of both traffic and operations in Yosemite Valley in order to restore more sites to natural conditions. As operations and their accompanying structures are moved out of Yosemite Valley, traffic back and forth between housing and work sites is increased, resulting in more congestion. In some cases a choice must be made between the "lesser of two evils"....

Reduce Traffic Congestion in Yosemite Valley

The 1980 GMP envisioned satellite parking lots where visitors would leave their cars behind and enter the Valley by shuttle buses.... there are four basic obstacles to realizing that goal:

Nearby satellite parking areas have proven difficult to locate. Flat sites out of flood plains are...limited and costly.

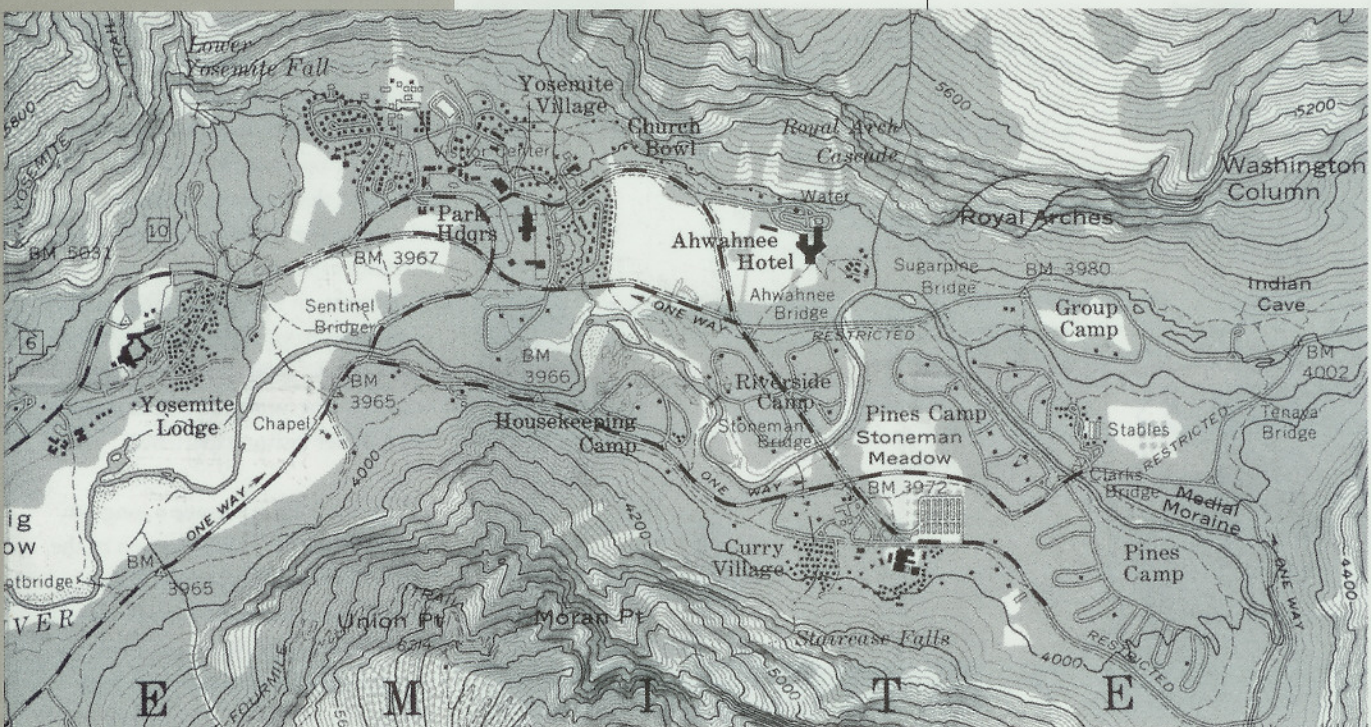
The fleet of long distance shuttle buses would be very costly to purchase and operate, and is unlikely to be

funded under near-term budget realities.... To accommodate existing visitation, buses would be required to leave once a minute from destination and satellite sites.

Highway 140 into Yosemite Valley ... is almost at capacity for two-way bus, automobile and limited commercial traffic.... Buses, especially the newer, wider sizes, can barely be accommodated by the existing narrow traffic lanes....

Most people prefer the convenience and scheduling flexibility offered by a private automobile, especially in an... outdoor environment where a variety of recreation gear and clothing are needed. While this visitor preference was considered and overridden in the recommendations of the 1980 plan, it has evolved as more of an issue....

Yosemite Valley receives 70 percent of the Park's annual 3.3 million visitors. The Valley's road system is seriously impacted... five to six weekends each year. On several occasions... the



United States Geological Survey.

Park has had to turn away visitors to the Valley for brief periods on peak days. Visitors who value the uncrowded... experience avoid the Valley or the Park on the predictably busy peak holiday weekends....

The major cause of traffic congestion in the Valley is the day-use visitor. Clearly, the need is to get the day-use visitor parked as quickly as possible and on the alternative transportation.

Reduce Overnight Accommodations

Part of the vision for a less crowded Park... called for a ten percent reduction in overnight visitor lodging park-wide and a 17 percent reduction in Yosemite Valley. To compensate for the more severe reduction in the Valley, the Plan recommended that additional accommodations be developed at Wawona and White Wolf.

...

Overnight lodging has been maintained essentially at status quo.... Addition of lodging units at Wawona Hotel is stymied primarily by the lack of an adequate water supply and complicated by the designation of the... [Hotel] complex as a historic district.

...

With the graying of America comes the graying of the Park visitor [and a] preference for more private lodging with a bath available in all four seasons. Given these considerations, there are a large number of people who object to reducing the status quo in numbers of overnight lodging units.

Relocate Non-Essential Operational Structures Out of Yosemite Valley

Primary constraints slowing the relocation of both NPS and Yosemite Park and Curry Co. (YPCC) operational facilities out of the Valley are:

The definition of which operational functions are essential to stay in the Valley or which should be removed... has not been fully resolved. Continued changes in visitor use patterns and upgrading of support systems require an ongoing re-evaluation of essential services.

The shortfall of funding has severely limited new construction and relocation of facilities. Safety- and health-related improvements have consumed most... available funds...

Some operational functions are housed in historic buildings which should be retained by law and therefore pose a conflict with... recommendations for removal of these buildings....

Park headquarters and additional administrative functions are still slated for relocation to El Portal. The primary limitation is getting the needed appropriations to build new facilities.

Relocate Non-Essential Employee Housing Out of Yosemite Valley

Depending on funding, it could be at least 1994 before it will be possible to vacate Park housing in the Valley....

El Portal has... severe limitations on how many new structures can be accommodated there. Steep slopes, limited water supply, the presence of toxic tailings from barium mines, high levels of radon gas emission and a presence of archaeological sites in the flatter portions of the area, all pose constraints....

Many employees, especially seasonals, earn low wages or work split shifts. It would be economically difficult for them to cover commute costs and living costs in outlying communities....

Capital Funding Priorities Beyond the Year 2000

It is difficult to make realistic prioritization... beyond 10 years due to all the budgetary and other uncertainties involved. The NPS continues to be dedicated to the vision and prescriptions of the GMP. [The plan] will be accomplished in incremental improvements over a longer time frame.

Public interest and desire to visit the Valley and other Park places... continues to grow. While there are limits as to how many people can enjoy these experiences without damaging the Park's natural resources, the NPS continues to seek... an acceptable balance. As a bottom line, Park visits will be limited to a manageable threshold consistent with protection of Park resources.

Yosemite Valley in the future will have less traffic and fewer structures. More original scenic vistas and habitats will be restored. The number of visitors year-round will be controlled.

Future technologies may help us reach a more sweeping solution of the private automobile dilemma. Perhaps a light rail system... could make it physically and economically feasible to move larger volumes of people more quickly and quietly into and out of Yosemite Valley. Transportation from [farther] away and from remote parking complexes, or lodging outside the Park, may become more manageable.

The NPS and concessioner will relocate more non-essential facilities and housing to El Portal and other locations further out of the Valley as quickly as budgets and technological improvements allow. Visitor accommodations will be upgraded and consolidated to take up less square footage. A regional visitor information, accommodations, and transportation network will be established and coordinated to make the best use of accommodations outside the Valley.