THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN

OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

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OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN

Tuesday, April 22, 2003
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
Yosemite National Park, California

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10 a.m., Yosemite National Park, California, Hon. George Radanovich [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

STATEMENT OF HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. RADANOVICH. Good morning. The Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands will come to order. My name is George Radanovich from Mariposa, proudly, and I am joined here with Representative Donna Christensen and Representative Devin Nunes for a hearing regarding camping spaces in the valley. And I do want to mention just before we get started—and I have a written text to read as we are doing this—to remind everybody that this is not a town hall meeting, but rather a hearing, a formal congressional hearing where issues get on the record. And I would ask, so that we can do this in an orderly fashion, that we have order in the room.

As you may know, you know, a lot of these congressional hearings are for us to get comments and such in the record. And we are going to be having three panels of witnesses today to talk about the issues regarding Yosemite as it relates to camping spaces. This hearing doesn't necessarily cover parking spaces or any other issues regarding the management plan or any other issues about Yosemite. They do mainly cover, or almost solely, the issues of campgrounds in Yosemite Valley.

As you know, the floods of 1997 took out Upper and Lower River Campgrounds and created some damage in the park, and we want to know more detail about the plans as it relates to that.

So, we are restricted to comments from the witnesses that are going to be in the three panels today, and at the end of each panel, and some have one person, some have a number of people, Donna and Devin and I will be allowed to ask them questions. And again,

the main reason for this is to get it in the Congressional Record. And we feel very strongly that we—well, obviously the three panels consist of every view that we can assemble on this issue.

So I want to welcome you here today, and thank you for coming. You can take the snow back. It looks like my friend Donna, who is representing the Virgin Islands, is going to get all four seasons in a very short time. So we are glad to have the snow, but I was glad to see the blue sky when we woke up.

So welcome here. I thank you for this. And help us get all this information out and into the record so that we can make sure that Yosemite stays a great place to be.

So with that, I am going to read my prepared text, and then we will get on with this hearing.

Before I read this statement, I would like to thank Superintendent Mike Tollefson, Mike Reynolds, and Don Quellos, Steve Shackleton, and the entire park staff for putting together the secondary hearing site of the Subcommittee in less than 24 hours. As you know, we were hoping to have the hearing out by the Superintendent's house outside, but the weather caused some real problems, so we had to move it indoors.

I would also like to point out that this is an official Subcommittee hearing where the witnesses who are here today are invited by the Subcommittee. It is not a town hall meeting. And for those not testifying who wish to submit something for the record, though, the hearing record will remain open for 2 weeks. And we have left a box outside in the back of the area for you to submit written comments. If you would like to send your comments to the Subcommittee, please see Casey, our Subcommittee clerk.

Casey, do you want to raise your hand?

This is Casey, everybody, and if you do want to do some—write out your comments and submit them that way, we would be happy to take them, and they will go into the Congressional Record. And I think we have a period of about 2 weeks for you to submit something to Casey or send back to the Committee in Washington.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Radanovich follows:]

Statement of The Honorable George Radanovich, Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands

Good morning. The Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands will come to order.

Before I make my opening statement, I would like to thank Superintendent Mike Tollefson, Mike Reynolds, Don Coelho, Steve Shackelton and the entire Park staff for putting together this secondary hearing site for the Subcommittee in less than 24-hours. As many of you know, we had originally planned to have the hearing outdoors near the old superintendent's residence with Half Dome in the background, but Mother Nature had other plans.

I would also like to point out that this is an official Subcommittee Hearing, where witnesses here today were invited by the Subcommittee. This is NOT a town hall meeting. For those not testifying and who wish to submit something for the record, the hearing record will remain open for two weeks. We have left out a box on the table to the back of the area for you to submit written comment. If you would like to send your comments to the Subcommittee, please see Casey, our Subcommittee Clerk (Casey, please raise your hand), following the hearing and he will give you the address for the Subcommittee.

As many of you know, I have had the pleasure to represent the Valley and Yosemite Park since entering Congress in 1994, as well as previously, when I served as a county supervisor for Mariposa County. I started coming to this magnificent and wonderful place when I was a child and to this day, I hike various parts of the park

every summer with my family. I say all this because I believe it is very important for everyone to know just how I feel about this Park and this Valley—I want all of its grandeur to be available to anyone wishing to experience it first-hand, as I was able to do.

I envision this Valley and the Park continuing to be open to all, consistent with the Park Service mission to "provide for the enjoyment" of parklands. To me, this means that we provide to the public what they want to have—including recreational activities such as camping, backpacking and horseback riding, AND roads for those who wish to see the Park from the family minivan; to provide access to back-country, AND to provide amenities such as rooms where families can stay; to provide a natural sanctuary for the contemplative, as well as the more mundane parking spaces for those who wish to stay for a while and explore and enrich their lives.

Let me make it clear, as long as I represent Yosemite National Park and this beautiful Valley, I will not allow it to become an exclusive retreat available only by tour bus, nor a natural preserve which you can get to only on foot. Neither of these alternatives are solutions for the future of Yosemite.

Today, I have brought the Subcommittee to the Valley not to discuss not the Park's past, but its future. As we all know, a number of constituencies believe that the 1997 Merced River Flood was a sign from above to the National Park Service to reverse course in the Valley—to remove roads, buildings, and opportunities and access from the public, and restore the Valley to a "wilderness zone" where only low impact hiking would be permitted.

While the 1997 Flood certainly brought a crisis to the Valley, it should not seen as an opportunity to limit access by the public. The Valley and Park belong to over 285 million Americans, not a select few.

I have asked my good friend, the Director of the National Park Service, Fran Mainella, to update the Subcommittee generally on the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan and to specifically address the recent NPS campground study as well as the status of parking spaces in the Valley. I do wish to state my frustration that a study of out-of-valley camping that was completed last year was only made available to me or to the public last week. The study shows that 204 campsites can be relatively easily constructed outside of Yosemite Valley, ostensibly to replace campsites in the Valley that were lost in the flood and in the subsequent planning process. It is my opinion that campsites outside of the Valley do not replace in–Valley campsites. Meanwhile, I had asked for a separate study identifying the costs and availability of campsites at Upper and Lower Rivers. That study shows that were setbacks from the river equal to the setbacks identified in the Merced Wild and Scenic River Study, 144 campsites could be installed at Upper and Lower Rivers while restoring a significant riparian corridor.Opposition to this proposal is based on the fact that the campgrounds would be in a flood plain. I cannot think of a better use of flood-plains than campgrounds.

I am most interested in how and when the Park Service will be restoring campgrounds in the Valley to their pre–Flood numbers, particularly in the Upper and Lower River campgrounds.

I also look forward to hearing the testimony of our other witnesses, especially those who have been coming to this park for many years and can speak to their experiences and what they see is the future for this Valley and the Park.

I now turn to the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Donna Christensen of the U.S. Virgin Islands, for her opening statement.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And as many as you know, I have had the pleasure to represent the valley of Yosemite Parks in Congress since 1994, and previously when I served as Mariposa County supervisor, I enjoyed using Yosemite very much. And I say all this because I believe it is very important for everybody to know just how I feel about this park and its valley. I want all of its grandeur to be available to anyone wishing to experience it firsthand as I was able to do and am able to do.

I envision this valley and the park continuing to be open to all, consistent with the Park Service mission to provide for the enjoyment of parklands. To me, this means that we provide to the public what they want to have, including recreational activities such as camping, backpacking, and horseback riding; and roads for those who wish to see the park from the family minivan, or to provide

access to the back country; and also to provide amenities such as rooms where families can stay, provide a natural sanctuary for the contemplative, as well as the more mundane parking spaces for those who wish to stay for a while and explore and enrich their lives.

I want to be very clear that as long as I represent Yosemite National Park and this beautiful valley, I will not allow it to become an exclusive retreat available only by tour bus, nor a natural preserve where you can get to it only on foot. Neither of these alternatives are solutions for the future of Yosemite and Yosemite Valley.

Today, I brought the Subcommittee to the valley not to discuss the park's past, but its future. As we all know, a number of constituencies believe that the 1997 Merced River flood was a sign from above to the National Park Service to reverse course in the valley, to remove roads, buildings, and opportunities and access from the public, and restore the valley to a wilderness zone where only low-impact hiking would be permitted.

While the flood of 1997 certainly brought a crisis to the valley, it should not be seen as an opportunity to limit access by the public. The valley and the park belong to over 285 million Americans, not a select few.

I have asked my good friend, Director of the National Park Service, Fran Mainella, to update the Subcommittee generally on the implementation of the Yosemite Valley plan, and to specifically address the recent National Park Service campground study as well as the status of parking spaces in the valley.

I do wish to state my frustration that the study of out-of-valley camping completed last year was only made available to me or the public last week. The study shows that 204 campsites can be relatively easily constructed outside of Yosemite Valley, ostensibly to replace campsites in the valley that were lost in the flood and in the subsequent planning process. It is my opinion that the campsites outside the valley do not replace in-valley campsites.

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I am most interested in how and when the Park Service will be restoring campgrounds in the valley to their preflood numbers, particularly in the Upper and Lower River Campgrounds. I also look forward to hearing the testimony from our witnesses, especially those who have been coming to this park for many years and can speak to their experience and what they see is the future for this valley, the park.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I now would recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee from the Virgin Islands, Mrs. Donna Christensen, Donna, for your opening statement. And welcome to Yosemite, Donna.

STATEMENT OF HON. DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN, A DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM THE VIRGIN SLANDS

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, Mr. Chairman, let me say at the outset I really appreciate the hospitality of you and the National Park Service Superintendent Tollefson for my first visit to this wonderful park. And I have been in hearings with you in Washington, and we have had pictures and maps, but they certainly don't do the park justice. So I am happy for the opportunity to be out here and see firsthand the magnificent resources and hear some of the challenges and opportunities that Yosemite National Park faces today. They are not unlike many that we face in my own district.

The Yosemite Valley plan has been years in the making, I think about 20 years, and it entails a lot of work and public participation, a significant document for a significant area of great beauty and majesty. As one of our premier national parks, people from all around the country and the world really have expressed an interest and concern for Yosemite. The extent of the national news coverage that the Yosemite Valley plan has received over the years is a testament to the attraction that Yosemite has with the American public.

Given the public's spotlight on Yosemite, the National Park Service has its work cut out to meet the expectations that people have for this park as well as meeting the needs and concerns of the gateway communities. That challenge is compounded by the geology of the valley that we are in. Yosemite Valley is only 7 miles long and less than 1 mile wide. The floor of the valley is further reduced by rock falls onto the flood plain of the Merced River. Within this relatively small area, which I understand is the area that is really utilized most in Yosemite, about 3 to 4 miles by 1 mile, millions of people come annually to experience the nationally significant resources of the valley. How to protect these important park resources and still maintain the quality visitor experience has been a concern going back for many years. I am hopeful that today's hearing can contribute to a better understanding of what we can and should do to provide for the long-term preservation and enjoyment of Yosemite National Park.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to learning more on what the Yosemite Valley plan will mean for the park's resources and visitors. I appreciate the presence of our witnesses here today, and look forward to their insight on the subject of today's oversight hearing.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Donna, very much.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And also here today is a good friend and new Member of Congress from California, representing primarily Fresno and Tulare Counties, Mr. Devin Nunes.

Devin, did you want to open up with anything?

STATEMENT OF HON. DEVIN NUNES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. NUNES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. It is a pleasure to be here, being that this is very close to my district and has a special place in my heart.

Some people may not know this, but the Ahwahnee Hotel was at one time a naval hospital, and my grandfather was in the Navy

during World War II. He was injured not in the war, but actually broke his arm on leave, and was stationed here. He was relocated here for about a year, and he always said how wonderful it was.

Then as a kid my family would bring me up here, and I hiked up to Vernal Falls, Nevada Falls, Half Dome, the top of El Capitan, the top of Yosemite Falls, and Glacier Point. And as you know, it is a really beautiful place.

And it is an honor for me to be here today as a new Member of Congress. They send me on these missions, and a few weeks ago Chairman Pombo asked me if I would go up to the north slope of Alaska to take part in a field hearing, and I, you know, because as the new guy, said, sure. I got up there, and it was 50 below zero, and I wondered what I got myself into. And then last week, George had asked to me to come up here, and I thought, well, this is easy. Yosemite is real close. I got in a wreck on the way up here, and it snowed. And I don't know, I am beginning to think they make freshmen Congressmen go on all these trips that no one else wants to go on, Mr. Chairman.

But I look forward to the testimony today, and thank you all for coming. I know this is very important to Mr. Radanovich's district, my district, the entire State of California and the Nation. So thank you very much.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Devin, and welcome to Yosemite.

Mr. RADANOVICH. We are going to begin with our first panel, and if those members would like to come up. I see more signs, more different folks.

Fran, do you want everybody up here?

Ms. MAINELLA. Yes, Mr. Chairman. And if I may, if I could bring up our Superintendent Mike Tollefson to come forward; also, Jon Jarvis, our Regional Director; and also my Deputy Director Randy Jones. If they may join us.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

Fran Mainella is, of course, Director of the National Park Service; Mr. Randy Jones, who is with the National Park Service as well back in Washington; Superintendent Mike Tollefson; and Mr. Jon Jarvis, Regional Director. Welcome.

And I am going to lay out a few rules for the red light, green light that you should be able to see. It is just like a traffic light. Green means go, yellow means speed up, and red means stop. So if we could, so that this does not drag out beyond a couple hours, and we want to conclude this hearing, if you would stay within the 5-minute rule, it would be much appreciated. Say it that way. I am pretty good about making sure that everybody gets to say what needs to be said, so we will make some leeway if it is necessary, but it is important to stay in that rule if we can.

STATEMENT OF FRAN MAINELLA, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, ACCOMPANIED BY MIKE TOLLEFSON, SUPERINTENDENT, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK; RANDY JONES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; AND JON JARVIS, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Ms. MAINELLA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. I really appreciate all of you being here and taking the time out of your schedule to visit, particularly here on Earth Day and part of

National Park Week, to be here in Yosemite, one of the key cornerstones of our National Park System. I really appreciate that all of you took the time to do that.

Also, I am going to ask if I could have my written statement put into the record. I am going to do a summary and hopefully be able to stay within that 5-minute period.

Mr. RADANOVICH. There being no objection, so ordered. Frankly, that is the better way to do it.

Ms. MAINELLA. Thank you, sir.

I do want to mention, though, before I get into some actual comments on our issues that we are going to be working on, I just want to make sure—and I talked to some of the folks here in the audience as I arrived and things to make sure everyone knows that we, under this administration, the focus of what we like to do, and it matches up so well with your gateway bill, Mr. Chairman, that you are working on, is that it is very, very important, in fact it is mandatory in our Park Service now, to be working with gateway communities and reaching out to partners, environmental leaders, recreation users. And this is not just something nice to do, it is something expected to do.

And, in fact, I brought Mike Tollefson in, and I got a lot of nasty letters from Smokies because—from those communities saying that I pulled him away. But he is here because of his ability to work so well with the communities. And I think that is an important message that I hope we can send out throughout, no matter what issues we talk about, that communication is absolutely important.

I think you know Secretary Norton has really always focused on what she calls her four Cs, which is communication, which is cooperation, and consultation, all under the service of conservation. And I think that, again, this is important for us, and you will see that constantly demonstrated through the National Park Service as we go forward. So I would just really appreciate that acknowledgment of all that we are working on.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I am just very pleased to be here and to be able to talk about where we are in the implementation of the Yosemite Valley plan. And I know that this is so important, as you know yourself the memories and the values that come when you visit Yosemite. Once someone is here, there is an ownership that all of us take because it is so significant. And we want to make sure that everyone knows that the National Park Service is not trying to ever keep people away. We want to encourage folks to visit our parks, and we want to emphasize that as we go forward not only here at Yosemite, but at so many of our parks, 388 in fact, as we address visitation.

Now, one thing that is unique here in Yosemite, particularly, I think, from about over the last couple of decades there has been a major change in Yosemite, is that we have gone from a number of decades ago where it was 20 percent of the visitation was day use—in other words, just coming in for the day and leaving—and 80 percent was overnight stays. What has happened now, though, is a major change, and this is not unique to Yosemite—we are seeing it across our national system both not only in national parks, but in State parks and others—is a switch to a much heavier

visitation by our day use visitors. In fact, it is actually completely swapped. It is now 80 percent day use and 20 percent overnight.

And this is something that what I hope that you will see in the plan that we are working on is in further enhancing, and, in fact, as we look at some of the campground areas and things like that, emphasizing more day use on some of those, and increasing and welcoming our visitors to the park and making sure they understand that we do have opportunities here, and we welcome our visitors to this to Yosemite, and not—and all our national parks throughout.

Again, as you know, we are currently working on 15 major projects—and all of you in Congress, particularly your leadership, Congressman Radanovich—for us to be able to move forward in this first implementation. And, in fact, we expect that this first implementation—and later we can have Mike or others go over some of the details of that implementation plan—be able to make sure that by December hopefully—our goal is to have the majority of the work done by December of 2004. It may overlap a little bit into 2005 if we have more snowstorms, but this is something that we are really working to do.

And these are major changes that will help traffic flow. It will—in fact, we will be working not only to get some of these projects done, we are always going to be working on one or two additionals that weren't on that list. As you know, in fact, I think, starting tomorrow, we are going to actually be working on some areas that will further enhance on some projects that will actually displace some parking, but in doing so we are actually going to increase parking in other areas so that we have no net loss of parking in the valley, particularly over the next 5 to 7 years as we work forward, and then we will continue to readdress that. And we will do what we call adaptive management, Mr. Chairman, and we will be looking at where that leaves us as far as the parking situation. So I just wanted to give you that heads up.

Also, as you know—and you have helped us work forward on the transportation system for Yosemite. And the YARTS system really has increased 20 percent over the last 2 years. We do expect to see it continue to increase. But again, we want to emphasize heavily to make that the enjoyable way and the way to work with the gateway communities so some of the business not only stays here in the park, but also in those gateway communities. And we will look forward to further enhancing that.

We are going to be working on energy efficiency, and we talked about some of that yesterday, Mr. Chairman, on how we could be more environmentally friendly and work forward with our transportation. And as you know, we are looking at possibly a diesel-electric hybrid engine, and we rode on one this morning to see an example, the quietness and everything. So we are going to be working on that as well, and we hope to have that moving forward. And this will help us also in our air quality, which not only helps the park, but helps all our communities. And also in the YARTS, it is in its 4th year, and again would be increased. As we work on the technology, we hope to further make it the method of choice as people come in, but still make available parking opportunities within the park.

On the subject of campgrounds, which I notice has been such an important one, and I apologize to you for that report getting to you only a few minutes before—may I continue? I am out of time.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Please do.

Ms. MAINELLA. OK. I talk a lot. Yeah. But on the subject of campgrounds, I apologize for that report coming in. In all honesty, we had to make sure it went within a format that was appropriate within, and many eyes looked at that as it went up. So I just want to make sure you know it was important, it was high on our radar screen. And this is the first report I am talking about is the one that the Appropriations Committee asked us to work on, but I know you had worked with them.

Looking at more of the out-of-valley campgrounds, and to make sure that we looked at what opportunities we have, I think at this point—and Mike, correct me—we have over—we are close to 1,500 campsites in the park today, but only about 475 are actually in the valley at this moment. But out-of-valley, that report indicated 788 additional campsites could come in.

Now, to be able to move forward quickly on that, of that 788, 204 actually match all requirements. And if we can get some additional funding to move forward on that or work with partners in that, we can move forward on that very rapidly.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Can you run through those numbers again quickly?

Ms. MAINELLA. Yes. What we have right now—and help me, Mike, if I go astray, please—is that we have right now, I think, close to 1,500 campsites.

Mr. RADANOVICH. That is preflood?

Ms. MAINELLA. No. That is now.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Now.

Ms. MAINELLA. Throughout the park now, right now, 1,542. Thank you. He whispered in my ear. And of that, of that 1,500 plus, is 475 that are in the valley itself.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Preflood or now?

Ms. MAINELLA. No. Now. The prefloods were higher numbers; it was close to 800 in the valley.

We are able to add in with that 204, that out-of-valley, an 25 additional in-valley that would match up with the management plan. Those are things that we could be doing now that is compatible.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Two hundred four out-of-valley?

Ms. MAINELLA. Two hundred four, yes.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Twenty-five in-valley?

Ms. MAINELLA. Twenty-five in-valley, right. So that would jump us up to 1,700 plus campsites at Yosemite, at the park as a whole. And so we would be able to move very rapidly on that. Again, it would match up with all the plans, and we just would need to do some additional funding opportunities. But those are some things that I think we can work on and find, again, as we work with different individuals, partners, and other things, there may be other opportunities for us to move on those very quickly.

The in-valley assessment—and remember, you asked us to do a report on the in-valley assessment of campsites separate from the out-of-valley that the Appropriations Committee—they identified 144 sites possible. And that is remembering in the valley originally

there was about 3—it was 828 originally; we have got 475, and adding another 25 and 50 leaves—the 144 is the part that at this point it would be possible.

Now, in doing that, though, that possibility does not match up with the plans. So that is where we have a concern: It does not match up with the plans.

Also, if you go back to my initial comment about 80 percent of our visitation now—and by the way, over that two decades, even though we had a little drop since September 11th and things of that nature, we have actually increased from two decades ago, which we were 2.5 million. We are now at 3.4 million visitors to the park today, and—but that we really feel we need to emphasize those day use visitors and find a way in that area, in the valley areas where we had some of the campsites, to make it so that that larger group, the 80 percent, can be better served through opportunities through—and we would be working through an EA, environmental assessment, to work with our partners and all the folks, so many of the folks here we would want to include, to talk about what opportunities we could do there, but still be respectful of being in a flood plain.

But the big thing is reaching out, trying to serve, and parks change as to the use, but I am seeing that, across our national parks as a whole, a greater visitation day use. And it is because a lot of the gateway communities are really jumping forth to help us with accommodations. And also the visitations to park used to be—remember, we used to do vacation a week to 2 weeks; now you looking at the majority being much shorter. And I don't have all the statistical numbers, but when I served on the Commission on Tourism in Florida, we had watched those numbers drop to 4 to 5 days as a typical visitation. And possibly our folks from—a concessionaire can maybe verify what that number drop is. Again, we want to emphasize biking, hiking, picnicking, and many other activities.

And then I would like to work with our partners, our communities again, and see if there is any opportunities for us to work in adjacent communities to provide some additional camping or other accommodations, which I think began—most of my experience at other parks, both in State parks and even here in the Federal system, most communities like to get the housing and overnight accommodations in their communities, and actually the normal opposition we receive is, don't build in the parks. Make that the day use, the area for people to come; have some minor accommodations that draw people there, but then put a great emphasis on the outside of the park. And that is more of a standard in a lot of our areas and to be having that request.

I am ready to close because I know I am way past my time, but I just think that there is so many exciting things we could be doing. And again, I want to just reach out to all the communities and all the people that are here as well as all of you to realize that we have a commitment. And I guarantee you that we will be working much more aggressively in communication across all this area, and we are doing it not just here, but in all our parks. I think Delegate Christensen knows that we are really working hard on that in the Virgin Islands. And, Congressman Nunes, I guarantee you

we are going to continue to work with you on some issues at Sequoia and others that we need to talk about. But the biggest thing is we need to reach out and make sure we are communicating. And that is a commitment on my part, and this team that is sitting here at the table have that same commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Director.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Mainella follows:]

Statement of Fran P. Mainella, Director, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee at this oversight hearing on the Yosemite Valley Plan here at Yosemite National Park. I am accompanied by Durand Jones, Deputy Director; Jon Jarvis, Regional Director for the Pacific West Region; and Michael Tollefson, Superintendent of Yosemite National Park.

It is a pleasure to have you and the Subcommittee here at the park, and we appreciate the opportunity you have provided for us to update you on the important projects that are being undertaken here. These include the park's transportation plans and the identification of potential additional campsites for park visitors.

I would like to begin by discussing visitation here at Yosemite National Park and how it fits with the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan. Two decades ago, annual visitation at Yosemite was about 2.5 million, and about 80 percent of the visitors stayed overnight while 20 percent came for the day. Now the park receives about 3.4 million visitors annually, and the proportion of overnight versus day-use visitors is the reverse: 80 percent are day users while 20 percent stay overnight. We believe this change has occurred largely because more visitors are using lodging in Yosemite's gateway communities. The Yosemite Valley Plan recognizes this trend and seeks changes that will accommodate the higher day use of the valley and the park while improving the experience of all visitors to Yosemite and protecting the park's resources.

At the same time, the Yosemite Valley Plan also seeks to respect the traditions and strong connections many visitors feel with Yosemite. We know from surveys that fully half of the park's visitors are making return visits. The public comment periods for the Yosemite Valley Plan and the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan, both of which were completed in 2000, drew more than 22,000 comments, demonstrating an extraordinary level of public interest in the park's future. This public involvement helped guide the National Park Service toward adoption of final plans that we believe will preserve and enhance the essence of what so many people find special about visiting Yosemite.

First Phase Projects

We are making significant progress on 15 projects that comprise the first phase of implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan, as reported to Congress last year. These are listed on the chart we have labeled as "Exhibit 1" and are identified in this statement by numbers that correspond to the chart. This chart, which includes a timeline for the projects, is also attached to this statement.

The Yosemite Falls Project (1) is a tremendous public-private partnership, funded predominately by the Yosemite Fund. As a project in which the park is working closely with the private sector and local communities, it exemplifies what Secretary Gale Norton refers to as the "4 C's": consultation, coordination, and communication all in the service of conservation. The major trail improvements have begun and the main portion of the project, the relocation of the parking lot and restrooms out of the primary view of the waterfalls, will be completed in the fall of 2004.

We will be removing the Cascades Diversion Dam (2) this fall. We are beginning Phase I of the Yosemite Lodge Project (3), which includes improvements for visitors enjoying the lodge in Yosemite. We are also designing the expansion of Camp 4 (4) and improvements to traffic flow on Northside Drive (5).

In addition, we have been working closely with the American Indian Council of Mariposa County in another important partnership to design an Indian Cultural Center (6) here in the Valley. This fall, the new Curry Village cabins (7) and employee housing to replace housing lost in the 1997 flood (8) will be completed. These projects will include new utility services, which will be the start of the valley-wide Master Utilities Upgrade that will vastly improve conditions for modern electrical and other utility needs in the valley, while consolidating these functions in

roadways and other previously disturbed areas so that sensitive resources in the park will be preserved.

The National Park Service will also be making important campground improvements in the eastern end of Yosemite Valley (9). These campground projects are especially important in meeting our goals of maintaining levels of camping opportunities consistent with the Yosemite Valley Plan, the Merced River Plan and the 1980 General Management Plan. They are a key component of the goal to eventually have 500 campsites available in the valley, 25 more than are currently available.

In addition to these critical projects, Yosemite has removed the Happy Isles Bridge (10), and is developing plans for the construction of an office building in El Portal to replace office space in the valley that was lost in the 1997 flood (11).

We are also developing an important strategy to restore degraded and lost riparian and wetland areas along the Merced River in former campground areas damaged in the 1997 floods (12). These riverbank areas and riparian zones are highly threatened components of the valley ecosystem within Yosemite and throughout the Sierra Nevada. Because of the unique value of these areas along the beautiful Merced River, enhanced visitor use is being integrated with restoration plans to offer more visitors opportunities to use these areas for a variety of activities, such as picnicking and hiking.

Shuttle Bus Replacement and Transportation

The transportation system for Yosemite will take a major step forward this year when the park orders the new valley shuttle bus fleet for use starting in 2005 (13). This new fleet will meet modern goals of fuel and emissions efficiencies and provide reliable alternative transportation. This is fundamental to reducing congestion, accommodating more visitors in the park, and improving the visitor experience in the valley.

After listening to our gateway communities and park visitors and conducting extensive analyses, the park decided to purchase new buses that use a proven technology known as a "diesel-electric hybrid" engine. The National Park Service studied many alternatives looking for ease of visitor use, reliability, and a reduction of emissions. We believe this hybrid design will meet the concerns of the public for the visitor experience, noise reduction, and improvement of air quality in Yosemite and the region. In addition to this new bus fleet, we are developing new shuttle bus stops (14) to accommodate the new buses and to improve the overall transportation experience in Yosemite Valley. Eventually these will be linked to the improved parking area at Yosemite Village (Camp 6) and other valley destinations.

On the subject of improved transportation, I would like to mention that the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) is now entering its fourth year of providing visitors, gateway communities, and Yosemite employees an alternative to driving their own vehicles to Yosemite. YARTS provides excellent service and connections to broader transportation systems such as Amtrak. Visitor usage of YARTS has increased by about 20 percent in each of the last two years. Although ridership and revenues are increasing, in order to become fully functional, YARTS is still in need of strong support to help it expand and provide quality service. We are grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership in the development of YARTS, and to the many partners in the communities adjacent to Yosemite that have funded and continue to manage and support the YARTS system.

While we anticipate that visitor use of alternative transportation will continue to grow, I want to note that over the next five to seven years, while Yosemite Valley Plan projects are underway, the availability of parking for day visitors will not be curtailed. As the various implementation projects are undertaken, some parking areas will change but during this time there will be no net loss of day use private-vehicle parking spaces in the valley.

Campground Planning Studies

Mr. Chairman, the final item on our list is the Parkwide Campground Planning Study (15), recently prepared in response to the House Appropriations Committee report on the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2002. The report directed the National Park Service to undertake a study of the potential for expanded opportunities for additional camping in Yosemite National Park.

There are currently approximately 1,490 campsites within Yosemite National Park, including 475 within the valley. This study looked at 13 different areas outside the valley, determined the number and type of campsites that could be reasonably accommodated at each location, and estimated the costs of constructing the new campsites. It identified 788 potential new campsites of various types within these

areas. The study is a useful starting point for planning additional campsites, but it is not a formal decision document or a compliance document.

In reviewing this study, the park found that constructing the majority of these new sites would require extensive compliance along with amendments to the 1980 General Management Plan, as modified by the Yosemite Valley Plan, and the Merced River plan. However, the park could develop 204 of the identified sites while still complying with approved plans. If the additional 25 sites planned for Yosemite Valley are added to that number, that would increase number of planned campsites by 229, to a total of 1,719 for the park. Yet placement of campgrounds would still be limited to areas of Yosemite that were found through the planning process to be capable of withstanding the impacts of development.

In addition to the campground study requested by the House Appropriations Committee, the park has also prepared a report at your request, Mr. Chairman, on replacement of campsites in the Lower Pines, Lower River, and Upper River campground areas in the valley. This report identified the potential for some campsites in these areas. However, using these areas for campgrounds that serve a limited number of overnight visitors would preclude making them available for greater numbers of day visitors to enjoy for hiking, picnicking, bicycling, and other activities. And, developing campsites in these areas would require extensive compliance and amendments to the park's three approved plans, which would be very costly.

We share the concern of this Subcommittee about the need to accommodate more visitors who wish to camp at Yosemite. The public's keen interest in camping has been demonstrated in many ways, including the fact that more than 1,400 of the 22,000 comments we received on the Yosemite Valley Plan and the Merced River plan addressed camping in some form. As we work to increase the availability of campsites within Yosemite National Park, we are also cooperating with our gateway partners, as well as other Federal and state agencies, to increase the capacity for providing camping opportunities outside the park.

Mr. Chairman, to conclude, the projects underway at Yosemite are designed to serve more visitors in better ways, and to enhance the experience of everyone who visits this magnificent park, now and in the future. They represent some of the most exciting projects we are engaged in anywhere in the National Park System today. We look forward to moving ahead with these projects with the involvement of our neighbors and partners, and with your continued interest and support. We would be pleased to answer any questions you or the other members of the Subcommittee may have.

[An attachment to Ms. Mainella's statement follows:]

Yosemite National Park - Yosemite Valley Plan Projects Reported to Congress in March 2002

	Project Title	Compliance		Design			Construction		Fund Source
		Compliance Type	Compliance Document Signed	Schematic Design Completion	Design Development Completion	Contract Documents Completion	Contract Award	Project Completion	
1	Improve Yosemite Falls Area	EA	May 2002	Nov 1997	May 2002	Jan 2003	Mar 2003	Sep 2004	Yosemite Fund Fee Demo 80%
2	Remove Cascades Dam	EA	Jul 2003	Oct 2002	Jul 2003	Aug 2003	Sep 2003	Apr 2004	Dam Safety
3	Reconstruct Yosemite Lodge Phase I	EA	Sep 2003	Jun 2003	Oct 2003	Nov 2003	Dec 2003	Dec 2004	Flood
4	Design Camp 4 Expansion	EA	Sep 2003	Jun 2003	Oct 2003	N/A	N/A	N/A	Flood
5	Design Northside Drive Reroute	EA	Sep 2003	Sep 2002	Oct 2002	Nov 2003	Dec 2003	Dec 2004	Flood
6	Design Indian Cultural Center	EA	Sep 2003	Oct 2002	Jul 2003	N/A	N/A	N/A	Flood
7	Construct Curry Village Cabins with Baths	EA	Aug 2003	May 2003	Jul 2003	Sep 2003	Nov 2003	May 2004	Flood
8	Construct Curry Village Employee Dormitories	SEIS	May 2003	Mar 2003	Jul 2003	Sep 2003	Dec 2003	Nov 2004	Flood
9	Expand Campgrounds (East Valley) Phase I	EA	Aug 2003	Jul 2003	Oct 2003	Nov 2003	Feb 2004	Jul 2004	Flood
10	Remove Happy Isles Bridge	EA	Oct 2001	Sep 2001	Sep 2001	Sep 2001	Nov 2001	Nov 2001	Flood
11	Replace Valley Flood-Damaged Offices in El Portal	SEIS	Mar 2003	Jan 1998	Jun 1998	Mar 2003	Apr 2003	Dec 2003	Flood
12	Develop Plans for Restoration of Flooded Campground to Natural Conditions	EA	N/A	Jun 2003	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Fee Demo 80%
13	Purchase Shuttle Buses	SEIS	Jun 2003	N/A	N/A	Jun 2003	Sep 2003	May 2005	Flood Fee Demo 80% FLHP III
14	Improve Shuttle Bus Stops	SEIS	May 2003	Mar 2003	May 2003	Jul 2003	Sep 2003	Nov 2003	Fee Demo 80%
15	Parkwide Campground Study	None	N/A	Dec 2002	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Flood

Legend: EA=Environment Assessment; SEIS=Supplementary Environmental Impact Statement (to YVP)

4/21/2003

Mr. RADANOVICH. So all three of us can begin to get a little more detail about the parking plan and such, I did want to ask, since the flood and since the reduction of campground spaces particularly as to Upper and Lower River Campgrounds, there has been a concern, I think, for myself and a lot of people with the reduction of that in the Yosemite Valley plan that calls for a reduction of parking spaces down to about 550 spaces.

Moves like these since the flood and the adoption of the plan at closing hours at the administration has led me to be convinced of the Park Service's responsibility to be balancing environmental protection with public access and in the development of their plans that it is too skewed toward environmental preservation and does—particularly in the parking spaces, which we are not going to get into today. But the fact that a satellite bus system from satellite parking lots, and turning people back to park there, and then get bused in, as it was set up, for 9 months out of the year, and that is how we got our 550 spaces to me was a—you know, anybody who has been in Yosemite knows that any time there is heavy traffic in the valley in Yosemite is during the Memorial to Labor Day weekends, and then only a short time during those—you know, peak hours during those times. So even if someone could justify a satellite parking system for heavy times of traffic, it would only need to operate 3 months out of the year, not 9 months. And that is what has led to my conviction that there is a concern about blocking people out of the park.

And as it relates to campgrounds, there is some concern—you know, I have got a real concern about that being the case as well, even though there are some real tough issues about preservation and what we think we should be doing with the flood plain in Yosemite, particularly Northside Drive and Upper and Lower River Campgrounds and how does all that— the increasing camping spaces, how does that affect traffic in the Yosemite Valley as it stands right now.

So, I want to make sure that I get all these questions in my mind out so that you can answer them. But in the course of—at least my concern as far as the camp spaces—that I am approaching this as a no land loss from preflood stages, and if we have to look at locating some of them outside the valley, that is fine. I want as many of them as can be to remain in the valley, and that is why that the controversy over these two campground spaces is with us right now.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, if there was a line drawn 150 feet from each side of the Merced River as it relates to campgrounds, and camping spaces were allowed to be replaced, you would probably have 144 spaces, which is close to—let us see how I can say this—close to the commitment of no net loss camping sites, if you add that to the 204 that could be located outside the valley.

So I am not real interested in opening up the general plan for Yosemite, because I think that it would stop a lot of projects that are going right now that I think are very good. If before we leave, too, if you can have yourself or one of the staff enter publicly in the comment—for right now, if you can briefly list the different projects that are moving forward right now, that would be really

helpful because I think it is important that these were all consensus projects that are moving on very well.

[The information referred to follows:]

DRAFT

Project	Description	Completion Date	Fund Source
Reconstruct Yosemite Lodge	Reconstruct the flood-damaged Yosemite Lodge in accordance with the Yosemite Valley Plan.	September 2004	Flood Recovery
Improve Yosemite Fall Area	Realign trails for accessibility and improved visitor experience, replace inadequate restroom and remove automobile and bus parking.	September 2004	Donation; Fee Demo; Flood Recovery
Design Camp 4 Expansion	Design of the expansion and rehabilitation of Camp 4.	May 2003	Flood Recovery
Design Indian Cultural Center	Design an Indian cultural center in partnership with American Indian groups.	May 2003	Flood Recovery
Design Northside Drive Reroute	Design the rerouting of Northside Drive to eliminate pedestrian/vehicle conflict.	October 2002	Flood Recovery
Construct Curry Village Cabins with Baths	Construct 10 duplex cabins (20 beds) with baths for guests at Curry Village to replace flood-damaged facilities.	March 2004	Flood Recovery
Expand Campgrounds (East Valley) Phase 1	Add campsites in three locations to replace flood-damaged sites, resulting in approximately 70 additional campsites in Yosemite Valley.	April 2004	Flood Recovery
Purchase Shuttle Buses	Purchase clean-fuel technology buses to replace and expand the current in-Valley shuttle fleet.	March 2004	Flood Recovery; FLHP; Fee Demo
Improve Shuttle Bus Stops	Improve roadway surface and upgrade signs, seating, bike racks and lockers at shuttle stops, and establish new stops where needed throughout Yosemite Valley.	October 2003	Fee Demo
Construct Curry Village Employee Dormitories	Construct dormitories to replace flood-damaged concession employee housing.	September 2004	Flood Recovery
Remove Happy Isles Bridge	Remove the flood-damaged Happy Isles vehicular bridge.	November 2001	Flood Recovery
Remove Cascades Dam	Remove dam and restore area in accordance with the Wild and Scenic River Plan.	September 2003	Dam Safety
Plan Ecological Restoration of Flooded Campgrounds	Complete the planning required prior to the restoration of flood-damaged campgrounds to natural conditions.	April 2003	Fee Demo
Replace Valley Flood-Damaged Offices in El Portal	Construct a building addition adjacent to the El Portal Warehouse to replace flood-damaged offices.	October 2003	Flood Recovery

Mr. RADANOVICH. Let me start the questioning. The value of the Yosemite whole plan is valued at—can you tell me?

Ms. MAINELLA. Four hundred plus million. And actually, Mike, you want to jump in, feel free to do so.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Yes. How much is available now from the money that was obtained shortly after the flood as appropriated from the Congress?

Ms. MAINELLA. Right. As I say, I am going to turn to Mike. But we have about 105 million yet to be spending.

Am I doing that right?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. That is correct. We have added some of the fee money and funds from other sources in to get some of these projects done as well.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And that money can cover the 15 or so projects that have been started right now?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. Fifteen projects are funded to get them done in the next year and a half.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK. And if you can, list me those 15. You want to do it now, Mike, if it is in your head, or when you can get the information, if you can?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. I can do it now. The projects, the first one that I will list is phase 1 of the lodge restoration, which is putting 90 units back in the lodge area that many were lost during the floods. So this is moving to that.

The second one which is under way and we are really excited about is the Yosemite Falls project, which is a partnership with Yosemite Fund. They are—actually private donations are paying for 90 percent of the project, and the construction on that is under way as we speak. And we are real excited about the future of Yosemite Falls and the improved access to all visitors.

Another one is design of the—redesign of Camp 4, the camping there. We are looking to double the amount of campsites available in Camp 4. And that is design only, which will be done in the next few months.

Again, a design-only project is the Indian Cultural Center, which is adjacent to Camp 4, west of Camp 4, and we are doing that in partnership with the local tribe.

We are redesigning the reroute of North Shore Road, and how we can eliminate that bottleneck and where the lodge is going to the falls, which is one of our major tracking problems in the park, as you know.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. We are going to begin construction of 10 new duplex cabins in Curry Village. That is scheduled to start later this year.

We are also doing the expansion and remodeling some of the existing campgrounds, improving those sites and building out in valley campgrounds where we camp, as we have talked about earlier.

Hopefully next month we will be letting a contract to purchase new shuttle buses, hopefully 19 new hybrid electric-diesel buses similar to the one that is in the valley today, which will greatly improve—reduce emissions and reduce noise in the valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And that is only for in-park transportation.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. That is only for in-valley transportation.

Mr. RADANOVICH. In-valley. Thank you.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. We are also—much needed, we are going to begin the construction of Curry Village employee dorms for 219 people. Again, that will be done by at the end of next year.

We have already removed the Happy Isles bridge which was damaged during the flood.

We will begin removal of Cascade Dam on the Merced River at the end of this summer.

We are working on, as was mentioned, restoration plans and then the visitor use plans for the river's campground area and how we would use that in the future, and that public process has started as well.

And the campground study was one of the 15 which has been turned in to you now.

And then the last of the 15 is to replace the flood—some flood-damaged offices with an office down in El Portel. Along with that, what was done with the 15, we are replacing a lot of the utilities as we move forward in that with FEMA, with the flood money.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Great. Thank you.

Can you tell me, Mike, is any of that money being used for satellite parking systems or—

Mr. TOLLEFSON. No.

Mr. RADANOVICH. —North Side Drive or for any of that?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. No. North Side Drive, while we don't have that final plan yet, we may reroute it around the lodge, and that will be a public review process that will start later this year. But the satellite parking is off in the distant future, I want to say 10 years, before we really look at that. And we need to see how opportunities like YARTS works out over time. That may eliminate the need for satellite parking.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And so that any funding for any project that was not mentioned by you just now that is in the plan will have to be appropriated by the Congress?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

OK. I am going to turn it over to you, Donna. I have got a lot of questions still, but I figure I have to chair a little bit here.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thanks, George.

Well, I will start out by saying I see a lot of progress having been made since our hearing in March of 2001, And it also makes a lot more sense now that I have seen Yosemite.

Two quick questions. How many campsites were there before the flood? Probably everybody else knows that.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. In the valley, there were 828 campsites.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. And on the parking spaces, in reference to the 500 parking spaces, but that does not include parking spaces at the campsites or the lodge; am I correct? That is just—

Mr. TOLLEFSON. That is for the day use. It is not for the lodge or overnight use.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. So it is actually more than 500 parking spaces that would be available?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. Yes.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. The plan has had at least 18 public meetings, 14 of them in California, and I am assuming that some of those 14 were with the gateway communities. How would you rate this plan in terms of the opportunities for public comment? It seems to me that there was like a great deal of opportunity for public comment.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. We received about 22,000 comments on the plan.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. Is that about average? Is that high?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. I would say with the advent of Internet, we get more comments. But I think my review of the plan—I have only been here 3 months, but my review of the plan is that many of those comments were very substantive and high-quality comments as opposed to a mass mailing on e-mail. So my impression is that the outreach to get input was good.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. And as a follow-up to that, is that the end of the comment process? I believe you said that you intend to continue this process. I want to, just for the record, clarify that that is not the end of the discussions and collaboration with the community.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. It is definitely not the end of the discussions. They are ongoing and beginning. But it is also not the end of the formal opportunity to comment. There is many of the—even some

of the 15 plans that I just outlined, while they were identified in the valley plan, the specifics of them were not. So as we go through the specifics, we are doing environmental assessments that are open for public comment. And, in fact, tomorrow we have a public meeting in this room to talk about some of those plans, and that will be an ongoing process. The best end result is when we have the opportunity for a wide variety of people to get involved in conversation.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. And just if I may follow up, one of the things that I expect of Mike and Jon and, you know, as they work throughout the parks in this whole region is that this communication is not—we may have some issues specifically we are focusing on, but we want to get into, where we have regular ongoing what I call non-crisis-oriented or nonspecific projects, regularly communicating and getting together. And I think already you brought on a staff person to help us in that effort right now.

Ms. MAINELLA. Right.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. I had had a question which I think you had pretty much answered in your opening statement, Director Mainella, about the importance of the gateway community relationship, because those are concerns that were raised in our meeting or our hearing back in 2001 that perhaps this relationship was not as it should have been. Do you want to make any further comment? That sounds like it is pretty well—

Ms. MAINELLA. Again, we have brought forth through this administration a greater emphasis on working beyond your boundaries, as we call it. And, in fact, we do not hire a superintendent anymore unless they know how to work in partnership with our environmental leaders, with our recreation users, with our communities. They must go beyond. And very shortly a finalization of the Director's order, Mr. Chairman, that we talked about before on specific engagement and public involvement will be forthcoming that hopefully we all can do together, because it spurred from a Committee meeting that we had back some time ago to make sure that is very clear throughout the whole National Park System.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. A question that might go directly on the campsites, the ones that would be near the river, the ones that are not being planned to be replaced. You know, we have been going through discussions in Washington and the Congress about the flood insurance program, and there are many Members of Congress who have—well, there are some who have said, you know, maybe we ought to repeal it, because what happens is people keep rebuilding back in the flood-prone areas. So to me it sounds not only a matter of maintaining the ecology and allowing that to flourish, but isn't safety a big concern and consideration in not replacing those campsites there?

Ms. MAINELLA. Well, the safety of our visitors is paramount and as well as safety of our employees, and we really need to continue to look at, you know, how we can make sure anything—even as we look at the recreation increase that we like to see in that area, to make sure that those are done in a safe manner, and also facilities that are placed in there are either able to be quickly removed and moved to higher ground in a quicker action, or be able to address again how we can best take care of those flood plain areas.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Donna.

Devin.

Mr. NUNES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Director Mainella, in your statement you said about 20 years ago there was 2-1/2 million visitors, and 80 percent of them were overnight users. Today there is 1,500 campsites in the entire park, and there is—I want to get the number here—5-—or less than 500 postflood; there used to be 820 campsites preflood. I am interested to know how many campsites were available 20 years ago when you had more overnight visitors.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. I will have to get that for you. I don't know off the top of my head.

Mr. NUNES. Does anyone here know? I am asking this question because, if you do the simple 20, 80 percentage that you talked about, that means there was 500,000 day visitors approximately 20 years ago, and 2 million visitors who stayed overnight. Today, there is only 680,000 visitors that stay overnight and 2.7 million that come during the day. And so something doesn't add up to me because it seems like there shouldn't be a shortage of campsites if we are only getting a third of the visitors that we had 20 years ago.

Ms. MAINELLA. I think part of the issue, too, is the fact that, remember, we had the lodging as well, of the lodges like here in the park which contribute to the overnight accommodations, and for the most part—in fact, part of our project is actually enhancing that and trying to increase or at least make sure that everything is in good shape there. But we can go back and do some further analysis on that. But, you know, again, going back to the trend across the Nation, what I see, though, is people still would like to stay in parks, but at the same time the gateway communities have been a great boost for us. And that may be what you are also seeing in that change, because many communities here had already started moving forward with accommodations maybe in a quicker basis. But again, we will give you a full analysis because we don't have exactly that whole breakdown, but I know that is the switch.

Mr. NUNES. Sir, do you have that number? You are raising your hand.

Mr. MINAULT. I have the total weekend sites in the park in the 1980 general management plan. That number is 2,200—

Mr. RADANOVICH. Sir, I am sorry. Can you state your name for the record?

Mr. MINAULT. I am sorry. Paul Minault with The Access Fund.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK. Yeah. If you can quickly then give the information.

Mr. MINAULT. Twenty-two hundred.

Mr. NUNES. And the reason I ask this is we are here discussing parking spots, and at some point we have visitors that are coming and going daily, but it used to be that visitors would come and park, and they had to park somewhere. I am just trying to do the math to figure out where these people are parking, trying to get an historical perspective as to what they are doing. Now, if you would get that information to me, I would appreciate it.

But I have one more question, and that is that what percentage or how many people per year are using the current bus transportation that we have in and out of the park on a daily basis?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. It is about 60,000 people.

Mr. NUNES. Sixty thousand people.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. Yes. And it is in the last 2 years the visitor ridership on that each year has grown 20 percent.

Mr. NUNES. OK.

Mr. Chairman, I think that is it.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Devin.

I want to get into specifics of the campground study here briefly, but I do want to get a couple questions answered on the plan for you, Fran, if you would.

Can you tell me if the Park Service and the Bush administration believe that cars must be removed from the valley, and that only mass transit or only public transportation should be used to bring people into and out of the valley?

Ms. MAINELLA. Mr. Chairman, we never see a time when all cars are removed from the valley or anything like that. We do want to, though, through a bit more businesslike marketing approach, bring—have the desired method of entry into the park to be one that, again, works with our gateway communities to be as much mass transportation as we can do.

One of the things that we recently did, like in Glacier National Park, the red bus has returned, and that has become a very popular way—in other words, interpretation opportunities, access in certain ways has really been enhanced because those buses come in; Zion National Park and others, a very similar scenario. So we have had a lot of success stories. But again, we need to try to be more businesslike, and you know we are working on that as well as partnership aspects, to make sure that we have the experience as people come in on the buses and others have a part of the total experience rather than just a method of transportation.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Very good. Thank you.

Director Mainella or Mr. Tollefson, those who strongly support the implementing of the Yosemite Valley plan have stated over and over their opposition to revisiting the Upper and Lower River campgrounds, campsite, or parking issues because it would force the Service to reopen the plan. Does the Park Service have to reopen the entire plan to address this issue? And has the Service made any changes to the plan in which it has not had to reopen the plan?

Ms. MAINELLA. Mr. Chairman, it is my understanding that it would reopen the plan. And I will be glad to continue to work with you and discuss if there are any other alternatives. But all we know, and the counsel we received, it would require reopening of the plan.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Is there leeway for changes to the plan that can be made without reopening it? Can you give me some input on that?

Ms. MAINELLA. Again, we can use adaptive management. For example, when we are going to start some construction coming up, and this is a parking-related one versus camping, is we are going to actually increase at Camp 6—at least our vision is to increase

parking there while—because we are removing it during construction from other areas.

So there is a lot of adaptive management opportunities, and I think, again, you know, we need to, in my mind, continue to move forward as best as we can with this plan, get things done, and succeed. And then if there are other issues as evolve through the trends and changes that we can use, then be ready to say if there is something else that needs to be further addressed, then we can do so.

But at this point, my understanding, it would reopen the plan; in fact, not just this plan, but the Merced also, I think, and that would probably slow—almost slows down if not bring us to a halt on our projects we are working on now.

Mr. RADANOVICH. On other projects as well?

Recently, the Park Service commissioned a study that I had asked for that studies the former Lower Pines and Upper and Lower River Campgrounds. The conclusion of that study stated that 144 campsites could be accommodated based on a 150-foot river protection overlay or setback. Obviously, the 144 number is way short of the 361 sites that existed before the 1997 flood. Does the Service support at minimum building 144 campsites on the former campgrounds?

Ms. MAINELLA. At this point we would not—we need to follow the plan at this point, and so we would not be recommending that 144. But again, we do feel it necessary to continue to increase the recreational opportunities in that in going after, again, the increase in day visitors as the way to better welcome people into the park, and then look at the out-of-valley opportunities, including even with our partners on this.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Now, I would like to get some detail on a campground study that has just been released. If you could give me some of that detail, Fran. Also, as it relates to costs of—to me, the issues—that there were a multiple, I think, number of issues that relate to campground replacement, one being the possibility of more campgrounds in the valley as it contributes to—whether or not it does—to traffic congestion in the valley. The other was the cost of infrastructure replacement and the study of whether or not, if infrastructure was replaced, in particular water and sewer lines, it can be done in such a way that would not be affected by a 50- or 100-year flood in a minimum-use area like that, and I am hoping that the study addressed that.

And then also the cost of infrastructure costs for locating these campground spaces, the 204 that you identified outside the valley. As you know, that there are, you know, water and sewage treatment and things, issues that need to be addressed on that, and give me an idea of the cost that would be associated that compared to the cost of replacing infrastructure at these campgrounds here in the valley.

Ms. MAINELLA. I am actually going to turn this to Mike, and if Jon or anyone else has any comments. But one of the things I do want to mention is that we are not comfortable with any of the—some of the numbers or things of that nature, numbers being dol-

lars and cents on some of the things that were in the reports. So we are definitely going to be wanting to revisit that.

And, Mike, I am going to turn to you if you can talk about in more detail the plan of the report.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. I assume we are referring to the out-of-valley campground studies.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Yes.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. I think it is important to recognize, and for the folks here who haven't had an opportunity to see it yet, that that is a study and is not a finalized plan; that we would have to go through the planning process, probably doing an environmental assessment, to move forward on that project. And that plan itself identified 788 campsites spread around throughout the valley off of the existing road system. And looking at the general management plan through the park, 204 of those 788 sites match the general management plan and could be, I will use the word, in-filled. They are sites that were identified in the general management plan that had never been built. And for the most part those are in existing campsites such as Wawona or Tuolumne Meadows or Grand Flat areas, areas like that where we could expand existing campgrounds and provide more additional sites. And that is where the 204 comes.

The other sites, the remaining 500 plus, would probably require an environmental impact statement, because those are sites that are outside of the existing general management plan that would require a change to that and require quite a bit of detail, looking at if it is physically possible to put them there because the sites are flat. But whether or not it is the right thing to do is not a question that the study went into in any way.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And does the study include the cost of what the infrastructure replacement cost would be for Upper and Lower River?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. Yes, it does.

Mr. RADANOVICH. So that we have something to compare it to, correct?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. Yes. As the Director said, the costs, we feel, might be a little bit high, so we would like to take some time to relook at those, but they are equal in their estimate right at the moment.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

Donna.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Somewhere in the answers you may have answered this already, Superintendent. If so, direct this to you. Based on what Mr. Minault said, and my calculations of where we could get to was with 229 plus what we have now, we would be short about 485 compared to back in 1980. Do you anticipate that, given the shift in the 80-20, that you need to shoot for the 2,200 that were there before the flood, or is that your objective?

Mr. TOLLEFSON. The general management plan, which is our overarching guide, identifies 2,262 campsites. That would be our ultimate goal. But if part of the equation as we move forward, and especially looking at out-of-valley campsites, is what might be offered by the private sector in either case, we are not charging ahead today on those.

Mr. TOLLEFSON. We need to look at them as we move forward. If we were looking, for example, Foresta would be a place that would be considered for a campground, but there are a lot of issues and concerns around that, and we would want to partner with a lot of folks in conversation about that before we move forward. So while that number is our optimum number, whether or not we reach it really depends on future conversations and future planning.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Director Mainella, you mentioned, is it Zion Park?

Ms. MAINELLA. Right.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. I am not that familiar with it, but were the same kind of objections and concerns raised when they were planning the implementation of their shuttle system? And also the second part to that question, how is it working?

Ms. MAINELLA. To my understanding, there were similar objections, but I am going to ask Randy Jones, our Deputy, who was at Rocky Mountain National Park at the time and could maybe speak to what was going on.

Mr. JONES. Thank you.

Actually our experience has been universal, but any time we initiate a new transportation system, there is a great deal of controversy and uncertainty as to its effects and how it will work. We are finding in places like Rocky Mountain and in Zion that as we are learning and developing, that actually there is a lot of public acceptance, and we are finding that we can get smarter and better as to how we manage and get people to the places they want to visit and, therefore, allow visitation to continue to grow and avoid situations of gridlock.

And so we are learning, and we are growing. We are working with the Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, who are consultants in developing transportation systems, and the experience, especially at Zion, has been very successful.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you.

The transportation plan based on expanding the system is going to be phased in, the phasing out of parking is going to be coordinated, or do we anticipate that we will be losing parking spaces before the shuttle system is implemented?

Ms. MAINELLA. This kind of goes back to our adaptive management.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Can you explain what that is?

Ms. MAINELLA. I apologize. I got into park lingo, and I shouldn't have. Adaptive management is a term that all of us are using not only national parks, but into our fellow State parks and local parks. This is where we look at situations and evaluate the pace for which removal of the parking spaces will take place. We commit that timing based on making sure that we do not decrease the visitors' experience here. If it takes a little longer to get the enthusiasm and the marketability of the transportation system, then we will not be moving as quickly on removing parking until we make sure we have ourselves working forth, and that is the adaptive part. In other words, we may say, OK, here is the guideline we would like to work off of, but it adapts based on what is going on.

I mentioned just the fact that weather can come in and change when we can actually develop something that is even on the list of 15, and we will not do things to hurt the visitation or to try to be negative to anyone's experience here. We can adapt our management and decisionmaking based off of what is transpiring. It is the same way as if somehow a bad storm comes through and does something negative here or somewhere else, we adapt our management strategies and timing. It doesn't mean, though, that we leave the plan in any way. It just means we do so in a time fashion that is friendly to our visitors. Thank you for asking that, though.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thanks, Donna.

Devin?

Mr. NUNES. I know that we are pressed for time, Mr. Chairman, so I will postpone any questions. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I am going to get something just briefly done, then we will move on to the next panel. I have got a lot of questions. Can you tell me, though, in any campground development or restoration, does the Park Service support the possibility of privatizing that function to a concessionaire?

Ms. MAINELLA. The way we look at all our—again, I call it—it is we look at the business part of how is it best to be done in our park. Most campgrounds are run by the National Park Service because they are already existing and things of this nature. When you are building new campgrounds, then you need to be asking yourself the question, is it best that we do it? Do we work with one of our business partners or some others? And that is always an option. Or does one of our gateway communities somehow want to partner with us?

We just—I don't have the answer of how we best move forward, but the biggest thing that I want you to hear from us today is we have good communication lines open, and there is never an idea that we certainly can't explore and discuss. This is what I would ask that we would do as we look at these different options.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you. Thank you, Director Mainella.

This concludes the questions for this first panel. Director, if you could make somebody from your staff available, though, during the time these other panels are testifying, I am sure some other questions are going to come up. Your expertise would be appreciated.

Ms. MAINELLA. Thank you all. I appreciate your time.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thanks very much.

Mr. RADANOVICH. With that, we will call on our second panel. The second panel represents people who provide accommodations both in and outside the parks, and while you are here, plan on going to either the Pines Resort in Bass Lake, California, the Groveland Hotel in Groveland, or stay here with the hosting of Yosemite Concession Services. I can say that because they are all wonderful constituents and fine people.

Our second panel is Mr. Steve Welch, who is the executive vice president of the Pines Resort in Bass Lake, California. Welcome, Steve. Ms. Peggy Mosley, who is the owner of the Groveland Hotel in Groveland, California. You reach that by taking Highway 120 out of the park. Bass Lake is Highway 41. Welcome, Peggy. Next, Mr. Kevin Kelly, who is the vice president of operations at Yosem-

ite Concession Services Corporation here in Yosemite National Park. Welcome, Kevin.

We are going to begin by everybody speaking for 5 minutes on your testimony. I didn't set a fine example here by limiting ourselves to the 5 minutes, but we are going to try to get this thing over with at 12:30. So if you could limit your statements to 5 minutes, and then after that when the panel is done, we will open up the panel to questions from members here.

Steve, again, welcome. It is good to see you. Please begin.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN WELCH, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, THE PINES RESORT, BASS LAKE, CALIFORNIA

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your support of H.R. 620, the school bill, and also your support of 1014, the Gateway Communities Cooperation Act. I know we are not here to talk about that, but we do appreciate your support.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to provide oral testimony about the Yosemite Valley plan. I am here to present the views of Madera County. We believe the plan is detrimental to the gateway communities and the American public and will ultimately result in environmental degradation of Yosemite itself if implemented. Therefore, we urge you to set aside the Yosemite Valley plan, including YARTS, and to put a hold on future funding requests.

I will focus my oral comments in two areas, one, parking spaces and, two, the camping issue. First of all, parking spaces. The valley plan we see as an urban and mass transit busing plan with all projects focused on the stated goal of ultimately eliminating private vehicle access to Yosemite valley. Parking spaces previously available to our residents and our customers, those known as day users, will be eliminated, and they will be forced to travel on buses to access their national park. Incidentally, in 1980 there were 2,500 parking spaces for day users. The plan is calling for a reduction to 550.

What is the logic behind inconveniencing so many persons? The concept began in the 1970's when there was legitimate concern with respect to vehicle emissions. However, since that time new environmental regulations and advances in technology have resulted in near zero auto emissions. The same cannot be said of buses. Yet the predetermined bus agenda is as entrenched today as it was in 1980. The vision of the Park Service is to replace all clean cars with big, dirty buses. Bus traffic will replace car traffic with more noise, more glare, more sell, more visual intrusion and significantly more environmental degradation.

Imagine a business today relying on a business plan with flawed functions that go back 25 years. What chance would it give of providing good direction today? So with this plan. An urban style system with massive park-and-ride lots, more than 500 daily round trips, and a 22-bay transit center as the point of arrival in Yosemite Valley hardly seems environmentally superior.

How about the social considerations? Most of our visitors live in urban areas and come to the mountains to get away from the citylike environment in search of freedom and flexibility. This sys-

tem unnecessarily complicates and delays the families' visit. Herding visitors like cattle from place to place is the antithesis of a back-to-nature experience. The 1994 transportation study even stated the greatest drawback would be, and I quote, loss of visitors' personal freedom to experience portions of Yosemite at their own pace and in their own way, end quote.

We believe visitors should have the right to access their national park in any manner they choose. All should have a choice, not just those who can afford a $300 plus hotel room at the Ahwahnee. As presented, this urban mass transit plan promises to socially reengineer the national park experience.

How about the economics of a mass transit system feeding the park? The initial estimated cost of buses alone is $28.2 million, followed by annual operating costs of $13 million. Who will fund this? If the true costs were placed on the riders, it would be a financial hardship on many of our lower-income citizens. If the U.S. Treasury assumes the burden, then it becomes a taxpayer-subsidized program. Congress needs to exercise proper fiscal restraint and oversight. Can this expenditure be justified at any time, let alone now with our current projected budget deficits? Any busing, we believe, should be voluntary and private, self-supporting and not subsidized. So we see from an environmental, social and economic standpoint if a mass transit system doesn't make sense, why is it in the plan?

We believe the plan process was fatally flawed and was a top-down plan driven by the prior administration with predetermined opinions. We ask now that you step back and sort through the rhetoric and apply common-sense judgments to the process. When you do, the answer becomes crystal clear: Maintain at least the current number of parking places; implement some simple, low-cost, low-impact traffic management measures; and scrap the unnecessary, costly and environmentally damaging mass transit system.

No. 2, valley camping spaces. We support restoring valley campgrounds to the pre-1997 level. Camping is an activity enabling the visitor to enjoy nature up close and personal and is the consummate park experience, and it is at a very affordable cost. The reduction of driving sites in the valley from 828 to 330, that is a 60 percent reduction, is unacceptable. These sites are very important for families, seniors and the physically challenged. Relocation out of the valley, which is the ideal elevation for camping activity, will only increase traffic as those campers will want to access the services that are already located in the valley. Closing the river campgrounds and popular picnic areas for the purpose of claiming restoration appears to negatively target young families and those of limited means.

In conclusion, I will wrap this up. These are the views of Madera County and are shared also by the Yosemite Sierra Visitor Bureau and a majority of the Highway 41 gateway community. The valley plan will adversely affect the visitor experience in terms of access and affordability. If access is not affordable and convenient, visitation will decline further and cause more economic hardship in our gateway communities. We urge you to set aside the Yosemite Valley plan so we won't cause irreparable damage to the environ-

ment, waste hundreds of millions of dollars, of taxpayer dollars, gamble with the economic vitality of our gateway communities and ultimately restrict the freedom of Americans to access and enjoy their park. Thank you very much.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thanks, Steve, very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Welch follows:]

Statement of Stephen R. Welch, Executive Vice President, The Pines Resort

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to represent the concerns of the people of Madera County with respect to the Yosemite Valley Plan.

Your written communication indicates that the purpose of this Public Hearing is to "examine the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan." Once again, we respectfully request that the Committee thoroughly investigate the flawed process by which this Plan was developed, calling into question the validity of the Plan itself. Charged with oversight of the National Park Service, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and thus the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) which NEPA created, the Committee is in a unique position to recommend that this Yosemite Valley Plan be rescinded before the magnificent splendor that is Yosemite National Park is destroyed forever.

Madera County continues to stand by our testimony presented at the 2001 Subcommittee Hearing in Washington, DC. We believe our comments are every bit as valid now as they were then—especially as we observe the negative impacts of the 15 Valley Plan projects that have garnered the Committee's support. Restating our position, we request:

1) No funding be appropriated for this Yosemite Valley Plan (and YARTS)
2) Set aside/rescind this Yosemite Valley Plan (and YARTS)
3) All excess flood funding ($110 million) be returned to the U.S. Treasury
4) Redo the Merced River Plan in full compliance with the protective mandate of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, thus creating a solid foundation for all future plans

As Congressman Radanovich has publicly stated in the press, "the preparation of the plan, in fact the entire planning process, has been fatally flawed." To allow these Plans (Yosemite Valley Plan authorized by the Merced River Plan) to be implemented, as legally enabled by a Record of Decision, reflects the same lack of integrity as the corrupt process by which they were developed. We urge Congress and the Bush Administration to exercise jurisdictional oversight and demand agency accountability.

And though we recognize that camping and parking issues are of particular interest today, they are only two isolated "symptoms." The Committee needs to address the root "disease"—the expired 1980 General Management Plan, the Merced River Plan, and the Yosemite Valley Plan—clear and compelling evidence of a planning process corrupted by a predetermined agenda.

YOSEMITE NEVER HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR DECEPTIVE FLOOD REQUEST

When Congress passed Public Law 105–18 in June of 1997 awarding a $187,321,000 flood recovery package to Yosemite National Park, it was with the understanding that it would be used "...for 'construction' for emergency expenses resulting from flooding and other natural disasters..." Yet then–Superintendent B.J. Griffin testified at the Subcommittee El Portal Oversight Hearing (3/22/97) that more than $123 million was for pre-flood projects.

And as stated in the "Trip Report for Field Hearing on Yosemite Floods and to Conduct a review of the $200 million Emergency Supplemental Request for Appropriations for Yosemite" prepared for this Committee (3/26/97) by a member of your professional staff:

> "According to the transmittal by the White House to Congress, "Each request has been kept to the absolute essential level and is limited to the amount necessary to restore damaged property—that is, damage caused directly by the disaster—to its pre-damaged condition." This is not true with respect to the request for Yosemite Park. In addition, the National Park Service has stated that its recovery proposal is guided by three principles: (1) the 1980 General Management Plan, (2) protection of park facilities from a similar level of flooding in the future, and (3) reduction of the

development footprint in Yosemite Valley. These statements are also not accurate."

"It is also clear that the National Park Service is using the occasion of the flood to advance an entirely separate agenda from flood restoration."

Apparently, such controversial warning signs were pushed aside in favor of the political capital that could be gained in solidifying funding to repair one of the world's treasures; you trusted that the funds would be used with integrity—even though in most cases there was no valid plan in place. But the "red flags" that were courageously raised in that congressional report have come back to haunt all of us; they are the centerpiece of why we're here today and they have fueled the controversy that has surrounded the Yosemite planning process for the past six years. Yosemite planning is driven by funding already received—money that is burning a hole in the agency's pocket.

AN URBAN BUS PLAN—PERIOD!!!

Yosemite planning efforts since 1980 have obsessed about the "evil" of cars and plotted their ultimate removal from Yosemite Valley.

The Carter Administration's 1980 General Management Plan (GMP) advocated freeing the Valley "from the noise, the smell, the glare, and the environmental degradation caused by thousands of vehicles." Insistent on removing all private automobiles from Yosemite Valley, it further stated "the ultimate solution...in parks generally and in Yosemite specifically rests upon integration with regional transportation systems."

The 1994 Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study, in response to Public Law 102–240, recommended changes in Valley traffic circulation to facilitate implementation of a mass transit system: a shuttle transfer point and tour bus parking at Camp 6; elimination of visitor traffic on Northside Drive, except for emergency use; relocation/removal of Upper and Lower River campgrounds, restoring campgrounds to natural conditions; closing Stoneman Bridge road between Curry Village and Yosemite Village; widening Southside Drive for two-way traffic as major access to the Valley; removal of stables; and more. The goal was to restrict access to the East end of the Valley, routing traffic instead across Sentinel Bridge to the transit center.

The 1997 Flood Recovery Action Plan states "the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan, must be approved before the transportation or campground replacement components of recovery can go forward." What replacement components of recovery? There was nothing to recover! As stated in the Trip Report for the El Portal Field Hearing (3/26/97): "The cost to re-open the campgrounds would be far less than relocating them elsewhere within the floodplain. The concessioner expressed an interest in taking over the campgrounds and could 'rehabilitate' them at little cost to the Federal Government." A review of the campground and transportation packages makes it immediately apparent that the flood was used as occasion to garner funding for the predetermined agenda.

Actively involved in gaining endorsement of the Flood Recovery Package, Secretary Babbitt was soon a co-signer with Secretary Rodney Slater as part of a Department of Interior/Department of Transportation Memorandum of Understanding orchestrated by President Clinton (November 1997); the MOU specifically targeted three parks for vehicle reduction and mass transit implementation—the Grand Canyon, Zion, and Yosemite. This action was nothing more than an executive order, a Federal mandate—the public never had any say.

Then in May of 1998, Congress passed the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21)—a comprehensive bill which funded various surface transportation programs at a total of $217 billion over 6 years. This bill opened up a tremendous number of additional funding opportunities to the National Parks ($165 million annually) and specifically referenced development of "a regional transportation system as well as in-park transit and intermodal transportation circulation plans" at Yosemite National Park. Shortly thereafter, DOT shared full-time staff on site at Yosemite specifically charged with implementing a transit program.

The 2000 Merced River Management Plan laid out the zoning blueprint that will ultimately forbid placement of camping or parking where it has existed for years. Additionally, the Plan eliminated air quality and natural quiet as Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The Plan has been steeped in litigation claiming a lack of scientific credibility and failure to quantify carrying capacity; that zoning decisions were made arbitrarily to accommodate plans that had been on the table for more than 20 years. (Appeal hearing was held March 11, 2003 with judgment to be rendered within 2–3 months.) Designed to amend the GMP, the River Plan laid the foundation for the ultimate busing plan—the Yosemite Valley Plan.

The 2000 Yosemite Valley Plan alternatives were named by virtue of their bus staging areas and forecast more than 500+ roundtrip shuttles, 76+ tour buses, and

an unspecified number of YARTS buses entering the park daily during peak season. Buses arrive at a 22-bay transit center near Camp 6, one every 1.4 minutes. Mirroring the 1994 Transportation study, the Upper and Lower River Campgrounds are gone, the stables are gone, Southside is to be widened for two-way traffic, and Northside closed to visitor traffic. And though the 1994 study refused to even consider remote staging areas for reasons of cost, visitor confusion, visitor delay, information challenges, management difficulties, and loss of personal freedom—remote staging areas are exactly what the Yosemite Valley Plan proposes. As stated in the Los Angeles Times (11/14/00), "Babbitt personally intervened in the drafting of the final report. He has said he regards the Yosemite Valley Plan as central to the Clinton administration's environmental legacy."

What we have is a planning process fiercely clinging to the goals of Carter's 1980 GMP—a plan which in its own preface states an expiration date of 10 years (or 1990), and which violates the mandate of NPS Director's Order 2 (Park Planning). Since 1980 there have been a host of environmental regulations as well as advances in technology that have mandated cleaner air and resulted in near-zero emissions in autos; the same cannot be said of buses. Yet no reevaluation has occurred. More than 20 years later, the "visionary" plans of the National Park Service are to replace clean cars with dirty buses; bus traffic will now replace auto traffic; buses make more noise, buses fill the air with diesel fumes; buses have expanded surface glare; and buses require massive amounts of man-made infrastructure which will result in significant and permanent environmental degradation. This is resource stewardship at its worst.

A BUS PLAN WITH NO JUSTIFICATION

One would think that after obsessing over buses and implementation of a mass transit scheme for the past 20 years, the National Park Service would have a well-developed plan, strongly supported by scientific documentation and validated by carrying capacity research to justify their case.

In a recently released (11/15/02) report, "National Park Service: Opportunities to Improve the Administration of the Alternative Transportation Program," a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation reveals the lax and unsubstantiated manner by which the Park Service implements its busing mandates. Of the 20 projects studied (which included two from Yosemite), only one (Mesa Verde) provided thorough analysis.

Each busing proposal is supposed to address non-construction alternatives (i.e., simple remedies such as traffic management that would not involve road widening/realignment, bus depots, etc.). Each proposal mandates park capacity data (i.e., carrying capacity) to guarantee that a bus won't bring in more people than what the carrying capacity will allow. Each proposal is supposed to address total cost including operations and maintenance costs. Each proposal is supposed to address analysis of cost effectiveness.

The first Yosemite project ($3,100,000) was to "expand shuttle service in the park to meet increasing demand." When evaluating that project, the GAO determined that NO information was provided in any of the four categories mentioned above. The second project ($990,080) was to "develop a new traffic information system to help park address increased congestion and resource degradation." The park provided information for only 1 categor—non-construction alternatives; the other 3 categories were left blank.

A particularly revealing statement: "A major objective of the program [alternative transportation] is to improve the quality of visitor enjoyment by relieving traffic and parking congestion in parks. However, because the agency has not established performance goals for reducing such congestion or identified how congestion is measured, there is no effective means of evaluating performance to determine what, if any, progress is being made. In the absence of specific programmatic performance goals and measures, evaluating the results of the program, and individual projects, is based on the subjective judgments of program managers."

It appears we have a "force people out of their cars" program, a draconian measure that will forever transform the way the American public will visit their national parks. Personal freedom, privilege and responsibility will be removed; visitors will be herded like cattle onto an assembly line of buses; resource degradation will occur from diesel fumes, increased paving and infrastructure to accommodate massive bus fleets, as well as mass trampling at on/off stops. Congress continues to throw millions of dollars behind the program—and all the while there is no environmental, social, or economic justification. A savvy park manager who knows how to lobby can push a project through because those with approval authority apparently overlook requisite documented justification and analysis that identifies whether the project

is even needed, park carrying capacity data, detailed operation and maintenance details and costs, or even a cost-benefit analysis. This is unacceptable.

PARKING—now you see it, now you don't...

A 1998 letter from a 37-year park ranger, now an official park document, states "it is estimated there are roughly 3050 parking places left in Yosemite Valley. In my most conservative opinion, that is probably a third of what the Park had in the early 1960s."

The 1980 GMP states there are 2,513 existing day-visitor parking spaces; the Plan proposes to reduce that number to 1,271.

The 1994 Alternative Transportation Study states that the consultants were told by the National Park Service that there were 5,055 parking spaces in the entire Valley, including formal and informal lots and roadside areas. The consultants could only find 2,247 spaces available for visitor use, about ° of those available to day visitors.

The Yosemite Valley Plan states there are approximately 3,500 total Valley parking spaces. Approximately 1,600 are used by day visitors: 904 spaces in the East Valley and 700 in the West Valley. It is the Plan's intention to reduce the total number of day visitor spaces to 550 in one consolidated location at Camp 6. However, a review of park documents clearly suggests those 550 are only temporary and that the ultimate goal is to remove ALL day visitor parking from Yosemite Valley.

- NPS Squad Meeting minutes, 5/27/99: "consensus that Camp 6 works well as a parking facility; better than Taft Toe...immediate dispersion, less stress on shuttle system. Reality is that buses for next 10–15 years will be limited to diesel fuels (technology not there yet to improve them)...Camp 6 enables us to pull back in phases and ultimately remove parking from the East Valley (meeting GMP goals) while bringing the public along."
- NPS Merced River Plan meeting and process notes—DEIS Workshop 4, 10/6/99: "Camp 6 and/or Taft Toe would be destination hubs and would be the start of the regional transportation system, introduce transit. While still looking toward the long-range goal of GMP to reduce vehicles in valley, in the meantime still need to accommodate visitor vehicle—when elimination of private vehicle is accomplished, and it is not needed for transit, then would revert back to background zone."
- Draft Yosemite Valley Plan, 3/27/00: A total ban on private vehicles was "recommended because it is considered an ultimate goal of the 1980 General Management Plan. However the General Management Plan also recognized that the goal was infeasible at the time of its initial approval, and that a phased, collaborative approach would be needed to ultimately achieve this goal. Collaboration is ongoing to develop a regional transportation system [aka YARTS] that would provide initial and developmental steps toward achieving the ultimate goal. It is not possible to project when it would be feasible to remove all private vehicles from Yosemite Valley." (ES, page 2–28)
- Final Yosemite Valley Plan, 11/13/00: "Potential wetlands at the proposed Yosemite Village parking site [aka Camp 6] would be addressed by future compliance." (Volume 1B, page 4.2–17)

The National Park Service has failed to disclose to the public that Camp 6 is a temporary parking area. Furthermore, they have structured the zoning in the Merced River Plan so as to forbid parking in any other locations.

As stated previously:

- THE YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN IS A BUSING PLAN THAT CLEARLY INTENDS TO PHASE OUT DAY VISITOR PARKING COMPLETELY; ALL PROJECTS ARE DESIGNED AROUND ACCOMPLISHING THAT GOAL
- REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION (aka YARTS) IS REGARDED BY THE NPS AS THE SOLUTION FOR REMOVING ALL PRIVATE VEHICLES FROM THE YOSEMITE VALLEY
- THE ZONING IN THE MERCED RIVER PLAN LEGALLY ENABLES IMPLEMENTATION OF AN URBAN BUSING SCHEME RESULTING IN REMOVAL OF DAY VISITOR PARKING.

FAMILY CAMPING AND PICNICKING—on the way out. . .

As mentioned earlier, the Upper and Lower River Campgrounds were slated for removal in 1994 as a means of streamlining traffic circulation. If such an idea had been suggested then, the public outcry would have been deafening. However, the 1997 flood provided the perfect opportunity to "take care of business."

It didn't matter that camping is a resource-focused activity as opposed to the resource exploitation that occurs with lodging, restaurants, stores, and other commercial ventures. It didn't matter that camping requires minimal permanent infrastruc-

ture; a flood can wash over a campground and merely cleans it—there is no permanent damage. In fact, in the case of the Rivers Campgrounds, the utilities were still intact following the flood; the damage resulted from the Park Service-constructed cement fireplaces that broke loose and battered everything in their path. It didn't matter that camping requires no special guest services, as does lodging; therefore, there is no need for additional employees and no need for more employee housing. Camping is a low-impact activity.

Interestingly enough, the National Park Service claimed in the 1997 Flood Recovery Action Plan, A Report to Congress that they needed $17,673,476 for three packages (920, 921, 922) dedicated to campground flood recovery. As you recall, the White House and Congress stipulated that flood funds were to "restore damaged property—that is, damage caused directly by the disaster—to its pre-damaged condition." But since there was no real damage, the flood became the ultimate opportunity to fund the demise of the campgrounds. The Trip Report for the Field Hearing warned there were no plans in place for what was being proposed; it further made mention that what was being proposed would "result in the reduction of about 300 campsites or about 40% below the level recommended in the General Management Plan" (the only valid(?) plan at the time). Yet Congress still appropriated the funding—plan or no plan—trusting that at such time as a plan was actually approved, the funding would be released. In effect, money already in hand poisoned the planning process; the agency had what they needed and public input was cast aside.

The 2000 Draft Yosemite Valley Plan, the only plan in which the Park Service actually itemized costs, shows campground-related projects that total $11,407,000. What happened to the other $6 million from the original flood request? And why did Congressman Radanovich feel the need to appropriate another $2.1 million for a campground study? Why isn't the National Park Service being held accountable?

Adding insult to injury, the Yosemite Valley Plan reflects another sleight of hand. Making much ado about how they listened to public input, the final Plan increased the number of campsites from 475 to 500. But what escaped the public was that of the 500, only 330 would be drive-in sites. Compare that number with the 684 drive-in sites specified in the 1980 GMP and the more than 800 drive-in sites that existed prior to the 1980 GMP. That's a 60% reduction or a loss of more than 470 drive-in sites that will directly impact families with children, seniors, low-income, and those with limited physical capabilities. That is unacceptable.

Leveraging the media, the National Park Service with help from the Clinton Administration promoted the Merced River Plan and Yosemite Valley Plan as restoration plans—returning the Valley to nature. However, when the public protested the loss of campsites—an outcry to which this Committee is listening—it became clear that the Park Service needed to lay claim to the campgrounds and picnic areas to offer up any restoration at all. In a recent LA Times article (2/8/03), Jay Watson of the Wilderness Society revealed "This [removal of the River Campgrounds] is the heart and soul of the restoration effort in the Valley, and to renege on it would totally undermine the integrity of the plan." In effect, the National Park Service has lied to the American people that the Yosemite Valley Plan is a restoration plan; follow the money—94% of the $441 million price tag is allocated for facilities, transportation/circulation, administration/infrastructure, and employee housing; only 6% is dedicated to resource stewardship.

Meanwhile, popular picnic areas such as Swinging Bridge and Church Bowl are being closed while the remaining picnic areas will only be accessible by bus. As stated in the Plan: "The style of picnicking is thus likely to change for many visitors from car-based (grills, coolers, etc.) to daypack or box lunch picnics, with major adverse impacts. Some visitors might find it more convenient (and costly) to purchase food at food service facilities, losing the picnic experience."

It appears that any Valley Plan claims of restoration and preservation are on the backs of campers and picnickers. Is it because these populations don't spend enough money in the park in relationship to their length of stay? This is unacceptable.

To restate—the Yosemite Valley Plan is a busing plan. Removal of the Rivers Campgrounds and Swinging Bridge/Church Bowl picnic areas will consolidate traffic circulation for busing; less drive-in campsites and bus-only picnic grounds will mean less cars in the Valley. The 1980 GMP clearly states "a total ban on private vehicles" using a "phased and collaborative approach" is the ultimate goal (i.e., one step at a time).

DO PARK PLANS FURTHER ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION?

Delaware North Parks Services, commenting on its successful entry into the parks concessions business, was quoted (Buffalo News, 10/3/99) as looking for "full service

kinds of parks...don't think we would be so interested in day-tripper kind of parks." Yet Yosemite is 80% day visitors.

The Merced River Plan states, "As required by the NPS Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998, the NPS cannot deny the park concessioner a reasonable opportunity for net profit. Should the application of the management zoning prescriptions result in the potential removal of sufficient concession facilities to deny the primary park concessioner a reasonable opportunity for net profit (as required by law), this would constitute a major adverse impact to the concessioner under the socioeconomic impact analysis."

To avoid such a scenario, the Yosemite Valley Plan explores a combination of three mitigation options: increased prices for visitor services; entrance fee revenue to support facility use; and modify concessioner operations to improve profitability. Some interesting observations:

Overnight opportunities

Prior to the 1980 GMP, Yosemite Valley had 1528 lodging units and 800 drive-in campsites for a total of 2,328 overnight accommodations. The 2000 Yosemite Valley Plan reduced the numbers to 961 lodging units and 330 drive-in campsites for a total of 1,291 overnight accommodations. Simple subtraction shows a reduction of 1,037 overnight accommodations.

What does the 1,037 reduction include?

- removal of 470 drive-in campsites (originally 800 sites)
- removal of 200 tent cabins from Housekeeping (originally 300 units)
- removal of 253 tent cabins from Curry Village (originally 427 units)
- removal of 91 rustic cabins without bath at Yosemite Lodge

It would appear that low-end, inexpensive accommodations are the bulk of this reduction. Tent cabins rent for approximately $50 per night; if room rates are raised $50, the financial difference can be mitigated with less work and greater profit.

The Valley Plan states that "camping provides the lowest-priced accommodations in the park" and reductions will significantly impact a large user group (27%). Campers also tend to be a low-spending population.

Conversion to bus travel

The Valley Plan states "While in the park, about 35% of visitors arriving by private vehicle eat at a sit-down restaurant, 30% eat at a fast-food establishment, 30% buy groceries, 15% purchase books, 30% shop for souvenirs, and 15% shop for clothes. Except for grocery shopping, these percentages all increase for bus passengers."

Separating visitors from their private vehicles (i.e., rolling storage lockers) increases dependency on the concessioner resulting in a visitor experience that is more controlled, more costly, and more commercialized. Additionally, a 1988 report to Congress on the Feasibility of Increasing Bus Traffic to Yosemite recommended against any increase because "increasing the number of...buses allowed in the park would increase the number of bus passengers who represent an older, slightly wealthier, and a non-family unit, and would cause a resulting decrease in the number of traditional families, especially those with children, who rely upon an automobile to travel."

Minority and Low–Income Visitors/Environmental Justice

The Valley Plan states "It is generally believed that low-income and minority visitors to the park are under-represented in the total visitor population. However, the overnight accommodation and recreation patterns of low income and minority park visitors have not been studied in detail. As a result, the impacts on low-income and minority overnight and day visitors cannot be analyzed quantitatively. It may be assumed that visitation patterns of low-income visitors tend toward the more inexpensive methods: day visits, camping, housekeeping, tent cabin rentals..." And yet with minimal socioeconomic data, the Valley Plan's most significant changes are with respect to day visits, camping, and rustic/tent cabin rentals. That is unacceptable.

In comparison, the Plan states "the largest percentage of visitors to Yosemite National Park (26%) have an annual household income greater than $100,000. The smallest proportion of visitors (5%) have an annual household income of less than $20,000. By contrast, in the State of California the largest percent of the population (37%) has an annual income below $20,000. The data illustrate that people from low-income households are largely underrepresented in the population of visitors to Yosemite" This is true on both a statewide and regional basis."

Perhaps that is why Yosemite recently sent representatives to the 16th annual International Travel Expo in Hong Kong to promote visitation to National Parks, including Yosemite within the Asian market. The National Park Service International Tourism Department chose this international trade show with 450 exhibi-

tors from over 50 countries to reach the Asian tourists and various National Tourism Organizations.

It apparently is all right for the American taxpayer to pay for our national parks; but as our parks transition toward becoming elitist enclaves, unaffordable to the average American, the National Park Service focuses efforts on recruiting visitors from overseas. Something is wrong with this picture.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF ILL–CONCEIVED PLANNING PROCESS

In response to the 1980 General Management Plan directive, restaurants, lodging and other services began investing along gateway corridors outside the park, thereby enabling park administrators to avoid further commercial development in Yosemite Valley. Yet nowhere in the General Management Plan or in the core principles that govern the actions of the Park Service is there any acknowledgment of, or concern for, the mutually dependent relationship that has subsequently evolved between the park and the gateway communities as a result of that directive. It is that apparent lack of concern that is particularly troubling to Madera County.

Dependent on the tourist dollar, the fledgling communities along the Highway 41 corridor are all too familiar with the extreme fluctuations that occur based on the park press release, policy or disaster of the day. Any rise or fall in visitation directly impacts business income and job generation, and consequently the economic vitality of the area. Visitation over the past five years has steadily dropped from a high of 4.1 million visitors in 1996 to 3.4 million visitors in 2002 to an NPS projection of 3.1 million for 2004.

The proposed urban-designed mass transit system that threatens to eliminate automobile touring in Yosemite Valley is the biggest gamble yet. Client surveys and park studies already predict busing will degrade the visitor experience—bad news for any economy based on tourism. In fact, from the moment the draft Yosemite Valley Plan was released, local businesses began receiving telephone calls from potential visitors asking if they had to ride a bus to get into the park—and the plan hasn't even been implemented yet. As proposed in this Valley Plan, guests of any lodging facility outside the park are considered "day visitors"—such visitors will directly incur increased economic hardship and inconvenience resulting from mandatory bus travel.

To date, the park has avoided conducting an independent socioeconomic analysis of day visitors to determine what eliminating cars and mandating buses will really cost the gateway communities. In fact, the Yosemite Valley Plan doesn't even recognize gateway communities, instead focusing on the "local communities" of El Portal, Foresta, Wawona, Yosemite Village, and Yosemite West—communities that, for the most part, can only be accessed inside park gates. The tourist dependent towns of Oakhurst, Mariposa, and Groveland are now included as part of a regional economy that the park claims will benefit from an increase in construction jobs as part of the numerous development projects planned inside the park. Such an "analysis" is of little use to the local lodge owner or restauranteur who invested his/her savings in a gateway business trusting that such an effort would help park administrators avoid further commercial development inside the Park.

The small town character of healthy, vibrant gateway communities are the first stop on the way to a pleasurable visit to Yosemite; the warmth and energy of our people, the attractiveness of our businesses, low crime rate, and an environment that mirrors the Park set the stage for a quality visitor experience. It is important that the Park take pride in the gateway communities just as our communities take tremendous pride in the Park. What has made this Yosemite Valley Plan such a flashpoint is that residents recognize the tremendous environmental damage that will occur inside as well as outside the park as it is converted from a nature center to a profit center; dealing with a nonresponsive but highly political and arrogant bureaucracy, that is funded by a never-ending supply of tax dollars, with large corporations poised to displace small local businesses, in a system that offers no recourse other than litigation—this is not the American way.

SUMMARY

As a Committee you have an invaluable opportunity to revisit a decision that was made in haste 6 years ago, in the midst of an emergency; we ask you to exercise courage and integrity as you provide oversight with respect to funds not yet expended in the name of flood recovery. We further request your intervention in a planning process that has gone awry. The "legacy" plans that are before you today will cause irreparable damage to the environment, waste hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, gamble with the economic vitality of our gateway communities, and ultimately restrict the freedom of Americans to access and enjoy their park.

To restate, we urge you to address the disease rather than dabbling with the symptoms:

- No funding be appropriated for this Yosemite Valley Plan (and YARTS)
- Set aside/rescind this Yosemite Valley Plan (and YARTS)
- All excess flood funding ($110 million) be returned to the U.S. Treasury
- Redo the Merced River Plan in full compliance with the protective mandate of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, thus creating a solid foundation for all future plans

In closing, we have attached a copy of a letter submitted by the Madera County Board of Supervisors to former Superintendent David Mihalic (6/27/00) for your review. This letter proposes a five-year interim plan during which time the park would focus on completing all necessary research up front rather than during the five years following the record of decision; such information (e.g., inventory/monitoring program, quantified carrying capacity, sociological studies on recreation patterns of low-income and minority populations, socioeconomic analysis of impacts on gateway communities, accessibility plan, etc.) is absolutely critical to an informed planning process. Additionally, this option outlines opportunities to embrace the value-added benefits of involving a diverse public in plan development rather than postponing their participation to the final comment period.

[The attached letter follows:]

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF MADERA
MADERA COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
209 W. YOSEMITE AVENUE / MADERA, CALIFORNIA 93637
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MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

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BONNIE HOLIDAY, Clerk of the Board

June 27, 2000

David Mihalic, Superintendent
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, California 95389

Dear Superintendent Mihalic:

The Madera County Board of Supervisors has already submitted formal comments on the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan in our letter of June 13. Since our opposition to the Draft Plan and all five alternatives was unanimous, we believe we have a responsibility to suggest an alternate two-part strategy as documented below.

PREPARATION OF SCIENTIFIC BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Define the visitor experience and its intrinsic relationship to the esthetic, scenic, historic, archaeologic, and scientific features or "core values" of Yosemite National Park. Resource-focused opportunities unique to a national park setting, based on resource preservation as opposed to resource exploitation, provide the framework for such a definition (e.g., camping as a resource-based activity that requires minimal permanent infrastructure vs. lodging replete with buildings, paved parking, and a host of guest services requiring additional employees/housing). Do swimming pools, pizza parlors, bars, equipment sales/rentals, etc. contribute to the uniqueness of Yosemite Valley or are they an intrusive "fragment of suburbia"? What is the base level of services to be provided in the Valley and what is the base level of employees required?

Establish a sound scientific base of information that documents the resources that are protected and preserved in the park; the condition of those resources; any changes in condition over time; and actions needed to ensure preservation. According to National Park Service Director Robert Stanton, "Preserving our natural resources far into the future now requires active and informed management based on sound science." An aggressive Inventory and Monitoring Program needs to be in place FIRST to provide information critical to the planning process—not within five years after a Record of Decision. Under the direction of practicing scientists, volunteers could certainly assist in gathering data.

Initiate carrying capacity studies that will scientifically document amount of visitor use an area can sustain before negatively impacting resources. Studies should also present a well-defined variety of options that will enable land-use to continue but perhaps under altered circumstances. Such research (though continually monitored) should be conducted FIRST, in preparation for planning—not within five years after a Record of Decision.

Refine process for collecting statistics at the entry gates. Since a major part of the planning effort appears to be based on annual visitation, it is critical that those numbers be clearly defined. The current method of relying on underground mechanical "counters" that (when operable) are unable to delineate between visitors, employees, and vendors other than by formula needs to be reexamined for validity.

Complete any and all sociological studies that will scientifically support visitor use planning assumptions including recreational patterns of low income and non-Anglo populations, visitor demand and attitudes, etc. Such studies should be part of a comprehensive Visitor Experience and Resource Protection study conducted FIRST, in preparation for planning—not within five years after a Record of Decision.

Complete the design of the "Traveler Information and Traffic Management System" and "Accessibility Plan" FIRST, in preparation for planning—not within five years after a Record of Decision. All projects that could have a secondary influence on Valley traffic circulation (e.g., out-of-Valley parking areas, visitor centers at the gates, etc.) should also be included.

Conduct in-depth study of ALL in-valley structures, evaluating possibilities for removal (e.g., Federal Court, NPS/YCS management housing, retail facilities, etc.).

Complete any additional studies deemed critical to the decision-making process FIRST, in preparation for planning (e.g., exhaustive air quality studies under variety of conditions, water quality studies, geological studies, comprehensive capital asset management plan with potential for gate fee allocations, etc.).

SPECIAL NOTE: Consistent with our previous communication, a legally adequate Merced River Management Plan must be in place affirmed with a Record of Decision—before scoping can begin on a Draft Yosemite Valley Plan. Participation (or lack thereof) in the Merced River Plan review process would indicate that the public did not fully understand that the River Plan would ultimately amend the General Management Plan and become the enabling authority for the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan. There are serious concerns about the scientific credibility of the management prescriptions outlined in the Draft Merced River Plan as well as the apparent lack of carrying capacity research. Since a final version of the Plan has yet to be released, there is no closure as to how those issues have been resolved. Therefore, we suggest it is appropriate to revisit the Merced River Plan.

FIVE-YEAR INTERIM PLAN FOR YOSEMITE VALLEY

The Madera County Board of Supervisors suggests a five-year interim plan for Yosemite Valley to address issues of immediate concern. During this interim period, preparation and planning for a well-researched and fully-informed comprehensive Draft Yosemite Valley Plan can be conducted. Such a Plan will encompass

broad-based public involvement and will be presented in its entirety with all projects detailed within its context. Recommendations during the interim include:

- Replace aging in-Valley diesel shuttle fleet with non-diesel vehicles immediately. Diesel is NOT an acceptable fuel of choice. Explore a full range of traffic management options to guarantee that the ultimate solution is not worse than the problem.

- Expand in-Valley shuttle route to include Bridalveil Fall and Four Mile Trail.

- Implement aggressive "Ride the Shuttle" campaign; would include restricting overnight visitors to assigned parking, requiring YCS/NPS employees to "bus" to work, informing day visitors to leave vehicle parked until such time as they are ready to leave the Valley.

- Explore creation of traffic management working group that includes shuttle bus drivers, patrol rangers, gate fee personnel, road maintenance, and other employees who have experience working directly with visitors "on the ground;" such individuals usually have a plethora of ideas to improve traffic management/circulation (e.g., signage, parking locations/management, traffic circulation patterns, etc.); group should also be affiliated with development of "Traveler Information and Traffic Management System" design as well as "Accessibility Plan."

- Resolve deplorable employee housing situation by working directly with employees (e.g., fewer services means need for fewer employees; opportunities for shift consolidation; transportation options, etc.). Remove trailers/cabins from parking areas.

- Enforce Mariposa Grove recreational vehicle length restrictions of 23 feet park wide (under premise that vehicles must be able to fit into one parking space). No generators to be used in the Valley from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

- Increase ranger presence (or volunteer host/intern), formally and informally, throughout the Valley to showcase education/interpretive role for it is through the latter that visitors learn environmental responsibility. Increase ranger presence (or volunteer host/intern) at areas needing more supervision (e.g., Swinging Bridge, etc.).

- Retain existing lodging (no new units) during interim period. The current mix of 1,260 units represents a significant number of rustic accommodations with minimal employee service requirements. Create "Lodging Advisory Council" to include representation from the gateway communities, the public, environmentalists, the concessionaire, park personnel, etc. to examine lodging issues.

- Retain current mix of campgrounds, striving to increase numbers to pre-flood levels during interim period. Create "Camping Advisory Council" to include members of the camping public, environmentalists, as well as park personnel to work toward resolution of issues of concern to campers.

- Evaluate the day visitor parking issue from the environmental, sociological, and traffic management/circulation perspectives. Proposed numbers reflect nearly 2,000 parking places reserved for overnight visitors (20%) and 1,022 spaces for Valley residents, while day visitors (80%) will be channeled into 550 spaces. The expected turnover of day visitor spots appears to be premised on current conditions enabling visitors to park at other locations including roadside turnouts; once that option is removed, it is reasonable to expect visitors will be very hesitant to give up their "golden" parking space. Additionally, trade-offs should be quantified with respect to eliminating roadside parking; though impacting the edge of a meadow, how does such parking compare with the environmental degradation associated with instituting a massive diesel bus system.

- Retain medical clinic in the Valley during interim period pending complete evaluation of medical and emergency services needed by residents and visitors.

- Establish opportunities for inclusive broad-based public participation (including "existing and potential visitors, neighbors, people with traditional cultural ties to park lands, scientists and scholars, concessioners, cooperating associations, other partners, and government agencies" per Director's Order #2) during the five years of plan preparation and development (e.g., quarterly updates at the Park; environmental forums; public advisory council to the planning team with tiering of councils providing input on particular issues such as camping, lodging, etc.).

We trust that you will consider the viability of an interim planning option. Such an option presents an opportunity to complete the necessary research so integral to the planning process. We further encourage you to embrace the value-added benefits of involving a diverse public in plan development rather than postponing their participation to the final comment period. Secretary Babbitt was right about one thing—Yosemite does have a lot of friends, and what better way to harness all that energy in a positive direction than to involve them in a collaborative and cooperative process that could ultimately serve as a planning model for the entire national park system.

Sincerely,

JOHN V. SILVA
Chairman

Mr. RADANOVICH. I really appreciate the enthusiasm of the crowd, but we can't have the clapping. I apologize, but that is just not the way we have to run these hearings.

Peggy, welcome to the Committee, and if you would begin your testimony, that would be terrific.

STATEMENT OF PEGGY A. MOSLEY, OWNER, GROVELAND HOTEL, GROVELAND, CALIFORNIA

Ms. MOSLEY. Thank you very much. It is my pleasure to be here. Thank you for giving us this opportunity. Today I am representing Tuolumne County in total. I represent also the Visitors Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce.

As you have previously stated, preparation of the plan, in fact the entire planning process, has been fatally flawed. This is particularly true in planning for the visitor experience. The national park belongs to every American, not just the rich who can afford to stay at the Ahwahnee or even the less expensive lodge or the Wawona. The draft Yosemite Valley plan states that the largest percentage of visitors to Yosemite, 26 percent, have an annual household income of greater than $100,000. The smallest proportion of users, 5 percent, has an annual household income of less than $20,000. This fact should be a major concern to the Congress who maintains vigil over the equity of resources in our great country. Perceived access to the park is a major contributor to the loss of visitation for the past 6 years. Visitation is now about 3 million people per year, down 25 percent from the peak 4 million.

I have written a little scenario on the all-American family who decides to visit Yosemite on the YARTS system. I believe this provides the insight to the issues of limiting access to Yosemite, eliminating the nonaffluent Americans from the park, and the frustration of dealing with a bureaucracy. Please come with me and put yourself in the hearts and minds of this family, then please make your decision based on the Golden Rule. Imagine this scenario, and then decide if you really want to take a bus.

It is 8:30 a.m. You, your spouse and two small children are totally excited about the prospects of visiting Yosemite for the very first time. You have debated about taking your own private vehicle, which could soon be forbidden, or leave the driving to them and take the bus. You elect to try the bus. You gather your family, your Yosemite freight, which consists of a stroller, diaper bag, picnic basket for lunch, camera bag, bicycle, clothing change for the kids, et cetera, open your wallet for the $28 fare for the four of you, remembering, of course, that the gate fee is $20 for a 7-day pass for as many people as you can safely put in your vehicle—for a seven-passenger van, that is 41 cents per person day—and board the bus by 9 a.m.

The bus arrives, and you load your freight on the bus. Since Buck Meadows, Highway 120, is the last pickup stop prior to entering the park, you rumble along the scenic highway into Yosemite. Perhaps your first stop will be Bridal Veil Falls, where you have heard about the spraying mist, the hike up the backside of the falls, et cetera.

You arrive at Bridal Veil and get off the bus. Yes, you, your family and all your freight. Now what? The kids are antsy after the

hour plus ride and need to stretch their legs, not to mention the adults. Where will you leave all your belongings while you experience the falls? Or what about that desire to hike up the backside? Someone must stay back to watch the freight.

Now that you have done Bridal Veil, the next bus arrives to spirit you off to the next stop, maybe the big meadow for your picnic. You load your freight and family and head for the next stop, where you get to unload again, haul your freight to the picnic site and proceed to have lunch. One of the kids is fascinated by the cute little striped yellow thing flying around the clover. Bingo. Now that is some sting on the tender little finger that begins to swell amidst all the piercing screams of a child in great pain. What to do? Your vehicle with its trusty first aid kit is back at your hotel in Buck Meadows, and there is no YARTS bus in sight to take you for first aid.

Finally, you get to the Visitor Center in the valley, and everyone needs a treat after the harrowing ordeal with the bee. Stop at Degnans for something and prepare to unload your wallet a second time. If you decide to take the 2-1/2-hour tour of the valley floor, expect to spend about $18 per person. If you get out for under $100 for the day, consider yourself most frugal.

It is finally nearing 5 p.m. and almost time to find the YARTS bus where you can finally load your freight for the final time and head back to your hotel, where you will arrive about 6:30 p.m.

Wow. What a day. What a Yosemite experience. Do you suppose Teddy Roosevelt ever imagined he was creating such a monster? I don't think so.

Beyond that, I pulled up some information from the YARTS site. It seems as though the ridership of YARTS, and I heard it mentioned 60,000 for the last year, I think if you delved into the ridership component, you would find that probably 90 to 95 percent of these people are employees of either Yosemite National Park, the Yosemite concession or students who are using the service. I don't believe this ridership represents visitors to the park. In fact, Route 1 and 6 is not even open on weekends and holidays. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much, Peggy. I appreciate that.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Mosley follows:]

Statement of Peggy A. Mosley, President/CEO, The Groveland Hotel at Yosemite National Park, Representing District 4, Tuolumne County, California

Thank you, Congressman Radanovich, for the opportunity to address this Subcommittee on the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan (YVP), regarding parking, personal vehicles and campsites in the valley.

As you have previously stated, "the preparation of the plan, in fact, the entire planning process, has been fatally flawed"." This is particularly true in planning for the visitor experience. The national parks belong to every American—not just the rich who can afford to stay at the Ahwanee, or even the less expensive Lodge or the Wawona. The Draft YVP states that the "largest percentage of visitors to Yosemite (26%), have an annual household income greater than $100,000. The smallest proportion of visitors (5%) has an annual household income less than $20,000".

This fact should be of major concern to the Congress who maintains vigil over the equity of resources in our great country.

Access to the park is a major contributor to the loss of visitation of the past six years—visitation is now about 3 million people per year—down 25% from the peak 4 million.

What is contributing to this reduction?

a. Frequent press releases by the National Park Service (NPS), that Yosemite is overcrowded, cars are being turned around at the gate and lack of parking in the Valley. These releases have continued, even though visitation has been reduced significantly.

The American Automobile Association (AAA) Tour Books (Northern and Southern California editions), even carried false information provided by NPS in their 2002 and previous issues, stating that "public transportation must be taken into Yosemite Valley".

I believe the major news media draw straws each Spring, to see who will carry the "Yosemite is Crowded" item!

Response: The self-fulling prophecy of removing parking places in the Valley, contributes to the shortage of parking places. It appears the Valley parking inventory has been as high as 5000 in 1994 and has been reduced to something less than 1500 now.

Gate closures occurred only in 1995 and were not really needed then, had generally accepted traffic management systems been invoked.

This flawed information was pointed out to the San Francisco AAA Office, who verified the status of private vehicles and made the correction in the 2003 issues. Unfortunately, these Tour Books are maintained by AAA members for many years, and it will take several years to get the correct message disseminated.

b. The touting of YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transportation) by NPS and Yosemite Concession Services (YCS), as the preferred way to visit Yosemite has created major confusion among would-be Yosemite visitors. Dozens of calls are received by Visitor's Bureaus, lodging properties, Chambers of Commerce, inquiring about reservations to visit the park, how to get into the park, etc.

Response: The YARTS demonstration was scheduled to run for two years. Since it was so successful, it only ran for one year. It clearly demonstrated that most visitors to Yosemite WILL NOT ride a bus! The only park visitors who ride the bus are those few, who do not have their own transportation, with minimal luggage, who fly into regional airports, and take the train/bus to Merced. This is a very small minority of visitors. Please see the item, entitled, "Yosemite Freight and YARTS" at the end of this testimony.

If ridership were viable, YARTS would not have to offer reductions in fares to entice riders.

The YARTS system is operating primarily for the use of NPS and YCS employees, and students from Merced College and other schools, to points along the YARTS Route, up Highway 140. This is the only route operating and is heavily subsidized for these riders.

A review of the YARTS financial statement, identifying revenue from the ridership by employee, student and paying park visitor would be most interesting and I strongly recommend this committee pursue this. Dollars from this demonstrated failure would be far better spent restoring the campgrounds, the crumbling sewer system, etc.

If YARTS were intended to be used by visitors to Yosemite, it would operate all week. YARTS is not available on weekends or holidays—the times NPS says they need to get private vehicles out of the park! (This information was taken from the YARTS website, www.yarts.com)

c. The Yosemite Experience has been evolving for many generations—from the days of arrival on horseback, to the hordes of "Tin Lizzies" seen in Yosemite parking lots in the 1920s, to today's visitors in cars, campers, bikes and yes, even busses. This, too, has become a part of American life, with generations coming together to celebrate the most beautiful, spiritual place on earth.

Response: The campsites along the Merced are a major part of the Yosemite Experience, and should be replaced. Camping along the river at Wawona is still intact. It would seem the cost of restoring the campsites along the lower Merced would be a great investment in the Visitor Experience.

So, they have to be replaced every 50-100 years—doesn't everything have to be replaced/maintained? The 361 campsites lost in the flood need to all be restored.

For NPS to believe that building 788 campsites OUTSIDE Yosemite Valley is an option to the river experience is preposterous! This is another example of NPS trying to eliminate part of the Visitor Experience for all Americans.

d. The Yosemite Valley is deemed to be overcrowded during the Summer months. There are thousands of acres of Yosemite not in the valley. No effort is being made to make visitors aware of these incredible areas to visit, thereby dispersing the visitors away from the Valley for Day Trips into other areas of the park, for an enhanced Visitor Experience.

Response: I asked former Superintendent Mihalic why this issue was not being addressed, and more effort being made to educate visitors. His response was, "we don't have any marketing money to do this". I suggested their contract with YCS should include the requirement for this information to be made available on a priority basis to visitors.

It's clear the reason YCS does not want to do this. They have no revenue generating sources in places like Hetch Hetchy and other "out of the way" places.

Other Issues

In addition to the access and Visitor Experience issues discussed above, another significant consideration is economics. The economic value of Yosemite National Park is felt throughout the United States. It begins with the local gateway communities, whose only source of revenue is the tourism industry.

Thousands of jobs are created in this region. Many of them are entry level for high school students, just learning about the free enterprise system and the job opportunities being provided by individual entrepreneurs. Many tipped employees earn in excess of $20.00 per hour. Many management level positions are also created in this industry. The value of employment is major and should not be ignored.

These jobs, in turn generate the much needed tax dollars needed for a strong economy. They provided income to the local community, state and Federal coffers. As an example, Mariposa County, recipient of all the Sales Tax and Room Tax from Yosemite, is the beneficiary of over $5 million annually.

The tourist dollars also provide much needed revenue to the local businesses, but also contribute heavily to the local and state tax programs.

Every tourist dollar received in a community turns over seven (7) times before it leaves the county. Example: Yosemite was closed for three (3) months in 1997 from the flood. My vet was in for dinner and discussing how his business had slowed. My kitchen staff had been cut severely and one of them had scheduled a cat spaying and then cancelled due to no work. The vet's comments—I never realized that I benefitted from Tourism until now!

The gateway communities have an extremely high number of welfare recipients. Every dollar earned by the local employees are dollars not required to be spent by welfare.

Conclusion

There are many issues with the YVP. All are important, but I believe, perhaps, the most significant is the devastating impact to the American People—the owners of Yosemite National Park, who will literally be locked out from their own sacred spot.

Yosemite is not just a pretty place to visit—it has a spiritual value, that is special only to Yosemite! One cannot be in the park and not feel the hand of our maker—a place of peace and solitude, that in today's environment is absolutely priceless.

Again, thank you, Congressman Radanovich, for the opportunity to address this Subcommittee. I hope you will consider the issues described here and put yourself on the bus with the All–American Family to experience the YARTS Experience vs. the Yosemite Experience!

YOSEMITE FREIGHT AND YARTS
(YOSEMITE AREA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM)

Imagine this scenario and then decide if you really want to take a bus.

It's 8:30 AM. You, your spouse and two small children are totally excited about the prospects of visiting Yosemite for the very first time. You have debated about taking your own private vehicle (which could soon be forbidden) or leave the driving to them, and take the bus.

You elect to try the bus. You gather your family, your Yosemite Freight, (which consists of a stroller, diaper bag, picnic basket for lunch, camera bag, bicycle, clothing change for the kids, etc.), open your wallet for the $28.00 fare for the four of you, (remembering, of course, that the gate fee is $20.00 for a 7 day pass, for as many people as you can safely put in your vehicle—for a 7 passenger van, that's 41 cents per person day) and board the bus by 9 AM.

The bus arrives and you load your "freight" on the bus. Since Buck Meadows (Highway 120) is the last pickup stop prior to entering the park, you rumble along the scenic highway into Yosemite. Perhaps, your first stop will be Bridal Veil Falls, where you've heard about the spraying mist, the hike up the backside of the falls, etc.

You arrive at Bridal Veil, and get off the bus—yes, you, your family and all your "freight". Now what? The kids are antsy after the hour plus ride and need to stretch their legs—not to mention the adults. Where will you leave all your belongings

while you experience the Falls? Or what about that desire to hike up the backside? Someone must stay back to watch the "freight"!

Now that you've "done" Bridal Veil, the next bus arrives to spirit you off to the next stop—maybe the big meadow for your picnic. You load your "freight" and family and head for the next stop, where you get to unload again, haul your "freight" to the picnic site and proceed to have lunch.

One of the kids is fascinated by the cute little striped yellow thing flying around the clover. Bingo!!! Now that is some sting on a tender little finger, that begins to swell amidst all the piercing screams of a child is great pain. What to do? Your vehicle with its trusty first aid kit is back at your hotel in Buck Meadows, and there's no YARTS bus in sight to take you for first aid.

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If you decide to take the 2.5 hour tour of the Valley Floor, expect to spend about $18/person. If you get out for under $100.00 for the day, consider yourself most frugal.

It's finally nearing 5 PM and almost time to find the YARTS bus where you can load your "freight" for the final time and head back to your hotel, where you'll arrive about 6:30 P.M.

Wow!!! What a day—What a Yosemite Experience!!! Do you suppose Teddy Roosevelt ever imagined he was creating such a monster? I don't think so!

Mr. RADANOVICH. Next up is Kevin Kelly from Yosemite Concession Services.

Kevin, welcome to the Committee and if you would begin your statement, that would be terrific.

STATEMENT OF KEVIN KELLY, VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS, YOSEMITE CONCESSION SERVICES CORPORATION, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

Mr. KELLY. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Kevin Kelly, and I am the chief operating officer of Yosemite Concession Services, a division of Delaware North Companies Parks and Resorts. We operate lodging, food and beverage, retail, interpretive programs, recreational activities and transportation services for the National Park Service in Yosemite National Park. I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify today on the issue of campgrounds in Yosemite, particularly as it relates to our role as park concessionaire and our ability to provide quality services to guests of the park. Our role in Yosemite is to provide goods and services to park guests with the goal of enhancing their overall experience, while living up to our important role as a steward of the park.

Our contract with the National Park Service in Yosemite began in 1993. In the 10 years we have been here, we have witnessed some of the most traumatic events in the park's history, and have faced many challenges as a result. Over the course of our contract, the park has suffered rock slides, government shutdowns, wildfires that closed the park, a catastrophic flood, five different superintendents, and murders outside the park that generated unprecedented publicity around the world. At the same time, attendance figures have ranged from over 4 million visitors annually in 1996 to slightly over 3 million per year this past year.

The flood of 1997 brought forth a renewed endeavor in planning for the future of Yosemite within the new footprint that this historic flood left behind. After 5 years and several avenues of litigation, the Yosemite Valley plan was finally adopted as a blueprint

to redevelopment and restoration of the park. We are in support of this plan and are proud to contribute to its ongoing implementation.

We recognize from our very unique perspective and history in Yosemite the daunting task and complex processes that this document represents. We understand and we are in agreement with the need to preserve this resource for future generations and limit our impact on the ecosystem.

Throughout our tenure, visitor access has remained at the forefront of our guest service initiatives, and we have worked as a partner with the Park Service to ensure that all Americans, as well as the many travelers from around the world who want to experience this national treasure, can come to know Yosemite. We believe that providing additional campsites to bring the park closer to its preflood level would go further toward making Yosemite accessible to people of all income levels.

It is our opinion that providing a quality visitor camping experience in a manner that is consistent with the Yosemite Valley plan is a positive step for the park, and we look forward to reviewing the campground study. Having said that, we are not in favor of a scenario in which the valley plan itself becomes embroiled in a new round of revisions as to render it incapable of moving forward. We believe it would benefit no one for a plan that provides direction for the future of Yosemite to lie dormant rather than restoring and safeguarding the park as it was intended to do. For too long, improvements to infrastructure and facilities have been held up in this planning process, and having a plan in place after several years of uncertainty is a very positive step to move Yosemite beyond the flood.

We are confident that given your commitment and the commitment of the leadership in Yosemite, the Yosemite Valley plan can move forward while certain elements may be modified to ensure the best possible balance between providing for visitor enjoyment of the park and protecting this irreplaceable national treasure. Consistent and reliable funding is paramount to delivering this goal.

In the spirit of partnership that has always been a strong point of our relationship with the National Park Service, we again state our willingness and desire to contribute to the ongoing implementation of this plan. We thank the National Park Service for its continued efforts in establishing the best possible balance between the visitor experience and protection and preservation of this incredible landscape.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kelly follows:]

Statement of Kevin Kelly, Chief Operating Officer, Yosemite Concession Services Corporation

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Kevin Kelly. I am the chief operating officer of Yosemite Concession Services Corporation, a division of Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts, which operates lodging, food and beverage, retail, interpretive programs, recreational activities, and transportation services for the National Park Service in Yosemite National Park.

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our ability to provide quality service to guests of the park. Our role in Yosemite is to provide goods and services to park guests with the goal of enhancing their overall experience, while living up to our important role as a steward of the park.

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We are in support of this plan, and are proud to contribute to its ongoing implementation. We recognize from our very unique perspective and history in Yosemite the daunting task and complex processes that this document represents. We understand and are in agreement with the need to preserve this resource for future generations and limit our impact on the ecosystem.

Throughout our tenure, visitor access has remained at the forefront of our guest service initiatives, and we have worked as a partner with the Park Service to ensure that all Americans, as well as the many travelers from around the world who want to experience this national treasure, can come to know Yosemite. We believe that providing additional campsites to bring the park closer to its pre-flood level would go further toward making Yosemite accessible to people of all income levels.

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In the spirit of partnership that has always been a strong point of our relationship with the National Park Service, we again state our willingness and desire to contribute to the ongoing implementation of this plan.

We thank the National Park Service for its continued efforts in establishing the best possible balance between the visitor experience and protection and preservation of this incredible landscape and look forward to being a part of the successful implementation of the Yosemite Valley plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you. I would be happy to respond to questions.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I am going to open up with questions. Mike, can you tell me, is there anything in the valley plan that you like? I am sorry, Steve. Forgive me. Anything worth doing?

Mr. WELCH. Frankly, I agree with the concept of moving on after the flood. What we are concerned about is what is stated in there is the ultimate goal of the removal of the automobile, and we think a lot of the things go toward that. I have submitted a detailed written testimony that hopefully will become part of the record and details a lot more, but many of the items of the 15 projects that were reviewed by the Superintendent this morning I would support personally, and I think many of the people in the entrances do. What

we are most concerned about is the access and affordability issues for our customers and the day users, as I stated.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Which I agree with. The problem with the issue of stopping the plan is it puts in jeopardy some of the things that, frankly, I think once they are done, like rerouting the road around Yosemite Lodge, is going to solve the traffic problem. I have always believed that solving the traffic problem at Yosemite was going to be whatever made the most common sense and cost the least, which is rerouting some intersections, and doing some improvements in key places in Yosemite in my view is going to preclude the need for any satellite parking.

The problem with getting a lot of this stuff done is that if we stop or reopen, lawsuits happen, and everything freezes. That is the counterbalancing concern I think that we are trying to work through.

Mr. WELCH. Certainly I appreciate that.

Could I respond?

Mr. RADANOVICH. Certainly.

Mr. WELCH. As a layman and a businessperson and a citizen, it is very difficult to understand these studies. They are pages and pages and reams and reams, and to understand the mechanics of whether it is better to amend the plan or modify it or reconstruct it or throw it out and start over is a judgment call that I would have to defer to you and your Committee and those who are part of this.

I am personally less concerned with the mechanics of how it is accomplished, but the end result. Sometimes these things are insidious. There were 2,500 parking places in 1980. I am told there are somewhere between 12- and 1,600 today. That is what has caused a lot of the perceived overcrowding and congestion that occurs now, and to reduce that further would be a real problem, we believe.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Peggy, can you envision a YARTS being—I want to try to separate, if it is separable, the issues with YARTS. If there was assurance or there was knowledge as an absolute fact that YARTS was not going to be the first step in what will eventually be forcing everybody out of their cars and into buses, would you see the need for some supplemental alternative transportation to the park that a bus service would provide?

Ms. MOSLEY. We have looked at this. I spent 5 years on the Citizens Advisory Council for YARTS. When I realized the vast cost of this system that would serve so few citizens and not employees or students, which was the original purpose of it, I find that there is absolutely no way that a system like this could be economically justified under any economic environment, particularly today.

There are private bus companies that come into the park every day. I had a woman call me yesterday from Sacramento saying, well, I would like to be able to take a bus. There are bus systems like VIA, has operated for decades up and down the 140 corridor. Every now and then I can see one on 120. So I think that a private entity should be able to maintain this service for the number of people that will ride.

Beyond ones that will ride it are the ones that were perhaps on it the day we did a demonstration ride for the YARTS group. We took a bus, a VIA bus, from Amtrak in Merced and went into the

park. Besides the YARTS group that was on it, there was a couple from Napa Valley, and there were a couple who wanted to just take a train-bus experience for the day. They had a very small overnight bag. There was a couple from Japan who had a hotel in San Francisco. Again, they just wanted a day trip to Yosemite. There were two guys from Australia. They also were boarded in San Francisco. These are the kind of people that use YARTS.

If you are going as someone who wants to visit the park, experience picnics, take cameras, we have some people in our local community who are photographers and artists. They love to come here for their painting and photography. They can't begin to load all their art freight, if you will, on a bus. It totally eliminates the positive visitor experience if they are forced into that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. If that is their only alternative or choice to get there—

Ms. MOSLEY. If that is their only alternative, VIA does a wonderful service for bringing people into YARTS that want to use it.

Mr. RADANOVICH. So the issues really are the possibility of it becoming the only alternative to get in the park, the only choice to get in the park, and the cost of the system itself.

Ms. MOSLEY. That is right. And as a taxpayer, I totally resent having to pay for the subsidized transportation of employees.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Donna?

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Just to see if we have some common ground here, I think, Mr. Kelly, you have been clear about your position with the plan. I would like to ask Mr. Welch and Ms. Mosley, are we in agreement on the five goals of the plan, reclaiming the natural beauty, reducing traffic congestion, allow natural processes so they will reduce crowding, promote visitor understanding and enjoyment? You are not opposed to the goals of the plan; am I correct? You support the goals of the plan?

Ms. MOSLEY. I think the goals are pristine. I think it is how we achieve them that is significant. For instance, on Memorial Day weekend of 1999, it is a Saturday, when you would expect this place to be totally packed, our fourth district supervisor and one of our public county transportation people took a video, started at the top of Priest Grade going into Yosemite on 120. They came all the way into the valley, and they found very, very little problem. In fact, the parking issue was so minimal that the Park Service had pulled two trams—or a tram across two separate parking lots that were totally unavailable to the public.

This is a self-fulfilling prophecy of transportation and parking problems. When you pull away all the parking places that we have seen go in the last 10 years or so, yes, you are going to have a parking problem.

The other issue would be to invoke professional traffic management in the valley. We have also seen that work. After there was so much problem with the parking problems, the gate closures, et cetera, the Park Service did invoke professional management, and we saw a massive difference.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. So you are saying that there is—let me ask the question that I wanted to ask. You probably partially answered it, and I would ask it again to Mr. Welch and Ms. Mosley. With

day users apparently increasing, you said, Mr. Welch, that there were 1,500 parking spaces in 1980?

Mr. WELCH. In the general management plan, it indicates there were 2,500 in 1980. I am not sure, I have seen 1,200 and I have seen 1,600 in different places in print for what exists today.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Given the fact that the day user—the day user population is apparently increasing, to me that could mean that managing traffic, which has already been cited as being a problem, could be just impossible. Wouldn't you agree that given the increase in day users, that we would need to have some other means of getting people around rather than being a greater number of people driving into the park?

Mr. WELCH. I think a couple of things. Five hundred fifty parking places is the number that you would find in a small shopping center in any city in this country. It seems to me that in 7 square miles you could find a place for a handful of parking. I think the key is to properly manage. I think it is dispersed, and I think it is a management issue more than it is a space issue. As Peggy alluded to, the reduction in the last few years has caused a lot of these problems, and they are perceived problems.

If I may address your first question about do we support the goals, absolutely. I support all the goals of the valley plan. The one phrase in there is a little misleading about overcrowding. Overcrowding is a very relative term. One person's perception of crowding is not somebody else's. The valley is about 5 percent of the Yosemite Park. There is 95 percent out there. There are thousands of acres of wilderness. If somebody wants a wilderness experience—I don't think the people visiting this national park want a wilderness experience, nor do they need to have one. They need the facilities and service, accessibility and affordability. Again, it seems that you could find in this beautiful place absent—I understand the flood plain and the rock falls and so forth, but there certainly has got to be someplace to have a handful of parking places properly managed and a few river campgrounds to accommodate the demand and still preserve this wonderful environment.

I want to preserve it for my kids, too. I was here in a tent cabin when I was 10 years old. That was my first experience. Recently I have had the pleasure of staying in an Ahwahnee hotel room. That is wonderful, too. But we need all of it, and we shouldn't be discriminating one over the other.

I hope that helped to answer your question.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. On the campsites, wouldn't the possible addition of new campsites along the road corridor address the demand for increased campsites and still protect the public from the flood areas that are likely to flood?

Ms. MOSLEY. I think the fact that this is a 50/100-year flood is something that we really need to consider. This is not the kind of devastation that occurs on a regular basis, even every two or three decades. It is like a once-in-a-lifetime-type event. And I think that we all recognize that even in our own private residences, we put things in, we maintain them, and I think that the Park Service needs to look at these campgrounds in a similar sense. I believe that some of the things I have seen about the building of campsites in the outlying areas, outside the valley, the cost of these that I

have seen, it seems to me they could build houses out there instead of campsites. And I think that we really need to look at the viability of what this means. And when I hear the Park Service ask for more money, I am devastated. I just can't imagine.

What we need to do is spend that money to repair the crumbling sewer system and some of the really important issues. And also on the congressional site that I had pulled up, there is mention of how the Park Service needs to spend their money on better prioritized lists. I really think we need to go back and look at that, too. I think the campsites are a viable part of this experience, and I think along the river is why people come into the park.

And if I might address your earlier question to Steve about the 80 percent-20 percent. This park has lost 25 percent or 1 million visitors a year over the last 6 years. They are certainly not coming into the gateways, because my business is down 25 percent as well. So I don't think it is an 80-20 perspective just clear-cut across the line. I think the reason people are not coming is because I almost believe that every spring the media draws straws on who is going to write the Yosemite is closed part. It is something that deters people from coming. They are convinced they can't get into the park. As a matter of fact, the Triple A tour guide last year in previous issues stated that you must take public transportation into the park, which is totally false. They did correct it this year because we helped them. I think that when this information is provided by the Park Service to an agency like Triple A that this entire country uses, it is wrong. It is wrong. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you. Thank you for your job.

Devin?

Mr. NUNES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Welch, in your testimony you get to the question that I was asking the first panel, and that is essentially since 1980, according to your numbers, you have seen a 50 percent reduction in campsites, overnight lodging, and parking spots. Would you say that is correct? Using approximate numbers.

Mr. WELCH. I believe for parking spaces that is true. I am not sure that the campsite reduction is quite that much.

Mr. NUNES. I see the concern here, and that was my question to the first panel is that incrementally, over the last 20 years, you have seen a reduction in campsites, parking spots. I think the concern that you folks have, and you can correct me if I am wrong, is what is going to happen in the next 20 years? Are you going to continue to see another 50 percent reduction in parking spots and campsites? Is that accurate to your concern?

Mr. WELCH. Yes, it is.

Mr. NUNES. When you look at daily traffic, I remember when I came up into this area for the first time, my family had a 1978 Ford Bronco that got about 7 miles to the gallon. We came up last night in a four-wheel drive pickup because of the snow that Mr. Radanovich didn't tell me about. Anyway, it was a pickup that gets closer to 20 miles a gallon.

I share the same concerns as you. I am confused by these strange numbers that seem to vary from testimony to testimony. I am wondering, are you satisfied with the process that this plan has been developed through, in the numbers? Are you satisfied with the

numbers that have been used and the scientific system that accounts for these numbers? Would you say it has been adequate, inadequate? Would you like to see it looked at again?

Mr. WELCH. We think the process was flawed and sort of finalized in the waning hours of 2000, which was the last administration, and I think the prior Park Service administration was not as receptive to gateway community input and disregarded a lot of our concerns.

Visitation has declined 17 percent since 1996. My business is down. Peggy's and many others are affected by this decline. The concessionaires' business must be suffering as well. The population certainly in California, and I understand 75 percent of the visitation here comes from California, I can't quote you the statistics, but I am sure there are more people in California now than there were 20 years ago, and it is going to continue to grow, and we need to provide access in an affordable fashion for these folks to use this. We can't do that by declining convenience and accessibility.

Mr. NUNES. In your testimony, you are not asking to go back to 1980 levels. You are just asking to go back to pre-1997 flood levels of parking and campsites.

Mr. WELCH. In terms of camping, pre-1997 levels in the valley would seem reasonable and certainly a goal that could be achieved. Parking, I would like to see it increased more to what it was. I have had old-timers tell me there used to be 5,000 places in the valley, many undeveloped in dispersed areas and just used seasonally. I am not sure how environmentally wise some of those things were, but, again, we have a lot of people in this country, and we need to accommodate them in a practical, reasonable way. I would think somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,500 to 2,000 parking places for day users to bring in their camping gear and picnic gear and all the things that they want to come is not an unreasonable or unachievable goal.

Mr. NUNES. Thank you, Mr. Welch.

Real quickly, Ms. Mosley, could you quickly go over the busiest times of the year for your business? Either describe your weekends or periods of time.

Ms. MOSLEY. Yes. Our busiest months are July and August. Obviously we have heavy visitation on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and the Labor Day weekend. But July and August, absolutely.

Mr. NUNES. And so if it is not July or August or Memorial or Labor Day, how is the traffic, how is your business? Are there plenty of parking spots available here? Isn't the need for the surrounding areas and for the valley here to accommodate these high-traffic periods of time?

Ms. MOSLEY. It is extremely limited, and it is limited to the holiday periods, and like I said, the July and August. Even in July and August I have been over here just to check it out, and, yeah, I had to drive around a little bit, but it wasn't anything that was terribly frustrating. It was something that was accessible.

I feel that we are sort of killing flies with sledgehammers with YARTS. It just doesn't fit.

Mr. NUNES. Thank you, Ms. Mosley.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Devin.

Kevin, can you tell me, in this report, the campground study, you did mention the cost—and granted they have got to go back and refigure these numbers—the cost of relocating 144 campgrounds was quoted something like $18.7 million. You could build the Ahwahnee for that, I think.

Mr. KELLY. You could build a Marriott hotel for that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Exactly.

Taking out the equation of the price tag—we are going to look at those numbers, we are going to talk a little more about that later with you as being the concessionaire to Yosemite—would you be interested as a concessionaire of possibly going in and doing the work on the campgrounds and running them?

Mr. KELLY. Well, certainly we have expertise in running inventory like a campsite or a reservations system. Building campsites, we would have to look into it. And certainly if the Park Service, our client, came and asked us to take a look at it, we would be open to looking at it. Again, as it applies to the valley plan, though, it would be a concern that, again, it would stop these 15 projects that we have in the works right now, and that would be our greatest concern.

As we talked about parking as well, I think the 1,600 places we have in place is what we had in 1997 as well. Our visitation has steadily gone down since then. I think that is in part because we are shooting ourselves in the foot here. We are telling everyone there are only 500 parking spaces. Don't come to Yosemite.

I think we need to stop having the negative press out there and saying, please come. You come here midweek in the summer, it is gorgeous. The water is wonderful in the river. There is plenty of parking. Come and visit. I think we need to stop being negative and say that there is plenty of parking, that we are not down to 500, you don't have to take YARTS. Drive your car and park and enjoy the park. It is a beautiful place.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you. And I think the number is around 1,600 spaces that are considered day use parking spaces that are in existence now. The issue is reducing it to 550. And so that you know, those numbers are tied to this satellite parking system, bus them in the park issue, and that is if you are going to use that satellite bus parking system for 9 months out of the year, you only need 550 spaces. If you are going to use it 3 months out of the year, you need 1,200 spaces. If you are not going to use it at all, you probably need 1,600 spaces. So they are connected. I appreciate those comments.

I want to ask Steve and Peggy to respond to the same question, if you would, please, and, that is, Kevin in his opening statement went through a long litany of all these problems that have happened in Yosemite over the last 5 to 8 years, including the murders and the flood. Can you tell me why, give a reason for the decrease in business in both the Pines and the Groveland Hotel and also your idea of what the Park Service can do to contribute to an increased visitorship at your facilities?

He said we need to get positive press rather than negative press, and every time I pick up the paper and see something about some devastating thing—or it does not even have to be real, but perceived—it creates problems.

And, granted, the things that had happened, many of them have been natural, but the ones that really upset us are the ones like when Congress closes the park because there is no money. It is the things that are manageable that don't have to be; and again I think media is where we are at. And I know that the people I talk to feel that the negative media is coming from the National Park Service, and we feel that they have major control over what goes out to the press; and we feel, at least in our neighborhood, that this has been a major contributor. Again, every time they see something that says the park is closed, the park is crowded, they don't come because they don't want to get embroiled in that kind of thing and my business started dropping off right after the 1999 flood. 1999 was my best year, and it has continually decreased since then, but I feel that we could get major assistance from the Park Service.

One other thing that I would like to—

Mr. RADANOVICH. In communications it sounds like—

Ms. MOSLEY. Yes.

One other thing that I would like to mention that I think would help the, quote, "crowding in the valley" would be making the general public aware of all the magnificent areas outside this 7 square miles. When Superintendent Mihalic first came to town, he came to visit, we talked about that. He said we have no money to market that kind of thing, and he indicated that WCS was the marketing of the park, and it seems to me if that is the case, then perhaps something needs to be done to assist WCS in directing more of their marketing to the outside areas of the valley, even though they don't have—

Mr. RADANIVICH. You mean Tuolumne Meadows or that kind of—

Ms. MOSLEY. Anywhere. But they don't have revenue-generating sources there, so as an entrepreneur, I can appreciate their desire not to market a place that they can't get into my wallet. So I think this is a major issue of how the message gets out.

Mr. RADONIVICH. Thank you.

Steve?

Mr. WELCH. I would share Peggy's comment about the press and the public perception. We—our visitor bureau goes to numerous trade shows up and down the State, and many people, their first question is, I understand I have to get on a bus. Other people say, gee, do I need a reservation? That idea was kicked around a few years ago and somehow it is still floating around, and these things are negative perceptions. At least, you know, they think it is overcrowded, they might need a reservation, they might have to get on a bus, et cetera, et cetera, and that all plays into this. So I think the Park Service and the media in general could assist getting out the proper image.

There is one other factor that hasn't been discussed today and that is the gate fee. In 1997 it was raised from $5 per car to $20. That is a quadrupling. I can't imagine any business person raising his prices overnight four times and not expecting a decline.

It was a demonstration program. I think there is something like $60 million out there from this. That really discourages our residents and the people from our county.

We have 15 percent unemployment in our county. The San Joaquin Valley has double-digit unemployment, twice the Federal

average. Those folks would like to come up and have a picnic. They would like to drive through, and maybe it should be $20 on the peak weekends in May when the people want to see the waterfalls, but how about Wednesday in March? Maybe that should be $5. Maybe it should fluctuate with our rates. All the businesses, whether you are in airlines or hotels or what have you, you base your rates on demand and maybe that is a concept that could be used in a positive way.

But I think that has had a negative impact as well as the other—the press that has been mentioned.

Mr. RADONIVICH. Thank you, Steve.

Donna?

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Chairman, as I asked you, I think it would be good for us to get—and time won't permit us to get it today, but to get some answers from the Park Service in response to Ms. Mosley's concern about how the Park Service would attempt to pay for the maintenance and operation of the shuttle, whether it be taxpayer dollars, or how would they propose to pay for it; and also an answer or have them address the adverse impact on low-income potential visitors to the park and maybe the issue around the media and the type of information that is sent out.

I have one question, because Mr. Welch said that most of the visitors probably come from California; and in a letter from members of the California House delegation, they cited polls that show that 80 percent of people polled in California supported reducing cars in the valley to a shuttle system, that 71 percent oppose building new permanent parking lots, and 71 percent supported limited future development along the Merced River.

And I would just like the panelists to comment on that poll and the results. That is my question.

Mr. KELLY. Well, certainly when you look at coming to the Yosemite National Park and coming to the valley, we do have a shuttle system that exists here. We transport 2.8 million on that valley shuttle right now. You can drive here, park your car, and ride a shuttle. You don't have to drive your car around this park. So I think that what the population is supporting is the fact that you come and park your car and still enjoy the parking, still get from point A and B on a transit system within the valley.

Certainly, 80 percent of our visitation does come from California, and they are certainly an important constituent that we need to pay attention to. So on development, again I think there it is pristine valley, and I think people are always concerned about what you build where in this park. So I think that is the general statement as well.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Anybody else?

Ms. MOSLEY. I would just like to have a little better definition. Eighty percent of, what was that again?

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. It said that 80 percent of people polled in California alone.

Ms. MOSLEY. Where did they poll these people and how many did they poll?

Mr. WELCH. I don't know that I can comment on the study exactly, but I do know there is a big perception of crowding. When I go to the Bay Area or Los Angeles, that is where the crowding

occurs, and a lot of the visitors, if they are polled there and they are given this mental picture of what they deal with on a daily basis is occurring in their national park, they probably would support those kinds of things.

But I—we do support valley shuttle. We support the shuttle around the big trees. There are some really logical, great applications of that kind of thing. But we are back to the access issue of being able to get in here and then making your choice or making your choice freely if you want to come on a bus from Fresno or Bass Lake or San Francisco or wherever and do a private tour, that is wonderful. Some people prefer that, and it works well for them.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

I think if you asked the polling question, if you were to drive up from Los Angeles and come into the park and on any given day be told once you got to the valley that you had to turn around and drive back 10 to 20 miles and park your car and get on a bus and come into the valley, the polling numbers probably would not be that high.

Thank you very much for your valuable testimony. And with that, we will excuse our second panel and introduce our third. Thank you very much.

Our third panel is Mr. Allan Abshez, camping enthusiast from Los Angeles, California; Mr. Paul Minault, Northern California Regional Coordinator of The Access Fund, San Francisco; Mr. Jay Thomas Watson, California/Nevada Regional Director of The Wilderness Society; Mr. George Whitmore, Chairman of the Sierra Club, Yosemite Committee, Fresno, California.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for taking the panel. I will ask, though I know it has been a couple of hours already, we are going to try to wind this hearing up as fast as we can, but, with you, still need to get all the information on the record. So if we can have it quiet, I would sure appreciate it.

We will begin with you, Mr. Minault. Thank you very much and welcome to the Committee. You do have 5 minutes of not stopping you. So summarize up and take it for 5, please. Please begin.

STATEMENT OF PAUL MINAULT, NORTHERN CALIFORNIA REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE ACCESS FUND, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Mr. MINAULT. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My name is Paul Minault, Northern California Coordinator for The Access Fund. The Access Fund is America's largest national climbers organization. And I am pleased to submit this testimony for inclusion in the public record.

Our testimony concerns the failure of the Park Service to provide campgrounds within Yosemite National Park as set forth in the Yosemite General Management Plan. The Access Fund respectfully recommends that the National Park Service replace campsites lost to flooding and bring the total number of campsites in the valley up to the level prescribed in the 1980 Yosemite General Management Plan.

We submitted extensive comments on the Valley Implementation Plan, the Yosemite Valley Plan, the Merced River Plan and the Lodge Plan with a particular reference to the need for more

camping opportunities in Yosemite. These comments were too long to attach, but I have brought copies of them with me for reference and for any member of the audience who would like to see them.

We also submitted suggestions to the consultant team preparing the Parkwide Out of Valley Campground study. And much of our comment focused not only on the numbers, which we have talked about today, but on the values which support camping and which we feel were not adequately discussed in the valley plan or represented in the Park Service planning documents.

In our letter to Chip Jenkins of the Park Service dated July 11, 1999, which is a part of our package, we pointed out that the park is almost 1,000 campsites short of the number called for in the 1980 General Management Plan with a shortfall in Yosemite—it will not be a shortfall after the plan is completed, but a shortfall in Yosemite Valley of almost 300 sites. We feel strongly that these campsites should be built as soon as possible to comply with the 1980 GMP.

Let me say something about the values which we feel support these numbers that we recommend. The National Park Service bible, the Management Policies 2001 version, states that it is the policy of the Park Service to encourage visitor activities that foster an understanding of and appreciation for park resources and values, or that promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to, park resources.

In our comments of the Valley Plan, we listed the ways in which camping enhances the visitor experience and furthers these values. First, we pointed out that camping is a form of recreation unlike staying in developed accommodations which is a form of leisure. I think that is an important distinction.

Second, camping promotes a closer relationship to park resources than any other form of overnight accommodation, furthering the park value which we discussed a moment ago.

Third, camping distances the visitor from the commercial values of comfort and convenience, from the expression of social status through consumption that pervade American society. Camping brings the visitor closer to nature, the simple necessities of daily life, and the way people lived in the past.

Fourth, camping is democratic. In campgrounds, social distinctions account for little, and camping has the potential to bring people together in shared appreciation of the natural surroundings in a manner that reduces social barriers.

The Nation's great parks present an opportunity to be a force for social equality. Unfortunately, the lodging picture in Yosemite preserves the social distinctions of the greater society rather than leveling them, which we believe should be a goal of the parks.

Fifth, camping is inherently communal. Campers have an enhanced opportunity to associate with other people, develop new relationships, and broaden their social horizons. Unfortunately, the Valley Plan largely ignored these values with the result that camping suffered the loss of 300 campsites through the Valley Plan. Instead, the park now emphasizes exclusive and expensive lodging over traditional camping accommodations that are more in line with NPS management policies.

We also pointed out the need for the Park Service to coordinate the development of new camping facilities with the national forests outside the park. In recent years the national forest has eliminated approximately 50 campsites along the Merced River west of the park, and just last fall Inyo National Forest closed all the informal camping areas along Highway 120 east of the park and along the road to Saddlebag Lake, eliminating about 100 informal overnight parking and camping areas.

These actions have increased demand for camping outside the park and need to be taken into account in the park's planning for new campgrounds.

The Yosemite Valley Plan noted that over 1,200 new lodging units are proposed for construction outside the park. No new campgrounds were proposed, however. This suggests to us that the park should focus on developing new campgrounds and shift the provision of developed accommodations to the private sector outside the park.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Minault, I am enjoying your testimony. If you could submit, however, I promised I would stick to this rule.

Mr. MINAULT. I am done. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Minault follows:]

Statement of Paul Minault, Northern California Regional Coordinator, The Access Fund

Dear Chairman Radanovich and Members of Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands:

The Access Fund, America's largest national climbers organization, is pleased to submit this testimony for inclusion into the public record regarding the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan. Specifically, this testimony concerns the failure of the National Park Service to provide campgrounds within Yosemite National Park as set forth in the Yosemite General Management Plan ("GMP"). The Access Fund respectfully recommends that the National Park Service replace campsites lost to flooding and bring the total number of campsites in the Valley up to the level prescribed in the Yosemite GMP.

THE ACCESS FUND

The Access Fund is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit advocacy group representing the interests of approximately one million rock climbers and mountaineers in the United States. We are America's largest national climbing organization with over 15,000 members and affiliates. The Access Fund's mission is to keep climbing areas open, and to conserve the climbing environment. For more information about the Access Fund, log on to www.accessfund.org.

THE ACCESS FUND HAS BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN YOSEMITE PLANNING

The Access Fund submitted extensive comments on the Valley Implementation Plan, Yosemite Valley Plan, Merced River Plan, and Lodge (Camp 4) Plan with a particular reference to the need for more camping opportunities in Yosemite Valley. These comments were too long to attach, but I have brought copies of them with me for your reference. We also submitted suggestions to the consultant team preparing the Parkwide Out of Valley Campground Study which are in your attachments

YOSEMITE HAS A SHORTFALL OF 1,000 CAMPSITES, 300 OF THEM IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

In our letter to the Chip Jenkins of the Park Service dated July 11, 1999, which is also attached, we pointed out that the park is almost 1,000 campsites short of the number projected for the park in the 1980 Yosemite General Management Plan, with a shortfall in Yosemite Valley of almost 300 sites. We feel strongly that these

campsites should be built as soon as possible to comply with Yosemite National Park planning documents and National Park Service Management Policies

CAMPING FURTHERS PARK MANAGEMENT POLICIES

National Park Service management policy is to "encourage visitor activities that . . . foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, park resources and values, or will promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to park resources." Management Policy 2001- 8.2 Visitor Use (emphasis added). In our comments to the Valley Plan, we listed the ways in which camping enhances the visitor experience, furthers park values, and promotes the enjoyment of Yosemite National Park through a direct association with park resources.

- First, we pointed out that camping is a form of recreation, unlike lodging in developed accommodations, which is a form of leisure.
- Second, camping promotes a closer relationship to park resources than any other form of overnight accommodation.
- Third, camping distances the visitor from the commercial values of comfort and convenience and the expression of social status through consumption that pervade American society. Camping brings the visitor closer to nature, the simple necessities of daily life, and the way people lived in the past.
- Fourth, camping is democratic. In campgrounds, social distinctions account for little, and camping has the potential to bring people together in shared appreciation of their natural surroundings in a manner that reduces social barriers. The nations' great parks present an opportunity to be a force for social equality. Unfortunately, the lodging picture in Yosemite preserves the social distinctions of the greater society, rather than leveling them, which we believe should be a goal of the parks.
- Fifth, camping is inherently communal. Campers have an enhanced opportunity to associate with other people, develop new relationships, and broaden their social horizons. Unfortunately, the Valley Plan largely ignored these values, with the result that camping suffered the loss of 300 campsites in the Valley. Instead, the park now emphasizes exclusive and expensive lodging over traditional camping accommodations that are more in line with NPS management policies.

THE PARK SERVICE SHOULD COORDINATE CAMPGROUND PLANNING WITH NATIONAL FORESTS OUTSIDE THE PARK

We also pointed out the need for the Park Service to coordinate the development of new camping facilities with the National Forests outside the park. In recent years, the Sierra National Forest Service has eliminated approximately 50 campsites along the Merced River west of the park. Just last fall, the Inyo National Forest closed all the informal camping areas along Highway 120 east of the park and along the road to Saddlebag Lake, eliminating about 100 informal overnight parking and camping areas. These actions have increased demand for camping opportunities inside the park and need to be taken into account in the park's planning for new campgrounds.

PARK PLANNING FOR OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS SHOULD FOCUS ON NEW CAMPGROUNDS AND SHIFT DEVELOPED LODGING TO THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR OUTSIDE THE PARK

The Yosemite Valley Plan noted that over 1200 new lodging units are proposed for construction outside the park. Valley Plan at II–55 - II–57. No new campgrounds were proposed, however. This suggests to us that the park should focus on developing new campgrounds and shift the provision of developed accommodations to the private sector outside the park. Such a shift is supported by the values we discussed earlier.

Chairman Radanovich and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands, the Access Fund appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on the Yosemite National Park Parkwide Out of Valley Campground Study. We hope you will acknowledge the problems caused by the 1000 campsite shortfall in Yosemite National Park and direct the National Park Service to construct new campsites.

Thank you,

Attachments: January 11, 1999 letter to Chip Jenkins

[ACCESS FUND LOGO
ON ORIGINAL]

120 Montgomery Street
Suite 2290
San Francisco, CA 94104
(415) 397-6152
(415) 788-5768 (fax)
pminault@earthlink.net

January 11, 1999

Chip Jenkins
Chief of Strategic Planning
and Partnerships
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

Re: Campground Planning and Development under the 1980 Yosemite General Management Plan

Dear Chip:

I am writing to ask you to give serious consideration in the upcoming Valley Plan to achieving the goals of the 1980 Yosemite General Management Plan ("the GMP") for the number of campsites in Yosemite Valley.

To assist you in that endeavor, I have prepared the attached chart analyzing campground removal and construction since the preparation of the GMP in 1980. Mike Osborne, the park's campground manager, has been of invaluable assistance to me in compiling and reviewing this information. For Yosemite Valley, the Tioga Road corridor, and other areas of the park, the chart shows the number of camp sites existing in 1980, the changes to these numbers proposed in the GMP, the actual number of camp sites existing today, and the discrepancy between present numbers of camp sites and the numbers proposed in the GMP.

The chart shows that the park is woefully short of camp sites. As you can see from the last page of the chart, parkwide there is a shortfall of almost 1,000 campsites below the number proposed in the GMP. The first page of the chart shows that in Yosemite Valley alone, the present shortfall is almost 300 sites. The 1997 draft Valley Implementation Plan would have reduced this shortfall to 104 sites, but that would still be 14% below the levels called for in the Valley by the GMP. We would like to see this shortfall reduced to zero in the final Valley Plan. We believe this is possible if more emphasis is given to the construction of walk-in camp sites (including the expansion of Camp 4 to its original size) and if the number of RV campsites in the Valley is reduced.

If the development of replacement campsites competes directly for space with the development of replacement lodging in Yosemite Valley, we believe it is also appropriate for the park to accord higher priority to the provision of campsites than of developed lodging. The reason is that camping brings the visitor into a closer relationship with park resources, reduces dependence on developed lodgings and dining facilities, and focuses the attention of the visitor away from developed recreational facilities (such as the swimming pools, ice rink, and trinket shops) and more towards the park's natural resources. By reducing visitors' reliance on developed facilities, camping helps fulfill the basic goals of the GMP to reduce development in the Valley, reclaim priceless natural beauty, and promote visitor understanding and enjoyment of park resources.

Giving priority to developing new and replacement campsites would also reduce the growing imbalance between camping and developed lodging facilities in the greater Yosemite region. Since 1980 when the GMP was prepared, there has been substantial construction of developed visitor lodging along the three highways leading into the Valley from the west, as well as at the Yosemite West enclave, while at the same time there has been a substantial and permanent loss of both formal and informal camp sites along the Highway 140/Merced River corridor leading to the Valley due to flood damage and increased regulation by the Forest Service and private land owners. In particular, the Sierra National Forest Service has decided not to rebuild the campground at Indian Flat on Highway 140, which was damaged by flooding, and has also restricted informal camping along Incline Road in the same area. The Valley Plan should weigh the growth in developed lodgings and the concurrent loss of camping opportunities in the greater Yosemite region in setting priorities for the development of campsites and developed lodgings in Yosemite Valley.

The Access Fund very much appreciates your considering our concerns in regard to the shortage of camp sites in Yosemite Valley and the park in general. Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions regarding this letter or the enclosed information.

Sincerely yours,

[Original signed by]

Paul Minault
Regional Coordinator
for Northern California

Enclosure

cc: (all w/encl)
Sally Moser, Executive Director
Sam Davidson, Senior Policy Analyst
Rick Thompson, Access and Acquisitions Director
Armando Menocal, Past President
Mike Osborne, NPS Yosemite Campground Manager
Dick Duane, Esq.
Joyce Eden, Sierra Club
Jay Watson, The Wilderness Society
Brian Huse, The National Parks and Conservation Association
Bob Hansen, The Yosemite Fund

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Abshez, welcome to the Committee and please begin your testimony?

STATEMENT OF ALLAN ABSHEZ, CAMPING ENTHUSIAST, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Mr. ABSHEZ. Good morning. Before I start, I hope you have had a chance to take a look at the photographs I submitted, if you ask me about them in the Q and A. Also up there on the easel is a photograph of myself and my wife. My wife is not able to be here today, but that was shot on a 2-week backpacker in Tuolumne Meadows on the occasion we decided to become parents.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Terrific. We won't go into detail.

Mr. ABSHEZ. We won't go there.

Mr. Chairman and honorable Subcommittee members, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I am very honored to be part of this distinguished panel and sit side by side with The Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club and the Americans for Access. But I represent no organization and I am here only on behalf of myself, my family, my friends and people like me whose lives have been enriched by the spirit and tradition of Yosemite.

We owe this place a great personal debt. I am making a small installment payment on that debt by urging you to ensure that no one constrains access to the valley through planning efforts that offer little real benefit, but would diminish the education, enjoyment, and enrichment of millions.

I am appearing today as a typical Yosemite visitor, but I am no stranger to the complex issues you are facing. By profession, I am a lawyer and that is one of the reasons you have got to indulge me on the time limit here.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I will hold you to it, though.

Mr. ABSHEZ. OK.

I am specializing in land use planning and environmental law. I also serve on a planning commission in Los Angeles, where I reside. One of my proudest professional accomplishments though was my representation of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust for several years. Ansel Adams was always a personal hero to me, a person whose image could equally express the awesome power of granite mountaintops and the aisle of willows along a sun-speckled street.

I remember reading in his autobiography that Ansel first visited Yosemite when he was 14. My first visit occurred in 1968; I was 12 years old, and it was my first visit to any national park. My family and I stayed at the Lodge. My grandmother was along. My family had no camping experience or inclination and my grandmother was elderly and not able to get around well. Had the accommodations at the Lodge not been available we might have passed over Yosemite entirely.

I remember the feeling of walking to the Lodge cafeteria in the pine-scented air and looking up at the blue sky and amazing cliffs each morning. I felt as if I were standing in the most magnificent cathedral in the world.

Why do I remember this feeling so vividly? Because it is the same feeling I experienced this morning and experience every morning that I wake up in Yosemite. It is an importance that

deeply touches the soul. Members of the Subcommittee, I hope that you will ensure that we restore the facilities necessary to let people have that extraordinary experience. You can do that and protect the park. That is the point of everything in my testimony.

While I was in high school, I attended the Yosemite Institute in the valley. When I was 16, my friends and I slipped our parental leashes and we rode the Greyhound bus here to camp at the upper river campground. As campers we were largely buffoons, but we were enthusiastic and were willing to tolerate a moderate level of discomfort. Camping in Yosemite Valley offered us the attraction, but more importantly, the opportunity to learn and mature. Like it was for Ansel Adams, like it is for so many others, Yosemite Valley was our schoolroom.

During college, I visited the valley every year and sometimes several times a year. Sometimes I camped in the valley for fun. At other times it was all I could afford. Yosemite Valley became my jumping-off point to explore other parts of the park. I began with no experience or equipment to speak up of and made every foolish mistake in the book.

In his autobiography, Ansel Adams tells the same story. During his first visit to the valley, Ansel Adams and his family lodged at Camp Curry. He later camped and made short hikes out of the valley. He was a beginner and had the same awkward misadventures as all beginners do. It was only in 1920 after several visits to the valley that he made his first high Sierra trip under the supervision of an early mentor, Francis Holman.

I grew and took on greater challenges, too. When I was a sophomore at Cal, I thought I would try winter backpacking. That trip ended in my being carried out of the back country with hypothermia. I recovered, but I certainly learned a lesson in humility. By the time I graduated college, I took many wondrous destinations throughout the back country.

Together with my family and friends, I have enjoyed most of the experiences the park has to offer and have stayed at every type of accommodation here. I learned how to ski at Badger Pass from Nick Fiori, another living legend. I cross-country-skied, snowshoed, rock-climbed, rafted, fished most everywhere that offered a decent prospect, skated on Glacier Point and swam every lake whose temperature I could tolerate.

I have ridden into the back country on mules. Let us not forget mules and horses in all of this. I have had my food stolen by a bear in the upper reaches of Tuolumne Meadows even though I hung my sacks according to the Park Service guidelines, or so I thought. The rest of the trip was a hungry one and to this day I still resent the bear who stole my food.

In 1985, I brought my future wife to the valley and proposed marriage. The park has since been the scene of many memorable experiences of our family life.

The reason I relate these experiences is not just that they are important to me. They are the stuff that lifelong conservationists are built from and they are offered in a wholly unique combination and setting in Yosemite Valley. If we curtail the availability of these experiences or eliminate them, we not only deny people life enrichment, but we also destroy the future audience for our

national parks and wilderness areas. We will tend to create bus tours who are content to be bussed in and bussed out instead of independent and self-reliant outdoorsmen and women.

It is ironic that we in the conservation organizations, whose membership foundation is built upon people who simply enjoy the outdoors, would support reducing access to formative outdoor experiences. After all, Ansel Adams started as a basic family camper and became a conservation icon. Our goal should be to foster the creation of more people like Ansel Adams. Our goal should not be to shut people out of the valley and that is why this plan needs to be readjusted.

It is true that the 1997 floods washed away some eyesores, but it is shocking that the preparers of the plan choose the word "opportunity" to describe the devastation they wreaked. The plan presents itself as increasing visitor accommodations, but that is a distortion of the picture and therefore the final EIS really contains little information that is useful to public discussion.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Abshez, I am sorry you have got to wind up. Please know in the audience we are cutting these people short, but their full written testimony is for the record. So your testimony is in there.

Mr. ABSHEZ. Rigorous discussion and analysis reveals that the claimed benefits of the plan are questionable. It is true that the plan would revert certain areas to passive use, but if one seeks it, quietude in the valley has always been available in many wonderful places. And if it is true, as the preparers of the plan contend, visitation won't be diminished, then there is no reason to assume that popular destinations such as trails and waterfalls will be any less congested during peak periods.

Similarly, the ecological benefits of the plan are overstated. The areas formerly used for camping represent about 30 acres, less than 1 percent of the valley's 4,480 acres, but they provide opportunities for about 19,680 families to camp in the valley every summer.

People like me are relying on you to correct the plan by insisting the Park Service restore preflood camping and lodging opportunities while furthering resource protection. We can educate park visitors and plan to distribute valley campgrounds and sensitive riparian areas are respected. When asked to do so, people have acknowledged—

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Abshez—

Mr. ABSHEZ. I am going to close it.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Are you closing?

Mr. ABSHEZ. I am closing.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Good.

Mr. ABSHEZ. OK.

Mr. RADANOVICH. There will be plenty of time during Q and A.

Mr. ABSHEZ. OK. Two more paragraphs. When I do visit the valley crowded with families and children and fumbling campers and hikers, I smile. I see my own experience reflected in theirs. I think we all do. And I would like to think that Ansel Adams would smile, too.

This morning all of you enjoyed the soul-stirring experience of waking to stand in the most magnificent cathedral in the world. Let us restore that opportunity for others.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abshez follows:]

Statement of Allan J. Abshez, Camping Enthusiast, Los Angeles, California

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee with respect to the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan. I represent no organization, and will appear only on behalf of myself, my family, friends, and people everywhere like me. I will be testifying to repay a great personal debt to the place, tradition, people and spirit that are Yosemite Valley. I represent the many millions of people whose life-experience and life-outlook has been formed by their visits to Yosemite Valley and Yosemite National Park. We have a love affair with this place, and want as much as anyone to protect and preserve it. I hope my testimony on behalf of those people will provide a foundation for your oversight to ensure that no one constrains access to Yosemite Valley through planning efforts that offer little real benefit to the environment, and diminish the education, enjoyment, and enrichment of visitors to the crown jewel of our National Park system.

Background

I will be testifying as a typical Yosemite camper and enthusiast; one who today is a father, a husband, and a lawyer, and as one who has visited Yosemite many times as a student and a child. My law practice today focuses on land use planning, environmental law, and related litigation. I have been responsible for coordinating major planning efforts for university campuses, hospitals, art museums, movie studios, shopping centers, hotels, and residential and commercial developments. I have significant expertise in air, water quality, biotic, traffic and parking and historical issues. I serve on a community planning commission in Los Angeles, where I reside.

One of my proudest professional accomplishments though, was my representation of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust for several years. In fact, the primary reason I chose the first law firm for which I worked was that one of their clients was the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. I figured that even though they were a "corporate" law firm (you must understand that I was a graduate of Boalt Hall at U.C. Berkeley), they couldn't be all bad if they represented Ansel Adams. I was right.

Ansel Adams was a personal hero. My father had passed on to me a love of photography and art, which I combined with a passion for the mountains and wilderness. Ansel saw many things as I did. As the Trust's lawyer, I created its copyright protection program, and oversaw many of its licensing activities.

Ansel Adams first visited Yosemite Valley when he was fourteen. My first visit occurred in 1968, when I was 12 years old. It was also my first visit to any National Park. My family and I stayed at the Lodge. My grandmother was along. My family had no camping experience and my grandmother was elderly and not able to get around well. If the accommodations at the Lodge had not been available, our visit would not have been possible, and we might have passed-over Yosemite entirely.

I remember the feeling of walking to the Lodge cafeteria, breathing the fresh air scented with pine, and looking up at the blue sky and amazing cliffs surrounding me each morning. I felt as if I was standing in the most magnificent cathedral in the world. Why do I remember that feeling so vividly? Because it is the same feeling I experience every morning I have woken up in Yosemite. It's an experience that deeply touches the soul. Members of the Subcommittee, I hope that you and the National Park Service will ensure that as many people as possible are able to have that extraordinary experience. We can preserve the opportunity for that experience and protect the Park. That's the point of everything in my testimony.

While I was in high school, I attended the Yosemite Institute in the Valley. That kindled my interest in mountaineering. When I was 16, my friends and I slipped our respective parental leashes, and rode the Greyhound bus to camp in Yosemite Valley. We camped at the Upper River campground. As campers and hikers, we were largely buffoons, but we were enthusiastic and willing to tolerate a moderate level of discomfort. Camping in Yosemite Valley offered us the attraction, but more importantly the opportunity to learn and mature. Like it was for Ansel Adams, and like it is for so many others, Yosemite Valley was our school room.

I moved to Berkeley, California to attend college. Yosemite Valley became my jumping off point to explore other parts of the Park and the High Sierra. I visited the Valley every year, and sometimes several times a year. Sometimes, I camped in the Valley for fun. At other times, it was all I could afford. Because of its peaceful setting, Upper River was always my campground of choice, although I have probably camped in every campground in the Valley, including the Climbers' Camp.

I began exploring Yosemite National Park from the Valley base; hiking up and out of the Valley on every one of the trails beginning there. As a young backpacker, I made every mistake in the book. I began with no money and no equipment of which to speak. In his An Autobiography, Ansel Adams tells the very same story. During his first visits to the Valley, Ansel Adams and his family lodged at Camp Curry. He later camped and made short hikes out of the Valley. He had no real equipment or knowledge, and had the same awkward misadventures that I did. It was only in 1920, after several visits to the Valley that he made his first High Sierra trip under the supervision of his early mentor, Francis Holman. In the Valley, Holman could always be found at the river campground.

As I became more experienced, I took on the High Sierra with extended backpacking trips throughout Yosemite, Kings Canyon and surrounding National Forest lands. I studied the mountains as a librarian's assistant at the U.C. Berkeley Map Library. I camped in the summer and winter. When I was a sophomore at Cal, I was carried out of the backcountry with hypothermia one winter (boy, did I learn a lesson!). By the time I graduated college, I'd hiked to many wondrous destinations in the backcountry, which are infinite in number, and all of which I will never be able to see. I've hiked the marked trails and have navigated and clambered cross-country as well.

All of my friends had to suffer my passion for Yosemite and the mountains. Together with them, I've enjoyed most of the visitor experiences the Park has to offer and stayed at every type of accommodation here, including the campgrounds, Curry Village, Housekeeping, the Lodge, the Ahwanee, Wawona, and the High Sierra camps. I learned how to ski at Badger Pass from Nick Fiori, another living legend. I've cross-country skied and snow-shoed. I've rock climbed with the Yosemite Mountaineering school. I've rafted raftable portions of the Merced, and fished most everywhere that offered a decent prospect. I've skated in the Valley in the winter, and swam every lake whose temperature I could tolerate in the summer. I've ridden into the backcountry on mules, and plan to do a stock trip to the high county this summer with my family out of Red's Meadow in the eastern Sierra. Horses and mules can be a wonderful experience, and are part of the mountain tradition. I've had my food stolen by a bear in the upper reaches of Tuloumne Meadows even though I counter-weighted the stuff-sacks and hung them ten feet from the trunk and twelve feet off the ground (or was it the other way around). I starved the rest of the trip (it was a solo hike), but refused to leave out of resentment against the bear.

The reason I relate these experiences is not just that they are important to me. They are the stuff that life-long conservationists are built-from. And they are offered in a wholly unique combination and setting in Yosemite Valley. If we curtail the availability of these experiences or eliminate them, we not only deny people life-enrichment, but we also destroy the future audience for our National Parks and wilderness areas. And as a nation, we will tend to create tourists who are content to be managed and "bussed-in" and "bussed-out," instead of independent and self-reliant outdoorsmen and women. It is ironic that organizations like the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society, whose membership foundation is built upon people who simply enjoy the outdoors, would now support reducing access to formative outdoor experiences.

After all, the classic outings of the Sierra Club are described by Ansel Adams in his An Autobiography with great enthusiasm as anything but "zero impact." Adams relates backcountry trips to magnificent settings featuring fifty or more mules, roaring bonfires, feasts, orchestras and plays staged in full costume. One would think that organizations with this rich heritage would be supportive of enhanced—not reduced—basic family and introductory camping. Ansel Adams started as a basic family camper and became a conservation icon. Our goal should be to foster the creation of more people like Ansel Adams.

To briefly conclude, and then on to the Yosemite Valley Plan. In 1985, I became engaged to my wife at an outlook on the Snow Creek trail in Yosemite Valley. At the time, I couldn't afford a diamond ring. In 1986, while on a two-week backcountry trip out of Tuloumne Meadows, my wife and I decided to become parents. I threatened to name my first daughter "Townsley" after the lake where we made the decision. Several years later we came back on a winter trip to the Valley, and I presented with my wife with a diamond ring in front of our kids during a day hike through the snow. When we lived closer to the Park, we celebrated my

wife's birthday (December 16th) at the Ahwanee dining room (the most beautiful dining room in California) every year. My kids (now 15 and 12) have grown up with the Park being a part of their life. My younger daughter, Natalie, caught her first keeper—an 18" rainbow—at Vogelsang Lake (at 10,500 feet). What a place to catch your first keeper. It was cooked-up for us at breakfast at Vogelsang High Sierra Camp. The whole dining room stood up and cheered Natalie when the fish was served.

The Yosemite Valley Plan

As a planner, a land use attorney, and a lover of Yosemite National Park, I've reviewed the plan before you today. The Yosemite Valley Plan contains many ideas that are commendable, but it is deficient in that it fails to restore sufficient visitor accommodations in the Valley. It is true that the 1997 floods washed-away some eyesores (floods always do), but it is shocking that the preparers of the Plan would choose the word "opportunity" to describe the devastation wreaked by the floods. See Executive Summary at Page 7.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Plan presents its Preferred Alternative as increasing the amount of visitor accommodations in the Valley. As many commentors to the EIS recognized, this is only technically true and not useful to meaningful public discussion.

The 1997 floods destroyed about 40% of the campsites in the Valley, and a significant number of hotel and cabin units as well. The Final EIS presents post-flood conditions as a baseline, and does not focus on what has been lost or what is necessary to replace it. Not even as an alternative. The Final EIS states that the Plan will increase the number of existing campsites in the Valley from about 475 to 500. But this is no increase at all. If you and the National Park Service implement the Preferred Alternative before you, you will permanently eliminate 40% of Yosemite Valley's historic camping sites.

The Plan's treatment of the Lodge is similarly deficient. The Plan does not discuss pre-flood conditions. Before the floods, there were approximately 495 rooms at the Lodge. According to National Park Service information, today there are only 245. The Plan proposes 251 units. Thus, if the Plan is implemented, approximately half of the accommodations at the Lodge will be lost forever.

The picture at Curry Village is not clear. Today according to internet information, there are approximately 628 guest accommodations (motel rooms, cabins and tent-cabins) at Curry Village. The Preferred Alternative suggests 487 future units; an apparent reduction of 141 units. Similarly, Housekeeping Camp is described as providing 266 tent-cabin units. The Preferred Alternative proposes 100; a 62% reduction.

If these assumed numbers are correct, the Plan will eliminate approximately half of the Valley's historic visitor accommodation capacity; approximately 325 campsites, 385 units at the Lodge and Curry Village, and 166 units at Housekeeping Camp.

I am fully aware that there are those who would affirmatively support reducing visitor access to the Valley because of their commitment to what they term "ecological values." However, most of those who espouse this viewpoint know that their reasoning and objectives would never be accepted by the public or by Congress. We entrust the great men and women of the Park Service the stewardship of the Parks so that current and future generations can enjoy them; a noble mission.

It is a shame then, that the Final EIS terms the 1997 floods an "opportunity." The only apparent opportunity in what was in fact a tragedy, was the "opportunity" to avoid confronting a serious public policy decision—an affirmative decision to decrease public access to Yosemite Valley—a decision that would never stand up to meaningful public discussion or analysis. For this reason, the Final EIS conveniently assumes there will be no impact on visitation levels if the Plan is implemented.

People like me are relying on you, as our elected representatives, to consider whether the Plan will in fact, reduce the access and enjoyment of visitors to the Valley. The only reasonable conclusion is that it will. Half of those historically able to experience an overnight stay in the Valley will be shut out and reduced to the status of "bus tourists."

You should be insisting that the Park Service investigate ways to restore and preserve the experience of a stay in Yosemite Valley while furthering resource protection. The Final EIS does not ask that question. For example, automobile management has been improved in the Valley over the past decades. We should be looking at and investing in more ways to reduce unnecessary automobile trips to Yosemite. We should be looking at ways to improve the Valley's air quality (particulate emissions) by, for example, controlling visitor campfires. We can do these things without

being anti-people. We can educate Park visitors, and plan and distribute Valley campgrounds, so that they respect sensitive riparian areas. When asked to do so, people have acknowledged and respected Yosemite's resources. That's part of Yosemite's tradition.

The Final EIS makes no real effort to analyze the planning, logistical and environmental issues that would be required for its Preferred Alternative to succeed (indulging the counter-intuitive assumption that the Plan would not cause visitation to be reduced). For example, there has been no real analysis of the ability of communities and areas outside of the Valley to successfully absorb the displaced level of overnight accommodations, or the environmental impacts of such displacement. Similarly, there has been no real analysis of the feasibility or timing of the transportation system (YARTS) that would be needed to successfully bring visitors to and from the Valley. The Final EIS simply states that these issues are beyond its scope. This is technical, but not true, planning. Hiding behind the procedural and scope limitations of the EIS process is just an excuse for failing to confront the obvious implication that if the Plan is implemented, many persons who would have otherwise visited the Valley will not come at all.

Moreover, the real benefits of the Plan are questionable. It is true that the Plan would revert historic accommodation sites to a more natural condition, and create more areas for passive use in the Valley. But, if one seeks quietude in the Valley, it has always been available at wonderful places away from the Valley's most notable features and destinations. Those who seek those places out know that. Further, if we indulge the Final EIS' assumption that the Plan will not diminish visitation, then there is no reason to assume that popular visitor destinations (trails, waterfalls, etc.) will be any less congested during peak visitation periods.

The real ecological benefits of the Plan, particularly as part of the bigger picture of the Park and regional ecosystem, are equally questionable. That is, of course, unless one assumes that the objective of the Plan is to decrease visitation to the Valley. Many areas to be restored are immediately adjacent, or proximate, to urbanized areas of the Valley. These areas will still both experience and be surrounded by visitation activity. The Valley is not and will never be a true wilderness area. Thus, it must be managed as most appropriate. While the appearance of certain areas of the Valley would admittedly be improved by the Plan, decreasing access cannot be truly justified on an environmental basis.

Conclusion

These days I do not often camp in Yosemite Valley. I am, in fact, somewhat crowd-averse and have learned to avoid the Valley during peak visitation periods. I also have acquired the interest and skill-set necessary to seek solitude and wilderness in other locations. Those who prefer to avoid Yosemite Valley's crowds can make the very same choice. They need not pressure the National Park Service to shut people out of Yosemite Valley. When I do visit Yosemite Valley crowded with families and children and fumbling campers and hikers, I smile. I see my own learning, love, and experience reflected in theirs. They are "in school." I hope they will go further into the outdoor experience and become life-long conservationists. I would like to think that Ansel Adams would smile too.

On the morning of April 22nd, each of you will enjoy the soul-stirring experience of rising from your slumber to stand in the most magnificent cathedral in the world. Let's restore the opportunity for that experience to as many people as possible. Please don't relegate Park visitors to "bus tourist" status. Let's recognize the value of Yosemite Valley as one of our nation's most important school rooms. There are many more Ansel Adams coming along. Let's put our resources and attention to work on solving Yosemite Park's real environmental issues and challenges. A second Yosemite Valley sits not far away beneath a reservoir. Someday, I would like to stroll through its woodlands and meadows, maybe camp there, and ponder the problem of dealing with the throngs who will want to come to experience it.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Please keep it to 5 minutes. I hate doing this, you guys, but we are going to be here until 4 o'clock.

STATEMENT OF JAY THOMAS WATSON, CALIFORNIA/NEVADA REGIONAL DIRECTOR, THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Mr. WATSON. Chairman Radanovich, members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of The Wilderness Society, thank you for the

opportunity to present testimony on the implementation of the landmark Yosemite Valley Plan.

While the 1997 floodwaters of the Merced River disrupted local businesses as well as the expectations of park visitors, there was a silver lining to the storm clouds that produced those floods: the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform into reality what had long been a grand but elusive vision for Yosemite.

To its credit, the Park Service seized that opportunity by writing the Yosemite Valley Plan. Intellectual honesty, rigorous analysis, and extensive public participation characterized that planning process, including 18 public hearings, 11,000 comments and countless walk-throughs with Park Service staff regularly scheduled during the week. Virtually every newspaper in the State supports the Valley Plan including even today's Fresno and Modesto Bees.

The final plan was adopted on December 29, 2000. On that day the Park Service presented the American people a plan that struck an elegant balance between protecting Yosemite's natural and cultural resources and providing the visitor use and enjoyment. The Wilderness Society is pleased to see the Park Service moving forward on implementing the plan, but more must be done still. Staffing assignments, preplanning, and sequencing of decisionmaking must be initiated if longer-term transportation and parking changes are to be realized.

With respect to upper and lower river campgrounds, the habitat restoration opportunities presented there are the single largest restoration component of the plan, and it would restore some of the most biologically productive habitat types found in Yosemite Valley, as well as providing new and different day-use opportunities.

Similarly, the reduction and centralization of day-use parking at Camp 6 is a vital component of the plan. Indeed, habitat restoration and transportation changes are the heart and soul of the Valley Plan and neither should be compromised.

In adopting the final plan, the Park Service showed its responsiveness to public comment. Both campgrounds and lodging best demonstrate that responsiveness. Under the final plan, assuming a 2-night stay during maybe the most crowded 4-month period in the summer, 94,000 families can camp inside Yosemite National Park, but the Park Service isn't stopping there. They have found a way to locate another 204 sites outside the valley, boosting total camping opportunities to over 106,000 in just 4 months. We support the addition of those additional sites outside of the valley.

Similarly, in direct response to public comment, the Park Service restructured the mix of total overnight opportunities in the plan to emphasize accommodations at the lower end of the cost scale. Under the plan, out of 1,461 total possible overnight stays in Yosemite Valley on any given day, a total of 1,179 are campsites, rustic tent cabins; and economy-scale cabins are 81 percent of all overnight accommodations.

Because of the Park Service's success in developing the Valley Plan, the future of Yosemite is bright. Some of the park employees that produced that plan are still here at the park. Others have moved on to other parks like Fort Clatsop, Channel Islands, and

Mt. Lassen. Wherever they are, the folks who produced this plan should be deeply proud of what they accomplished.

It has been 23 years since the Park Service set forth the vision for Yosemite and saw it embraced by the American people. Yosemite's time has come. Let us get the job done and done right as set forth in the final Yosemite Valley Plan. Reopening it and changing individual components of it will simply turn it into a house of cards or a set of dominos; the whole thing will come tumbling down because all the different components that we have talked about today are linked together. If you change one, it's going to affect another.

Just like John Muir said years ago, everything is hitched together, everything is hitched together in the Valley Plan, and like I said earlier, it did strike a delicate balance that has long been needed in Yosemite; and we look forward to its continued implementation. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Watson.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Watson follows:]

Statement of Jay Thomas Watson, California/Nevada Regional Director, The Wilderness Society

Chairman Radanovich, members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to join you here today in this Incomparable Valley. You have picked quite a location for this hearing—Half Dome as a backdrop, the sound of water rushing over Yosemite Falls—it is indeed a pleasure to present testimony on behalf of The Wilderness Society on the implementation of the landmark Yosemite Valley Plan.

It is hard to believe that it has been more than six years since the floodwaters of the Merced River passed through Yosemite Valley. While the 1997 flood caused a lot of damage, disrupting the lives and economic well-being of local residents and businesses, as well as the expectations of park visitors, there was a silver lining to the storm clouds that produced those floods—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform into reality what had long been a grand, but elusive vision for Yosemite.

Realizing that vision has indeed been elusive since it has been 23 years since it was first articulated to the American people in the 1980 General Management Plan for Yosemite National Park. The vision is captured in five key goals:

- Reclaim priceless natural beauty
- Allow natural processes to prevail
- Promote visitor understanding and enjoyment
- Markedly reduce traffic congestion
- Reduce crowding

In other words, a more natural Yosemite, where hydrological and other natural process operate freely, a Yosemite with less asphalt, fewer automobiles, less development, less congestion, a Yosemite with an improved and enhanced visitor experience.

Fortunately, the National Park Service seized upon the opportunity presented by the floods by launching a three-year planning process that culminated in the adoption of the Yosemite Valley Plan and the Merced River Plan. Intellectual honesty, rigorous analysis, and extensive and open public participation characterized these planning processes. At the end of the trail, on a bright but chilly November day, the Final Yosemite Valley Plan was formally announced by then Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt.

It is important to note that more than 10,000 comments were received on the Yosemite Valley Plan. In addition to public comments, the planning process was characterized by 18 public hearings and meetings in 18 locations and cities, regularly scheduled on-the-ground tours led by Park Service staff, written planning updates and newsletters, and extensive media coverage.

In other words, the Final Yosemite Valley Plan was the product of a comprehensive, open, and honest process that offered unprecedented opportunities and avenues for public review and input. To this day, the Park Service and the planning team deserves credit and applause, not only for the process they undertook, but also for the product they developed as well.

The Final Yosemite Valley Plan was duly adopted through a signed Record of Decision dated December 29, 2000. On that day, the National Park Service bestowed

a gift upon Yosemite Valley. Moreover, on that day, the Park Service showed that it had struck an elegant balance between protecting Yosemite's natural and cultural resources and providing for visitor use and enjoyment of a popular national park.

Accordingly, The Wilderness Society is pleased to see the Park Service moving forward with vigorously implementing the Yosemite Valley Plan. We support the projects currently moving forward—particularly the Yosemite Falls Project, the Cascades Dam Project, the acquisition of clean fuel shuttle vehicles, and the restoration to natural habitat of the area currently known as Upper and Lower River Campgrounds.

I would also like to state clearly that The Wilderness Society is unalterably opposed to reopening the plan to changes, particularly in the area of campgrounds, parking, and transportation.

With respect to Upper and Lower River Campgrounds, the habitat restoration opportunities presented there not only are the single largest restoration component of the entire plan, they also would restore some of the most biologically productive habitat types found in Yosemite Valley—riparian, wet meadow, and Black oak.

With respect to the proposed reduction and centralization of day-use parking to a 500-space lot at Camp Six, please understand that this also a vital component of the Final Yosemite Valley Plan and is of elemental importance if congestion is to be reduced in Yosemite Valley. It is not only an answer to those handful of days when gridlock is achieved, it is also an answer to the countless number of days during the visitor season when automobile congestion, while short of absolute gridlock, renders a visit to Yosemite Valley an exercise in frustration.

Indeed, habitat restoration and transportation changes are indeed the heart and soul of the Valley Plan. Neither must be compromised or undermined.

In adopting the final plan, the Park Service also showed its responsiveness to public comment by making significant changes in moving from draft to final. Two issues that continue to be hot topics perhaps best demonstrate this responsiveness—campgrounds and lodging.

Under the final plan, there would be 500 campsites in the valley. Assuming a two-night stay, that is enough for 30,000 families or groups of friends to camp out over a four-month summer camping season. Add in the 1,065 other campsites within the boundaries of Yosemite National Park, and there is enough for a total of 94,000 camping opportunities during a four-month period.

But the Park Service isn't proposing to stop there, the agency has found a way to locate another 204 sites in the park, yet outside the valley—boosting total family camping opportunities to 106,140 two-night stays over a four month period.

Similarly, in direct response to public comment, the Park Service restructured the mix of total overnight opportunities in Yosemite to emphasize accommodations at the lower end of the cost scale.

Under the final plan, there will be a total of 1,461 total overnight accommodations in Yosemite Valley. Out of this total, 1,179 are campsites, rustic tent cabins, and economy-scale cabins, or 81 percent of all overnight accommodations. Only 282 beds so to speak, or 19 percent would be at the upper cost levels.

In other words, the Park Service has more than adequately found a way to accommodate camping and low cost overnight accommodations in Yosemite. While we support this effort, we will vigorously oppose any modifications to the Yosemite Valley Plan to increase camping any further in Yosemite Valley.

It is time to realize that Yosemite Valley is a finite place. Over the years, far too much development and infrastructure was crammed into the valley. The Yosemite Valley Plan sought to reverse that trend. It is exciting to see it being implemented.

But more work needs to be done. In addition to the implementation activities currently underway, I would like to touch on several other efforts that must be started sooner, rather than later.

As I mentioned earlier, changes in transportation and parking are vital to the success of the Valley Plan and to the future of Yosemite. Staffing assignments, preplanning activities, and up-front analysis, and sequencing of decision-making must be initiated now to facilitate a smooth transition to centralized parking and reduced day-use parking.

Similarly, with the help of this committee, the National Park Service must see its authorities expanded by legislation to enable fuller engagement in the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System or YARTS. While the Valley Plan is not dependent on YARTS, the success of YARTS could significantly reduce overall implementation costs. Several factors are converging during the next few years that will increase ridership on YARTS—the ramping up of UC–Merced, employees moving out of Yosemite Valley into surrounding communities, reduced day-use parking in the Valley, and the increased activities of the UC Merced/Sierra Nevada Research Station.

YARTS was a homegrown idea that continues to deserve support. To this day, I applaud Mariposa, Merced, and Mono Counties for having the courage of their convictions to stick with YARTS. Their belief that local, state, and Federal Governments can work together to solve a common problem or serve a shared purpose is an inspiration. And yet, additional funding is needed through TEA III legislation, as are additional Park Service authorities similar to what the agency has at Zion National Park.

Because of the Park Service's success in developing the Yosemite Valley Plan and the Merced River Plan, the future of Yosemite is bright. Think about it, in just a short time, an unsightly and dangerous dam will be removed from the Wild and Scenic Merced River, a parking lot removed and the Lower Yosemite Falls area restored and made accessible to people with disabilities so they can feel the spray of Yosemite Falls in their faces, the clean fuel shuttle fleet expanded, congestion relieved, and one day soon, vital habitat restored along the Merced River.

There is much to cheer about. There is much to be thankful for. And there are people in the National Park Service who are true heroes of public service. Some of them continue to work at Yosemite, some have moved on to other parks like Fort Clatsop, Channel Islands, and Mt. Lassen Volcanic.

Wherever they are, the folks who produced this plan should be fiercely proud of their accomplishment. I am pleased to see the Park Service embrace and implement the plan. On behalf of The Wilderness Society, I ask that the Park Service, with the full support of this committee, do even more by acting now on the tasks necessary to realize the full promise of the Valley Plan—promises that will only be realized when the full Yosemite Valley Plan is implemented, not just those components represented by the fifteen or so projects currently under way.

It has been 23 years since the National Park Service set forth a majestic vision for Yosemite and saw it embraced by the American people. Yosemite's time has come. Let's get the job done and done right as set forth in the Final Yosemite Valley Plan. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Whitmore, welcome to the Committee and please begin your testimony.

STATEMENT OF GEORGE WHITMORE, CHAIRMAN, YOSEMITE COMMITTEE, SIERRA CLUB, FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

Mr. WHITMORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, for having invited us to testify here in the Yosemite Valley, the heart of the crown jewel of the entire national park system. You will be glad to know that I have truncated my summary. I will hit just the major points in hopes of encouraging more questions.

From the very beginning, we have found some things in the Valley Plan which we like and some things which we believe are not desirable. Being human, we tend to focus on the negative, which you will find in our written testimony. But something we need to make clear is that we believe the plan can be improved without throwing it out and starting over.

Using the plan as a starting point, we need to move on, evaluating individual actions on their merits. We need to implement the less controversial provisions first, leaving the more questionable ones for later consideration. The point has already been made; we would like to emphasize that we agree with it.

There are a lot of simple, inexpensive, low-impact measures that would significantly reduce the perceived need for massive, costly, and harmful actions called for in the Valley Plan. And some examples have been given, like redesigning both intersections and better directional signing.

There has been relatively little mention of a day-use reservation system. For us, that is a major issue. We think that it would go

a long way toward dealing with the problems, both real and perceived. By directing people away from the peak periods, we feel will it would vastly reduce the perceived need for massive parking lots and bussing systems that probably would result in a net increase in annual visitation because people would be assured of getting in and would find their visit more enjoyable. But that does assume that a reasonable number of slots would be set aside on a first-come-first-serve basis, ensuring that people would usually get in even if they did not have a reservation.

We feel that North Side Drive should not be closed because this would lead inevitably to the widening of South Side Drive, and we find the widening of South Side Drive totally unacceptable. As I think anyone who looks carefully as they drive along there would realize, it cannot be widened without massive damage.

One point that might seem minor, but I will mention it because I think it is symptomatic of a lot of the problems that are occurring and will occur in implementing the Valley Plan, we feel that the realignment of North Side Drive in the Yosemite Lodge vicinity is not necessary. It would have been possible to design or redesign the problem for a wide intersection without the damage which is being done by the Lower Fall project and without moving overnight accommodations closer to the rock falls as is being planned.

Just to go on the record, we do support efforts, including those by organizations such as YARTS, to address regional transportation issues which affect Yosemite, provided those efforts advance the goals of the 1980 General Management Plan.

One of the biggest deficiencies of the Valley Plan is its failure to address the ever-increasing demand for access to the valley by highly polluting and noisy tour buses. It is inconsistent to focus on getting rid of cars while doing nothing to prevent the polluting intrusion by buses of all kinds, including tour buses.

Expansion of the valley shuttle routes to the west end of the valley, as called for in the Valley Plan, should be implemented sooner rather than later and most certainly before making it even more difficult for people to use their cars. We strongly feel that no more day-use parking should be removed without providing suitable alternatives to use of the private automobile.

And as far as campgrounds, my last point, we support the decision to restore the Upper and Lower River campground sites to natural conditions. We also support the expansion of additional camping outside Yosemite Valley as suggested by recent studies. Providing free shuttle service for outlying campgrounds into the valley would greatly enhance the appeal of these campgrounds and would fit well with expansion of the valley shuttle to the west end of the valley.

So again we thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to take any questions.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I thank the panelists. Thank you, Mr. Whitmore for your testimony.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Whitmore follows:]

Statement of George W. Whitmore, Chairman, Yosemite Committee, Sierra Club

INTRODUCTION.

We appreciate having been invited to testify before the Subcommittee.

OVERVIEW of the Valley Plan and associated problems.

A. Too much is being done too quickly.

A chaotic situation has been created wherein so much is being attempted so quickly that it seems inevitable that one project will end up conflicting with another, or simply create more problems because other things should have been done first.

As an example, we cite the Lower Yosemite Fall project. Replacement parking for the tour busses ultimately is supposed to be created behind the Village area, but that project is not even being mentioned. In the meantime the tour busses will be shunted from one temporary site to another in the Lower Fall area because their previous parking is being removed. And, continuing a long tradition, more automobile parking is being removed without any improvement in the Valley shuttle bus service to facilitate a transition to less reliance on private autos.

B. Problems with public notification and input.

Adding to the chaos, the Park Service keeps asking for public input, but it is difficult for the public to be aware of what is happening. So it's hardly surprising that they don't have enough information to comment in a rational manner.

The Park Service has been conducting a series of Open Houses on their planning and projects. These offer an immense amount of information and are very useful. But they have almost all been during the week and during the day, so very few people would be able to attend them even if they were aware that the event was occurring. (There will be another one on Wednesday, the day after this hearing, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.)

The Park Service relies excessively on their web site. Many people simply are not in the habit of getting their information this way. There needs to be more use of mailings to update the public on projects, planning, and comment deadlines.

C. Potential problems because of litigation.

Another reason for slowing the pace of development in the Valley is because litigation over the Merced River Plan still has not been resolved. It is currently before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the likely outcome is not at all clear. The River Plan is supposed to provide a foundation for the Valley Plan (as directed by a District Court judge), and projects now underway might have to be placed on hold if the Circuit Court should find even one problem with the River Plan. Particularly if that one problem happens to be the failure to "address user capacity" as called for by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. That issue alone could pull the underpinnings out from much of what is in the Valley Plan.

D. Simple measures would yield large results.

Much of the development called for by the Valley Plan would not be necessary if simple steps were taken to deal with congestion. There are a few problem road intersections which have been allowed to fester for decades. Why not redesign those intersections instead of turning the whole Valley upside down? Again, inadequate or confusing directional signs has been a problem for decades. Instead of providing better signs, the Park Service points to the confused drivers going around and around and says the solution is to get rid of the drivers and their cars.

E. Day-use reservation system: simple and effective.

And the most obvious solution of all to deal with the congestion which occurs a relatively small portion of the year would be to implement a day-use reservation system with a portion of the slots being available on a first-come-first-served basis. That way those who need to be assured of getting in on a specific date would have that assurance, while those who prefer a more spontaneous approach would probably still get in. Most of the time there is simply not a problem of too many people or too many cars.

There is much anecdotal evidence that many people don't come because they think it is crowded, or they won't be able to get in, or they won't be able to drive their car in. A reservation would ensure their getting in, and would steer them away from the times that do tend to be crowded. We suspect that a reasonably implemented day-use reservation system would actually reverse the continuing decline in annual visitation, as well as improve the quality of the visitor's experience.

We hasten to point out that the Valley Plan actually moved AWAY from the concept of a day-use reservation system. The idea was implied in the 1980 General Management Plan, but that seminal beginning was deleted by amendment through the Valley Plan process. It is one of the reasons that we are less than enthusiastic about the Valley Plan.

This action of the Valley Plan was actually in contravention of the Park Service's own regulations, which direct that every unit of the National Park System address the carrying capacity issue. This requirement was brought out in the General Accounting Office's November 15, 2002 report on transportation projects in the National Park System ("National Park Service: Opportunities to Improve the Administration of the Alternative Transportation Program").

OTHER TRANSPORTATION ISSUES in addition to those mentioned above.

A. South Side Drive widening and North Side Drive closure.

While it is not on the table yet, we dread the day that the Park Service starts widening South Side Drive in anticipation of closing North Side Drive. At present, South Side Drive (as well as North Side Drive) provides two lanes of one-way traffic, making for the safe and pleasant movement of movement of different types of vehicles in one direction. Faster and slower—autos, busses and bicycles—all are accommodated smoothly.

In order to move traffic as well if it were two-way, as called for in the Valley Plan, four lanes would be required. Huge numbers of trees would have to be removed, and an ugly swath of asphalt inviting high speeds would take their place. The very idea is an abomination which never should have found its way onto paper. To keep it at two lanes (one in each direction) would result in gross traffic congestion, a high accident rate, and an unpleasant visitor experience.

And all this because someone thought it would be a good idea to close North Side Drive to traffic. JUST LEAVE THINGS ALONE! This is a prime example of failure to anticipate that "restoration" of North Side Drive would inevitably result in gross destruction of natural values and quality of the visitor experience on South Side Drive.

B. Realignment of North Side Drive in vicinity of Yosemite Lodge.

Again, why can't it just be left alone? Because the Lower Fall project has already committed the Park Service to another project which doesn't make sense. The four-way problem intersection could easily have been fixed without a massive realignment of North Side Drive, or moving overnight lodging closer to the rockfall zone. The entire Lower Fall, Lodge redevelopment, and North Side Drive realignment complex of projects is an example of planning run amuck. A massive urban redevelopment project, without regard for the fact that this is a national park.

C. Segment "D" of the El Portal road (Highway 120/140 junction to Pohono Bridge).

While it is not on the table yet, and the environmental reviews have not been started, it is quite clear that the Park Service has every intention of raising this segment of road to the same standard as the newly completed section. And this is in spite of the fact that the gradients and curves that provided the rationale for the other construction do not exist on Segment "D". Although portions of the road require stabilization because of flood damage, this could be accomplished without the massive impacts to the landscape that would be required if the road were reconstructed to the same standard as that already done. Rather than a blind insistence on uniform widths just for the sake of uniformity, we ask that the road not be rebuilt except as necessary for safety.

D. YARTS.

Because there continues to be misunderstanding as to the Sierra Club's attitude toward YARTS, we wish to make it clear that we support efforts, including those by organizations such as YARTS, to address regional transportation issues which affect Yosemite provided those efforts advance the goals of the 1980 General Management Plan. Those goals include reduction of traffic congestion, reduction of overcrowding, and promotion of visitor enjoyment.

We should also add that we strongly urge that transportation systems be implemented in such a way as to make progress toward cleaner air.

E. Tour (excursion) busses.

One of the biggest deficiencies in the Valley Plan is its failure to address the ever-increasing demand for access to the Valley by tour busses. The Plan makes much of the problems which are perceived to be caused by autos, with Draconian restrictions on their use. Yet it simply ignores the potentially far worse problem which will be caused by unlimited numbers of highly polluting and noisy tour busses.

It is our understanding that the Park Service has the authority to regulate tour bus access to the Park, and could require that the busses meet specific emission standards as a condition of entry. If the Park Service does not have that authority, it seems that enabling legislation would be appropriate. If they already have the authority, it seems that they need to be encouraged to move in that direction.

And, to the extent that tour busses are carrying day-use visitors, our comments above regarding the wisdom of a day-use reservation system would apply to tour busses also.

F. Fuel cells.

We appreciate Mr. Radanovich's interest in seeking cleaner air for Yosemite, and we support a fuel cell project provided the goal is to make progress toward cleaner air in Yosemite. Apparently the project would not necessarily be for a bus; if it is for a stationary facility, we suggest Crane Flat because the electricity supplied there now is from a diesel generator.

G. Valley shuttle busses.

We would like to see the present fleet of old and polluting diesel busses replaced with vehicles which would match former Western Regional Director John Reynolds' vision of "the cleanest busses in the world", as articulated by him before this Subcommittee on March 27, 2001.

We are not convinced that a diesel powered electric hybrid bus would meet that vision. We would like to see a comparison of the alternatives, including propane powered electric hybrid, gasoline powered electric hybrid, and straight propane powered. If emissions data shows that diesel powered hybrids would be the cleanest and otherwise suitable, we could support that. But diesels have such a bad reputation that it seems hard to believe they would prove to be the cleanest just because they are put into a hybrid application. It seems as though the others would also be cleaner in the hybrid application, still leaving diesel at a relative disadvantage. Like I said, we would like an opportunity to review the comparative data, but have been having some difficulty getting the information.

H. Expansion of the Valley Shuttle Routes.

It would seem that this is one of the less controversial actions called for in the Valley Plan, and has the potential for reducing congestion and facilitating visitor access. Yet we see no indication that the Park Service has any plans for taking it up in the foreseeable future. We believe they have indicated that they would first have to build a series of stops complete with rest rooms, so they are looking upon it as a massive undertaking.

It seems self-evident that people drive all around the Valley now, stopping and getting out of their cars, at countless places where there are no rest rooms. We see no reason why public transportation could not be provided on the same basis.

I. Day-use parking.

As alluded to above, we find it highly inappropriate for the Park Service to continue to remove day-use parking without first providing suitable alternatives to the use of the private auto. Much of the congestion which actually occurs is the result of removal of parking, which has been ongoing for at least the last twenty years. We are usually in favor of removing asphalt, but not if it is simply going to get laid down somewhere else (as called for in the Valley Plan), and not if it results in degradation of the visitor experience (as called for in the Valley Plan)

IV. CAMPGROUNDS.

We support the decision in the 2000 Yosemite Valley Plan to restore the Upper and Lower River Campground sites to natural conditions. We also support the expansion of additional camping opportunities outside Yosemite Valley as suggested by recent Park studies. In particular, we support the 1980 General Management Plan provision that there be "in kind" replacement of camping opportunities to compensate for those which are removed from Yosemite Valley.

We note that there has been a continuing long-term process of reducing camping opportunities throughout the Park. It appears to be part of the pattern of phasing out lower-cost accommodations, and putting in higher cost accommodations, which has manifested itself so clearly in the Yosemite Valley Plan. Recognizing that it is difficult to find suitable locations for new camping opportunities in the Valley, we feel there is all the more reason to make every effort to find appropriate locations as near as possible outside the Valley.

Another way of compensating for the loss of campgrounds within the Valley would be to provide adequate shuttle service into the Valley from outlying campgrounds.

V. CONCLUSION.

We thank you for the opportunity of testifying.

Mr. RADANOVICH. We will move to the asking of questions by the panel.

Let me begin by asking Mr. Minault—thank you for being here—in your testimony, you stated that based on the 1980 General Management Plan, the valley has a shortfall of over 300 campsites. I am wondering how you would reconcile that with Mr. Watson's belief that the 500 campsites slated for the valley is sufficient.

Mr. MINAULT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our feeling is that the overnight accommodation pattern in the valley is skewed toward developed lodgings and that really the purpose of a park is to provide a recreational experience, that campgrounds do that, that developed lodgings are a form of leisure, as we have stated, and that there should be a shift to have a greater number of campgrounds and a gradually reduced number of developed lodgings.

And it is hard to identify a perfect number, and we won't attempt to do that, but in our comments on the Valley Plan we did show that there was room for increased campsites east of the Ahwahnee, and in fact, we would love to see the Ahwahnee cabins, which are the valley's single most space-consumptive and most expensive lodgings and which were untouched in the Valley Plan while campsites were radically reduced—we would love to see those cabins removed and the part of the valley east of the Ahwahnee made into a Royal Arches campground so that east of the side valley where you have the most sun and the Ahwahnee has its own waterfall could be shared with some of the riffraff who have enjoyed camping, like myself.

And, incidentally, we also believe that the Park Service's goal of adaptive management requires that they be a little bit more on the balls of their feet in handling NEPA documents, environmental documents, and that it is not necessary to bring the Valley Plan to a grinding halt in order to consider some of these campground options, that supplemental and environmental documents can be prepared and will have to be prepared as the plan goes on and as the concept of adaptive management is implemented and that additional campgrounds can be developed under those sorts of documents.

Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Mr. Abshez, we appreciated your testimony, what I have gotten from it, and I am sorry to have to cut all of you off, or most of it, on this, but I do have a question. I want to ask you, you mentioned in your testimony the discrepancies in the final Yosemite Valley Plan regarding the number of campsites. Can you elaborate on that for me?

Mr. ABSHEZ. Well, when I was referring to discrepancies, I was referring to the baseline, the assumed baseline of post-flood conditions.

One of the alternatives which was not included in the discussion was the alternative of restoring the level of accommodations and campsites. So we are 40 percent down in campsites. I think we are

approximately 500 units down in lodging, and yet there is no alternative that addresses restoration.

If you look at campsites alone, using the map that was developed by The Wilderness Society, which looks like a good map, the campsites that were lost represent opportunities for 19,680 family camping vacations every summer. And with regard to camping opportunities outside of the valley, there are lots of camping opportunities outside of the valley. They are available all over the Nation.

The valley is unique. There is no substitute for a camping experience in the valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Watson, I do have a question. It is my understanding that the mission of The Wilderness Society is to deliver to future generations an unspoiled legacy of wild places with all the precious values they hold, such as biological diversity, towering forest, rushing rivers, and safe, sweet, silent deserts.

Assuming that you stand by the mission, how can a family truly experience all that the Yosemite Valley and the park have to offer without somehow disturbing nature? Can you reconcile those things for us?

Please, no more comments from the audience. I have got to tell you it is just not appropriate for a congressional hearing.

Mr. WATSON. The Wilderness Society is fully supportive and thinks one of the highest and best uses of the national parks is for the public to visit them. That is in large part their purpose. It is balanced with sort of a dual mission in the organic act of protecting the underlying resources, but we do believe that restorative visits to the public lands are one of the highest and best uses of the public lands, including the parks.

We all have impact. Backpackers have an impact. I am not saying we can't have any impact in the Yosemite Valley. Clearly, there is impact. There is impact in the back country from a backpacker. So I recognize that there is impact through that use, and that is just the way it is.

It is the purpose of agencies to try to minimize that use, but not at the expense of locking people out, and I don't believe the purpose of the Valley Plan in any way is to lock people out of this park. It was to find a balance between habitat restoration and conservation and public use and enjoyment. Sure, you could have more people camping in Yosemite Valley. You could tear down the Lodge and build a campground and you wouldn't have as many hotel units. Under the plan it is interesting to note that while 300 campsites are being removed, lodging is decreasing by 262 units. So there is less of everything in the Yosemite Valley Plan, and camping has not been targeted for reductions at the expense of everything else.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Donna?

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Just two brief ones. Mr. Chairman and panelists, the goal here is sometimes difficult to achieve, but I want to commend you, Mr. Chairman, on the balance of the testimony that we have had here this morning.

Mr. Whitmore, both the Chairman and I have felt that our desire to improve the gateway community process, gateway process—in your written testimony you stated you didn't feel that it was ade-

quate. I thought we had established that with the 14-plus hearings, town meetings that were held around this particular plan, that it had been a very open process and there has been a lot of opportunity. Yet you don't seem to think the process has been as it should have been or provided the opportunity it could have.

Mr. WHITMORE. I don't recall having said that recently, but we have been involved in the past—well, in fact, currently—with litigation challenging basically the planning processes on both the Merced River Plan and the Valley Plan—well, not the Valley Plan yet; that was perhaps a Freudian slip. But the Merced River Plan and a couple prior to that, we were actually the plaintiffs on two prior lawsuits, but we are not on the current Merced River litigation.

So, yes, we did have some concerns with the process, but it mostly had to do with the internal procedures of the Park Service. I do not think that we ever felt that there had been an inadequate opportunity for the public to make its feelings known.

And I do feel that while I realize it may be beyond the purpose of this hearing, but I think that I should point out that we do feel the Park Service was quite responsive to public input following the close of comment period on the draft Valley Plan. The final Valley Plan as it came out was substantially improved over the draft Valley Plan, and probably largely because of the input from the public which the Park Service listened to and acted upon.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you.

Just one last question. Mr. Minault, in your testimony, and you said it in response to a question also, that the National Park Service plans for lodging in the valley is geared to the upper end of the income scale.

In contrast, Mr. Watson, in your testimony, you noted that 81 percent of the overnight accommodations are economically minded campsites, tent cabins, et cetera, with 19 percent at the upper cost levels.

I am trying to reconcile that. So my question is, what is the lodging situation? Do you feel that a broad economic range of options is being offered, or is it really geared to the upper end? I am just trying to reconcile those two views.

Mr. MINAULT. My feeling is that the park has an affirmative obligation to create a situation of social equality in the parks, not simply to accommodate the social distinctions which exist in the greater society and which—

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. And you—

Mr. MINAULT. —which any careful observer will see are increasing as the society matures.

I think we need to be compressing the distance between people socially in the parks rather than just reflecting the distance between classes that we have in our society now.

So my feeling is—also the parks are a recreational resource. My feeling is, we should not be using the parks as a place where people come and enjoy leisure. This is a place for recreation, and campgrounds, more than developed lodgings, foster leisure. And I also believe that the lodging situation we have in Yosemite right now reflects the history of Yosemite when there were not accommodations outside the park and the park needed to have accommoda-

tions geared toward guests. That is increasingly changing, and I do not think the plan that we have now recognizes that change. So—

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Even though the number of lodging units are also decreasing?

Mr. MINAULT. Yes. I don't think they are decreasing as fast as I would like to see them decrease.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Watson?

Mr. WATSON. Yes. Thank you.

In my calculations, what I do is combine five categories. There are campsites, there are rustic tent cabins, there are economy-level cabins, mid-scale lodge units, and upscale, the Ahwahnee. So I included the three at the lower-end campsites, rustic tent cabins and economy cabins would probably cost less than motel unit outside the valley and added those all up and that is how I came up with 81 percent.

You could perhaps count it a different way, but that is how I chose to do it. I think it was accurate and fair.

You know, The Wilderness Society would certainly support more campgrounds in the Yosemite Valley, but there is only so much room. Something else is going to have to come out, and I guarantee you whatever comes out to replace campgrounds has a local constituency for it, just like everything else.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thanks, Donna.

Devin?

Mr. NUNES. Mr. Watson, assuming that the 1980 baseline is correct, that there are 2,500 campsites, do you agree with that number?

Mr. WATSON. You know, I really don't know. I would have to go back and look at documents in my office. But assuming it is—

Mr. NUNES. Assuming it is—

Mr. WATSON. Let us just assume it is.

Mr. NUNES. —and we are down to 50 percent of that number 23 years later, where do you think that number should go over the next 20 years?

Mr. WATSON. Well, I am assuming that other types of facilities have, in part, replaced some of those campsites that were lost. Perhaps others have been—have become natural habitat. I tend to kind of doubt that. I think, if anything, the trend in the valley over the years was to cram on more stuff in here.

You know, I think if the Park Service could find a way, like they have in this study, to locate 204 some-odd sites outside of the valley, that is a terrific start. I am assuming that those would be attached to existing campgrounds, and that is why they would be easier to do through a regulatory process that is less complicated to add on to an existing site than build a brand-new campground somewhere in the park.

There is one location for an additional campground, though, and that is on a piece of private land that is currently on the market called Hazel Green. It has been eyed for resorts and for ecoresorts in the past by a company that went out of business. So it is now on the market. That could be a relief out there for additional camping and that is something that we would be more than interested

in looking at because we fully support camping in Yosemite National Park.

Mr. NUNES. Those are not on the valley floor?

Mr. WATSON. They are not on the valley floor. That is correct.

Mr. WATSON. You can certainly have more camp sites and they would fill up, but then they would compromise other aspects of the plan. I mean, there was a balance between providing for visitor use and enjoyment, allowing natural processes to prevail and restoring scenic beauty. Those are three goals that date back to the 1980 plan. So it was a balance between those, and I know "balance" is a loaded word. It means something different to everyone. But I believe they have struck that now. Like I said, if there is a way to find additional camp sites outside of the valley, we will have to allow the Congress to make the money available to build those.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Abshez, could you answer that same question from the 1980 baseline in comparison to now? Where do you think, as a hiker and an avid user of the park, where do you think the numbers should go?

Mr. ABSHEZ. I think we need to bring back up the number of camp sites throughout the park. I personally know that there are many cases when I have sought to come in places other than the valley where camp site accommodations have not been available, even that other than peak seasons. And I personally am familiar with many camp grounds that have been abandoned. There might be good reasons for abandoning those particular camp grounds.

In the valley, I agree with Mr. Radanovich, that their use of floodplains for a campground is a good use. In fact, if you would examine the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in First Evangelical Church versus County of Los Angeles, you will see that the County of Los Angeles once took the position that they would prohibit building in floodplains but that the property owner could still make viable use of it for camping, which is an interesting point. And I am informed that the camp sites after the 1997 floods were not destroyed by the floods, but they were damaged, but they were removed after the floods.

So I think we—you know, there is a lot of reason to look at responsibly planning the reintroduction of the camping in the valley and increasing the camping in other parts of the park so that people can enjoy it. They are being denied that visitation, and sometimes when you can't get in it is not an option to stay outside the park. Often that is a good option, I want to support the gateway communities, but other times people would just pass on because they feel they can't visit their destination.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Mr. ABSHEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Abshez, can you tell me—tell me, help me to reconcile this. Do you believe that the Park Service must reduce access in Yosemite to save the valley for future generations?

Mr. ABSHEZ. I don't know that the Park Service believes that. I certainly don't believe it. We look at the history of human development in the park. We have seen that there has been—previously there has been much more intensive use of the valley as a city, as farmland. There have been bowling alleys and pool halls in the

valley. We have had much more parking here previously. We had driving all over the valley. There was reform and the valley is a lot better for that today.

I think we have the tools to have intelligent land planning and management in the valley and enable all sorts of people to come here, stay in all sorts of accommodations. I like to camp but I have nothing against people who don't like to camp and would rather stay in a lodge. My grandmother was an example. I like economy accommodations. I have stayed in them. Sometimes I was flat broke. I love the chance to stay in Ahwahnee. I wouldn't deny that opportunity to anyone. Let's get the access for people.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Minault, can you—you represent through the access fund and promote the need for camping. Does that type of camping go anywhere from minimal-use, walk-in campgrounds to the 40-foot RV, beer-popping camper that likes to fish and everything else with him when he goes camping? Do you have some parameters as to what you support and what you don't support or—well.

Mr. MINAULT. Well, I am afraid I do. You know, climbers are famous for being able to subsist on very minimal conditions. And we have many climber campgrounds in the United States with no water, no trash facilities, no really developed facilities, simply minimal toilets. And in Yosemite we have recommended in the outer valley parkwide—I have to remember the name of this—parkwide out of valley campground study—that there be development of those type of campgrounds, walk-in campgrounds that serve climbers and backpackers and people who are able to live successfully in a campground with less developed facilities as a balance to the more developed campgrounds.

And frankly, you know, I have to say personally, an RV to me is really—is not really a campground use. It is a movable building and doesn't really belong in a campground in a place like Yosemite where there's so much competition for space.

Mr. RADANOVICH. If somehow some camping sites were to go back into upper- and lower-river campgrounds, without reopening the general plan or creating havoc, what kind of campgrounds would you like to see?

Mr. MINAULT. We would like to see some group sites which are missing or lacking in the valley, walk-in sites that allow people to—basically get more people in a small space, fundamentally—and a mix of regular family and car camping sites. And the political reality is you would have to have some RV sites as well.

But I think if I could just speak for climbers, we are content with less. If less is what it takes to get us in the valley and housed here, then less is what we will be happy to take.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Can you define for me this idea of group camp sites? Is that some like Boy Scout group or is that—what do you mean by group camping?

Mr. MINAULT. Right. They are group sites like those in Tuolumne Meadows Campground. There may be groups sites in the valley that were. I think they were lost in the floods. But there are a half a dozen group sites in Tuolumne Meadows Campground where you have school camps, church camps, Boy Scouts, that kind of thing, and you may have 20 or 30 people.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Mr. Whitmore, thanks for your testimony. And I am interested in your support of the North Side Drive staying in, and Mr. Watson had mentioned there is always—you know, this plan is so interconnected; one thing out, one thing in has some pretty dynamic effects to the whole plan all together.

How do you reconcile, though, the issue of North Side Drive is the fact that it is in the floodplain, Stoneman Bridge down to Yosemite Village, the idea of removing that which is in the floodplain of the river, as are the campground spaces; how can you reconcile leaving a road in there and removing—but removing the campgrounds?

Mr. RADANOVICH. They are both in the floodplain. It is a floodplain issue that drives both of these, and yet if you are respecting—or of the opinion that they should be removed because they are in a floodplain, why would you allow one and not the other?

Mr. WHITMORE. Well, I don't think that we can use presence in the floodplain to be an absolute standard in Yosemite Valley as to whether something is permitted or not. If you wait long enough you will get a very giant flood; and, potentially, practically all of the valley floor is a floodplain. And so I think you are going to have to make compromises just with everything else.

I think that having a road in a floodplain is probably a little more practical than having buildings or structures or restrooms, other constructed facilities. But actually as far as closure of North Side Drive, I was referring to the section from Yosemite Lodge and Camp 4 to the west, to the El Capitan crossover where they are proposing to make that into a walking and bicycle trail. A lot of that does get flooded.

But I think the main reason that—their main rationale, I believe, for proposing that to be closed to autos was simply to make more of the valley more natural, which is normally something we would support. But in that particular case, I think the impact on South Side Drive would be so immense and unacceptable that we just cannot see that it is feasible to close North Side Drive.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK, thank you. We may be closing down on our questions.

I have got to ask this thing because this has really been in my craw for a long time. During the plan—and I guess I can direct this to you, Mr. Whitmore, because it is regarding the Le Conte Memorial. Why was there no consideration—or was there—to removing the Le Conte Memorial and getting it out of the valley for habitat restoration? It just bothered me that that building is still there and, you know, John Muir would be turning over in his grave to have something built in his memory that is a man-made object in the valley. And I—why is that? I mean, it seems to me if we are really interested in habitat restoration, it ought to be in areas that affect us, not other people, and I have got to ask this question.

Mr. WHITMORE. Well, it is not in its original location, as I understand it. I don't know where it was first built.

Mr. RADANOVICH. It was somewhere else.

Mr. WHITMORE. It was somewhere else and it was relocated to where it is now.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. WHITMORE. And it is my understanding that it is considered to be a national historic site, and so that immediately invokes a bunch of rules that don't apply to other things. I think it is sort of like the Ahwahnee in that regard. It is sort of a landmark structure, and it may be inconsistent with the natural scene but it is there and it is one of the things we live with.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right. It troubles me that—it just seems to me that it is for a special interest group in some ways, and if we are willing to shut down certain areas for habitat restoration, it seems to me that that would be an ideal spot. And it is where it affects perhaps your interest group as well, and maybe not others—other interest groups. And I just—I see a double standard there and I don't, you know—it troubles me.

Mr. WHITMORE. I think it would be well to note that there is some question as to ownership of the building. The title has been sufficiently obscure over the years; that it is my understanding that the Park Service and the Sierra Club just came to an understanding: We will talk about management and never mind who owns it. So it is not known that it belongs to the Sierra Club, it may belong to the Park Service.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. WHITMORE. And so basically the Sierra Club operates it as a tenant of the Park Service, you might say.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right. Which to me—yeah. That just chaps me, I have got to tell you. I think this should go because of that. And I—it is mainly because what I want to make sure, you know, that everybody has—if we are going to limit access, we should do it for everybody. And I just want that on the record. I am sorry, but that just really troubles me.

Mr. WHITMORE. I would hasten to note that the Sierra Club is not favoring limiting access. We favor a reservation system in order to spread out the access and manage it better.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. WHITMORE. So that the experience becomes more pleasant and is more predictable, and my feeling is it probably would result in a decrease in annual visitation by removing the uncertainty that we have now—

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. WHITMORE. —as to whether someone will get in or not.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK. Well, it is that question of balance, and their results probably seems to be different in everybody's mind. So I think that is what we are trying to get here, so—Donna, any more questions, or Devin?

Well, listen, I want to thank everybody for being here. I know it went a little bit longer than what we thought, but I think that we got out all the issues out on the table. I think that we have adequately addressed them for now. This is going to be a long process. And I appreciate you being here. And with that, the hearing is closed.

[Whereupon, the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

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