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YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

March 27, 2001

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THE FINAL YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN AND SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Tuesday, March 27, 2001
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
Washington, DC

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in Room 1334, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Joel Hefley [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Mr. HEFLEY. The Committee will come to order.

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE JOEL HEFLEY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO

Mr. HEFLEY. Good morning. Welcome to the hearing today. This morning, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands will hear testimony on the National Park Service's Yosemite Valley Plan and its accompanying Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

At this point, I would like to ask unanimous consent that Congressman Doolittle be permitted to sit on the dais to give his statement and to participate in the hearing. Is there any objection? Hearing none, so ordered.

We actually shouldn't do that, Representative Doolittle, after you deserted our Committee to go somewhere else, but—

Mr. DOOLITTLE. I was kicked off, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter.]

Mr. HEFLEY. Well, then that's rightly so. So we'll move on.

On December 29th, 2000, the National Park Service signed the Record of Decision for the Yosemite Valley Plan. The Record of Decision, the result of a very lengthy process, will provide direction for managing the natural and cultural resources, facilities, and visitor experiences in Yosemite Valley for the next decade. In its final form, the plan encompasses thousands of pages and, if implemented, would cost a healthy $441 million.

For those of you who are not familiar with the Valley, it encompasses an area within Yosemite National Park that is a mile wide and seven miles long, and is visited annually by 70 percent of the Park's visitors. It is famous for its campgrounds, hiking trails, waterfalls, scenic wildlands and, of course, the sheer walls of

El Capitan. Since becoming a national park in 1890, Yosemite National Park has been enjoyed by millions of people every year, and is considered to be one of the crown jewels of the National Park System.

However, according to the National Park Service, the Valley has become congested, especially with private automobiles. It is overcrowded with more than a thousand park facilities, such as stores, homes, garages, apartments, lodging facilities and restaurants. It is bisected by approximately 30 miles of roadway. All of these factors allegedly threaten its natural beauty and suggest that a plan of action is necessary.

While many people in this room would agree that the Valley may be crowded during certain peak times, many would disagree with a number of recommendations slated for action in the Valley Plan. Based on the tenor of our new Interior Secretary, and her approach of inclusiveness, I am optimistic and hopeful that the Bush administration will be open minded in their review of this plan.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, especially their thoughts on the transportation plan, lodging, campsite changes, parking relocation, and the overall effects to the gateway communities.

I now recognize the gentlelady from the Virgin Islands.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hefley follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Joel Hefley, Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands

Good morning and welcome to the hearing today. This morning, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands will hear testimony on the National Park Service's Yosemite Valley Plan and its accompanying Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

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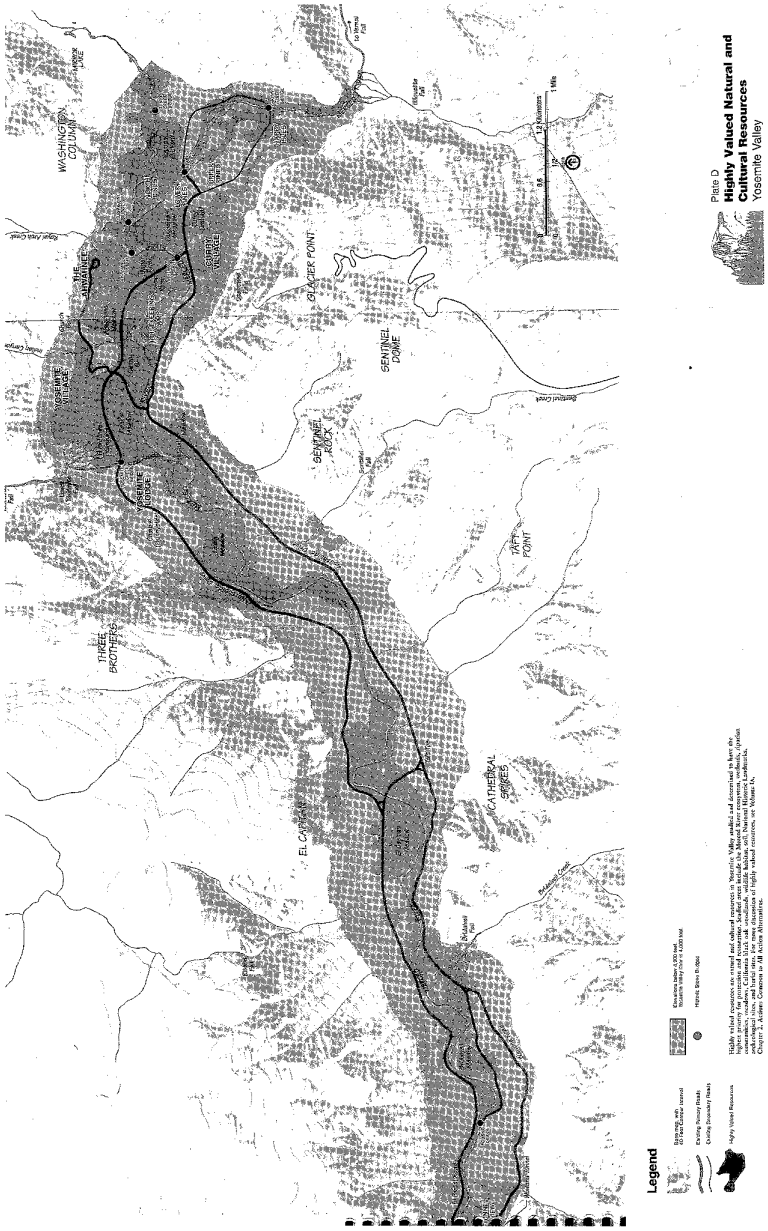
{A map of the Yosemite Valley and a summary of the Yosemite Valley Plan submitted for the record follow:]



Summary of Major Changes in Relation to Existing Conditions

RESTORE

- Large tracts of meadow, riparian, and California black oak woodland communities along the river from Clark's Bridge downstream to Swinging Bridge

REMOVE

- Roads through Stoneman and Ahwahnee Meadows (including the road through the former Upper River and Lower River Campgrounds)
- North Pines Campground
- Historic Sugar Pine Bridge and possibly historic Stoneman Bridge to restore the hydrologic system of the Merced River
- Other historic structures: concessioner stable, Cascades Diversion Dam, and Cascades houses
- The abandoned wastewater treatment plant in El Portal from a sensitive cultural resource area
- Most parking in east Valley other than at lodging, campgrounds, and the Yosemite Village area
- Five motel buildings from Yosemite Lodge
- The historic concession administration building and Village Garage
- Commercial trail rides in Yosemite Valley

ESTABLISH OR PRESCRIBE

- A Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) study and program to identify existing and desired conditions for natural resources, cultural resources, and visitor experience
- A traveler information and traffic management system to provide information to visitors, provide incentives for efficient use of available parking and transportation services, and manage access and parking
- Out-of-Valley day-visitor parking areas at Badger Pass, El Portal, and Hazel Green or Foresta
- Some utility hookups for recreational vehicles, and shower facilities in campgrounds
- Land management zoning throughout Yosemite Valley
- Design guidelines for new construction and for rehabilitating the landscape in historic developed areas

IMPLEMENT

- A contiguous River Protection Overlay, as prescribed in the Merced *Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement* (*Merced River Plan/FEIS*)

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Construct

- A day-visitor parking area for 550 vehicles at Yosemite Village
- A visitor center and transit center near the day-visitor parking area at Yosemite Village
- A vehicle bridge across Yosemite Creek near Yosemite Lodge
- A replacement footbridge at Happy Isles near the Nature Center
- Lodging at Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village
- Campsites at Camp 4 (Sunnyside Campground); east of Curry Village; in the Upper Pines area; and along Tenaya Creek
- Employee housing at Curry Village, El Portal, Wawona, and Foresta
- Two fire stations, one in the Yosemite Village area (outside of the Yosemite Village Historic District), and one in the Curry Village area

Convert

- Yosemite Museum/Valley District Building back to its historic function as a museum
- Southside Drive from El Capitan crossover to Curry Village to two-way traffic, one lane each direction (road widened where necessary)
- Northside Drive from El Capitan crossover to Yosemite Lodge from a vehicle road to a multi-use (bicycle and pedestrian) paved trail
- Trail to the base of Yosemite Falls to a route accessible by people with mobility impairments, and provide a larger viewing platform

Increase/Expand

- Shuttle bus service west to Bridalveil Fall and out-of-Valley parking areas
- Interpretive and orientation services, including a new visitor center in Yosemite Valley and at or near principal park entrances
- Multi-use paved trails

Reduce

- Stock trails by approximately 0.5 mile
- Lodging by 299 units (including 164 units at Housekeeping Camp)
- Traffic entering the east Valley on a typically busy day by 50%

Relocate

- Employee housing to El Portal and Wawona, leaving 683 beds in Yosemite Valley
- National Park Service and concessioner administrative stables operations to McCauley Ranch in Foresta
- National Park Service and concessioner headquarters out of Yosemite Valley
- Historic Superintendent's House (Residence 1) and its garage to a site within the Yosemite Village Historic District
- Museum collections storage, research library, and archives consolidated adjacent to the museum building in Yosemite Valley

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN, A DELEGATE TO CONGRESS FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today, as you said, the Subcommittee will receive testimony on the Yosemite Valley Plan. I am assuming that's the plan over there. Oh, my goodness. This plan has been years, obviously, in the making. It's a significant document for a significant area of great beauty and majesty.

As the National Park Service notes in its testimony, Yosemite Valley is only seven miles long and less than one mile wide. The floor of the Valley is further reduced by rock fall zones and the flood plain of the Merced River. Within this relatively small area, millions of people come annually to experience the nationally significant resources of the Valley.

How to protect these important park resources and still maintain a quality visitor experience has been a concern going back for many years. In fact, I have been informed by staff that today's hearing is at least the fourth congressional hearing held in the last decade dealing with Yosemite Valley and related matters.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to learning more on what the Yosemite Valley Plan will mean for the Park resources and visitors. I appreciate the presence of our witnesses, including our former Committee member, Congressman Doolittle, here today. I look forward to their insights on the subject of today's oversight hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Christensen follows:]

Statement of The Honorable Donna M. Christensen, a Delegate to Congress from the Virgin Islands

Mr. Chairman, today the Subcommittee will receive testimony on the Yosemite Valley Plan. This plan has been years in the making. It is a significant document for a significant area of great beauty and majesty.

As the National Park Service notes in its testimony, Yosemite Valley is only seven miles long and less than one mile wide. The floor of the valley is further reduced by rock-fall zones and the flood plain of the Merced River. Within this relatively small area, millions of people come annually to experience the nationally significant resources of the valley.

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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 insights on the subject of today's oversight hearing.

Mr. HEFLEY. Thank you very much, Mrs. Christensen.

Our first panel is—I'm sorry. Mr. Radanovich, do you have an opening statement?

Mr. RADANOVICH. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do, if I may take the time.

Mr. HEFLEY. You certainly may. I'm sorry. I was about to overlook that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. No problem.

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

Mr. RADANOVICH. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing. I think Yosemite is one of the crown jewel parks in our Nation and deserves the attention that this does.

I also want to thank many constituents, frankly, that are out here testifying, and I'm glad that you're here to give some input on this plan, as well as members of the National Park Service.

I have been personally involved in the formulation of the Yosemite Plan and all of its manifestations since the 1980 General Management Plan, and since that original plan, Yosemite has been studied, prodded, poked and written about by numerous park planners, with ideas ranging from massive bridges across the Valley to multi-story parking garages in the Valley itself, to trains, guideways, monorail—you name it, it's been considered for Yosemite.

These plans are represented by what's in front of me here. As I was leaving my office this morning, I pulled out these plans that were made available to me, were sitting on my bookshelf, and I believe that this pile of documents demonstrates one of the problems with the Yosemite Valley Plan and the EIS. Frankly, it's just simply too much for the average citizen to comprehend, let alone review and digest.

These massive piles of documents do not do one thing to improve the visitor experience for Yosemite Valley. I understand that they are part of the mandated planning process, that they provide a basis for actions, that they cost a lot and that they keep numerous graphic designers employed. But they serve to confuse and distract from the purpose of the Park Service, to be good stewards to the resources and facilities that it is charged to manage.

To the substance of the plan, in sum, the implementation of the Yosemite Plan and the EIS will cost about $441 million in one-time funds, and an increase of over $10 million in annual spending, in annual operating funding, and large increases in the number of Federal employees serving the Park.

It will do this, while at the same time reduce the services available to the public—the roads, the bridges, parking spaces, stables, camping and lodging units and convenience which provide service for the owners of the Park, the American taxpayer.

This analysis would lead one to start the planning process over, but I must confess that I don't have the patience for this kind of paperwork. I don't think anybody wants to start from ground one, in a process that took over 20 years to develop.

My goal is that the Park Service implement the most incremental, least cost, and least disruptive elements of the flood recovery and park improvements first, and reevaluate each step as the public experiences the improvements. Renovations and rebuilding required by the flood must be first on the list, and other projects that have obvious merit should be pursued.

There are numerous projects contained in the details of this plan that I do support and that I want to ensure get accomplished as soon as feasible within the constraints of the law. For example,

transfer of park and concessionaire administrative activities into the gateway communities of Oakhurst, Mariposa, and elsewhere.

The old warehouse and other facilities in the Park were replaced in El Portal, yet the old facilities have not been removed and they should be removed.

Public/private partnerships for the development of new employee housing in the gateway communities should move forward, where appropriate. Employee housing in the Valley for those employees who are required to be near their work was destroyed in the flood and needs to be replaced.

Campgrounds that were an integral part of the visitors' public enjoyment of the Park were closed and have not been reopened since 1997. Specifically, the upper and lower river campgrounds, they need to be renovated, repaired and reopened. And then traffic patterns causing congestion and confusion for the visiting public have been identified and these bottlenecks need to be fixed.

These projects need to be completed quickly. Funds are available for most of these projects as a result of the appropriation which Congress made for the flood recovery, from the flood of 1997, and from Park visitor fees retained by the Park, from donations made to the Park for improvements and from capital improvement funds contributed by the concessionaire.

There are many elements of the plan that I do not support. The most important in the long run is the over-reliance of the plan on the success of the Yosemite Area Regional Transit System, also known as YARTS. This system depends upon the provision of some $850,000 per year of specially approved funds from Congress. We have not considered or approved this request, and until we have, I believe the Park Service must make available sufficient parking and related infrastructure within the Valley to support the public.

We cannot support a plan that prevents the visiting public from enjoying their park. Eliminating parking spaces in the Valley will do just that. I, therefore, do not support that element of the plan.

The Park Service has provided a plan that relies on YARTS nine months out of the year. Instead, I have asked the Park Service to provide an analysis of the level of parking required in order to meet the demands of the visiting public at least nine months per year without YARTS. Many of my constituents claim that the Park Service has already reduced the number of parking spaces in the Valley by as many as 3,300 spaces. I am not sure what the real number is, but I do know that 550 spaces provided in this plan are inadequate by any measure.

Earlier I commented on the sources of funds available to the Superintendent to accomplish the goals of the plan. One concern that you will hear today is that Congress cannot adequately monitor the implementation of the plan because there are too many discretionary sources of funds available to be spent without further congressional review. This is true and is of concern that I intend to correct, with your help, Mr. Chairman, through continued oversight by this Subcommittee, through the appropriations process, and through my continued personal and direct involvement in the implementation of this plan.

I believe the planning process, as implemented by the National Park Service, in this case is fatally flawed. Further review, in con-

junction with gateway communities concerning the economic, infrastructure and land use impacts of the proposed actions needs to be accomplished before the plan is finalized.

I recognize that Mr. Babbitt, while he was Secretary of Interior, committed to and accomplished a record of decision for this plan prior to leaving office. I believe that, in this case, as with other cases under the Clinton administration, the plan was finalized because review by the new administration would find that the conclusions were not supported by the facts.

Since that administration would not and could not be held accountable as it left office, arbitrary decisions were fair game. We need to hold the Clinton administration accountable and to stay the record of decision until the Department of Interior has appropriate staff in place to evaluate the plan and its impact on the surrounding communities.

I have asked the Secretary of Interior to take whatever action is necessary to accomplish this because, as you will hear today, a consensus has not been established in the surrounding communities. In fact, my constituents believe that they have not been heard throughout the park planning process.

Last year, I introduced the Gateway Communities Cooperation Act and will shortly reintroduce it. That Act will require Federal land managers to consult with, assist and support local gateway communities that are affected by such massive planning efforts. The gateway communities in my district do not have the resources available to fully participate in such huge planning efforts, nor do the Federal land managers have the mandate from this Congress to involve their local gateways in these efforts. We need to correct that, and I will ask the Subcommittee to move the legislation so that such an oversight will never happen again.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to provide this input at the beginning of this hearing, and to display the incredible plan that we have before us. I look forward to the testimony of the panels.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Radanovich follows:]

Statement of The Honorable George Radanovich, a Representative in Congress from the State of California

Chairman Hefley, thank you very much for the opportunity to submit this statement on the Final Yosemite Valley Plan and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, and the related concerns, comments and issues identified by gateway communities, concessionaires and interested parties. This plan and planning process has had a significant impact on my district. More importantly, the plan will set the direction for Yosemite Valley for the foreseeable future. That future is important; to the health and vitality of the communities I represent, and to our neighbors.

Let me first say that Yosemite Valley is in my district, and that I grew up not far from that valley. I. have a direct personal knowledge and involvement in what happens in Yosemite and in the mutual dependence of gateway communities on the park, and of the park on the gateway communities. This interdependence cannot be overstated, and I think part of the controversy we will hear about today is based upon the concern that the Park Service does not fully embrace the importance of the gateway community relationship.

Mr. Chairman, I have been personally involved in the formulation of the Yosemite Valley plan in all its manifestations dating back to the 1980 General Management Plan. Since that original plan, Yosemite has been studied, prodded, poked and written about by numerous park planners with ideas ranging from massive bridges across the valley to multi-story parking garages in the valley itself, to trains, guideways and monorails. As I was leaving my office this morning I pulled out the plans

that were available on my bookshelf. I believe that this pile of documents demonstrates one of the problems with the Yosemite Valley Plan & EIS - it is simply too much for the average citizen, even one who is directly affected by it - to review and digest.

These massive piles of documents do not do one thing to improve the visitor experience in Yosemite Valley. I understand that they are part of mandated planning processes, that they provide a basis for actions, that they cost a lot, and that they keep numerous graphic designers employed. But they serve to confuse and distract from the purpose of the Park Service to be a good steward of the resources and facilities it is responsible to manage.

Let's move on to the substance of the plan that this subcommittee is charged to review. In sum, implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan and EIS will cost $441 million in one-time funds, over $10 million in annual operational funding, and large increases in the number of federal employees serving in the Park. It will do this while at the same time reducing the services available to the public - the roads, bridges, parking places, stables, camping and lodging units and conveniences which provide service for the owners of the park, the American taxpayer. This analysis would lead one to want to start the planning process over, but I must confess to not having the patience for more of this paperwork.

My goal is that the Park Service implement the incremental, least cost, least disruptive elements of flood recovery and park improvements first and re-evaluate each step as the public experiences the improvement. Renovations and rebuilding required by the flood must be first on the list. Other projects have obvious merit, and should be pursued. There are numerous projects contained in the details of this plan that I do support, and that I want to ensure get accomplished as soon as feasible within the constraints of the law. Examples of this include:

- Transfer of park and concessionaire administrative activities into the gateway communities of Oakhurst, Mariposa and elsewhere;
- The old warehouse and other facilities in the valley were replaced in El Portal, and then old facility never removed. Let's remove it;
- Public–Private partnerships for the development of new employee housing in the gateway communities should move forward where appropriate;
- Employee housing in the valley for those employees which are required to be near their work was destroyed in the flood in 1997, and needs to be replaced;
- Campgrounds that were an integral part of the visiting public's enjoyment of the park were closed, and have not been reopened since 1997. Specifically, Upper and Lower River Campgrounds need to be renovated and reopened.
- Traffic patterns causing congestion and confusion for the visiting public have been identified. These bottlenecks need to be fixed.

These projects need to be completed quickly. Funds are available for most of these projects as a result of an appropriation which made by Congress for flood recovery, from park visitor fees, retained by the Park, from donations made to the Park for improvements and from capital improvement funds contributed by the concessionaire.

There are many, elements of the plan that I do not support. .The most important in the long run is the reliance of the plan on the success of the Yosemite Area Regional Transit System (YARTS). This system depends upon provision of some $850,000 per year of specially appropriated funds from Congress. We have not considered or approved this request, and until we have, I believe the park service must make available sufficient parking and related. infrastructure within the valley to support the public. We cannot support a plan that prevents the visiting public from enjoying their park. Eliminating parking spaces in the Valley will do just that, and therefore I do not support that element of the plan. .

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I believe that the planning process as implemented by the National Park Service in this case is fatally flawed. Further review in conjunction with the gateway communities concerning the economic, infrastructure and land-use impacts of the proposed actions needs to be accomplished BEFORE the plan is finalized. I recognize that Mr. Babbitt, while he was Secretary of the Interior, committed to and accomplished a Record of Decision for this plan prior to leaving office. I believe that in this case, as with other cases under the Clinton administration, the plan was finalized because review by a new administration would find that the conclusions were not supported by the facts.

Since that administration would not and could not be held accountable as it left office, arbitrary decisions were fair game. We need to hold the Clinton administration accountable and to stay the Record of Decision until the Department of Interior has appropriate staff in place to evaluate the plan and it impacts on the surrounding communities. I have asked the Secretary of the Interior to take whatever action is necessary to accomplish this stay because, as you will hear today, a consensus has not been established in the surrounding communities. In fact, my constituents believe that they have not been heard throughout the park planning process.

Last year, I introduced the Gateway Communities Cooperation Act and will shortly reintroduce it. That act will require federal land managers to consult with, assist and support local gateway communities that are affected by such massive planning efforts. The gateway communities in my district do not have the resources available to fully participate in such huge planning efforts, nor do the federal land managers have the mandate from this Congress to involve their local gateways in these efforts. We need to correct that. I will ask this subcommittee to move the legislation so that such an oversight will never happen again.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the testimony from our panels today concerning the Yosemite Valley Plan and Final EIS. I believe that today's hearing will highlight the important role of gateway communities in federal planning efforts, and provide a new look at the future of the Crown Jewel of the National Parks, Yosemite.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. HEFLEY. Thank you, Mr. Radanovich.

Is there anyone else who has an opening statement they would like to make?

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Chairman, I do not have an opening statement, but I would like to insert a statement at a later point. I was at Yosemite again the weekend before last and I'm interested in hearing the testimony today and learning from the witnesses.

Thank you.

Mr. HEFLEY. Without objection.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Souder follows:]

Statement by The Honorable Mark Souder, A Representative in Congress from the State of Indiana

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this important hearing. Yosemite National Park is indisputably one of our world's foremost natural wonders. Yosemite Valley, with its towering waterfalls and massive granite walls, impresses visitors from all over the world, young and old.

It is perhaps our greatest challenge to balance the desire of increasing numbers to see the greatest wonders of the world—Yosemite Valley, Grand Canyon, Old Faithful in Yellowstone, Glacier Bay—without so degrading the experience that it is no longer memorable in a positive sense. Visitors expect to be awed with nature, not fumes, smog, trash and jockeying for a view.

But we are not arguing over pristine environments. Long ago, Americans decided that providing the opportunity for many to view those magnificent wonders superseded the desire of some to return them to pristine wilderness or the preserve of a privileged few. It is important to preserve wilderness—with limited or no access—but Yosemite Valley is not such a place.

What today's hearing focuses on is the attempt to achieve a balance. Sometimes those on opposing sides imply the other is either for total elimination of human impact or for paving over the last grass in the Valley. The American people not only don't support such radical viewpoints, but they are pretty firmly in the middle: give us reasonable access and stop the drama. The problems addressed in this hearing

is illustrative not only of the problem facing Yosemite National Park but in many—if not most—of our national parks.

Since I joined this Subcommittee, I have visited Yosemite National Park twice, including just over a week ago. Over the last two years I have systematically been visiting our national parks to discuss challenges facing the parks with park superintendents and staff. My meetings and visits have included large and small parks, as well as natural and cultural parks. These include, but are not limited to, at least one visit to these natural parks: Yosemite, Yellowstone, Glacier, Mt. Rainier, Grand Canyon, Everglades, Olympic, Grand Teton, Denali, Kenai Fjords, Theodore Roosevelt and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore; to these cultural parks: Independence, Gettysburg, Fort Clatsop, Golden Spike, Lincoln Home, and Mount Rushmore; and combination parks like Golden Gate NRA (including the Presidio) and Gateway NRA (including Ellis Island). What becomes apparent is that problems are not unique, though specific variations may be.

Today's hearing on the Yosemite Valley Plan highlights a number of the major challenges. I would like to review a few of them.

1) Traffic congestion in the most popular areas

Yosemite, Grand Canyon and Zion are each developing plans limiting automobile usage. Each is different. But today's discussion on Yosemite highlights several points.

a) Traffic congestion is not a year -around problem. It peaks at certain times—usually the summer season. Yet solutions tend to be restrictive of automobile use year around, or at least beyond the peak of the normal bell curve.

b) The cost of mass transit alternatives is high thus tending to attempt to maximize (*i.e.* force) as many auto passengers out of their cars, even if it means limiting them at off-season times and by greater amounts than necessary.

c) The cost of mass transit adds to pressures to reduce parking spaces in the sought after locations even if additional spaces could be allowed in management plans such as the Yosemite Valley Plan.

d) Other options need to be pursued such as charging higher fees for such parking as is done at airports (*e.g.* high rates for close access, none or minimal for "satellite lots") Those dollars could then help subsidize a shorter season mass transit solution, especially with adequate parking spaces.

2) Historical/cultural preservation versus natural preservation

At fifty years cultural resources come under the Historic Preservation guidelines. Because this law is universal, it at times has lead to the unintended consequence of letting structures deteriorate that may have been worthy of preserving because scarce dollars and resources must be spent on less significant structures. It also leads to conflict such as at Gettysburg, where a truly significant historic structure sits on one of the nation's most culturally significant pieces of land.

a) At Yosemite one such issue that appears to be resolved is the preservation (through moving) the historic superintendent's office which sits on a flood plain, and was seriously flooded. It clearly needed to be preserved—its historic significance is directly related to Yosemite Park's history.

b) There is a debate about the usage of other buildings in Yosemite Village. These buildings are of also great significance to the Park's history. Hopefully creative solutions can be found similar to these being pursued at Grand Canyon Village and Longmire at Mt. Rainier National Park.

c) There is a debate about a number of historic footbridges. This is the type of debate that needs some serious re-evaluation of the current system (though at least the current law forces such a debate, not just a tear-down). The bridges apparently alter the natural flow of the Merced River, a National Scenic River. Of all the cultural resources in our natural Parks, a strong argument can be made that structures that epitomize the "National Park" look are the most important to preserve. Those include the great historic inns like Many Glacier Lodge, El Tovor, Old Faithful and Ahwanee; the works of Underwood and Coulter, the landscaping of Olmsted. But the broadest application is the WPA "park look". Bridgework is one of the best examples of this type of architecture. The Yosemite Valley Plan proposes to remove one, and study the impact. But once again, the key point here is that we need to develop and approach that combines historic significance, natural importance of the impacted area, and visitor impact (which at a minimum, should break "ties").

3) National Scenic River and other environmental guidelines

Let me state this clearly: I support the goals of the National Scenic River legislation. It has been and will continue to be a vital way to continue to clean up our most scenic rivers. The challenges are many. Obviously, a scenic river that has been highly developed along its river banks is going to be treated differently than in a wilderness area. The debates in Yosemite about the Merced River are interesting

because they are not as not as clear cut. The Merced is gorgeous as it meanders through the Valley, and then cuts its way out.

a) But the Merced River is already significantly altered. Today's visitors who enter Yosemite Park have no desire to repeat the experiences of John Muir. Few had the time to wander then and few do now. To access the road at the El Portal entrance, the Merced River was "controlled". It still has enough force (and speed) to alter its riverbed during the last major flood, but it is significantly altered. The goal should be minimal further alteration, but the Park Service should be commended for its attempts to improve the safety of the road with minimal river damage. The small environmental groups that are suing to stop such improvement should be accountable to lawsuit if someone is hurt or killed because of their grandstanding.

b) It is not an easy question as to removing culturally significant structures to let the Merced River discover its "natural" course in the Valley. Moving the Superintendent's residence makes sense because the flooding damages the building. The riprap of the disputed bridges may alter the flow but the question here is destruction of a structure that is not endangered. Perhaps, all things considered, the first bridge should be removed as a trial, but visitor usage should also be a factor.

4) Closing the horse trails in Yosemite Valley

Once again, this issue is debated in other areas as well. Clearly horseback riding is a historic usage within a National Park. In fact, other than hiking, it is probably the oldest. (And few, if any, of the earliest hikers didn't have a horse or mule.) Banning horseback riding would be akin to banning camping. It is not like the firefalls at Yosemite that delighted visitors for years, nor is it like feeding the bears. They may have been traditions but were "artificial" creations for entertainment (and did impact natural behavior). This is also not snowmobiling, air overflights, or engine -powered motorcraft—about which there is much legitimate despite.

But just because horses are allowed, does not mean that they need to be allowed everywhere in the park. It is an especially thorny issue when people are packed into a small area of the park, like in Yosemite Valley. As a general rule, it seems that when one visitors experience negatively impacts a large number of visitors, changes are in order. With a limited number of valley trails, mutual enjoyment is difficult. Therefore, as long as the service is provided and not reduced, and scenic alternatives are found, Valley limitations seem to make sense.

5) Numbers of lodging and camping sites

There is a clear trend toward reducing overnight accommodations inside our national parks. This clearly is not responding to visitor demand: it flies in the face of it. It is one thing to argue that additional accommodations should not be added, and should instead be added in gateway communities (often in national forests). It seems like that whenever a Park develops a plan, they universally have a proposal to reduce overnight accommodations. Not only is it not visitor requested, it is, at most for negligible environmental gain.

Moving campground spaces at Yosemite and other parks because of issues like rock slides or flooding may be needed but then attempting to maintain the number should be undertaken. (At Yosemite, to pre-flood levels).

6) Gateway communities

Nearly every park has inevitable conflicts with the gateway communities. From my experience, each park superintendent spends a lot of their time working with these communities (in disproportion to their numbers—visitors and taxpayers, being far larger constituencies). Furthermore, gateway community leaders almost always say to the superintendent (or the Park Service) is unresponsive if they don't get their way.

But gateway communities do have a vital interest in each park and, quite frankly, are part of the "National Park experience" for most Americans. To not work with them would be shortsighted and counter-productive for visitors and those of us who fund the National Parks. Issues include lodging, food services, recreation, and wildlife issues (*e.g.* wolves, elks, bears) just to name a few.

As a business person with a background in retailing, it is amazing to me to note the often limited vision of the gateway community business leaders. While visitors may prefer, when given the choice, to stay overnight inside the park, it benefits gateway communities if the Park Service limits overnight accommodation, for example. It is obviously clear that all across America excellent accommodations—along with other visitor services like food, shopping, entertainment (*e.g.* IMAX theaters and museums as well as supplemental visitor centers) and recreation- are booming in gateway communities. It is not clear that the National Park Service has diminished interest in visiting the parks by limitations on visitor services. But it is a delicate balance. The criteria to be evaluated at parks like Yosemite include: Does a proposed transportation system create a disadvantage for one gateway community

over another? At what point do rising fees discourage visits? (And which visitors, day, overnight or once-in-a-lifetime)? From the gateway merchants perspective—can visitors be enticed into extending their stay by having more entertainment options at the edges of the parks? From a business standpoint, that is their best financial opportunity.

7) Employee and Concessionaire Housing

This is a critical issue in nearly every park. Some is sub-standard. Some is far away, making transportation costs increasingly prohibitive for many park employees. The Yosemite Valley plan proposes to move some employee housing to El Portal at the edge of the Park. They have already moved- logically -park services that don't need to be in the valley to El Portal. Some of the moves make sense, even if it is also understandable that people would prefer Valley housing. But for those who must commute in, transfer costs are serious. Furthermore, inside parks if more and more employees are removed it is going to be an increasing problem to provide adequate schooling for the children of remaining employees without resorting to lengthy bus journeys.

8) Demonstration Fees

Two points-they should be made permanent and superintendent should be given more flexibility to utilize them. Excellent visitor friendly projects have been developed in most parks, including Yosemite. Analysis should be made about using fees for personnel but should only be done after careful debate about consequences.

9) Private support groups like the Yosemite Fund

The Yosemite Fund, and groups like it, are critical to the preservation of our parks. In Congress we need to stimulate further charitable giving through the tax code. While I was recently in Yosemite, I visited a Yosemite Fund Session with scientific researchers who study all the aspects of Yosemite's natural history. It is a living laboratory for Yosemite Park and university researchers. The Yosemite Fund is working with researchers to make sure the research is coordinated with what is most needed to make wise decisions.

I also met with major Yosemite Fund donors who are working to raise over ten million dollars to redo the chaotic Yosemite Falls visitor area. We need to constantly thank those thousands of families who give additional dollars to the park they love. Those contributors should not be viewed as a lessening of the obligation of the general taxpayer, but rather a resounding vote of the confidence by citizens in the priority of that particular park. One way to determine whether a park has public support or was a "pork barrel" project of a Member of Congress (or a President) is whether it has support public financial support. The concept of "crown jewels" is hotly debated, but the size and membership diversity of some parks non-profit groups (often multiple ones) proves the point. Yosemite and Yellowstone, Independence Hall and Gettysburg, to name a few, are in fact, different than your average park.

Mr. HEFLEY. Our first panel will be made up of Mr. Doolittle, from the 4th District of California, a district which encompasses about half of the Park. Is that correct, Mr. Doolittle?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. That's right, Mr. Chairman. Between Mr. Radanovich and me, we encompass the entire Park. I have the high country and he has the Valley.

Mr. HEFLEY. I see. Well, we would recognize you then for your statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOHN T. DOOLITTLE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, distinguished members. I appreciate the opportunity to rejoin you today for this hearing. Yosemite is obviously a vital national treasure, and it's a privilege to represent a portion of it.

I would like to specifically express my thanks to my colleague, Representative George Radanovich. His district, as we mentioned, together with mine, do encompass the Park, and he has displayed tireless efforts to maintain continued public access. Those have

been very well received throughout our shared region. I know that the Tuolumne County Counsel, Gregory Oliver, is here as well, and I especially appreciate him making the long trip to Washington to represent the views of my constituents, and you will hear from him on the third panel, I believe.

As we all know, Yosemite National Park has long been an international travel destination, drawing millions of tourists every year to marvel at breathtaking waterfalls, Giant Sequoias, and plentiful wildlife. I have long appreciated the beauty Yosemite has to offer, and have made it a priority to preserve this national treasure for future generations to enjoy.

However, I believe very strongly that we should seek to accomplish that objective without compromising the visitor experience and without unnecessarily impacting the economies of the communities that lie at the gateway to the Park. It is in these two/ areas that the Valley Plan falls woefully short.

First, the plan, as Mr. Radanovich mentioned, has unnecessarily and unfortunately decreased the amount of parking spaces in the Valley. You know, this reminds me, this is kind of a "Jerry Brown" approach to transportation. You just don't build freeways and somehow we're going to solve the problem. Mr. Chairman, this is a problem. Taking out those parking spaces is something I am strongly opposed to.

Now, there is a congestion problem at times in the Valley, and it's a heavy congestion problem. Those problems are not good for the Park or for the visitors. However, I want to emphasize congestion, at that level, only exists a few days per year, and for those days, a more efficient traffic management strategy is needed. But permanently reducing the number of parking spaces would only result in unnecessarily hampering the ease of visitation for many day-use travelers during times of the year when traffic volume is low. As such, I will continue to seek alternatives that reduce congestion while preserving auto touring as a viable means for all to visit the Park.

I don't know how many of our members have actually been to Yosemite but, obviously, it's possible to enter one way and leave another, and to cross the mountains in the process. It's a great way to see features of Yosemite without having to make that your end destination. We want to preserve that. But if there's no place for you to park once you drive into the Park, you're not going to be able to see the Park. You'll just have to keep on going. I think that's a great injustice to the day-use visitors.

Second, Mr. Chairman, I object to the Plan's severe reduction in the number of overnight accommodations under the guise of flood management. As one who has been very supportive of the Park's efforts to obtain Federal funds to repair damage resulting from the 1997 floods, it is disheartening to see those appropriations being used to impede the visitor's ability to enjoy what is perhaps the Park's greatest appeal—one's ability to spend the night under the stars in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Third, although Housekeeping Bridge will remain under the Plan to provide access across the Merced River, the removal of Sugar Pine and Stoneman Bridges remains in the Plan.

Now, maybe this is just nostalgia on my part, but when we used to go camping in the Valley, we would camp on one side of the Merced River and cross Stoneman Bridge to reach Camp Curry, which had the store with the candy and, you know, all the "fun" stuff. It's a marvelous old bridge. It looks like some of the beautiful stone work you see on the GW Parkway. It's all nicely assembled. Those two bridges are a great part of the culture and the history of Yosemite Valley, and I think it would be a travesty to cause those to be removed. So I join many of my constituents in objecting to the elimination of these historic and valued attributes of Yosemite.

Fourth, I am very much opposed to the removal of horse stables from the Valley and the elimination of commercial trail rides. As one who has personally utilized these stables, I can attest to the enjoyable and historical experience they provide to many of the Park's visitors. I might add, I still remember how sorry I felt after my eight-hour trip up and eight-hour trip down—I think it was eight hours—to get to the back of Half Dome. But horses belong in the Valley. It would be a shame to force them out. I think diversity in the type of experience visitors can enjoy has the effect of spreading out congestion in the Valley, which would otherwise be more concentrated under this restrictive Plan.

Finally, I am concerned with the manner in which the Clinton administration force-fed this plan to the people of this country. Former Interior Secretary Babbitt's refusal to extend the diminutive public comment period of a plan that has been 20 years in the making was very disappointing. Furthermore, I received a copy of the Merced River Plan Record of Decision, a plan critical to the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan, a mere four days prior to the end of the public comment period for the Valley Plan. Needless to say, ample time for both my constituents and me to fully digest and comment on the Plan was effectively denied.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, I believe that the Yosemite Valley Plan significantly limits the ability of visitors to enjoy the Park. When this ability is eroded, the value of the Park, as well as the economies of the gateway communities, is compromised. This result is unnecessary, and I encourage Park officials to develop a more appropriate balance between visitor experience and protection of the Park. I am further encouraged that the new Bush administration has signaled a greater willingness to work with communities when developing policies that impact them on such a significant level.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing, and I thank our witnesses for their contributions and their interest in preserving the beauty of and the continued access to Yosemite National Park. I look forward to the testimony.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Doolittle follows:]

Statement of The Honorable John T. Doolittle, a Representative in Congress from the State of California

I would like to thank Chairman Hefley for holding this hearing on this very important matter, the Yosemite Valley Plan. Also, I would like to express my thanks to my colleague, Congressman George Radanovich. His district together with mine contains Yosemite National Park, and his tireless efforts to maintain continued public access have been well received throughout our shared region. I know that Tuolumne County Counsel, George Oliver, is here as well, and I especially appreciate him making the long trip here to represent the views of my constituents.

As you all know, Yosemite National Park has long been an international travel destination, drawing millions of tourists every year to marvel at breathtaking waterfalls, Giant Sequoias, and plentiful wildlife. I have long appreciated the beauty Yosemite has to offer, and have made it a priority to preserve this national treasure for future generations to enjoy. However, I believe very strongly that we should seek to accomplish that objective without compromising the visitor experience and unnecessarily impacting the economies of the communities that lie at the gateway to the Park. It is in these two areas that the Valley Plan falls short.

First, the Plan has unnecessarily and unfortunately decreased the amount of parking spaces in the Valley. I am well aware that at times, Yosemite Valley experiences heavy traffic congestion, and that such congestion is neither good for the Park or for the visitor. However, congestion of this level only exists a few days per year, and for those days, a more efficient traffic management strategy is needed. But permanently reducing the number of parking spaces would only result in unnecessarily hampering the ease of visitation for many day use travelers during times of the year when traffic volume is low. As such, I will continue to seek alternatives that reduce congestion while preserving auto touring as a viable means for all to visit the Park.

Secondly, I object to the Plan's severe reduction in the number of overnight accommodations under the guise of flood management. As one who has been very supportive of the Park's efforts to obtain federal funds to repair damage resulting from the 1997 floods, it is disheartening to see those appropriations being used to impede the visitor's ability to enjoy what is perhaps the Park's greatest appeal - one's ability to spend the night under the stars in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Third, although Housekeeping Bridge will remain under the Plan to provide access across the Merced River, the removal of Sugar Pine and Stoneman Bridges remains in the Plan. I join many of my constituents in objecting to the elimination of these historic and valued attributes of Yosemite.

Fourth, I am very much opposed to the removal of horse stables from the Valley and the elimination of commercial trail rides. As one who has personally utilized these stables, I can attest to the enjoyable and historical experience they provide to many of the Park's visitors. Diversity in the type of experience visitors can enjoy has the effect of spreading out congestion in the Valley, which would otherwise be more concentrated under this restrictive Plan.

Finally and most importantly, I am concerned with the manner in which the Clinton Administration force-fed this plan to the people of this country. Former Interior Secretary Babbitt's disgraceful refusal to extend the diminutive public comment period of a plan that has been 20 years in the making is nothing but a total affront to our democratic system. Furthermore, it is absolutely appalling that I received a copy of the Merced River Plan Record of Decision - a plan critical to the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan - a mere four days prior to the end of the public comment period for the Valley Plan. Needless to say, ample time for both my constituents and me to fully digest and comment on the Plan was effectively denied.

Overall, I believe that the Yosemite Valley Plan significantly limits the ability of visitors to enjoy the Park. When this ability is eroded, the value of the Park, as well as the economies of the gateway communities, is compromised. The result is unnecessary, and I encourage Park officials to develop a more appropriate balance between visitor experience and the protection of the Park. I am further encouraged that the new Bush Administration has signaled a greater willingness to work with communities when developing policies that impact them on such a significant level.

Again, I thank the Chairman for holding this very important hearing, and I thank these panels of witnesses for their contributions and great interest in preserving the beauty of, and continued access to, Yosemite National Park.

Mr. HEFLEY. Any questions for Mr. Doolittle?

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Chairman, I have one.

Mr. HEFLEY. Yes. You're recognized for five minutes.

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Doolittle, obviously, since the upper part of the Park is closed during the winter, the eastern gateway, Tioga Pass and that area in your district, would be most heavily impacted by this.

Do you have any visitation figures for how many people would stay at the gateway community and then come into the Park and exit at another point?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. You know, I don't have that at my fingertips, but I will provide them for the record, because the figures illustrate just how significant having the road open is to our gateway communities. It means—as I recall, it's hundreds of thousands of dollars a day when people have the ability to go through the Park. So every day beyond Memorial Day that that road isn't open is of great concern to us.

Mr. SOUDER. The time to enter from the east side, going across Columbia Meadows and down into the Valley is about how long?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. You know, I have not entered the Park ever from the east side, but I believe that that would be, well, a good hour or more, probably, an hour-and-a-half.

Mr. SOUDER. And then it's similar if you exited one of the other directions, you're 45 minutes to an hour?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Yes. It would be more like an hour or so, I think.

Mr. SOUDER. Okay. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. HEFLEY. Thank you. Any further questions?

With that, Mr. Doolittle, I do hope you will stay with us and participate fully in the hearing.

Mr. HEFLEY. The next panel will be Mr. John Reynolds, Regional Director, Pacific West Region, National Park Service, San Francisco, California.

At this point I would like to ask Mr. Radanovich to take the gavel and to chair the hearing. The Valley is in his district; he has a deep and abiding love for Yosemite National Park, and an interest in this Plan. So I would like, Mr. Radanovich, if you would care to, to come and chair the Subcommittee.

Mr. RADANOVICH. [Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think we will call the next panel up, but first, let me do one quick housekeeping thing. I do have a letter from the Mariposa County Unified School District that has some concerns regarding the Plan, and I would ask unanimous consent that it be included in the record. Hearing no objection, I will go ahead.

[The letter follows:]

MARIPOSA COUNTY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 8 Mariposa, CA 95338 • (209) 742-0250 Fax (209) 966-4549

Jeffrey N. Hamilton, Ed.D.
District Superintendent

March 21, 2001

The Honorable George Radanovich
123 Cannon HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Radanovich:

On March 27, 2001, an oversight hearing will be held in Washington D.C. before the National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands subcommittee. Interested persons from the gateway communities to Yosemite National Park will be testifying regarding the Yosemite Valley Plan and its Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Although the Mariposa County Unified School District was not specifically invited to testify at this hearing, we wish to request that the potential impact of the Yosemite Valley Plan on the schools serving Yosemite National Park be considered in the implementation of the Plan.

The Mariposa County Unified School District is nearly coterminous with Mariposa County. Enrollment at the 13 school sites within the District is currently 2,590 students. An elementary school for K-8 students is located within Yosemite National Park, and a K-6 elementary school and a necessary small high school are located in the adjoining community of El Portal. The student population of these schools consists primarily of the children of Park Service, concessionaire and support services employees.

The ability of the school district to deliver a high-quality educational program for these children directly impacts the ability of the National Park Service and related employers to attract and retain good employees. It is therefore important that the school district and the National Park Service work together to meet the educational needs of these students.

The school district's primary concern is how the three Park schools will be impacted by the Yosemite Valley Plan. Adequate planning and funding must be addressed for such needs as school facilities, teacher staffing, and transportation for Park students to the comprehensive middle school and high school programs in Mariposa (a 92 mile round trip). The relocation of employees and housing for the Park will directly affect how the school district will plan to meet the needs of these students. The school district is committed to ensuring a quality educational program for students in the Park schools and asks that the National Park Service consider these factors in making decisions that will affect the future of Yosemite National Park.

We also feel it is appropriate at this time to request that a dialog begin between the Department of the Interior and representatives of the Mariposa County Unified School District to discuss long-range options to ensure the continuation of the educational program in Yosemite National Park.

Sincerely,

Nancy McConnell

Nancy McConnell, President
Board of Trustees/Education
Mariposa County Unified School District

Mr. RADANOVICH. Let's go ahead and start then with our first panel. That is John Reynolds, who is the Regional Director of the Pacific West Region of the National Park Service in San Francisco.

John, welcome. We're glad that you were able to come testify today, and we look forward to your statement and follow-up questions.

STATEMENT OF JOHN J. REYNOLDS, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PACIFIC WEST REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; ACCOMPANIED BY DAVID A. MIHALIC, SUPERINTENDENT, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you, Congressman Radanovich, and thank you, Chairman Hefley. It's my pleasure to be here.

My name is John Reynolds. I'm the Regional Director of the Pacific West Region of the National Park Service. I am here today to report on the Yosemite flood recovery efforts, the Yosemite Valley Plan, and how it relates to the flood recovery efforts.

A major flood occurred at Yosemite National Park in January, 1997, causing significant damage throughout the Park. In July 1997, Congress appropriated $186 million for flood recovery repairs, with the proviso that these repairs be carried out to help implement the Park's 1980 General Management Plan. An additional $11 million of funding is available from the Federal Lands Highway Program, for a total flood recovery program of $197 million.

We are on track with the flood recovery program. A substantial portion has been completed. Thirty-two miles of damaged roads throughout the Park have been repaired, and six miles of the El Portal Road has been completely reconstructed. One hundred-and-thirty eight miles of back-country trails have been reconstructed, 25 trail bridges have been repaired or rebuilt, and seven miles of paved bike paths have been reconstructed. The Park sustained substantial damage to the valley water, wastewater and electrical systems, and they have been repaired.

Seventy-seven million dollars has been obligated to date. Of the balance, $106 million is for flood-affected facilities that are included in the Yosemite Valley Plan, with the remainder for flood damage repairs to infrastructure elsewhere in the Park, outside of Yosemite Valley.

At the end of last year, I approved the Yosemite Valley Plan and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. This plan will implement many of the goals of the Park's 1980 General Management Plan, and will ensure Congress' direction that flood appropriations be used for this purpose. The 1980 plan established the broad goals to reclaim priceless natural beauty, to allow natural processes to prevail, to promote visitor understanding and enjoyment, to markedly reduce traffic congestion, and to reduce crowding. The Yosemite Valley Plan was guided by these goals.

Since 1980, additional studies and analyses have been conducted, particularly related to natural processes, visitor enjoyment, transportation, and housing. In the early 1990's, work on specific improvement plans for housing in the Yosemite Valley and the Yosemite Falls area was started. These efforts took on greater urgency following the flood of 1997, with the need to replace visitor facilities damaged or destroyed by the flood. The flood reconstruc-

tion plan for Yosemite Lodge, in conjunction with other pre-flood plans, spurred litigation against the National Park Service over concerns about fragmented planning. This litigation resulted in the decision to create one comprehensive and integrated Yosemite Valley Plan.

We will soon begin to obligate the balance of the flood recovery funds on those portions of the Yosemite Valley Plan that were affected by the 1997 flood. Campgrounds will be restored or relocated. Lodging units lost to the flood will be replaced at Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village. New facilities will be designed and located where they will not experience damage in future floods. Other projects include natural resource restoration and improved road circulation to reduce congestion and conflicts with people walking or riding bicycles.

Beyond flood recovery, the Yosemite Valley Plan also identifies many important projects that would require additional funding and further approval from Congress and the administration before they could proceed. For these projects, we will do additional regulatory compliance that will involve extensive community and public review and input, specifically including the gateway communities.

In the Yosemite Valley Plan, we commit to fulfilling our housing needs first in local communities. We have authority to create public/private partnerships to build and operate housing outside the Park. We intend to use private fundraising, where appropriate, such as that we are doing with the Yosemite Falls project. We would need to seek additional funding and approval before we could provide out-of-valley parking areas and associated shuttle systems.

There are exciting opportunities underway by several of the local counties near the Park to develop regional transit that has dramatic potential for lessening the amount of capital expenditures called for in this Plan. Park visitors staying in nearby communities, leaving their cars in the motel lot and taking regional transit, could lessen the need to develop out-of-valley parking and associated business systems in Yosemite.

Yosemite Valley is only seven miles long, and less than one mile wide. The floor of the Valley is further constrained by rockfall zones on both sides, and the flood plain of the Merced Wild and Scenic River down the middle. Through the Yosemite Valley Plan and extensive public involvement and studies, we have addressed issues concerning space for campgrounds, tent cabins, historic hotels, roads, bike paths, parking lots, Housekeeping Camp and employee housing, while also providing for and conserving the very natural scenery that draws people to this very special park.

For the draft plan, testimony was received at 14 public meetings throughout California. Public meetings were held in Denver, Seattle, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. We held over 60 informal open houses and 59 walking tours to help people see, on the ground in the Valley, what the Plan proposed. We made 150 presentations to interest groups and service clubs. This resulted in over 10,200 comments that were used to modify the Plan into the final Plan.

While the majority of commenters acknowledge that recreational opportunities should continue to be available for Yosemite Valley visitors, people differ, obviously, in their opinions of what sort of

activities should be allowed and how they should be managed. While these choices are difficult, I am pleased to report that traditional activities will, for the most part, continue at levels that fit within the rockfall hazard and flood plain that constrain us in Yosemite.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions you or members may have.

As you know, I have with me Superintendent Dave Mihalic of Yosemite, and I would appreciate your permission to invite him to the table with me, so that we may all benefit from the most knowledgeable answers to your questions as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Reynolds follows:]

Statement of John J. Reynolds, Regional Director, Pacific West Region, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. My name is John J. Reynolds and I am Regional Director of the Pacific West Region of the National Park Service.

I am here today to report on the Yosemite flood recovery efforts, the Yosemite Valley Plan and how it relates to the flood recovery efforts, and future projects that will require us to come back to Congress for more discussion.

As you may recall, a major flood occurred at Yosemite National Park in January 1997 causing significant damage throughout the park. The damage was so severe that Yosemite Valley was closed to the public for three and one-half months and, in fact, reopened to the public four years ago this month. In July 1997, Congress appropriated $186 million for flood recovery repairs, with the proviso that these repairs be carried out to help implement the park's 1980 General Management Plan. An additional $11 million funding is available from the Federal Lands Highway Program, for a total flood recovery program of $197 million.

I am pleased to report that since then, we are on track with the flood recovery program. A substantial portion of the flood recovery program has been completed, resulting in restoration of many different types of public services. For example, 32 miles of damaged roads throughout the park have been repaired and six miles of the El Portal Road, one of three major access roads to Yosemite Valley has been completely reconstructed. This road not only connects Highway 140 and Mariposa to the valley, but also provides the connection to the park's primary administrative and maintenance center in El Portal. Moreover, 138 miles of backcountry trails have been reconstructed, 25 trail bridges have been repaired or rebuilt, and seven miles of paved bike paths have been reconstructed. The park sustained substantial damage to the valley water, wastewater and electrical systems, which has been repaired. This vital infrastructure is critical to supporting both park operations and visitor facilities.

As of February 28, 2001, $77 million has been obligated. Of the balance, $106 million is for flood-affected facilities that are included in the Yosemite Valley Plan, with the remainder for flood damage repairs to infrastructure elsewhere in the park, outside of Yosemite Valley. More information on these projects can be found in the Flood Recovery Quarterly Report, which we routinely provide to Congress.

At the end of last year, I approved the Yosemite Valley Plan and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. This plan will implement many of the goals of the park's 1980 General Management Plan and will ensure Congress" direction that flood appropriations be used for this purpose. The 1980 plan established the broad goals to reclaim priceless natural beauty; allow natural processes to prevail; promote visitor understanding and enjoyment; markedly reduce traffic congestion; and reduce crowding. The Yosemite Valley Plan was guided by these goals.

Since 1980, additional studies and analyses have been conducted, particularly related to natural processes, visitor enjoyment, transportation, and housing. In the early 1990's work on specific improvement plans for housing, Yosemite Valley, and the Yosemite Falls area was started. These efforts took on greater urgency following the flood of 1997 with the need to replace visitor facilities damaged or destroyed by the flood. The flood reconstruction plan for Yosemite Lodge, in conjunction with the other pre-flood plans, spurred litigation over concerns about fragmented planning. The litigation resulted in the decision to create one comprehensive and integrated Yosemite Valley Plan.

With the completion of this plan for Yosemite Valley, we are now on track for completing the remainder of the flood recovery program. We will soon begin to obligate the balance of the flood recovery funds on those portions of the Yosemite Valley Plan that were affected by the 1997 flood. For example, campgrounds will be restored or relocated to areas identified in the plan that are better able to sustain their impacts or do not, in themselves, cause impacts to the Merced Wild and Scenic River. Lodging units lost to the flood will be replaced at Yosemite Lodge and Curry Village. As detailed in the Flood Recovery Action Plan, new facilities will be designed and located where they will not experience damage in future floods of similar magnitude. Other projects include natural resource restoration and improved road circulation, to reduce congestion and conflicts with people walking or riding bicycles.

Beyond flood recovery, the Yosemite Valley Plan also identifies many important projects that would require additional funding and further approval from Congress and the administration before they could proceed. For many of these projects, we will do additional regulatory compliance that will involve extensive public review and input, including input from the gateway communities. Some of these projects include moving additional employee housing and services out of Yosemite Valley.

In the Yosemite Valley Plan, we commit to fulfilling our housing needs first in local communities. We have authority to create public-private partnerships to build and operate housing outside the park. We intend to use private fundraising, where appropriate, such as what we are doing with the Yosemite Falls Project. We would need to seek additional funding and approval before we could provide out-of-valley parking areas and associated shuttle systems. However, there are exciting opportunities underway by several of the local counties near the park to develop regional transit that has dramatic potential for lessening the amount of capital expenditures called for in this plan. Park visitors staying in nearby communities, leaving their cars in the motel lot, and taking regional transit could lessen the need to develop out-of-valley parking lots and associated shuttle bus systems in Yosemite. In fact, motels in gateway communities could offer their guests a choice in how to visit the park.

Mr. Chairman, Yosemite Valley is only seven miles long and less than one mile wide. The floor of the valley is further constrained by rockfall zones on both sides and the floodplain of the Merced Wild and Scenic River down the middle. Through the Yosemite Valley Plan and extensive public involvement and studies, we have addressed issues concerning space for campgrounds, tent cabins, historic hotels, roads, bike paths, parking lots, Housekeeping Camp, and employee housing, while also providing for and conserving the very natural scenery that draws people to the park.

During the public comment period for the draft plan, testimony was received at 14 public meetings throughout California. Public meetings were held in Denver, Seattle, Chicago, and Washington, DC. In Yosemite Valley, we held over 60 informal open houses and 59 walking tours to help people see on the ground what the plan proposed. And we made 150 presentations to interest groups and service clubs. This resulted in over 10,200 comments that were used to modify the draft and make changes in the final plan in response to public input.

We have found that people are passionate in their opinions of what should, or should not happen in Yosemite, and their input is important. While the majority of commenters acknowledge that recreational opportunities should continue to be available for Yosemite Valley visitors, people differ in their opinions of what sort of activities should be allowed and how they should be managed. While these choices are difficult, I am pleased to report that traditional activities will, for the most part, continue at levels that fit within the rockfall hazard and flood plain that constrain us in Yosemite Valley.

We are fortunate that with the funding opportunities of the flood recovery appropriations, the Fee Demonstration program, private donations, public-private partnerships, and future line item projects, we can implement the plan and restore natural processes and visitor services that are vital to the very values people come to Yosemite to enjoy—the meandering Merced River, the views of the thundering water falls and shadowed granite walls, the lush meadows and the wildlife that makes this valley its home.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions that you or the members of the subcommittee may have.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Without objection for others to speak on your behalf, I don't see any dissent on that. So ordered.

John, thanks for your testimony. The way I'm going to handle this, I'm going to ask a couple of questions and then we'll go quick-

ly down. I would ask for—You know, typically the thing is five minutes per person. I want to make sure that everybody who has a question gets answers, but I don't want to take up all the time initially, either. So we're going to pass this baton along rather quickly, and we're going to go more than one round. If you don't get every question asked your first go around, you will have a second round. I just want to make sure everybody has a chance to participate.

If you would set the clock to three minutes, then we'll go ahead.

My first question, John, is that, as you know, the budget request for this is $441 million. In the flood of 1997, there had already been appropriated some $200,000 for improvements to the Park. Much of that was spent on Highway 140, getting it repaired and up and running, which leaves a balance of about $106 million that's already available to you to begin spending on this plan, in addition to gateway receipts that add up to about $40 million.

Can you list for me specifically what you have the green light on, to go ahead and begin spending on, and what you intend to spend money on, given that appropriation already?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir. We would begin immediately on guest lodging and campground replacement and restoration; replacing the existing shuttle fleet with a fleet that is much more environmentally friendly; construct a transit center; reconstruct trails, bridges and utilities; and reconstruct concession employee housing so that the concessionaire can operate in a more effective manner.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Did you mention also the campgrounds, the upper and lower river campground projects as well?

Mr. REYNOLDS. As you know, sir, the upper and lower river campgrounds are called for in the Plan to be restored to their natural environment. They are in the natural waterway and floodway of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. They have been held in place so far by riprapping along much of the bank, on the upper side of the river.

We are not, under the constraints of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; we may not continue—we are not allowed to continue to protect that landscape in that manner. So as part of both the mission of the National Park Service and the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, we would restore the natural environment of those two campgrounds. Work is called for in the 1980 plan to provide campsites, additional campsites, in other parts of the Park.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And that is not lodging facilities outside the Park to account for any loss of campground spaces or anything like that; that is, actual campground spaces may not be in the Valley itself but somewhere in the Park?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir, that's correct.

Mr. RADANOVICH. What would be an example of some of these projects that are part of the Plan that would require future appropriations for outside that $140 million that's available to you now?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Can I ask Dave to address that in detail, sir?

Mr. RADANOVICH. Sure.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, I think that the question is which ones are not yet funded, that are part of the Plan?

Mr. RADANOVICH. Yes, that would require future appropriation from the Congress.

Mr. MIHALIC. A good example of that would be Mr. Doolittle's concern over the historic bridges, which are called for removal in the Plan. Those are not yet—those do not have funding appropriated for them.

Another example might be the satellite and out-of-valley parking. That does not have funding. In fact, the Plan, before we would actually construct those, calls for further environmental review, public input, and a traffic management study that we would do in order to best be able to build those appropriately.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to defer to Mrs. Christensen, and we'll have more questions. I do want to make the rounds for everybody first before we answer any more.

Mrs. Christensen.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you.

I'm sort of concerned about the discrepancy and whether there was enough public comment, and your statement about all the outreach that you made and the number of hearings and so forth that you had.

Do you feel that all of the communities that were involved were reached through the various outreaches that were made by the Park Service? Because we're hearing on the other side that the communities have not been properly consulted.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Congresswoman, I would never decide that I should speak for those communities. It was obviously our intent and we tried very, very hard to include those communities. I think, obviously, if they feel that they need additional ways in which we can communicate, it is up to us to meet with them, to find ways with them to do so.

We have started something that I don't think we've done anywhere else with Mariposa County, which is now starting its general plan, and Superintendent Mihalic and the Park are working with the county now to try to come to a way where we can do our plans for El Portal, which is within Mariposa County, and the Mariposa County plan as one document that serves us all and as one process led by the county and participated in by us that results in that kind of thing.

So I think your question is a question that is one that is very, very important. We felt very strongly that the design of our involvement system would include the counties. The counties I think would say that they would have liked additional and different ways to be involved.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. One of the concerns also is about the lodging and whether the new Plan allows for enough accommodation for visitors and so forth. In your plan, do you think there's enough lodging, both within and outside the Park to accommodate the usual number of visitors that would come to Yosemite?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Congresswoman, in no park has it ever been the intent of the Park Service to accommodate all the demand. Instead, we've tried to accommodate that which is necessary and appropriate, as the law says. Our intent has always been, and continues to be, to provide the maximum amount of access to people.

When the 1980 plan was approved, we expected some development of overnight lodging to take place outside the Park, because

we put limits on the amount in the Park, and called for further reductions. We were overwhelmed by the—I mean, in terms of the emotion—by the amount of overnight accommodations that has taken place outside the Park to serve the needs of visitors, so that more people can come and stay in the Yosemite area in the local economy. We expect the same thing to continue to happen.

So I think whether or not visitors can have access to the Park and enjoy the Park is very well taken care of, and will be further taken care of by local private interests.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I will stop here and allow others to ask questions.

Mr. RADANOVICH. All right. Thank you.

My Chairman, Mr. Hefley.

Mr. HEFLEY. Thank you, and I will try to be brief.

You have two charges as the Park Service. One of them is to protect the resource and the other one is to provide for the enjoyment of the public to enjoy that resource.

Why in the world would the Plan call for destroying these historic bridges, which are one of the things that people do remember when they leave the Park, in addition to the waterfall and other things, and what is your plan for the horses, which has been a part of the Park experience for, gosh, who knows, generations, I suppose. It's kind of part of the western experience that people enjoy, even if they don't ride the horses anywhere, to see the horses in the park as part of the western experience.

What are your plans for the horses and why would it call for destroying the bridges?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Hefley, may I ask Mr. Mihalic to give you a good, detailed answer? And if you would like to come back to me, I would be happy to respond.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, it's an excellent question. With respect to the bridges, as you know, with our mission, we are required to do two things, not one or the other.

With the Merced River having been designated a wild and scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, we were confronted with the challenge of how to allow the river to be free-flowing, as required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, yet constrained by these bridges that were put in that cause the river to act in an unnatural way, and sometimes even during the flooding, act as dams.

What the Plan calls for is for the first bridge, the Sugar Pine Bridge, to be removed, and because of controversy, we know that the river will then react in a different way. The Plan then calls for us to do a hydrologic study to determine whether the other bridges need to be removed.

With respect to the horses, the Plan calls for the removal of the commercial horse stable. The government horse stables are also in the Valley. We're taking those stables out. The commercial trail rides have been in conflict with other visitors with respect to hikers, day hikers and backpackers using the same trails. The trails that we're talking about receive literally thousands of people on those trails a day out of the Valley. With respect to the public input, we believe that having the commercial trail rides will reduce that conflict.

It is important to note that private horse users, day users, people who bring their horses into the Valley and wish to ride in the Valley, that will still be possible and trails will still be open. It's only the commercial aspects that we're calling to be removed.

Mr. REYNOLDS. May I also add that the rest of the Park, the entire rest of the Park, is still open to horses, as it is today, under this plan.

Mr. HEFLEY. Thank you very much.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Mr. Kildee, any questions?

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you. I will be very brief. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If the flood of 1997 had not occurred, would your plan for this Valley been significantly different than what it is now, or how different would it have been, perhaps, from the 1980 plan that had been developed for the Valley?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Sir, thank you. I don't believe, in having participated extensively in both efforts, I don't believe it would have been much different today. The reason for that is we've learned, since the 1980 plan, about the actual extent of the dangerous rockfall zone and the actual location of the flood plain. Even if the flood hadn't occurred, there are other floods that have been very, very near to the same volume and aerial extent. So I think we would have been faced with exactly the same constraints that we had as a result of the flood.

I think what the flood did was give us the opportunity and the direction by the Congress to take that new knowledge into account and create a plan and get on with doing it. So I think the answer is it would not have been significantly different, sir.

Mr. KILDEE. In general, do we have to be careful with our national treasures like this, to make sure that the reason that attracts people to these places is we do not at the same time destroy the very thing they came to see.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir, I think that's the charge of the National Park Service and why it's so much fun to work there.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. The gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Souder.

Mr. SOUDER. Thank you. It's good to see you again, Mr. Mihalic. I appreciated your hosting me while I was there, to explain and help me understand some of the concerns.

I have a quick question about the bridges. Are the bridges historic structures?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Souder, yes, they are. They are designated under the National Historic Preservation Act, because of their age, as historic bridges.

Mr. SOUDER. It is suggested that, in trying to reconcile, that there's a third thing in addition to the fact that we have this dilemma, with different places where we have a historic structure on historic natural ground and which takes preeminence, but visitor enjoyment is also a third charge of the National Park Service. So you're really trying to balance multiple things.

In trying to sort through the parking question, is 550 the maximum amount allowed under the Plan?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Souder, yes, 550 is the amount called for under the Plan.

Mr. SOUDER. Could that be altered? Are there variables in the plan that would allow that to go up, or is that fixed?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Souder, the Plan, as you know, includes an environmental impact statement. As part of the environmental impact statement process, we looked at an area in which the day-use parking of 550 cars would go. It's important to note that the total amount of parking in the Valley is actually over 2,000 cars. The remainder of that are for the Housekeeping Camp, the campgrounds, the lodge, Curry Village, the Ahwahnee Hotel. Everyone going there will have a parking place as well. The 550 figure to which you refer is just for the day-use parking lot.

In that area, we actually did an analysis that we could probably fit as many as maybe half again as much as the 550, maybe 800 vehicles, in that area. It is also important to note that if we were to try to reverse the figure in terms of reliance on buses, that that figure would probably be closer to 1,200 cars for day-use parking.

Mr. SOUDER. Could you explain that last statement again? In other words, if you used buses, you would have fewer, longer-term people in the park. Therefore, your day-use availability of spaces would be higher; is that what you're saying?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Souder, the concern of Mr. Radanovich that he mentioned was that he would like to see less reliance on the out-of-valley parking and the bus system that would serve that parking. The number that it would take to make the out-of-valley shuttle only about three months of the year would be around 1,200 cars for day-use parking.

Mr. SOUDER. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. The chair recognizes Ms. McCollum from Minnesota.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Reynolds, if I'm understanding your testimony correctly, part of the contributing factor to the floods were some of the man-made structures that were placed in the Park; is that correct?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, that's correct, particularly in the case of some of the bridges.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. So part of the management plan was looking at reducing potential flooding in the future by removing some of these obstacles—and I understand you still have some hydraulic studies that are going to progress forward, to see where or not some of the structures should be removed. But the decision to remove them would be to lessen the threat of flooding in the future; is that correct, Mr. Reynolds?

Mr. REYNOLDS. It would be to—that's generally correct. It would be to reduce the aerial extent of the floods above the bridge, above the bridges, and let the natural flow of the water take place.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chair and Mr. Reynolds, I read in one of the pieces of information that I have that you have about four million visitors a year, is that correct, Mr. Reynolds?

Mr. REYNOLDS. It has actually been as high as four million. I think last year it was about 3.7.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chair, could someone from the Park Service tell me, in the next ten to twenty years, what do you think, based

on trending that you did in your Plan, what do you think you might have for annual visitors?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I think we would have to come back to tell you exact numbers, but with the population increases in California and the continuing trends toward travel from all over the United States and all over the world, I think the pressures to visit national parks everywhere, including Yosemite, is just going up.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chair. That information coming at a future time is fine.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

In response to a question asked by Ms. McCollum to John Reynolds concerning visitation trends at Yosemite:

While specific visitation projections for the next ten or twenty years are not available, we expect visitation to the park to continue increasing, based on the anticipated growth of California's population and trends toward increased travel to national parks from within the United States and abroad.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. I haven't had an opportunity to be there, gentlemen, but the Yosemite Valley, along with the congestion, often has a smog core to it. Could you tell me about the air quality in the Park, if that's ever been a concern?

Mr. REYNOLDS. It has been a concern, from two sources. The first source is within the Park itself, and it consists of automobile exhausts and campfire smoke, if you will. At some times of the year, it could be from natural or prescribed fires.

The second source is out of the Park and is increasing. The recent studies show that everything in the Sierras, all plant materials in the Sierras below 6,000 feet—and the Valley is just about 4,000 feet—all plant materials in the Sierras are being damaged, about 29 percent of the plant materials in the Sierras below 6,000 feet.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chair, if I could just make sure that I understand the testimony, if I could do a follow up. Mr. Reynolds, the cars that are going through on a heavy day use are contributing to the lack of air quality, the potential smog quality, for people that are hikers who could be suffering from asthma, respiratory disease?

Mr. REYNOLDS. In the Valley itself. The intent of the Plan, of course, is to reduce the adverse air quality within the Valley from emissions produced inside the Park.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. RADANOVICH. The gentleman with whom I share the Park with, Mr. Doolittle. John?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The bridges, tell me about the flooding problem. Well, before we get into that, what was the bigger factor, the flooding issue or the incompatibility of the Wild and Scenic River status that dictated the selection of a plan that removes these two bridges?

Mr. REYNOLDS. From my point of view—and if you would like to have Dave answer as well, because we might get a more full answer here—but from my point of view, it is the combination of the two together. Had we not had the Wild and Scenic River mandates,

I'm sure we would have had a much more difficult time making this decision.

Nonetheless, that being said, as we understand natural systems better and better from better science, I'm sure we would have had the same kind of discussions and probably come to the same conclusion. But I think that focusing in on the Wild and Scenic River helped us very much to focus in on this issue.

Dave, do you want to add more to that?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman and Mr. Doolittle, it's one of the most difficult parts of not just the bridge question but almost all the questions in the Valley, because our mission from Congress is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein. So it's very difficult to come to an either/or conclusion.

In this particular instance, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act has specific language that says that it shall take precedence over other law. In order to keep the bridges, which are obviously anchored on either side of the river, from washing away during flood events, the river has been riprapped and the channel has been kept in the bridges upstream, and then there's been scouring downstream, which has caused the erosion to occur below the bridges. In essence, what we've had to do is constrain the river to fit where the bridges are.

It's a very difficult issue. It's obviously as much a science issue as well as an emotional issue. I think we came down on the side of trying to retain those natural features and those natural processes in the Valley that the public does come to see, and that's why we had originally proposed in the draft plan the removal of three of the bridges. We said we will remove the first bridge, do a hydrologic study, and then see what happens after that.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Let me just observe that certainly a different approach has been taken on other rivers. The American River, below Nimbus Dam to the confluence of the Sacramento, is a wild and scenic river. There are, I believe, close to half a dozen bridges that traverse it. The river itself is impounded by levees on both sides that are about 20, 25 feet high. No one has ever suggested that we remove any of the bridges.

You know, in the case of Yosemite, I think you have erred in the wrong direction by taking out those bridges.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. You're welcome.

Tom Udall from New Mexico.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Reynolds, it seems to me one of the issues here is the impact on the Valley communities, the community outside of Yosemite Valley. In looking at this and hearing your testimony and the questions of others, it seems like what you're doing is actually a "win win" for the communities outside the Valley, in the sense that you're moving parking spaces, many of them, to outside the Valley. So if there are parking spaces outside the Valley, those individuals will park and shop in those communities and be out there and then be able to take a shuttle in.

The same thing is true, I think, for the concessions and the hotel space. There are many new hotels being built, I think, hotel rooms

in the outside community. So there is more of an opportunity for those people to spend time there.

Then the "win" on the Park side is having people come into the Park and really enjoy the experience. It seems to me that you're reaching a pretty good compromise here.

But could you give me your comments on that, in terms of looking at both sides of this?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir. Thank you for the question.

Obviously, as I came to the time to sign or not sign the Record of Decision, I had to think about that very issue as well as the rest of the issues that have been talked about here. We believe, of course, we're headed there. I think a lot of people actually believe that we're headed there, too.

I think the real issue, in relationship to the communities here, and particularly as we have found out in the last several months as we've gone into very detailed discussions with Mariposa County, it's how we go about creating an understanding between both of us and the need to raise our ability, to improve our ability to do that, which I think many of the counties are coming to.

I think that's one of the reasons that Dave came to the Park almost two years ago, was to increase the relationship between the Park and the communities prior to the time the decisions were made. I would point to the recent developments with Mariposa County to indicate how much we might be able to do that.

I think it's a difficult question. I think it's a question of agencies in transition, plus I think it's a question of communities becoming much, much more concerned with their relationship with their Park areas nationwide, not just in Yosemite.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Could you tell us briefly about the fee demonstration program, how that operates and how those monies are to be used?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes. If it's all right with you, I'm going to have Dave do that because he can illustrate with exact examples from Yosemite as opposed to some more general things I might be able to cover.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Udall, the fees called for in this Plan, we've actually been banking our fee revenue. We get about $12 million a year and we want to apply it toward this Plan.

Some examples of visitor facilities that would be funded by the Plan would be everything from fixing up some of the water and sewage treatment plants and the utilities that support those visitor services, to some of the campground and road projects and other restoration projects, and a lot of the research that is needed to be done before we can actually do the environmental compliance.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I might add to that, sir.

As you probably recall, we have fee demonstration authority from the Appropriations Committee. The Park keeps 80 percent of the fees that it collects in the Park to use for projects, and those are primarily headed toward addressing the backlog of infrastructure and resource projects within the Park.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Thank you both very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have additional questions, but I will do them on the next round.

Mr. RADANOVICH. We'll make sure we get to them all.

Mr. Reynolds, I grew up next to Yosemite, and always the common wisdom was don't go to Yosemite between Memorial Day and Labor Day because it was crowded, that school was out and there were a lot of people visiting. I know this plan attempts to address that problem.

By the way, the only time it ever got on national TV, that Yosemite had traffic problems, was either Memorial weekend of the 4th of July or Labor Day. I think it created a problem that in some ways could have been easier dealt with, rather than this image that Yosemite has gridlock traffic 9 to 12 months out of the year.

In the development of this Plan, I know there is a direct relationship between YARTS, the busing system that would bus people from points in the Valley, but also points in the outlying communities into the Park and back. There is a direct relationship between that and the amount of parking spaces that this record decision has identified as being sufficient to meet the demands for visitorship in Yosemite. You have settled on 550 spaces, but that includes the operation of YARTS for a nine-month period.

I have always been a supporter of YARTS, but I have always perceived it as being there to make the need when traffic was a problem, when visitorship was at an excess, and that, to my knowledge, would be a three-month period between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

Superintendent, you alluded a little bit earlier that there's a direct relationship between the amount of time that YARTS operates and how many spaces are required.

If YARTS were to operate on a three-month period, just so that I understand it completely, was it said there would be 1,200 spaces required in the Park, different from the 550 that are there now?

Mr. MIHALIC. Actually, Mr. Chairman, I may have misspoken and I apologize if I didn't say it quite correctly.

It is not so much the YARTS regional transit system, but the Plan proposes three satellite out-of-valley parking areas—

Mr. RADANOVICH. Correct.

Mr. MIHALIC. —which we would have to run an additional shuttle bus service from that satellite parking into the Valley. It would be that shuttle system that would work nine months out of the year.

What we have said is, if YARTS is successful, YARTS is the regional transit system, then we may not have to build or run such a separate shuttle system. It may be that YARTS could either do it under contract, or YARTS' regular normal regional service may actually serve that need. Therefore, that aspect of the Plan wouldn't have to be built, which would substantially reduce the $441 million capital cost of the Plan.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Satellite parking aside, my question is, if YARTS were to run for three months, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, what would be, in your view, the necessary amount of parking spaces in the Valley, not including the satellite parking spaces, that would meet visitor demand?

Mr. MIHALIC. From the studies—and we did extensive transportation studies with transportation engineers. We worked with Caltrans. We had other reviews of those studies. In order to get it to three or four months, that summer period of which you speak,

we believe that you would need around 1,200 spaces for day users in the Valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. So for a three-month operation of YARTS, you would need 1,200 spaces, not the 550 that were called for in the Record of Decision?

Mr. MIHALIC. That's correct.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Sir, if I may add, partially just for the record, I think that the—Well, let me start over.

There are two trends that have taken place since the 1980 plan came out which are essential in understanding the transportation issues. One is, the percent of the visitation to the Park that is day use has gone way, way up. In addition to that, the percent of the time that the Park has heavy transportation issues has also gone way, way up. So visitation has changed from primarily overnight use to primarily day use, corresponding in large part to the increases in population at the California location. And it has spread through the year farther.

So the plan, just for the record, calls for eight months, and for transportation four months. That was decided based upon when the largest amount of transportation need was, because of the trends in the way use is going. If California continues to develop in the way that we all think it is, electricity aside for the moment, we expect that the amount of time that the Valley is heavily used and the percent of day-use visitation will continue to go in the same way they have been. So that's why there's a lot of difference between the 1980 plan and this Plan here.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I think the debatable part is that by using—The plan overly relies on the busing system, YARTS, in order to meet that demand. It's the perception of some that the overdependence on YARTS is another means of just basically keeping people out of the Park, because YARTS, although it's been on a test pilot program for the last year, has not necessarily proven that it's going to be able to meet the visitorship demands that are required on the Park. That's my big issue with this plan, that it's been overly relied on.

As to the cost of also maintaining a bus system into the Park, do you have information you can provide to me that would show the cost of operating YARTS on an eight-month, 550 parking space scenario, and also a three- or four-month operating scenario at 1,200 spaces?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We would be glad to provide that. In addition, you might be interested to know that if we did build a 1,200 space site, it would probably be in the east Valley, where there are no utilities, no electricity, no previous development. You might be interested in the comparison cost to build and operate that as well.

Mr. RADANOVICH. If you could separate out operating costs with development costs, that would be fine.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Absolutely.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

In response to questions asked by Mr. Radanovich to John Reynolds concerning costs for an out-of-valley shuttle system:

The operating cost for an out-of-valley shuttle system based on 550 day-use parking spaces would be approximately $7.4 million

annually. An out-of-valley shuttle system is not required if 1,200 day-use parking spaces are provided.

Development costs for an out-of-valley shuttle system include construction of parking lots, utilities, water and wastewater systems, and visitor information facilities at each of three parking areas (Badger, El Portal, and Hazell Green). In addition, development costs include purchase of fleet vehicles, as well as construction of storage and maintenance facilities. The estimated costs are $7.6 million for Badger, $6.1 million for El Portal, and $14.2 million for Hazell Green. A private developer is expected to cover the majority of development costs for Hazell Green.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I'm sorry that Mrs. Christensen is not here. I'm going to advance to Ms. McCollum.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Reynolds, back again to the parking. Some of the parking areas you are eliminating, were they destroyed during the flood?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I don't—I would not say there's any significant day-use parking areas that were destroyed by the flood. They are, instead, dispersed around the Valley and this brings them together.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Okay, thank you. I just wanted to be clear that I had some information on that.

For me, I am struggling with—you can look at cost benefit analysis and hard, cold cash, or you can look at cost benefit analysis of maybe doing some transit and transportation for not having ongoing, continuing maintenance of parking facilities. So when you provide to the Chair here the cost of building the parking lots, could you also include your best estimates for what it's going to cost for repaving and replenishing and taking care of these parking lots on an ongoing and continuing basis? Because quite often we fail to do that.

Could you tell me a little more about what you have done to monitor air quality inside of the Park and what might happen if we don't do something about automobile emissions going into the air, how it might impact people being able to camp and have fires in the Park? Is there something maybe you can point me to or let my staff know about air quality that is in the plan?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I think—First, in answer to your first question about cost, the answer is yes, just for the record. Second, I think it would be far more instructive for us to get good information to you rather than for us to give you sort of an overview that wouldn't teach any of us very much, if that's all right with you. We can provide it for the record and to your staff.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. That's what I said. You can provide it to my staff or in the documentation. Thank you.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

In response to questions asked by Ms. McCollum to John Reynolds concerning road maintenance and air quality:

Specific maintenance costs for the roads and parking lots associated with the shuttle system have not been determined. Although implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan will reduce the number of automobiles, the number of buses will increase. The heavier weights will initially cause greater wear and tear on park roads, primarily on older asphalt. As roads are upgraded to accommodate

the heavier bus traffic, they will be better able to withstand the loads. Once the roads have been upgraded, it is not expected that there will be significant differences from current maintenance costs. Similarly, parking lots for the shuttle system will be constructed to a standard appropriate for the types and numbers of vehicles that will use them. Once constructed, cyclic maintenance costs are expected to be consistent with current costs.

The Final Yosemite Valley Plan/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement included air quality analyses for each alternative considered. The document concluded:

> Compared with Alternative 1 (existing condition), Alternative 2 (preferred alternative) would produce moderate adverse impacts on nitrogen oxides emissions, moderate beneficial impacts on carbon monoxide and particulate matter emissions, and minor beneficial impacts on volatile organic compounds emissions with the use of diesel fuel in shuttle buses through 2015. There would also be a moderate, beneficial impact on sulfur dioxide emissions. Alternative 2 would achieve a major reduction in PM 10 emissions associated With reductions in vehicle miles traveled and road dust. In comparison with diesel fuel for shuttle buses under Alternative 2, the use of fuel cells would result in lower vehicle traffic emissions for all pollutants by 2015. Emission reductions under Alternative 2 would be the greatest for all pollutants with fuel cell technology in the shuttle bus fleet. With the use of diesel, propane, or compressed natural gas in shuttle buses, emissions of three of the four pollutants would be reduced under Alternative 2.
>
> Air emissions associated with construction and demolition projects would be minor and occur over a relatively short-term period. (See Vol. IB, p. 4.2–125).

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mark?

Mr. SOUDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First I would like to note for the record one last comment on the bridge question and the wild and scenic river.

Clearly, a wild and scenic river in a park needs to be more sensitively treated than outside of a park. At the same time, this has always been a dilemma with Yosemite, because when you come in from Congressman Radanovich's home town, clearly the wild and scenic river has been partially filled in and riprapped because of the road. In fact, the National Park Service is in a fairly—hopefully it will be worked out soon—but a contested suit over the last part of the road, where your car practically gets destroyed with the lack of width and the potholes in the road. So, in that situation, I think the Park Service is doing the absolutely right thing, to just widen it and do minimal damage to the river, but accommodate visitors. It's a combination of historic structures, the visitor, and the wild and scenic river. In fact, this isn't a pure wild and scenic river, or people wouldn't be able to get into the Park. They would be doing like John Muir did, going on mules and trying to go up the side of the hills to get in.

A second thing, I would appreciate you providing some clarity for the record in an additional supplemental statement, because I have the Park Service data—and we're going to hear, I'm sure, additional data. But what was the number of lodging units pre-flood,

now in your proposed post-flood? Because I have here the number of lodging units would change from 91 to 61, but I assume that's from current to post-flood as opposed to pre-flood. And similarly for camping, which your statement says is currently 465, the draft would take it to 500, and I wanted to see a pre-flood number with that as well.

One other question I want to make sure I get in here. This bell curve that goes up in the middle months—and we had a question about whether the shuttle would be financially feasible, and you were going to provide that data. Has there been discussion about that peak period, charging for some of the day parking and helping fund a shuttle by the people who are willing to pay for the parking? Because many people, particularly those who have driven from long distances, may be willing to pay that extra. It would be a small percentage of their cost, whereas those who are day users, in fact, if you could reduce the shuttle cost, might feel differently and would still accomplish some of the same goals.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Could Dave answer these?

Mr. SOUDER. Yes.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman and Mr. Souder, with respect to the camping, there were about 800 campsites pre-flood. The draft called for about 465 sites. As a result of public input and public comment, we revised that in the final Plan to around 500 sites, again, the numbers mostly being in the River's campground area that we spoke of earlier, that would not be retained in the Valley. But those numbers could be provided for elsewhere in Yosemite National Park from the general management plan that proposed other areas.

With respect to the actual number of lodging units, I would feel more comfortable getting back to you with exact numbers rather than do it off the top of my head, if that's okay with you, sir. And...

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

In response to questions asked by Mr. Souder to John Reynolds and David Mihalic concerning the number of lodging units and campsites in Yosemite Valley:

Prior to the 1997 flood there were approximately 800 campsites in Yosemite Valley. At present, there are 475 campsites, and the Yosemite Valley Plan calls for an additional 25 sites for a total of 500.

With respect to lodging, before the 1997 flood there were a total of 1,510 lodging units available in Yosemite Valley, spread among Housekeeping Camp, Curry Village, Yosemite Lodge, and the Ahwahnee. At present, there are 1,260 lodging units available in the valley. The Yosemite Valley Plan calls for a total of 961 lodging units. It should be noted that, in comparison to the existing conditions, the mix of accommodations in Yosemite Valley will be geared more toward affordable economy lodging units.

A full description of the lodging and camping scenarios can be found in Volume IA of the Yosemite Valley Plan l Supplemental EIS.

Mr. SOUDER. ...whether or not you had looked at the parking fees.

Mr. MIHALIC. With respect to market and stuff like that, we did not consider that in the Valley Plan itself. We have talked about using either the market or that type of differential pricing as a possibility when we do the traffic management plan that the Yosemite Valley Plan calls for us to do, and look at ways of either utilizing the fee structure to fund the shuttle system, or to use it in a way to manage demand, such as demand for airport parking is used, whether you park in the long-term lot and take the shuttle, or you park up close to the terminal.

Mr. SOUDER. Mr. Chairman, I have two groups waiting outside that I need to see. Can I ask one more question now, and then I will come back a little bit later.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Sure. Go ahead, Mark.

Mr. SOUDER. And this may require additional data as well for the record.

Mr. Reynolds, you said day use numbers had gone up substantially. I wondered whether or not that day use number is up—In other words, is it because there is not overnight capacity? In other words, is that day use up mostly in the summer periods when, in fact, there may be minimal capacity for overnight lodging, and in a day use figure, do you figure in people who may come in one day, come back out to a gateway community, and come back in the next day?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I will provide the information. But, in general, I would like to say—I was talking about the percentage that has gone up. The visitation in the Park has only increased slightly over time, but the percentage difference—Part of it is because the external community is providing so much overnight accommodations these days, that that contributes, of course, to the percent that's day use.

Mr. SOUDER. Because, in fact, if the number of campground spaces go from 800 down to 465, and some lodging after flood, your day use percentage would go up because they wouldn't have an alternative.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Right. I would be glad to provide some information, and if we need to talk about it, we can do that, too.

Mr. SOUDER. Thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Thank you, sir.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

In response to a question asked by Mr. Souder to John Reynolds concerning lodging capacity and day-use visitation:

In 1980, visitation to Yosemite National Park was approximately 2.5 million people, the majority of whom stayed overnight in the park. In recent years, visitation has varied between 3.6 million and 4.3 million, although no additional overnight accommodations were provided inside the park. In response to the increased demand for overnight accommodations, hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, campgrounds, and other visitor services have been provided by the private sector in the gateway communities. Damage caused by the 1997 flood resulted in a reduction in the amount of overnight accommodations in the park, placing additional demand for services on the gateway communities. As the number of visitors staying outside of the park in the gateway communities continues to increase, the percentage of park visitors that are day-users will increase ac-

cordingly. Visitors who stay in lodging outside the park in the gateway communities or elsewhere are counted as day-use visitors each time they enter the park

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Udall.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Back to the fee demonstration issue. My understanding is that the fee demonstration project was started as a result of trying to allow you to do projects and the need for money. Could you give us a little background on that?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Gee, I can't remember what year we started the fee demonstration program, but Congress authorized us to do a fee demonstration program and relieved us of having the Congress setting the fees park by park by park, and also relieved us of having to send the fees back to the general treasury.

The idea of the demonstration program is to try a lot of different things in a lot of different places. There's a hundred different fee demonstration projects within the National Park System, some multi-park, and to be able to show what we accomplished because we were able to get the money directly, rather than have it go back to the general treasury.

In general, it has been an incredible boon to the National Park Service. Although the backlog figures, as we all know, are still very high for maintenance and resource issues, they would be higher had it not been—much higher, had it not been for the fee program. It's been extremely successful in the National Park System.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Thank you, Mr. Reynolds. My point there—and I'm not asking you to comment on this—is that I have heard rumors and comments that this administration, in terms of pulling together the budget, may well try to move some of that fee demonstration money into other areas, other than specifically back to the National Parks, as 80 percent of it is supposed to go. That is something that would concern me a lot, because I think we have, as you pointed out, huge maintenance needs and resource needs that this program provides for. So I think we need to keep that money right where it is.

Back to the automobile usage and parking spaces and all of that. Is there a big need for having an automobile after you get into the Valley there? Are we talking about hiking huge distances or something, or are we talking about a fairly narrow area where the ability to use an automobile is very limited?

Mr. REYNOLDS. The Valley is seven miles long and one mile wide. It is generally flat. It's a marvelous place to bicycle and walk. Increasing numbers of users particularly want to bicycle. So our proposals are to try to make the Valley more tranquil and make the Valley quieter, have less intrusion of automobiles, and have as many or more people than we do today enjoying the Park, at a pace in which they can take in the grandeur, take in the sublimity of that place that doesn't exist anyplace else in the world.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Thank you, Mr. Reynolds. I applaud you for that part of the plan. I think that's a very important thing you're doing. I think the idea of reducing automobile usage and trying to get the experience of the visitor to be heightened, and doing that with walking and bicycles and those kinds of things, I think

makes a real difference. I think those of you who have worked on that plan have thought this out well and I applaud you on that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. You're welcome.

Mr. Doolittle?

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Thank you.

Does it concern either of you gentlemen that the Merced River Plan was released for comment just, I believe, four days before the end of the comment period on the Valley Plan?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, if it—I don't have the schedules in front of me, but as I recall, there was more time than that. But I would have to check. Obviously, if there were just four days, I would probably have to be concerned.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Because the two plans are closely intertwined, are they not?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Absolutely. As a matter of fact, the Yosemite Valley Plan is constrained by the Merced River Plan.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. The facts that I have before me indicate that my assertion about that is, indeed, correct. I would appreciate your looking into it and submitting for the record what the answer is. If it should be different than that, then—I understand there wasn't much time. If four days is not right, I don't believe there were very many days between the release for inspection by the public of the Merced River Plan and the end of the comment period for the Valley Plan.

Mr. REYNOLDS. We would be glad to provide that.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

In response to a question asked by Mr. Doolittle to John Reynolds concerning the timing of the Final Merced River Plan and the Yosemite Valley Plan:

The Final Merced River Plan was available by mail and on the park's website on June 20, 2000. The comment period on the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan closed on July 14, 2000.

While the Final Merced River Plan was being printed during the spring of 2000, the park actively provided information to the public about its contents. At each of the 19 formal public meetings on the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan during May and June 2000, and at the 63 open houses held throughout the public comment period, information regarding the Final Merced River Plan was made available to the public.

Mr. REYNOLDS. In addition, as you well now, the Yosemite Valley Plan was started long before the Merced River Plan was finished, and so—

Mr. DOOLITTLE. It must have been in the works for 20 years, right?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, this particular piece. Actually, as others here in this room know, it has been a lot longer than 20 years.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Wasn't the plan created before Yosemite was created? Forgive me, John—

Mr. REYNOLDS. No. As a matter of fact, just as an aside, Yosemite never had a long-range plan approved for it until 1980, so it came about originally in 1864, so that's a long way to have any rational piece of paper in front of you.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. It's my understanding there was a 90-day comment period on the draft, and then a 90-day comment period on the final. Is that correct?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. For a plan that you have said was even longer than 20 years—and I thought 20 years sounded pretty long—does that strike you as unnecessarily brief, given the severe potential impacts this plan can have on everything, from the visitor experience, to the quality of the resource management, to the impact on the gateway communities?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, sir, obviously my answer has to be no, and it's twice as long as the norm is in the regulation. But, on the other hand, I would agree with you, that the public, in all of its forums, should have ample time. We believe that there was, and we made a tremendous effort to get out and to be able to talk to people in their communities.

I would have to say that yes, we did provide a lot of opportunity for people to be involved.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. If your research confirms that there was a very brief period between the release of the Merced River Plan and the close of the comment period on the Valley Plan, would you support a reopening of the Valley Plan for an extended comment period?

Mr. REYNOLDS. No, sir, I would not.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Would you support reopening of the Plan under any circumstances?

Mr. REYNOLDS. No, sir, I would not. And the reason is that I believe there is lots and lots in this Plan that is both funded and agreed to by a lot of people.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Sir, didn't you indicate earlier that you would be concerned if there were only a few days between the release of the Merced River Plan and the close of the comment period? I thought I understood that manifestation of concern.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I did. But I—

Mr. DOOLITTLE. But it wasn't that strong a concern apparently.

Mr. REYNOLDS. But I would also take into account how much people had the opportunity before the Yosemite Valley Plan was finalized to take into account what happened.

If I may continue, the reason I would not reopen it is because I think there's lots of things that a lot of people agreed to, and there is some money to be able to do those things right away.

If we stop, nothing will happen in Yosemite for probably another 10 years. The current condition that exists there today will be the status quo for that time.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Oh, I have other questions, but my time is up.

May I just ask this one. Air quality is one of the concerns advanced for restricting the cars, is that right?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Could you confirm, then—with reference to the Merced River Plan, I am told that the Plan deleted air quality as an outstanding resource value. True or false?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Doolittle, I think we'll have to get back to you exactly. But as an outstanding resource value for the River, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act specifically speaks to issues in which the value is directly related to the River, and if I recall, between

the draft and the final, air quality was deleted as an outstanding resource value for the Merced River.

In other words, the Merced River was not designated a wild and scenic river because of air quality. What that doesn't imply is that it somehow is not an outstanding resource value, in a sense, for the Valley or for our planning efforts for Yosemite National Park.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Well, I'll close with this. I would just observe, Mr. Chairman, that the deletion of air quality as an outstanding resource value has the effect to advance forward this mass transit plan. Those buses will be belching diesel fumes, because that's the available technology. That's a far dirtier quality of air than would be coming out of automobiles. It's important that air quality be deleted as an outstanding resource value from this plan in order to allow the mass transit to move forward.

I would just submit that this whole thing has been manipulated by the Park Service to promote these buses. I would like to say more about it and ask more questions, but I'm out of time. I thank you.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

Response to a question asked by Mr. Doolittle to John Reynolds concerning the decision not to use air quality as an outstanding resource value in the Merced River Plan:

Air quality was not included in the Merced River Plan as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value because it does not meet the criteria for such. In accordance with the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council Reference Guide (joint document prepared by the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service) in order to be considered, two vital questions must be answered to establish the criteria for selection of Outstandingly Remarkable Values:

- Is the value river-related or river-dependent?
- Is the value rare, unique, or exemplary in a regional or national context?

Air quality does not meet the criteria for being included as an Outstandingly Remarkable Value, and was not included in the original 1987 Wild and Scenic River designation..

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Doolittle.

Mrs. Christensen.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to go back a bit to traffic, realizing that at least half of the emissions, half of the air quality, is affected by automobile emissions, but there is also a matter of a lot of congestion and traffic congestion.

What would be the level of traffic congestion in the Yosemite Valley on a typical summer day?

Mr. REYNOLDS. That is kind of—I don't know how to characterize this so that it's understandable.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Even though it's a seven-mile long area, there is an area that is probably more likely to get a lot of traffic, a particular area.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Obviously, there are locations within the Valley that exhibit congestion, severe congestion, more so than other locations in the Valley. It is the intent of this Plan to not only elimi-

nate those but to create a situation where additional places in the Valley do not become severely congested.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. But in reducing the amount of traffic, that would really enhance or improve the visitor experience, would it not? Isn't that what you're getting towards, instead of having a lot of traffic going through, wouldn't reducing the traffic really—For an area where most people can walk or bike or so forth, does it enhance it or does it go against the visitor experience?

Mr. REYNOLDS. We believe it enhances it tremendously.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you. I think that answers my question.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

To address a number of things that have been said in the past, this air quality thing is not relevant, I think, to this Plan, at least in my opinion, because so much of the air pollution that might happen in Yosemite comes from everywhere, from San Francisco and all points in between, meaning the Bay Area, the Central Valley. The trade winds, on inversion days, bring all that smog up against the west side of the Sierras.

This Plan is really six of one and half-dozen of the other as far as air quality is concerned in the Park, don't you think? Give me some reason to think otherwise.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, I think Mr. Doolittle's concerns are certainly valid. If we meant to imply that air quality wasn't a concern of ours, then we misspoke, because—

Mr. RADANOVICH. No, I know that air quality is a concern, but this Plan doesn't address that, unless its campfires.

Mr. MIHALIC. This plan does address air quality because of the issues of the foothill communities, which are both in your district and Mr. Doolittle's district, the counties that will become nonattainment areas.

One of the official air quality monitoring sites for Mariposa County is—

Mr. RADANOVICH. —is Yosemite Valley.

Mr. MIHALIC. —is in Yosemite Valley. So if we can reduce air quality in Yosemite Valley, it obviously will be of benefit to the remainder of the county. And since both Tuolumne County and Mariposa County are both going to be treated as one air quality district, we believe—

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Mr. Chairman, did the witness mean if they can improve air quality or reduce air quality? The bus plan will reduce air quality, I believe, but I think you meant to say if you can improve it.

Mr. MIHALIC. That's what I did mean to say, Mr. Doolittle. Thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. And I might clarify that the buses that we are specifying are California standard buses for the future standard. They are the cleanest buses in the world. They are not the traditional bus that exists today.

Mr. RADANOVICH. But to say that the Yosemite Plan improves air quality in the Park and enhances the visitor experience I think is a real stretch, mainly because the bulk of the air quality issues are a result of Bay Area pollution, air pollution, and Central Valley.

I mean, if you're going to address it, unfortunately, you have to address that in order to make this work. I mean, that's just my comment.

Mr. REYNOLDS. First, within the Valley, we can improve the air quality in the Valley by reducing the number of miles traveled, with high technology buses. So we can improve the air quality of the Valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. But it will never have a significant impact, I think, on the air quality because you can't deal with Bay Area and Central Valley pollution.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Nonetheless, we are required by law to reduce—

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right, I understand. But to say this is a big improvement in air quality for the Park I think is a bit of a stretch.

Mr. REYNOLDS. It is an improvement. I will leave out the word "big".

Mr. RADANOVICH. Let's have a discussion about bridges now. There are three bridges that are planned to be removed, according to this Plan; am I right?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, there were three proposed in the draft plan. There is only one bridge proposed in the final plan, with a hydrologic study to look at the effects of, once the first bridge is removed, then determining about the other bridges.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And that would be Stoneman?

Mr. MIHALIC. The bridge to be removed is Sugar Pine Bridge, which would be the farthest bridge upstream, and then Stoneman would only be removed if the hydrologic study determined that it would be necessary to meet the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Now, to my knowledge—is it Sugar Pine Bridge, did you say, Dave?

Mr. MIHALIC. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. This is a bridge that is not on a road any more, right?

Mr. MIHALIC. That's correct, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. What's the point of keeping the bridge?

Mr. MIHALIC. Well, the point would be one of two points. As Mr. Doolittle rightfully points out, it is a historic bridge, and under the National Historic Preservation Act, has historic values which we are required to look at, just as we look at any other values. Right now it is part of the trail system, and we believe we could actually reroute the trail around fairly easily to get around that bridge. It is part of our trail system. It is not part of the road system.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Then the other bridge was the foot-bridge that went from across the River from Housekeeping. Is that not a part of the final ROD?

Mr. MIHALIC. The bridge from Housekeeping was part of the draft plan, and as a result of public input, we determined that we would not remove it as part of the final Record of Decision.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Is it possible to use the money that's been appropriated already to restore Stoneman Bridge to where it was prior to any flooding? As you know, the way Stoneman Bridge is set up, there is the arch where the river runs through, and then there's two passageways for pedestrians on each side, which is now

part of the river, because the river is flooded and the banks have not been restored to pre-flood stages.

Can you use part of that money to restore the bridge for the use that it was originally intended?

Mr. REYNOLDS. I think we're looking at each other because I think you know more than we do in this case.

Mr. RADANOVICH. It would just be pushing the bank back up to the river. I think the problem—

Mr. REYNOLDS. I would like to provide an official answer for the record. But I think the answer is no, because of the impact on a free flowing wild and scenic river.

[The response to the aforementioned question follows:]

Response to a question asked by Mr. Radanovich to John Reynolds concerning the Stoneman Bridge:

At Stoneman Bridge, the Merced River has widened to the point where the bridal paths that passed through the arches on either side of the bridge have been inundated. This widening has been caused by ongoing and gradual changes in the dynamics of the river, rather than as a result of the 1997 flood. Following the flood, the damage assessments identified bridge abutment damage at Tenaya, Sugar Pine, and Ahwahnee Bridges, but did not note any damage at Stoneman Bridge. Therefore, no flood recovery funding was requested for Stoneman Bridge.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Has there been any studies to split Stoneman Bridge and just lengthen it, in order to save the bridge?

Mr. REYNOLDS. No, there has not been.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Part of the problem with Stoneman Bridge is the bridge itself, and that the river, if left alone, would go around the bridge and make it an island. The other part is that it's a vital link to a part of the northside drive, which a lot of people don't want to see removed, and that's part of what the controversy is.

But there isn't that type of controversy on the Sugar Pine Bridge to the north. That literally is a bridge that—it's part of the walkway system, but it's not being used by automobiles right now, right?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Correct, sir.

Mr. RADANOVICH. With regard to consultation, it has always been my opinion that, in this process of public hearings, I think they began to do a lot of good. I think some of the far flung ideas for solutions to the Yosemite traffic problem were vetted properly and I think the Park Service learned a lot from these public hearings, and also the outlying communities did.

I thought that it was hastened, though, by the end of the Clinton administration in their desire to want to have a Record of Decision by the time the administration ended. I think it would have been better served had this public hearing process gone on for perhaps another six months to a year. I think we could have gotten to some better solutions.

Now, you are not beholding to the prior administration. I guess what I want is some idea from you as to whether or not you think this project was hastened and improperly drawn to a conclusion by the end of this last administration.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I am probably a bad person to ask, sir, because I have been, as you know, involved in the planning and decision making for the Yosemite Valley for 25 years. So I think if there's anyone that wanted to have a very good process, that included lots and lots of people and took into account the best information we had available and get a decision so we could start spending the flood money, it was me. It was me.

So I didn't feel a particular lot of pressure from the Secretary. I mean, he never came and told me, "John, you had better damn well have this thing done." But I wanted it done pretty badly. I also wanted to have what I considered to be a very open process, with lots and lots of public involvement.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Mihalic, would you care to respond?

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, I think obviously there would be opinions that would differ on whether to stretch the planning out further or bring it to some conclusion. The very good thing about having a deadline—and I'm reminded that this process started long before I got to the Park—the very good part about having a deadline was that it did focus people's attention, it kept people engaged, for the time period since the flood in 1997 until the end of December of 2000, when the Record of Decision was signed, everybody who had an interest in Yosemite was heavily involved and engaged, not necessarily full time, but certainly fully engaged in the planning process. I think it actually gave us a better plan as a result.

My concern is that if we keep it up as it was prior to the flood, where planning just happened every now and then and never came to conclusion, we would never get to a final plan.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

Ms. McCollum, did you have any questions?

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Chairman, I know you were moving on to bridges, but in the Yosemite Final Plan, it does—and I won't get into all that, Mr. Chair—there is some serious discussion about air quality in here, ozone. We have done much, probably because of the stringent laws that California has passed, in going from 1995, 11 days exceeding the California standard, to 1997, which is the last date on here, three days of the standard.

Congressman Doolittle, I certainly agree with you, that buses do pollute. But I think if we were to look on the basis for California emission standards, one bus versus 40 cars going through, I think we would start seeing an analysis that would show we're better off with more condensed people making fewer trips.

Mr. Chair, I also would like to ask the Park Service if they would be kind enough—When I was asking for the maintenance on the parking lots, I forgot to ask for your maintenance on roads, too, and the contributing factors, or what you might see in road savings by having fewer vehicles going on your Park roads. If you could provide that to me, also at your convenience, I would appreciate it.

Mr. REYNOLDS. We will do so.

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Mr. Udall.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just to follow up on Ms. McCollum's question here on the buses, for the record, could you tell me—are you talking about future

buses that are going to be the latest California buses, and could you tell us about that bus, the pollution, and what it runs on?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Dave can, sir.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I'm glad we have him here today.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. So am I.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman and Mr. Udall, the bus issue, as has been pointed out, the Plan does discuss air quality quite extensively.

With respect to the buses, in almost all of the measurable areas of air quality, the Plan will call for reductions in those various parameters of air quality, overall.

The buses we're speaking to are actually two different kinds of buses. The buses that we are moving forward now to replace the existing shuttle fleet in the Valley, which are diesel buses, they are diesel buses of old technology, we—

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. So that have extensive particulate emissions and all the—

Mr. MIHALIC. They're horrible, sir.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. And the smoke that you see on the freeways and all that with diesels, the same kind of thing?

Mr. MIHALIC. Exactly.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. And you're replacing those?

Mr. MIHALIC. We're replacing those. It will take—with the Federal procurement process, it will take about two years to get either alternative fuel or a hybrid fuel type of vehicle, hybrid meaning either a very small gas or diesel engine that is very efficient, that then drives a generator for electric powered buses, or something similar in terms of alternative fuels. Those are in the Valley where it's flat.

The buses that will have to come from outside the Park into the Valley, if we had fuel cell technology, we would make a huge difference. But that's years away. We could either wait for that technology to happen, or what we have proposed is that, with the clean diesel standards that California has proposed, that any buses that would be used in shuttle systems would meet those clean fuel standards. But it would have to be diesel at this point because they're going from 1,000 feet up to 4,000 feet. As Mr. Reynolds said, the Valley floor is about 4,000 feet, so it's constantly going uphill and then back downhill. That would have to be diesel technology, but it would be the best available. We would hope the future diesel technology for California standards will be the best in the Nation.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Go ahead, Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. REYNOLDS. I believe the new California standards go into effect in 2004, if I'm not mistaken, so all diesel in California will have to move to the new standard.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. So we're talking about not only improving air quality, in terms of changing over to these buses, but we're probably talking about lowering the noise level, too, with the noisiness that diesels have compared to these newer technologies you're talking about.

Mr. REYNOLDS. For the shuttles in particular inside the Valley, yes.

Mr. UDALL OF NEW MEXICO. Okay. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RADANOVICH. You're welcome.

I'm going to ask a couple more questions, and then we'll move on to the next panel. One thing I wanted to mention, I have a memo dated August 4, 1999, from then Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt, to members of the National Park Service, which was a comment that was a reaction from a Federal court ruling that enjoined the Park from doing any further work on the planning effort because of an issue with the Merced River.

In that the Secretary states, "Bob Anderson has advised me that it is still possible to complete a final Valley EIS by the end of FY 2000, and I have directed him to see that these interim deadlines are met and that the ROD is signed prior to the end of the Clinton administration." So it really was the goal, I think, of this past administration to get this thing done, whether it was done in a timely manner or not.

Two more questions and then I'll be done. You mentioned the upper and lower river campgrounds being in the flood plain. Does that mean that both campgrounds are entirely within the flood plain?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir, that's correct.

Mr. RADANOVICH. So the entire campgrounds are included in that?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Yes, sir.

Mr. RADANOVICH. The other question I have, the Park Service and concessionaire housing continue to be an area of concern to employees in Yosemite. Congress has authorized the Park to contract for off-site housing for employees in 1996.

What progress has been made in that effort, and what do we need to do to encourage movement toward the public-private partnership?

Mr. REYNOLDS. Well, I think both of us should answer that. The first thing I would say is, the more encouragement that you and the Committee and anybody else can give us, the better off we're all going to be.

The Park Service has not made significant strides in implementing that part of the law. Knowledge in Yosemite about ways in which that might happen is probably higher than anyplace else in the Park System. The need to drive us, for both of us to drive ourselves and you to drive us to implement that experience, to find ways to do it, would be extremely helpful.

Now, in terms of a more technical response, let me ask Dave if he would like to say a few words, if I may.

Mr. MIHALIC. Mr. Chairman, the bill that Mr. Reynolds refers to is the 1996 National Park Service Omnibus Act, which did provide special authorities. I don't know if a final decision has been made, but we believe that Yosemite will be one of the test cases for the National Park Service for having this type of housing.

We have broached the subject with county officials, and everybody is very favorable to us doing that. One of the things that would be helpful is if we could participate in the Mariposa County general plan, which as you know, this plan deals only with the Yosemite Valley, which is part of the larger Yosemite National

Park. We are constrained, in terms of solving our problems within Park boundaries. Nonetheless, many of our problems, housing and moving office space out of the Park, would probably be more efficient if we did it outside the Park. The best opportunity to do that would be to participate with the county.

However, right now, while we have the authority to do that, we don't have the funding to participate.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Mr. REYNOLDS. May I also add, sir—I hope I'm not interrupting you—both the General Services Administration and the U.S. Forest Service have authorities that we do not have, that we're exploring the ability to use, in either housing or office space outside of the Park itself.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Okay. Thank you.

I want to thank you both very much, Mr. Reynolds and Superintendent Mihalic, for testifying here.

Mr. REYNOLDS. Mr. Radanovich, may I just say thank you very much for this hearing. We have appreciated it very much and we appreciated the questions and the atmosphere in which we were asked to respond. Thank you, sir.

Mr. RADANOVICH. You're welcome. And thanks for being here.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Our next panel includes Mr. Gary Gilbert, who is Chairman of the Board of Supervisors for Madera County, California; Mr. Doug Balmain, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors for Mariposa County; and Mr. Gregory Oliver, who is the Tuolumne County Counsel, from Sonora, California.

Welcome, gentlemen. I'm sorry it took so long to get to you. There is just a lot of questions about this Park that need to be asked and answered.

Mr. Gilbert, if you would like to begin, what we will do is hear testimony from each of you and then questions will be from me alone, it looks like. I'm kind of the "Lone Ranger" up here right now. Perhaps some other members will come back. But you each have five minutes to read and/or summarize your comments.

STATEMENT OF GARY GILBERT, CHAIRMAN, MADERA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, MADERA, CALIFORNIA

Mr. GILBERT. My name is Gary Gilbert, and I am Chairman of the Madera County Board of Supervisors. I would like to also thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of your Committee, for this opportunity to discuss the Yosemite Valley Plan.

The word "implementation" implies the Valley Plan has been developed through a legally-mandated process and administered with integrity. Our Congressman, Congressman Radanovich, has recently stated, "the preparation of this plan, in fact, the entire planning process, has been fatally flawed." Our written testimony will further support his statements.

Today, you're going to hear varying points of view, but Madera County comes before you representing the gateway community of Oakhurst and other small communities on Highway 41. We have no conflicts of interest. Madera County's budget does not contain any Park pass-through taxes. We have no well-placed individuals in government agencies, and we receive no donations from special interests.

The Yosemite Valley Plan and the Merced River Plan were negotiated by Secretary Babbitt from a prior position of political power and special interests. As legally mandated, the public participated in that process. Major funding had already been allocated and the agendas had been aligned.

The 1997 flood request was misrepresented to Congress. More than $123 million was for nonflood projects. The 1997 Congressional Report further documented that the Park Service is using the occasion of the flood to advance an entirely separate agenda other than flood restoration.

That separate agenda can be traced to a 1994 transportation study. It focused on Yosemite and it mainly focused on mass transit tourism. Secretary Babbitt again, from his position of power, referred to the flood as a "heaven sent" event and implemented his agenda that will forever change the way the American public accesses our national park.

In 1997, an MOU between the Department of Interior and Transportation again targeted not only Yosemite, but the Grand Canyon and Zion for mass transit tourism. In 1998, Congress passed TEA-21. Again, funding is provided in that legislation for Yosemite National Park for development of a regional transportation system.

Your Resource Committee documents confirm that one of the shortcomings of NEPA is the sham of public participation when decisions have already been made. That was exactly the environment in which both the Merced River and Yosemite Valley Plans were prepared.

In 1987, Congress designated the Merced River wild and scenic. That designation required the Park Service to develop a river management plan within three years. Thirteen years later, and only after a court order, Yosemite National Park finally complied. That plan was assembled in three months. It lacked scientific credibility and is currently in litigation.

It is impossible to make informed decisions on the proposed projects in the Valley Plan without a clear understanding of the River Plan. Yet, the Valley Plan was at the printers before the public comment period for the River Plan had even closed. The Record of Decision for the River Plan was made in November of 2000, well beyond the close of comment on the Valley Plan. Again, a sham of public participation. The goal was to get the River Plan Record of Decision completed before the Clinton administration left office. Such political manipulation and control of time lines have no place in safeguarding the future of Yosemite.

The Valley Plan acknowledges underrepresentation of low income and non-Anglo visitors. There is a lack of appropriate studies, and the Plan assumes that these visitors will use inexpensive methods of visitation, such as day use, camping, and tent/cabin rentals and concludes that the Plan may impact and perhaps displace this population.

The Plan further targets day visitors for inconvenient bus rides, with additional expenses, with an increased dependence upon the concessionaire, with the removal of nearly 300 campsites, 400 tent cabins, and that's on top of a higher gate fee.

Do you ever wonder what the largest percentage of visitors to Yosemite National Park is and their annual income? It's over $100,000 per year.

The Yosemite Valley Plan is a framework of open-ended documents. It promises to embark on a resource inventory and monitoring program within the next five years, it will have an inventory monitoring, and within the next five years it will have carrying capacities, and in the next five years it will design a traffic system.

The Valley Plan's transportation element proposes an urban design bus system, complete with massive park-and-ride lots, more than 500 daily round trip buses—and that's one diesel bus arriving every 1.4 minutes during the peak period—-a 22-bay transit center in the heart of Yosemite Valley, as well as other out-of-place infrastructure. This remote staging option was dismissed by the Park Service consultants in the 1994 study. Yet, it's the centerpiece for this Valley Plan.

The prior administration's political legacy and abuse of power will cause irreparable damage to the environment, waste hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars, gamble with the economic vitality of our gateway communities, and ultimately restrict the freedom of Americans to access and enjoy their park.

As a Committee, you are faced with the challenge of sorting out the truth. We would respectfully request that: as a Committee, that no funding be appropriated for the implementation of this Yosemite Valley Plan, or YARTS, the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System; set aside and rescind this Valley Plan; redo the Merced River Plan in full compliance with the protective mandate of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; schedule follow-up hearings in our local congressional districts to more fairly and fully understand the impacts of this Park's planning process, and finally, return the left-over flood money, $110 million, that was never used for damage caused directly by this disaster to the U.S. Treasurer.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gilbert follows:]

Statement of Gary Gilbert, Chairman, Madera County Board of Supervisors

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 refers to implementation of the Valley Plan. We believe any discussion of implementation is premature. Instead, we 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.

In testimony today, we urge the following:

—No funding be appropriated for this Yosemite Valley Plan

—Set aside/rescind this Yosemite Valley Plan

—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'

—Schedule follow-up hearings in the local districts to more fairly and fully understand the impacts of park planning

Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt commented to the Commonwealth Club (3/27/00) that "the problem with Yosemite—it's got too damn many friends; I wish about 95% of them would go home and shut up." We always wondered what it would take to be among the favored 5%. Campaign contributions?? Special interest trade-

offs?? Political paybacks?? Instead we trust that the Bush administration and members of this committee have the courage and integrity to examine the truth and respond to the American people with the respect they deserve.

As Congressman Radanovich has publicly stated in the press, "the preparation of the plan, in fact the entire planning process, has been fatally flawed." We could not agree more.

97 FLOOD REQUEST MISREPRESENTED

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. 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 four years.

Congress, in its haste to do good things, awarded money IN ADVANCE for projects that were not part of any publicly approved plan—for example, removing Upper and Lower Rivers Campgrounds (utilities still intact), closing/rerouting Northside Drive, relocating concession employee housing, constructing new/upgraded (more expensive) lodging, rebuilding/widening El Portal road under the guise of repairs, an overblown multimillion dollar mass transit plan, and more. In fact, closing down the Rivers Campgrounds, closing Northside Drive, and mass transit tourism were integral parts of the "Alternative Transportation Modes Feasibility Study" (1994) prepared by consultants BRW/Dames and Moore for the National Park Service. Such projects had nothing to do with "emergency expenses resulting from flooding and other natural disasters" but instead were identified as critical to the consultant's idea of a master transportation plan for the park.

In a desperate attempt to stop the Park "spending spree," lawsuits and injunctions were filed by the public with the court ultimately ordering that all Yosemite Valley projects be placed under one comprehensive planning process. Now four years later and with Secretary Babbitt's endorsement, the Park Service claims to have $110 million "left over" from the flood money (and more than $60 million in gate fees) to begin implementing the Yosemite Valley Plan. Yet something as basic as the sewage infrastructure, which was severely damaged in the flood, is in such disrepair and so poorly maintained that the California Regional Water Quality Control Board has voted to begin fining the National Park Service for their negligence in the never-ending sewage spills, the only apparent recourse in dealing with a nonresponsive federal agency.

Taxpayers, terribly concerned about damage caused by what was promoted as a 100-year flood fully endorsed a flood repair package; but instead they ran head on into Park Service bureaucrats flush with cash, now armed to implement an agenda dictated from Washington, D.C. As Interior Secretary Babbitt told the Sacramento Bee: "It was a heaven-sent event, tantamount to Hercules cleaning out the Aegean stables." Eager to implement a long-elusive valley decongestion plan that the Carter

administration had unveiled back in 1980, the post-flood generosity of Congress now made Secretary Babbitt's goal a reality. But the public trust has been betrayed.

A TOP–DOWN PLAN

From the onset, the Yosemite Valley Plan has been dictated from Washington, D.C. As Secretary Babbitt told supporters in his Commonwealth Club presentation (3/27/00), "I immersed myself in this issue of the future of Yosemite very shortly after I went to Washington in 1993.—

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 six 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.

To further support and reinforce planning decisions, the Department of Interior and the National Park Service released a flurry of new and revised Director's Orders. And though mass transportation is the foundational element of the Yosemite Valley Plan and therefore opened to comment through the required public hearing process, the funding and the political agendas had already aligned. According to House documents, at a full Resources Committee hearing on March 18, 1998, the administration admitted that it had "not well implemented" NEPA and testified to some of the shortcomings including "the sham of public participation when decisions have really been made already." This Yosemite Valley Plan and the Merced River Management Plan appear to be casualties of that administration.

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.—

The top-down effort was not lost on the press as a host of articles reflected Babbitt's involvement in their headlines: "Interior to develop plan for reducing crush of cars, air pollution at Yosemite (Washington Times, 12/8/98); "White House Tries Again to Restore Yosemite" (New York Times, 11/12/00); "Government Acts to Reduce Yosemite Traffic" (Associated Press, 11/14/00); "Babbitt Releases Plan for Yosemite" (Washington Times, 11/15/00); "Feds want fewer cars, rooms in Yosemite National Park" (San Francisco Examiner, 3/28/00); "New Plan To Reduce Traffic at Yosemite; Babbitt wants satellite parking lots outside valley" (San Francisco Chronicle, 3/25/00); et al.

Current Interior Secretary Gale Norton in testimony (3/18/98) before the House Committee on Resources Oversight Hearing on the National Environmental Policy Act stated the following: "The original goal of NEPA and of many other environmental statutes was to forge a federal-state partnership in protecting the environment. In NEPA, state and local governments were to have an essential part in determining the environmental and societal impacts of federal actions." "—after NEPA declared national environmental policy, Congress intended and wrote the concept of "state primacy" into all subsequent major federal environmental statutes." "The federal agencies—often pay lip service to state primacy, but in practice, the agencies have mastered the art of "mission creep," using their budgets and authorities to micromanage the 50 states. That approach is not just bad policy: it defies the will of Congress as expressed in NEPA and the subsequent environmental statutes." "To return to the original intent of Congress in NEPA and so many other environmental statutes, I (Gale Norton) recommend—Congress should require that agencies consult at an early stage with state and local governments in developing environmental impact statements. It should be clear in NEPA that an environmental impact statement is not adequate if it does not address fully state and local concerns.—

As part of an administration that espouses the value of local and state participation during the formulative stages of federal decision-making, we urge you to aggressively investigate options for rescinding or indefinitely tabling this Plan that represents nothing more than Secretary Babbitt's "top down" personal attempts at a legacy.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER IMPLICATIONS

In 1987, the Merced River was designated a Wild and Scenic River. The National Park Service had three years from that date to develop a Comprehensive Management Plan that would protect the river corridor. In July of 1999, as part of litigation on the Highway 140 construction project, Judge Anthony Ishii ordered the Park Service to refrain from releasing any more planning documents until a Merced River Management Plan had been prepared. The Park Service told the judge it would need one year to comply; litigants stated they did not believe one year was sufficient time to create a valid plan that would fulfill the protective mandate of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and encouraged the National Park Service to request additional time.

One month later (8/4/99), Secretary Babbitt circulated a memo stating that the Merced River Plan must be completed by July 12, 2000 and "I have directed him (Bob Anderson) to 'see that the Record of Decision for the Yosemite Valley Plan is signed prior to the end of the Clinton Administration.' I will need your cooperation and help in making sure that the work gets done in a timely fashion. Please ensure that we have adequate financial and personnel resources working on these initiatives to meet our objectives."

In releasing the Draft Merced River Plan in January 2000, Superintendent David Mihalic explained in his cover letter:

> "The Merced River Plan is a 'foundational plan.' By that I mean it provides a foundation and a direction for future actions. You will find that this plan does not spell out specific actions that may occur in the future, but through various zoning options in the alternatives, provides a direction for the specific action that will follow. For example, the upcoming draft Yosemite Valley Plan—is a plan that may call for a specific 'action,'but only as permitted by the zoning proposed in this document."

The enabling authority of the resource-based Merced River Plan raises numerous concerns with respect to development of the follow-on Yosemite Valley Plan:

TIMELINES DETERMINED BY ELECTION CYCLE/POLITICAL AGENDAS

Public comment on the draft Merced River Plan was scheduled from January 7, 2000 through March 24, 2000. The following Monday (3/27/00), Secretary Babbitt released the five-volume, 2300 page draft Yosemite Valley Plan for public comment through July 7.

—In order to comply with such a timeline, the follow-on Yosemite Valley Plan would have had to be at the printers as much as 4–6 weeks previous, during the public comment period for the "foundational" Merced River Plan. Therefore, the public comments for the River Plan could not have been considered when developing the draft Yosemite Valley Plan. It appears that public comment on the Merced River Plan was merely an exercise in futility—just a check off on a NEPA list of requirements—since apparently the draft Valley Plan was already completed.

—An effective, adequate public comment period for the Yosemite Valley Plan cannot be achieved until the public knows the full parameters, effects and impacts of the Merced River Plan. How can the public or even the Park Service make fully informed decisions or comments on a follow-on plan that is directly affected by a foundational plan not yet completed?

—All of the land-use zoning for the Valley is prescribed in the River Plan, yet the Record of Decision for the River Plan wasn't final until November of 2000. What planning department in the country conducts project review and approval (*i.e.*, Yosemite Valley Plan) without a legal zoning map? A valid River Plan needed to be completed before starting on a draft Yosemite Valley Plan.

LACK OF SCIENTIFIC CREDIBILITY

No less than 12 major reports prepared for Congress over the past 40 years have criticized the National Park Service for its lack of science-guided resource protection. As recently as February 1997, the General Accounting Office testified to Congress that "although NPS acknowledges, and its policies emphasize, the importance of managing parks on the basis of sound scientific information about resources, today such information is seriously deficient." "At California's Yosemite National Park, officials told us that virtually nothing was known about the types or numbers of species inhabiting the park, including fish, birds, and such mammals as badgers, river otters, wolverines, and red foxes." "This lack of inventory and monitoring information affects not only what is known about park resources, but also the ability to assess the effect of management decisions." (National Parks: Park Service Needs Better Information to Preserve and Protect Resources, GAO/T–RCED–97–76)

—The Merced River Plan is supposed to be a scientifically based resource preservation plan. What role did scientists play in its development? Though park scientists admitted involvement in a technical review, they were not members of the planning team. Raised as a concern by the public, their names suddenly appeared in the final plan on the "list of preparers.—

—The 1500-page draft Merced River Plan was developed in three months. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires detailed knowledge of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) as inventoried on a mile-by-mile basis along the River. Such documentation serves as the foundation in determining classifications, establishing boundaries and preparing management prescriptions for the various river segments. Yet the follow-on Yosemite Valley Plan now proposes an Inventory and Monitoring Program within five years of the Valley Plan Record of Decision. Such data should have been an integral part of the foundational Merced River Plan; therefore, the Merced River Plan is an invalid document.

—Why was Air Quality removed as an ORV in the Merced River Plan? The recently approved 2001 NPS Management Policies state: "The National Park Service will seek to perpetuate the best possible air quality in parks because of its critical importance to visitor enjoyment, human health, scenic vistas, and the preservation of natural systems and cultural resources." "The Park Service will assume an aggressive role in promoting and pursuing measures to protect these values from the adverse impacts of air pollution. In cases of doubt as the impacts of existing or potential air pollution on park resources, the Service will err on the side of protecting air quality and related values for future generations." (Chapter 4.28) Currently, both Mariposa County and Tuolumne County are nonattainment counties. Was Air Quality dropped as an ORV to accommodate the elephant chain of diesel shuttle buses projected during peak season (500+ roundtrips daily) as would be proposed in the follow-on Yosemite Valley Plan, thus exacerbating the situation.

LACK OF CARRYING CAPACITY STUDIES

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Interagency Guidelines (1982) refer to carrying capacity as the "quantity of recreation use which an area can sustain without adverse impact on the outstandingly remarkable values and free-flowing character of the river area, the quality of recreation experience, and public health and safety." The Guidelines further state that "studies will be made during preparation of the management plan and periodically thereafter to determine the quantity and mixture of recreation and other public use which can be permitted without adverse impact on the resource values of the river area. Management of the river area can then be planned accordingly.—

—According to the most recent release of the Merced River Plan (February 2001), "the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) framework is a tool developed by the National Park Service to address user capacities—and to meet the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act." Yet the follow-on Yosemite Valley Plan "proposes to fully implement a Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) study and program within five years of the Record of Decision for the Final Yosemite Valley Plan." Isn't such research required as part of determining the management prescriptions/zoning in the Merced River Plan that would ultimately enable Valley Plan projects? Consequently, the Merced River Plan is an invalid document.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

A legally adequate Merced River Comprehensive Management Plan must be in place affirmed with a Record of Decision before scoping can begin on a draft Yosemite Valley Plan. Limited participation in the Merced River Plan review process resulted in only 2,500 comments, indicating the public did not fully understand that the River Plan would ultimately amend the General Management Plan, rezone the Valley floor, and become the enabling authority for the follow-on Draft Yosemite Valley Plan. Politically charged timelines suggest that the Merced River Plan was designed to accommodate an already completed Yosemite Valley Plan rather than vice versa. Therefore, we urge the committee to request that the National Park Service redo a valid Merced River Plan.

$441 MILLION FOR WHAT???

The draft Yosemite Valley Plan came with a $343 million price tag, but only a few months later the final document suddenly increased to $441 million (one-time development costs). Thousands of pages and 10,000 public comments later, the increased price tag appeared to be the only major change between the draft Valley Plan and the final Valley Plan, indicative of a predetermined agenda.

Referred to as an "implementation plan," the Plan in actuality resembles a loosely bound framework of open-ended projects with no design-level specifics and suggesting further environmental compliance. Not only was the public unable to evaluate the full extent of the collective impacts of the various "design/build" projects since no site-specific details were available, but it would appear that any cost estimate for such projects is purely hypothetical—a guesstimate at best. Additionally, the Park Service projects a $10 million increase in its annual operating budget for the transportation component alone (see Special Note below).

As responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, we urge you to reject any request for funds to support implementation of this Yosemite Valley "Plan." The dollar amounts appear to be premature and without substance. We've already seen how the National Park Service manipulated the flood request; "fool me twice, shame on me.—

(Special Note: According to park officials at Alaska's Denali National Park, the Park Service implemented a transit system at Denali in 1972 to "minimize the impacts of increased traffic." "The system was provided free to riders from 1972 through 1994. The bus system cost federal taxpayers about $1.6 million annually. The bus system subsidy amounted to 22% of the Park's operating budget, and as the price of running the system increased, the Park had to reduce other services to visitors as well as reduce the number of buses and the distance they travel. National Park Service funding was no longer able to cover the costs of such services and still provide necessary visitor services and adequate protection of park values. Park visitors were being asked to share in the costs associated with their visit through increased fees." Turned over to the concessionaire, bus tickets now cost $30–$40 per adult depending on distance traveled. Should this same scenario occur at Yosemite, it would effectively price out most Americans; Valley Plan research documents that the statistically typical visitor to Yosemite has a yearly income of over $100,000—evidence that park policies are already contributing to economic discrimination.)

"ASSEMBLY–LINE TOURISM" IS NOT "ACCESS"

Obsessed with mass transit and increasing throughput by moving visitors as though on a conveyor belt, the Clinton/Babbitt regime sought to control the way Americans experience our national parks. Couched as "environmentally responsible," their perceived solution lacks scientific credibility and, in the words of environmental icon David Brower, will cause "irreparable damage to the environment.—

This Yosemite Valley Plan continues on the Clinton/Babbitt course as it proposes to follow the example of our large cities with massive park and ride lots, an urban-designed transit system with more than 500 daily round trip shuttles projected during peak season, a 22-bay Transit Center as the "point of arrival" denigrating the glorious shadow of Half Dome in the heart of Yosemite Valley, faster and wider roads and other assorted infrastructure to accommodate the 45-foot over-the-road diesel behemoths—in effect, an assault on personal freedom and individual responsibility and anathema to the treasured "up close and personal" national park experience. In their rush to implement such a system, park officials have ignored the advice of their own traffic committee which functioned during the "80s; additionally, they've displayed no interest in simple, low-cost, low-impact suggestions that would facilitate traffic management. Preferring more draconian measures, remodeling the valley to provide the visitor with a more costly, more controlled, and more commercialized experience appears to be the goal and most certainly would be the outcome.

The Valley Plan's transportation component also flies in the face of what the Park's own consultants advised in the congressionally mandated 1994 Alternative Transportation Modes Feasibility Study. The Study states that "locating staging areas in remote locations would influence the following quantifiable aspects of visitor use and park management:—

—Parking Demand. The time required to travel to and from the Valley on buses would lengthen the time visitors spend making a visit to the Valley and would result in a need for additional parking spaces.

—Shuttle System Fleet. More distant staging areas would require larger bus fleets to transport Valley visitors to and from the staging area.

—Shuttle System Operating Costs. Larger fleets and longer travel distances required for remote staging would require greater levels of funding for operations.

—Delays to Through Visitors. Visitors traveling to the Valley as part of longer trips which involve stops in other areas of the park or which involve entering Yosemite at one location and leaving from another would be inconvenienced by the need to travel to and from the valley by bus and then travel much of the same route in a private vehicle to complete their park visit.

—Remote staging areas would limit visitors" ability to stop at features along the park roads for sightseeing and other activities.

—Potentially higher levels of particulate and nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions would be generated by high volumes of bus travel on park roads.

—Increased noise levels on park roads and in the Valley would be associated with high volumes of bus travel.

"The cost, visitor confusion, visitor delay, information challenges, and management difficulties associated with operating remote valley staging areas would be substantial. In return, the benefits would be minor, consisting of moderate decreases in vehicle traffic along sections of park road that are not congested. Perhaps the greatest drawback of remote staging would be the loss of visitors' personal freedom to experience portions of Yosemite at their own pace and in their own way." And yet this is exactly the option proposed in this Yosemite Valley Plan.

A recent letter to the editor perhaps states it best: "The whole concept of elimination of individual ownership and use, in favor of group use, is at the base of many of the Park Service plans. For example, the massive invasion of the visitors, foreign and domestic, by controlled means through the use of the tour bus is creating a faceless user who no longer feels a personal connection between himself, his family and these pristine areas. He is fed our national parks much like the Monterey Aquarium—behind the glass wall of Park Service policy. In a controlled environment, he will be shown and told what the Park Service thinks is appropriate at the time. The loss of personal pride in our national parks will ultimately be devastating.—

Threatening to "close the gate" as the alternative, we urge the National Park Service and the Department of Interior to focus instead on resolving a host of internal management and performance issues. Congress has commissioned numerous studies through the General Accounting Office that document "significant problems and weaknesses in the management of Interior's programs——problems that are "the result of serious deficiencies in organizational structure, information systems, and the management controls that provide oversight and accountability" (Major Management Challenges and Program Risks: Department of the Interior, 01/01/99, GAO/OCG–99–9).

We urge Congress to exercise its jurisdictional oversight as representatives of the citizenry who own the national parks and other public lands. To allow further restrictions, regulations, and increased fee assessments on the American taxpayer, albeit endorsing the mantra that "people" are the problem rather than placing the responsibility squarely where it belongs—on the land management agencies, is criminal. Americans have a right to access their national parks in the manner they so choose, while still preserving the integrity of the Park, and deserve better than to be placed on a conveyor belt like a can of beets. As elected officials, we all have a responsibility to fiercely protect that right and privilege.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF ILL–CONCEIVED PLANNING PROCESS

In response to a 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 acknowledgement 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.

Heavily 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 3.5 million visitors in 2000. The Park Service is projecting another 2% drop in 2001. And even those numbers are suspect. The current method of relying on an underground mechanical "counter" that (when operable) is unable to delineate between visitors, employees and vendors other than by formula needs to be reexamined for validity. Since a major part of park planning efforts appear to be based on annual visitation numbers, it is critical that those numbers be clearly defined.

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 Val-

ley 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.

Another part of the Yosemite Valley Plan is the Park's stepchild, YARTS, the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System. Heavily funded by the National Park Service as well as through the Department of Transportation and TEA 21, this effort has been promoted as the answer to economic vitality in the gateway communities. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In reality it has enabled the Park and the concessionaire to move out into our communities further controlling our visitors and the manner in which they access the Park. Though promoted as a "voluntary alternative," YARTS is the vehicle for helping the Park incrementally achieve the stated 1980 General Management Plan goal of removing all cars from the Yosemite Valley. Once day visitor parking has been completely eroded, bus transportation will be the only means of access. But it's important to note that the 1980 Plan is 20 years out of date. 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 can not be said of buses. Consequently, the 1980 goal must be reevaluated. Nonetheless, the Yosemite Valley Plan continues to parrot a predetermined agenda for buses regardless of the environmental and socioeconomic consequences. YARTS and the Valley Plan are one in the same, so when we urge no funding for the Yosemite Valley Plan—included in that request is no funding for YARTS.

To date, the park has avoided conducting a 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 restaurateur 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.

Adding insult to injury, Superintendent Mihalic told the press shortly after his arrival that "if there's ever a conflict on his watch between what's best for Yosemite and these so-called "gateway communities," the park will win every time." 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

In closing, thank you for your leadership in conducting this hearing on the Yosemite Valley Plan. But we strongly urge you to continue your investigation, coming to our districts and talking with the numerous folks who could not be here today but who certainly have important contributions to make. It would be especially beneficial to hear from Friends of Yosemite Valley; this grassroots organization has consistently and articulately raised concerns about the environmental destruction inherent in both the Merced River Plan and the Yosemite Valley Plan and is currently pursuing litigation in a system that offers no recourse to Park Service decisions. It would be beneficial to visit with our Visitors Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce, the folks who assist the visiting public day after day. It would be beneficial to speak with our law enforcement and emergency personnel and hear their perspectives on public health and safety as well as fire management in a region where private and public lands are intermingled. It would be beneficial to hear from our civic groups

who provide endless hours of volunteer labor in support of every worthwhile cause, making our gateway communities better places to live. It would be beneficial to visit with our citizens as well as folks in neighboring counties to hear their concerns. Making a decision in Washington, based upon five minutes of testimony, is unfair to Yosemite and unfair to the American people. Please consider scheduling follow-up hearings in our districts.

As a committee you have an invaluable opportunity to revisit a decision that was made in haste four 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.

As stated earlier, we urge the committee to consider the following:

—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

—Schedule follow-up hearings in the local districts to more fairly and fully understand the impacts of park planning

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COUNTY OF MADERA PARTICIPATION IN THE YOSEMITE PLANNING PROCESS

SCOPING, Yosemite Valley Plan; January 25, 1999

—Concern about visitor demographics and access; requested Park immediately investigate the socioeconomic impact of its decisions in determining policy to ensure that such policies are not and will not be discriminatory.

—Concern about preservation of the environment should the Park introduce a mass transit system both in Yosemite Valley and the outlying areas.

—Concern about economic vitality in the gateways; requested Park commission an independent study that will analyze the economic impact of Park policies on the gateway communities

PUBLIC COMMENT, Merced River Plan; February 29, 2000

No alternatives acceptable in draft Plan; requested full compliance with WSRA Federal Register Guidelines as well as conformity with the NPS Natural Resource Challenge Initiative.

—Define visitor experience

—Scientific credibility compromised as result of politically charged timelines

—Lack of carrying capacity studies

—Boundary/classification/management prescription concerns

—Air Quality removed as an ORV

—Concerns about process of plan development

PUBLIC COMMENT 1, Yosemite Valley Plan; June 13, 2000

Unanimously rejected Draft Yosemite Valley Plan

—Status of Merced River Management Plan unknown

—Status of Yosemite Valley Plan scoping comments submitted by Madera unknown

—Planning assumptions not supported by sound scientific study

—Lack of project design-level specifics; numerous issues "beyond scope—

—Concerns about transportation component

PUBLIC COMMENT 2, Yosemite Valley Plan; June 27, 2000

Submitted two-part strategy: preparation of scientific body of knowledge in advance of Plan development with five-year "temporary" plan for Yosemite Valley in the interim.

APPEAL TO CONGRESS, SECRETARY NORTON, PRESIDENT BUSH; February 13, 2001

—Request that no funding be appropriated for this Yosemite Valley Plan

—Request that this Yosemite Valley Plan be rescinded/tabled indefinitely pending further investigation

—Volunteered to host local forum with broad-based participation to develop strategy for future plan development

COPIES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST:

Board of Supervisors, Madera County
209 West Yosemite Avenue
Madera, CA 93637
Phone: 559–675–7700

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Gilbert.

Mr. Balmain, welcome.

STATEMENT OF DOUG BALMAIN, CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, COUNTY OF MARIPOSA, MARIPOSA, CALIFORNIA

Mr. BALMAIN. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. My name is Doug Balmain, and on behalf of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mariposa County has closely followed the Yosemite Plan process. While we regret the lack of opportunity for effective input during the development of the Yosemite Valley Plan, the County recognizes that the implementation phase of the Yosemite Valley Plan provides opportunities for our community to join the National Park Service to address numerous elements of the plan.

There are many planning and implementation issues that are of mutual concern to the County of Mariposa and the National Park Service, most notably the following: providing sufficient alternative parking and overnight accommodations outside Yosemite Valley; appropriate relocation of employee housing and worksites from the Yosemite Valley to gateway communities within Mariposa County; providing responsible and sustainable management of solid waste, and providing regional transportation sufficient to attain the goals of the Valley Plan and meet the needs of the County.

Other current planning efforts between the County and the National Park Service include a comprehensive update of our County general plan in anticipation of opportunities presented by the Valley Plan, and the development of a new University of California, Merced campus, near the western border of Mariposa County. The National Park Service has also joined the county in developing waste recycling programs and an innovative composting project that will revolutionize the management of our solid waste. This is an extremely important project for the County and the Park.

The County has planned and subsidized a regional transportation program serving Yosemite National Park for the last 10 years, most recently in the form of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System, or YARTS. The town of Mariposa affords good opportunities for developing Park and concessionaire administrative offices, visitor centers, and employee housing. Developable land exists with expansion capabilities, and with utility and transportation infrastructure.

Although encouraged by the aforementioned opportunities, the County of Mariposa is discouraged by the potential reduction of parking spaces in Yosemite Valley. The County does not believe the elimination of parking spaces is necessary to achieve the primary goals of the Yosemite General Management Plan or the Valley Plan. Rather than reducing the supply of parking spaces, the County suggests reducing the demand for such parking spaces by making bus transportation more attractive.

The County is also discouraged by the potential removal of transportation infrastructure in Yosemite Valley, such as roads and historic bridges. These improvements are not only used for recreational access, but they are also needed for emergency vehicles.

The County of Mariposa requests the following of this Committee and Congress: Encourage the participation of Mariposa County in the implementation of the Valley Plan elements that impact gateway communities, and encourage additional funding to the Park Service for joint planning efforts with the County, supplementing a regional transportation system, and addressing K-12 education and other socioeconomic concerns in communities within or adjacent to the Park.

The County of Mariposa offers the following to this Committee and Congress: The County will continue to include the participation of the National Park Service in the development of the County general plan update, to prepare for potential relocation of Park offices and residences.

The County will continue to partner with the National Park Service to improve visitor experience, while still maintaining the integrity of Yosemite National Park.

With these joint planning efforts, the County can incorporate into the County's general plan the accommodations needed to relocate Park offices and residences in the County of Mariposa.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Balmain follows:]

Statement of Doug Balmain, Chairman, Board of Supervisors, County of Mariposa, California

The County of Mariposa wishes to extend their gratitude to the Subcommittee for inviting our community and requesting our testimony at this hearing. Mariposa County has been closely following the Yosemite Valley Plan process. While we regret the lack of opportunities for effective input during the development of the Yosemite Valley Plan, the County recognizes that the implementation phase of the Yosemite Valley Plan provides opportunities for our community to join the National Park Service to address numerous elements of the Plan. Particularly, 1) the relocation offices and housing out of the Park and into other communities in Mariposa County, 2) the development of a premier regional transportation system, 3) the development of a jointly operated visitor centers, and 4) the continued partnership to develop a very innovative, sustainable solid waste management system, and other infrastructure to serve the Park and its gateway communities.

The entire Yosemite Valley is geographically located within the boundaries of the County of Mariposa. The Park gateway communities of El Portal, Wawona, Fish Camp, Buck Meadows, Foresta, Yosemite West, Midpines, and Mariposa are all located within the jurisdiction of the County of Mariposa. There are no incorporated cities. The County spans 1,463 square miles, half of which is Federal entitlement lands managed by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests. The permanent residential population of the County is 16,150 persons. The daily population, including visitors, during the summer is over 34,000 persons.

The town of Mariposa rests 32 miles from the Park's western boundary. It is the County seat and the County's largest community with a residential population of 1,800. Regional government administration and Park tourism are the economic foundation for the town. It offers a hospital, airport, high school, middle school, elementary school, senior center, fairgrounds, the California State Mining and Mineral Museum, new public library, regional shopping, residential utilities and services, and ample visitor accommodations.

There are many planning and consequent implementation issues that are of mutual concern to the County of Mariposa and the National Park Service, most notably the following:

- Providing sufficient alternative parking and overnight accommodations outside Yosemite Valley.

- Appropriate relocation of employee housing from Yosemite Valley to gateway communities within Mariposa County.
- Appropriate relocation of employee work sites from Yosemite Valley to gateway communities within Mariposa County.
- Consideration of socio-economic impacts of employee relocation. Particularly, potential development of or access to governmental and private sector services, health care, schools, transportation and recreation.
- Appropriate relocation of visitor centers from Yosemite Valley to gateway communities within Mariposa County.
- Preservation of Historic Structures.
- Conformance with the "Merced Wild and Scenic River Plan.—
- Appropriate phasing of Valley Plan elements and projects.
- Funding timelines, restrictions, and amounts for implementation of the Valley Plan.
- Providing responsible and sustainable management of solid waste.
- Providing regional public transportation sufficient to attain the goals of the Valley Plan and meet the needs of the County.

The County of Mariposa and National Park Service are working towards an unprecedented approach to solving planning issues in areas of solid waste management, transportation, and where both agencies have joint jurisdiction. This effort, made possible by both the Valley Plan and Merced River Plan Records of Decision, creates a model for the National Park Service with other gateway communities both here at Yosemite National Park and around the country.

If successfully funded and implemented, this program would provide some surety for our citizens owning property within the park boundaries or dependent on park approvals. In addition, it provides surety for the National Park Service about the type of development the County will permit on lands adjoining or within Yosemite National Park. The Valley Plan opened the door for this effort.

Other current planning efforts between the County and National Park Service include a comprehensive update of the County General Plan in anticipation of the opportunities presented by the Valley Plan and development of a new University of California campus (UC Merced) near the western border of Mariposa County. The National Park Service has also joined the County in developing waste recycling programs and an innovative composting project that will assist in the management of our mixed solid waste. It is important to the Park and County for the National Park Service to be able to continue in these efforts.

The County has planned and subsidized regional transportation programs serving Yosemite National Park for the last ten years, most recently in the form of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) demonstration project. The County has partnered with the Park and neighboring counties to plan and fund YARTS to assist transporting visitors and park employees to and from Yosemite Valley. This effort has greatly reduced the number of private vehicles entering the valley. The demonstration period is soon closing and YARTS will be expanding services to increase its use and further decrease the number of vehicles entering the valley.

The currently successful working relationship between the National Park Service and the County of Mariposa will certainly help address the known limitations and opportunities for key relocation elements of the Valley Plan. Known limitations for potential development in the communities of El Portal, Wawona and Foresta are of great concern for the County.

The town of Mariposa may afford good opportunities for developing Park and concessionaire administrative offices, visitor centers and employee housing. Developable land with expansion capability, existing utility and transportation infrastructure, proximity to services and UC Merced, and opportunities for cost sharing exist. Employees residing in Mariposa can have access to museums, art studios and performances, social groups, greater breadth of educational and activity programs for children, and governmental services.

Although encouraged by all the aforementioned opportunities, the County of Mariposa is discouraged by the potential reduction of parking spaces in Yosemite Valley. The County does not believe the elimination of parking spaces is necessary to achieve the primary goals of the Yosemite General Plan or Valley Plan. Rather than reducing the supply of private automobile parking, the County suggests reducing the demand for such parking by making public transportation the preferred access choice. Further development of the existing regional transportation system, greater marketing of the service, and other incentives can accomplish this.

The County is also discouraged by the potential removal of transportation infrastructure in Yosemite Valley, such as roads and bridges. These improvements are not only used for recreational access, but they are also needed for emergency vehicle

access, bicyclists and pedestrian use. The Valley Plan goals of reducing the impact of vehicles can still be met with better traffic management. In addition, the County's desire and responsibility for providing public safety and effective emergency response can also continue. We are all well aware of Yosemite Valley's proneness to rockslides and exposure to floods and wild land fires.

The County of Mariposa requests the following of this Committee and Congress:

- Encourage the participation of Mariposa County in the implementation of all Valley Plan elements that impact gateway communities. Support the participation of the National Park Service in the County's General Plan update process.
- Encourage additional funding to the National Park Service for joint planning efforts with the County for Wawona, El Portal, and Foresta, supplementing a regional transportation system serving Park visitors and employees, and addressing K–12 education and other socio-economic concerns in communities within or adjacent to the Park.
- Decrease regulatory restrictions to the National Park Service so they may partner with the County in accommodating the relocation of offices, residences, visitor centers and transportation infrastructure outside Park boundaries. Provide exceptions to the "rules and regulations" that traditionally prohibit more feasible investments than what the National Park Service is sometimes limited to.
- Encourage the completion of flood recovery projects in Yosemite Valley before embarking on many other elements of the Valley Plan.

The County of Mariposa offers the following to this Committee and Congress:

- The County will continue to include the participation of the National Park Service in the development of the County General Plan Update, to prepare for potential relocation of Park offices and residences.
- The County will plan for any pressures to increase overnight visitor accommodations outside the Park resulting from the implementation of the Valley Plan.
- The County will make available staff with expertise in transportation planning, land use planning, building development services, and environmental health services to assist the National Park Service in executing key relocation elements of the Valley Plan, particularly employee housing, visitor centers and administrative offices.

The County of Mariposa will continue to partner with the National Park Service to improve visitor experience while still maintaining the integrity of Yosemite National Park. With a joint planning effort, the County can incorporate into the County General Plan update the accommodation of relocated Park offices and residences in the County of Mariposa. The County will continue to partner with the National Park Service to further develop a premier regional transportation system so that the elimination of vehicle parking spaces is not necessary to achieve Valley Plan goals.

With full County of Mariposa support and participation, sufficient funding to the National Park Service, and regulatory flexibility, the Valley Plan will be successfully implemented with broad-based satisfaction.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Balmain.

Mr. Oliver.

STATEMENT OF GREGORY J. OLIVER, ESQ., COUNTY COUNSEL, TUOLUMNE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Mr. OLIVER. Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. My name is Gregory Oliver, and I am the County Counsel for the County of Tuolumne, California.

I would like to begin by thanking Congressman John Doolittle for securing my opportunity to address this Committee. With over 57 percent of Yosemite National Park located within the boundaries of the County of Tuolumne, the county obviously has a major stake in the outcome of the Yosemite Valley Plan.

The county appreciates the Subcommittee soliciting comments on the implementation of the Valley Plan. Our county's comment is simple. Please do not implement the Yosemite Valley Plan until the county's concerns have been adequately addressed.

One of the most fundamental areas of concern to the county is how conversion from traditional, family-oriented, private vehicles,

auto touring to mass tourism will affect the natural and socio-economic environments of the County of Tuolumne. Auto touring is arguably the number one recreational activity in America. The vast majority of people visiting Yosemite National Park do so in private automobiles.

Some 80 percent of these tourists are day visitors, most of whom spend on average only about 4.2 hours in Yosemite Valley. Many day visitors stay overnight in lodging and campground facilities located in Tuolumne County. Day visitors are accustomed to driving their own vehicles on their own time schedules to Yosemite Valley. Auto tourists also expect to be able to drive to the east end of the Valley where the Park Service and concessionaire facilities are located, and where a number of Yosemite Valley's most popular natural features are to be observed and accessed.

Day and overnight visitors also enjoy driving the loop road system, stopping at various locations during their auto tour. These visitor activities are central to the current marketing strategy of the tourism industry of the affected region. The ability to spontaneously visit and tour Yosemite Valley by private vehicle is also frequently cited by the real estate industry in its promotion of property sales within the County of Tuolumne.

Tourism is the largest sector of the economy in Tuolumne County. It is by far and away the most important segment of the economy of southern Tuolumne County, specifically the State Route 120 corridor. Adoption of any plan which would disrupt the present ability of the traveling public to access Yosemite Valley by private automobile would adversely affect businesses and communities located along the State Route 120 corridor.

Proposals to develop out-of-valley parking facilities and shuttle day visitors to the Valley floor would inconvenience motorists. This inconvenience would serve to reduce visitation to Yosemite Valley and, consequently, adversely affect businesses located along the State Route 120 corridor.

Similarly, the inconvenience of riding shuttle buses into Yosemite Valley would encourage day visitors to ride tour buses into the Valley from locations outside the Park, and this, in turn, would reduce tourism in gateway communities if tour buses do not stop within those communities. Where an individual in a private automobile can stop in a gateway community if he/she so chooses, that same individual may lose that option if he or she rides a tour bus into Yosemite for the day. This scenario would negatively impact businesses in the gateway communities.

The Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce has estimated that by limiting private automobiles from entering the Park and relying on mass transit instead, it would equate to a loss of tens of millions of dollars to the businesses located in the gateway communities in Tuolumne County.

In addition, the County of Tuolumne would lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in transient occupancy tax from reduced stays in hotels and motels located within the County of Tuolumne. While these numbers may first appear insignificant, in a county like Tuolumne County, that relies on tourism for its major source of revenue, the impact to the county and businesses is catastrophic.

Another area of concern for the county is that the process followed by the National Park Service in producing the Valley Plan was flawed. The public could not provide an informed opinion of the merits and demerits of the various alternatives found in the draft Valley Plan because too much key information was missing. Critical information regarding visitor patterns, transportation redesign impacts, and updated cultural resources inventories were missing from the draft Valley Plan. Most glaring of all was that the Merced River Plan was not finalized and released to the public until just shortly before the closing of comments on the Valley Plan.

Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Systems, or YARTS as it is known, and the Valley Plan are inextricably intertwined, and yet the environmental review for YARTS was prepared independent of the Valley Plan. The County of Tuolumne believes that a programmatic environmental impact report should have been done of the joint Park Service/YARTS bus plan. As National Park Service representatives have stated, the transportation scheme within the Valley Plan is designed to marry with the YARTS plan. Only when the impacts and the mitigation for those impacts have been identified and adequately addressed will the ultimate cost of this experimental bus system be known.

The County of Tuolumne recognizes that the Valley Plan does contain some elements of benefits. Few would argue that it is time to remove the Cascades Dam or redesign the lower Yosemite Falls area. However, the County of Tuolumne feels strongly that at the foundation of any land management plan should be the ideals of equity and environmental benefit. The process that produced the Valley Plan was warped by special interests with shortsighted goals. The Valley Plan is, indeed, fatally flawed because none of the applicable scientific theories were considered when the plan was written, and it was not properly explained to the public.

It is time to return to the National Park Service's founding authorities and regain the high ground of resource protection. It is also past time to remember that our national parks are for the people and we must carefully plan our strategies around equality of access.

The County of Tuolumne requests that this Subcommittee send the Valley Plan back to the Yosemite National Park area for further comment to address the concerns of the County of Tuolumne and others that have not yet been heard on the Yosemite Valley Plan.

The County of Tuolumne also requests the Subcommittee hold hearings in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding communities to obtain comments from the people and communities in and around Yosemite National Park who would be affected by the adoption and funding of the Yosemite Valley Plan. The County's comments on the Valley Plan also apply to the Merced River Plan. The County also requests that the Merced River Plan be returned to the park in order to allow for the required public input.

Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to address your Committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Oliver with attachments follows:]

Statement of Gregory J. Oliver, Esq., County Counsel, County of Tuolumne, California

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. My name is Gregory Oliver and I am the County Counsel for the County of Tuolumne in California. I would like to begin by thanking Chairman Hefley for the invitation to speak today. I would also like to thank Congressman John Doolittle for securing my opportunity to address this subcommittee.

With over fifty-seven percent (57.27%) of Yosemite National Park located within the boundaries of the County of Tuolumne, the County obviously has a major stake in the outcome of the Yosemite Valley Plan. The County appreciates the subcommittee soliciting comments on the implementation of the Valley Plan. The County's comment is simple: please do not implement the Yosemite Valley Plan until the County's concerns have been adequately addressed.

One of the most fundamental areas of concern to the County is how conversion from traditional, family orientated private vehicles auto touring to mass transit tourism will affect the natural and socioeconomic environments of the County of Tuolumne. Auto touring is arguably the number one recreational activity in America. The vast majority of the people visiting Yosemite National Park do so in private automobiles. Some eighty percent (80%) of these tourists are day-visitors, most of whom spend on average only about 4.2 hours in Yosemite Valley. Many day-visitors stay over night in lodging and campground facilities located in Tuolumne County. Day-visitors are accustomed to driving their own vehicles on their own time schedules to Yosemite Valley. Auto tourists also expect to be able to drive to the east end of the valley where the Park Service and concessionaire facilities are located, and where a number of Yosemite Valley's most popular natural features are to be observed and accessed. Day and overnight visitors also enjoy driving the "loop road" system stopping at various locations during their auto-tour. These visitor activities are central to the current marketing strategies of the tourism industry of the affected region. The ability to spontaneously visit and tour Yosemite Valley by private vehicle is also frequently cited by the real estate industry in its promotion of property sales within the County of Tuolumne.

Tourism is the largest sector of the economy in Tuolumne County. It is by far and away the most important segment of the economy of southern Tuolumne County, specifically the State Route 120 corridor. Adoption of any plan which would disrupt the present ability of the traveling public to access Yosemite Valley by private automobile, would adversely affect businesses and communities located along the State Route 120 corridor. Proposals to develop out of Valley parking facilities and shuttle day visitors to the Valley floor would inconvenience motorists. This inconvenience would serve to reduce visitation to Yosemite Valley and consequently, adversely affect businesses located along the State Route 120 corridor.

Similarly, the inconvenience of riding shuttle buses into Yosemite Valley would encourage day visitors to ride tour buses into the Valley from locations outside the Park and this in turn would reduce tourism in gateway communities if tour buses do not stop within those communities. Whereas an individual in a private automobile can stop in a gateway community if he/she so chooses, that same individual may lose that option if he/she rides a tour bus into Yosemite Valley for the day. This scenario would negatively impact businesses in the gateway communities.

The Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce has estimated that by limiting private automobiles from entering the Park and relying on mass transit instead, it would equate to a loss of tens of millions of dollars to the businesses located in the gateway communities located in the County of Tuolumne. In addition, the County of Tuolumne would lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) from reduced stays in hotels and motels located within the County of Tuolumne. While these numbers may first appear insignificant, in a county like Tuolumne County that relies on tourism for revenue, the impact to the County and businesses is catastrophic.

Another area of concern for the County of Tuolumne is that the process followed by the National Park Service in producing the Valley Plan was flawed. The public could not provide an informed opinion of the merits and demerits of the various alternatives found in the draft Valley Plan because too much key information was missing. Critical information regarding visitor patterns, transportation redesign impacts, and updated cultural resources inventories were missing from the draft Valley Plan. Most glaring of all was that the Merced River Plan was not finalized and released to the public until just shortly before closing the comments on the Valley Plan.

Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) and the Valley Plan are inextricably intertwined, and yet the environmental review for YARTS was prepared

independent of the Valley Plan. The County of Tuolumne believes that a programmatic environmental impact report should have been done of the joint Park Service–YARTS bus plan. As National Park Service representatives have stated, the transportation scheme within the Valley Plan is designed to "marry" with the YARTS plan. Only when the impacts and the mitigation for those impacts have been identified and adequately addressed, will the ultimate cost of this experimental bus system be known.

The County of Tuolumne recognizes that the Valley Plan does contain some elements of benefits. Few would argue that it is time to remove the Cascades Dam or redesign the lower Yosemite Falls area. However, the County of Tuolumne feels strongly that at the foundation of any land management plan should be the ideals of equity and environmental benefit. The process that produced the Valley Plan was warped by special interests with shortsighted goals. The Valley Plan is indeed fatally flawed because none of the applicable scientific theories (*i.e.*, Forest Management theories, Species protection theories, etc.) were considered when the plan was written, and it was not properly explained to the public. It is time to return to the National Park Service's founding authorities and regain the high ground of resource protection. It is also past time to remember that our National Parks are for the people, all the people and we must carefully plan our strategies around equality of access.

The County of Tuolumne requests that this subcommittee send the Yosemite Valley Plan back to the Yosemite National Park area for further comment to address the concerns of the County of Tuolumne and others that have not yet been heard on the Yosemite Valley Plan. The County of Tuolumne also requests that this subcommittee hold hearings in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding communities to obtain comments from the people and communities in and around Yosemite National Park who would be affected by the adoption and funding of the Yosemite Valley Plan. The County's comments on the Yosemite Valley Plan also apply to the Merced River Plan. The County also requests that the Merced River Plan be returned to the park in order to allow for the required public input.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity to address the subcommittee. If anyone has any questions, I would be happy to answer them. Thank you.

{Letters and exhibits attached to Mr. Oliver's prepared statement follow:]

March 22, 2001

The Honorable Joel Hefley, Congressman
Chairman Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan

Dear Congressman Hefley:

The County of Tuolumne wishes to publicly thank Congressman John Doolittle for securing us an opportunity to address the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands on the issue of implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan. This plan will not only have a significant impact on the future of Yosemite Valley, but all of Yosemite National Park and the gateway communities surrounding the Park. With over fifty-eight percent (58%) of Yosemite National Park located within the boundaries of the County of Tuolumne, the County obviously has a major stake in the outcome of the Valley Plan.

We appreciate the subcommittee soliciting input on how to implement the Valley Plan and how the Valley Plan will impact such things as transportation, parking, visitor services, employee housing, and the wild and scenic river. The County's comment is simple: please do not implement this Plan until these concerns have been adequately addressed.

Several issues were raised during the scoping on how the redesign of the Valley's infrastructure was going to impact the natural environment, the cultural environment, and the visitor experience both within and outside the Park. Central to the Valley Plan is access conversion from private vehicles to buses, and the National Park Service was asked repeatedly what the design limits were for mass transit tourism, and how impacts associated with mass transit tourism would be mitigated. Unfortunately, these questions went unanswered.

While the theory of mass transit tourism has been discussed widely and defended strenuously by its supporters, the test of this theory appears to be intended for Yosemite National Park. Indeed, Park Service representatives have stated their in-

tent is to "experiment" with Yosemite National Park. They have- openly advocated that experimentation is the best way for implementation. No true protector of the environment would take this position, and neither does the County of Tuolumne. Again, our comment is simple: please do not implement this Plan until these concerns have been adequately addressed.

The County of Tuolumne has many concerns about the adverse impacts implementation of the Valley Plan will cause. Enclosed as Exhibit "A" is a copy of a letter dated June 28, 2000, which was Tuolumne County's Response to the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan. In addition, these concerns were outlined in the County's response to scoping on the Valley Plan. The entire text of the letter is submitted to the committee as Exhibit "B". In short, there are impacts that will occur far beyond the boundaries of the Park if the Valley Plan goes forward as adopted.

Our key concerns are as follows:

- One of the most fundamental areas of concern is how conversion from traditional, family orientated private vehicle auto touring to mass transit tourism will affect the natural and socioeconomic environments of the County of Tuolumne. The National Park Service has made clear their intent to limit private vehicle access to Yosemite National Park. They contend that they cannot handle the vehicle traffic loads that occurred in the mid–1990s without having chronic gridlock and congestion or causing unacceptable resource impacts. However, it should be noted that in 1997 the Park Service demonstrated that it could handle those traffic levels with relatively simple traffic management techniques and no appreciable resource impacts.
- A common myth has been that Yosemite Valley is chronically plagued with gridlock and congestion. This is blamed on day visitors in private vehicles exceeding the capacity of the Valley's parking space inventory. In reality, the lack of restraint is a bigger threat. A carefully managed auto plan will bring about far greater equity and superior environmental benefits than the poorly thought out, open ended mass transit tourism plan.

  The County of Tuolumne is on record asking for the National Park Service to provide information on the people carrying capacity of Yosemite Valley. Carrying capacity or occupancy limits is not just a matter of parking space inventory. There are a number of infrastructure constraints in Yosemite Valley. Before launching upon an undefined mass transit bus system, the National Park Service should research and divulge the design limits of Yosemite Valley. The National Park Service should identify what the "people per hour" limits are at the most popular viewing stations, trail heads, trails, and visitor contact points. Capacity should also be divulged regarding food services, restrooms, sewage system, water supply, and electrical loads. A Valley Plan alternative based upon known infrastructure limitation is the most practical and environmentally sound approach, which has not been considered by the Park Service.
- According to the National Park Service over a third (1/3) of day visitors enter the Park through one gate and exit through another. By restricting private vehicle access for day visitors at least thirty-three percent (33%) of the existing tourism market will be affected. The proposed bus plan does not fit this visitor pattern. Over the past eighty (80) years the gateway communities have built their tourism economy around private auto touring. A potential loss of thirty-three percent (33%) or more of this market will have a significant economic impact on the gateway communities. In addition, the bus plan favors one corridor over the others as the distances traveled from staging areas to the Valley are far less. With shorter distances, travel times by bus are less, and fares are lower. There is a real potential that travelers will be aware of this and tend to patronize the Highway 140 corridor to the detriment of businesses on the other routes. With traditional auto touring there was more equity in the Yosemite tourism market. In light of the tremendous economic impact on surrounding communities, our comment remains: please do not implement this Plan until these concerns have been adequately addressed.
- The process followed by the National Park Service in producing the Valley Plan was flawed. The public could not provide an informed opinion of the merits and demerits of the various alternatives found in the draft Valley Plan because too much key information was missing. Critical information regarding visitor patterns, transportation redesign impacts, and updated cultural resources inventories were missing from the draft Valley Plan. Most glaring of all was that the Merced River Plan was not finalized and released to the public until just shortly before closing the comments on the Valley Plan.

  Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) and the Valley Plan are inextricably intertwined, and yet the environmental review for YARTS was

prepared independent of the Valley Plan. The County of Tuolumne believes that a programmatic environmental impact report should have been done of the joint Park Service–YARTS bus plan. As National Park Service representatives have stated, the transportation scheme within the Valley Plan is designed to "marry" with the YARTS plan. Only when the impacts and the mitigation for those impacts have been identified and adequately addressed, will the ultimate cost of this experimental bus system be known.

The National Park Service was fairly clear in the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP) about private vehicle capacities in the Valley floor. In stark contrast, the information on bus limitations has been vague at best. In fact YARTS insists that buses will "guarantee access" to all that come and that the bus system will bring "more people" to Yosemite. They are correct about one thing, buses can bring more people per hour into the Park than private vehicles.

- In the Merced River Plan, one of the obvious entitlements is mass transit tourism. The evidence that the plan was manipulated to usher in mass transit tourism can be found no more clearly than in the plan's deletion of air quality as an outstanding resource value. Obviously, the bus technology currently available and proposed for the Valley will severely damage air resources.

  The question must be asked how does the Valley Plan and YARTS comply with the Federal Clean Air Act, as both the County of Mariposa and the County of Tuolumne have been identified as future nonattainment areas. Although both the National Park Service and YARTS have stated they will use alternative fuel buses, it is clear that for the foreseeable future diesel buses will be the mainstay of the proposed regional bus plan. The emissions impacts associated with this plan are unacceptable especially when the superior technology of the private vehicles is displaced by diesel buses with low ridership. The National Park Service and YARTS representatives propose that technology will solve this problem in the future. The County of Tuolumne believes that all development projects must mitigate impacts with current technology instead of being approved with the hope that in the future we will find a cure.

  It should be made very clear that the introduction of electric buses and shuttles into the Valley may not be possible if Pacific Gas and Electric cannot provide the infrastructure to support, or deliver the energy needed to recharge, a large electric fleet.
- Equity is a key issue with the Valley Plan. During the peak visitation years of 1995–97, less than twenty percent (20%) of the development footprint of Yosemite Valley was solely attributable to day visitor needs. The Yosemite Plan targets nearly ninety percent (90%) of the day visiting auto touring market for removal from Yosemite Valley. More than sixty percent (60%) of the development footprint of Yosemite Valley is dedicated for the overnight market and its supportive services. Considering the $441 million price tag of the Valley Plan and with less than six (6) cents on every dollar going to natural resource restoration, that equates to far too much of the $441 million going into the construction and rehabilitation of overnight lodging. The Valley Plan appears to be weighted toward intensification of commercialization. Simply put, the city of 2,500 located at the east end of Yosemite Valley is there to service the overnight guest not the day visitor. It is the position of the County of Tuolumne that day visitor auto touring is far less of an impact to the environment of Yosemite National Park than the open ended mass transit tourism that is codified in the Valley Plan. It is also the opinion of Tuolumne County that even though currently up to eighty percent (80%) of the Yosemite tourism market is comprised of day visitors using private vehicles to visit Yosemite Valley, the vast majority of resource impacts in the Valley are caused by overnight visitors and their supportive services. Overnight visitors can be accommodated with less environmental impacts in gateway communities.
- The overnight market for the Valley consists primarily of campers and lodgers. Despite the fact that lodgers have a greater impact on the environment than campers, it is the campers that are called to sacrifice more accommodations in the Valley Plan. As a rule, lodgers pay more per night than campers therefore, campers will tend toward the lower income groups. There is real concern that the Valley Plan is practicing economic discrimination.

Certainly the Valley Plan does contain some elements of benefit. Few would argue that it is time to remove the Cascades Dam or redesign the lower Yosemite Falls area. However, the County of Tuolumne feels strongly that at the foundation of any land management plan should be the ideals of equity and environmental benefit. If the subcommittee truly wants to leave a legacy worthy of the traditions of the National Park Service then you must agree with us that the Valley Plan and the

Merced River Plan must be pulled back. The process that produced these plans was warped by special interests with shortsighted goals. The products are indeed fatally flawed because they are not science based, and they were not properly explained to the public. It is time to return to the National Park Service's founding authorities and regain the high ground of resource protection. It is also past time to remember that our National Parks are for the people, all the people and we must carefully plan our strategies around equality of access.

The County of Tuolumne requests that this subcommittee send the Yosemite Valley Plan back to the Yosemite National Park area for further comment to address the concerns of our County and others that have not yet been addressed in the Yosemite Valley Plan. The County of Tuolumne also requests that this subcommittee hold hearings in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding communities to obtain comments from the people and communities in and around Yosemite National Park that would be affected by the adoption and funding of the Yosemite Valley Plan.

The County of Tuolumne wishes to thank Congressman Joel Hefley for the opportunity to comment on the Yosemite Valley Plan and the invitation to our County Counsel, Gregory J. Oliver, Esq., to speak before the subcommittee hearing.

Very truly yours,

DON RATZLAFF
Chairman
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

Enclosures

EXHIBIT A

Tuolumne County
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Sonora, California 95370

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF TUOLUMNE

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June 28, 2000

David Milhalic, Superintendent
National Park Service
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite National Park, CA 95389

Subject: Response to the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan

Dear Superintendent Milhalic,

Thank you for providing Tuolumne County an opportunity to participate in the shaping of this significant regional planning endeavor. The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and the Tuolumne County and Cities Area Planning Council staff has reviewed the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (YVP) and commends the National Park Service for its efforts in proposing long term stewardship of this precious national treasure. However, we cannot support the YVP as drafted.

1. *Comments are being sought on the YVP prior to a Record of Decision being publicly released regarding the MRP.*

We are deeply concerned about the YVP being circulated for public comment even though a finalized version of the Merced River Plan (MRP) which is considered as a foundational document, has not been completed nor has the public been made aware of the Record of Decision. The public comment period for the YVP terminates on July 7, 2000, well before the July 31, 2000 Record of Decision date on the MRP. The YVP is intended to describe a comprehensive proposal for the management and use of Yosemite Valley through an analysis of the direct and indirect environmental effects of five proposed project alternatives. Until the MRP comments have been analyzed and issues resolved, the YVP cannot be considered as a comprehensive planning document.

2. *The YVP fails to clearly define and justify the economic, air quality or transportation benefit of reducing traffic congestion and parking in the Valley by limiting the number of privately owned vehicles entering Yosemite while increasing diesel-powered buses.*

The YVP is designed to provide direction and propose specific actions toward preserving Yosemite's natural, cultural and scenic resources. Alternative 1 of the YVP is based upon a continuation of current conditions. Alternative 2, the preferred alternative endorsed by the NPS and Alternatives 3,4 and 5 emphasize diesel-powered bus transportation as the primary mode of visitor circulation in Yosemite. Aside from Alternative 1, the proposed alternatives include the construction of additional infrastructure such as a bus terminal, additional roadway and bridge modifications, and vehicle check points in order to support mass transit. However, these types of "improvements" which will create greater Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and do not utilize the best technology available, are contradictory with Federal, State and regional air quality conformity practices.

3. *Emergency response preparedness to Multiple Casualty Incidents should be analyzed in the YVP.*

Regional bus traffic will significantly increase pursuant to the alternatives being proposed in the YVP. Consequently, bus-related accidents can be expected to increase correspondingly. Air and ground emergency response services are limited in the State Route 120 corridor, and could not be expected to respond to a multiple casualty incident without coordinated assistance. An assessment of Yosemite National Park ingress/egress routes need to be evaluated for adequate staffing, equipment and training levels pertaining to emergency response.

Southside Ambulance stationed in Groveland, operates a single ambulance. Additionally, the nearest emergency response air services originate in Modesto, and only have access to two helipad locations along the State Route 120 corridor, one in Buck Meadows and the other in Ackerson Meadows. The YVP does not address additional support services, training or equipment that will be required on the part of emergency response personnel. Nor does it contain contingency plans for access, transport or medical care of the public in the event of a multiple casualty situation. The safety and wellbeing of the public needs to be made at least equally important as the environment. Consequently, the YVP is incomplete without the commensurate emergency response assessment of the agencies located along the ingress/egress routes.

4. *The YVP should be fiscally constrained and provide a detailed breakdown of funding.*

According to the YVP, congestion management in the Valley should focus on transportation options currently available that have been proven to work well within the Yosemite National Park environment and be cost effective. The YVP, has been drafted to provide direction and propose specific actions. It does not list costs associated with additional analysis, planning or design of such components including a traveler information system, traffic management or carrying capacity studies included in the proposed alternatives. However, a specific total of $343,000,000 is being sought to implement the Plan. The YVP should identify historical and reasonable future funding levels and be appropriately financially constrained. Otherwise a fragmented

implementation process will occur that undermines the Plan's overall validity and effectiveness in attaining stated goals.

5. *A comprehensive and current assessment of the Valley's carrying capacity in addition to regional transportation, economic and demographic impacts of the Plan's implementation should be included in the YVP.*

According to the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP), a guiding document for the YVP, the amount of parking is adequate to accommodate the number of visitors to the Park. Furthermore, carrying capacity of people in the Park remains undefined. The YVP claims, visitor population (using a 1988 baseline) is estimated to remain unchanged in the future. California and the world population are expected to double in the next twenty years. This is an example of the YVP contradicting one of its primary source documents in addition to an inconsistent use of data and existing studies to promote the NPS's current position regarding implementation of a mass transit in Yosemite.

It is apparent from the information provided in the YVP that fewer campsites would be retained than more expensive accommodations under all proposed alternatives. The loss of campsites is magnified when compared to pre-1997 flood conditions. A large segment of the public can afford only camping for overnight accommodations. More campsites or similarly priced accommodations should be provided in Yosemite Valley than is currently proposed in the YVP to allow more visitors the option to stay overnight.

6. *Economic impacts on gateway communities should be studied.*

The NPS proposes to limit the preferred mode of access, "auto touring" without studying the cumulative impacts of such a policy on gateway communities who rely on tourist dollars for economic viability. The YVP fails to address the potential adverse economic impacts on Groveland and the State Route 120 corridor from reduced tourist traffic to and from Yosemite along this traditional travel route. The YVP also states that decisions on development of a regional transportation system will not be made through the governing powers of the Park. Regional transportation decisions will be made through a coordinated process administered by the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) or other efforts. The YVP acknowledges cumulative impacts of those plans exist, however no mention of agency coordination regarding regional transportation is discussed in the document. These omissions, which address the inevitability of other Sierra Nevada tourist locations that don't restrict auto access, becoming recipients of displaced and inconvenienced auto tourists at the expense of Yosemite's gateway communities should be investigated.

Tourism is the largest sector of the economy in Tuolumne County. It is by far and away the most important segment of the economy of southern Tuolumne County, specifically the State Route 120 corridor. Adoption of any plan which would disrupt the present ability of the traveling public to access Yosemite Valley by private automobile, would adversely affect businesses and communities located along the State Route 120 corridor. Proposals to develop out of Valley parking facilities and shuttle day visitors to the Valley

would inconvenience motorists. This inconvenience would serve to reduce visitation to Yosemite Valley and consequently, adversely affect businesses located along the State Route 120 corridor.

Similarly, the inconvenience of riding shuttle buses into Yosemite Valley would encourage day visitors to ride tour buses into the Valley from locations outside the Park. This in turn would reduce tourism in gateway communities if tour buses do not stop within those communities. Whereas an individual in a private automobile can stop in a gateway community if he so chooses, that same individual may lose that option if he rides a tour bus into Yosemite Valley for the day. This scenario would negatively impact businesses in gateway communities.

The Caltrans mandate of restricting tour buses in excess of 40 feet in length from traveling along State Route 120, between Groveland and Yosemite National Park, should be addressed in light of Tuolumne County's non-participation in the YARTS process. None of the YARTS affiliated bus services are scheduled to provide dedicated service to this corridor. The only service being mentioned in this region is the Park's shuttle service that transports visitors from a parking facility in Crane Flat to Yosemite. Cumulative impacts stemming from restrictions placed on tour buses along this route creates a lack of direct visitor accessibility to and from Yosemite. These restrictions in conjunction with a lack of an auto touring option will effectively neutralize tourist travel and the economic benefits derived from such activity along the State Route 120 corridor and Groveland. Therefore, a multi-jurisdictional study including elected officials, area merchants and general public involvement from potentially affected regions is in order.

7. *The 1980 GMP should be updated and the Merced River Plan conclusions incorporated into the YVP in a comprehensive manner.*

The 1980 General Management Plan (GMP) is referred to as the guiding document for the YVP. The YVP has an objective of carrying out the goals and objectives of the 1980 GMP as they relate to the Valley with more specific detail. Yet the YVP is drafted as a continuation of processes targeting restrictive planning of the Park and its resources. The YVP appears to be little more than an attempt to validate the 1980 GMP, which is based on 20+ year old data and philosophies. As the primary guiding document for park policies and the YVP, the 1980 GMP should be updated utilizing current and relevant scientific data in order to validate the MRP, prior to be comprehensively incorporated into Park management plans. The best available air quality, traffic calming and congestion management technologies should be incorporated into the YVP.

8. *The best available air quality, traffic calming and congestion management technologies should be incorporated into an Auto Touring Transportation System Management alternative in the YVP.*

The YVP's congestion management philosophy centers on the reduction and removal of privately owned automobiles and auto touring from Yosemite. Despite the historical significance of the private automobile as the most versatile and preferred mode of ground

transportation, motorized touring of Yosemite is to be accomplished primarily by the expanded use of diesel-powered tour buses operated by private firms. Under the preferred alternative, bus trips are anticipated to increase to 231 per day from current peak day levels of 76 trips. Additionally, the travel time under the preferred alternative is projected to increase by 21 minutes per trip over the current condition alternative. Yet, despite these increases, in addition to an increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) from construction and subsequent restrictions of roads in the Park, the YVP purports to positively contribute to improving air quality in the Park and regionally. Increases in VMT are contradictory to State Air Quality attainment policies and not in compliance with pending regional ozone reducing objectives being placed on new nonattainment districts. The YVP continues to forge ahead with plans that have not proven to consider or comply with regional air quality attainment standards.

The YVP is intended to describe a comprehensive proposal for the management and use of Yosemite Valley through an analysis of the direct and indirect effects of five proposed project alternatives. However, people carrying capacity studies which were not included in the foundational MRP document, are now being proposed as a subsequent study to the YVP. Furthermore, of the five alternatives presented in the YVP, four are variations of utilizing diesel buses as the primary mode of transportation in Yosemite. An "auto touring" alternative has not been given consideration by the NPS as a viable alternative despite the automobile's status as the preferred mode of achieving accessibility and little documentation that the bus-oriented alternatives will produce congestion relief, improved air quality and enhanced visitor enjoyment of Yosemite. Subsequent Yosemite Valley carrying capacity studies may very well identify visitor thresholds that negate the need for mass transit systems in Yosemite National Park.

According to the YVP, total air emissions would decrease over time due to fleet turnover under the current situation (Alt 1), relating to a long-term negligible minor, beneficial impact. Total air emissions normally refers to mobile and stationary sources unless the term is specifically designated. However, since the term is not clearly defined in the document, it is difficult to quantify the amount of emission reduction applicable precisely to fleet turnover assumptions and those attributable to a specific proposed alternative. Furthermore, the document does not address how any of the alternatives that specify increased diesel bus operations including a dedicated terminal, intend to reduce PM10 impacts and reduce hot spot increases. Facilities that support unusual concentrations of diesel-powered vehicles such as truck and bus terminals, are projects ordinarily subject to PM10 quantitative analysis.

The YVP is being guided by five goals contained in the 1980 GMP. Those goals are to reclaim priceless natural beauty, allow natural processes to prevail, promote visitor understanding and enjoyment, markedly reduce traffic congestion and reduce crowding. With the notable exception of the no action alternative, the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan's preferred and subsequent alternatives contain traffic management conditions designed to limit private automobile accessibility to the Park as a means to achieve two-decade-old goals of the GMP. None of the proposals offered in the YVP indicate a study of auto touring as a viable alternative was considered. Despite concluding that newer

automobiles emit substantially less pollutants than their 20 year old predecessors, and acknowledging that if the no action alternative was implemented better air quality would be achieved, any auto touring option, has been deemed as inappropriate and non-beneficial. Modern day traffic management and traffic calming techniques have evolved since the 1980 GMP, which combined with recent and future vehicle emission improvements make the GMP obsolete. An auto touring alternative that embraces the most recent traffic management, traffic calming, Air Resources Board vehicle emissions policies and crowd control techniques is at the very minimum a reasonable alternative to be considered.

The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and the Tuolumne County and Cities Area Planning Council recognize the effort extended by the National Park Service to include the public in this instrumental planning of Yosemite's future. However, we are deeply concerned that the YVP is fundamentally unsound as a comprehensive planning tool due to its lack of regard of the public comments generated from the MRP. Adherence to the YVP's goals, objectives and conclusions regarding economic, environmental, social and transportation impacts, are likely to lead to irreparable consequences for Yosemite, communities who rely on park related tourism and public trust. This national treasure and the public deserve the best and most comprehensive planning effort available. It's our combined responsibility to deliver such an effort. Until this much deserved level of state of the art planning, scientific analysis and environmental assessment is undertaken, we cannot support the Draft Yosemite Valley Plan Environmental Impact Statement or the Merced River Plan and reject them as sound management plans.

Sincerely,

Don Ratzlaff

Don Ratzlaff, Vice-Chairman
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

DG/ae

EXHIBIT B

January 12, 1999

Stan Albright, Superintendent
Yosemite National Park Valley Plan
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

Dear Superintendent Albright:

The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors thank you for the opportunity to comment on the drafting of your "new comprehensive plan" for Yosemite Valley. However, we note that the announcement of the scoping period took place on December 18, 1998, just ahead of a two-week holiday break for many people and organizations. We also note that the scoping period closes on January 15, 1999, less than 30 days after your press release. We wonder if the notice and the duration of the scoping period meets the legal requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We don't believe we have to remind you of the criticism that occurred when the Draft Valley Implementation Plan (VIP) was released in 1997 just ahead of the holiday period. In response to those concerns the National Park Service did extend the comment period for the VIP. Likewise, we believe that the timing of the scoping period is not conducive to gaining complete public awareness nor garnering broad-based input and Tuolumne County requests that the scoping period be extended an additional 30 days. In addition to this, we have the following comments and concerns.

The merging of the four existing documents (Draft Yosemite Valley Housing Plan/EIS, Yosemite Lodge Development Plan/EA, Draft Valley Implementation Plan/EIS, Lower Yosemite Falls Corridor Project) with public comments on these plans, is the focus of this scoping. The National Park Service has stated that these plans are all "rooted" in the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP). Therefore, the proposed "New Yosemite Valley Plan" does not constitute a "new" comprehensive plan for Yosemite Valley. The four individual plans were all predicated on the assumption that they are to implement the nineteen year old, 1980 GMP.

The 1980 GMP is an outdated plan which does not address changes that have occurred in the last nineteen years in environmental regulations and federal regulations. The 1980

GMP does not address the changes that have occurred in the last nineteen years to the natural environmental conditions, the cultural resources conditions and to other physical conditions in the Valley floor. The 1980 GMP does not address the tremendous change that has occurred in the past nineteen years in the social expectations of the traveling/visiting public. The four implementation plans cited above also do not address these innumerable changes.

The National Park Service's Organic Act states in part that the National Park Service's purpose is to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife" in the park "by such means.as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations". Under the terms of the National Historic Preservation Act, the 1980 GMP would only have addressed historic objects that were fifty years of age or older at the time the GMP was adopted. Within the last nineteen years, many objects in Yosemite Valley have passed their 50th anniversary, objects which would not have been addressed in the 1980 GMP. The four implementation plans have proposed significant alterations to historic objects that have not had complete environmental review, such as bridges, roads, and parking areas constructed in the 1930's and '40s. This seems to be a clear violation of NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, and the 1997 National Park Service Cultural Resources Strategic Plan (CRSP). The CRSP Section 1.A requires that "Cultural Resources are protected, preserved, and maintained in good condition."

It is the opinion of several cultural resources specialists that the Yosemite Valley floor constitutes an historic district as defined by the National Historic Preservation Act and therefore, each individual historic object, structure, or building contributes significantly to the overall historic district which is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In essence, Yosemite Valley is a highly prized cultural landscape

and your Organic Act charter mandates sensitive environmental protection of the Valley's cultural resources.

Federal wetlands regulations have become more stringent in the past nineteen years. This is due to changes in the Clean Water Act and in Army Corps of Engineers Regulations. These changes could not have been addressed in the 1980 GMP.

Another significant change in environmental regulation is air pollution control regulations. In the last nineteen years the State of California has adopted tighter regulations on emissions for private vehicles, while buses have not had the same level of restrictions. Recent studies have shown that buses add 30 to 40 times the pollutants to the air than private vehicles in California. The changes in regulations and emissions were not addressed in the 1980 GMP.

In discussing transportation options, the various implementation plans as well as the 1980 GMP appear to only focus on private passenger vehicles, bicycles and shuttle buses. There needs to be a comprehensive analysis on how various forms of transportation could be accommodated and/or treated separately. For example, tourists traveling to Yosemite Valley via motorcycle pose a significant difference in environmental impacts than tourists arriving on diesel fuming buses. The National Park Service should address all forms of transportation including, equestrian, bicycle, motorcycle, small passenger vehicles and trucks, large recreational vehicles and trailers, shuttle and tour buses, and rail.

Traffic patterns and usage levels that existed in 1980 have substantially changed in the last nineteen years. While these changes were partially considered in the visitor transportation study conducted by Yosemite National Park in 1992–93, there are significant components to traffic patterns and usage that have not been documented by the National Park Service. Some of these significant changes have occurred in the "gateway communities" surrounding Yosemite National Park. The National Park Service's incomplete and outdated traffic analysis fails to meet the NEPA requirements to address the entire environmental impact associated with the various alternatives proposed by the four implementation plans nor those impacts associated with the "conceptual alternatives" for the new plan.

The Central Sierra Nevada has been classified by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) as an extreme wildland fire hazard area. In 1987, 1990 and 1996, major event fires closed all or part of the access roads leading into Yosemite Valley. Profound changes to the environment have occurred because of these fires. Federal and State fire, health and safety regulations have substantially changed in the last nineteen years. The proposed changes to the physical infrastructure of the Valley floor that are predicated on the 1980 GMP could not have addressed these regulatory changes. There needs to be an analysis of how variously proposed transit programs will address fire, health and safety issues. For example, private vehicles are easier to evacuate from the Valley and pose less interference to incoming emergency vehicles than buses. Also, buses would have to wait for all of their passengers to board before leaving a threatened area, putting larger groups of people at risk in an evacuation situation.

There is a significant absence of quantified and quality data on cultural resources, natural resources, and visitor experience. In particular, there is no clear information provided in the various Yosemite plans on how one area is weighed against another in arriving at management decisions. For example, management decisions to reduce private vehicles and increase buses in an attempt to "improve" visitor experience may actually decrease the quality of the visitor experience by increasing total numbers of visitors at popular stops

and vistas which would be to the detriment of the visitor experience, cultural resources and natural resources. Buses can actually bring in more people per hour than private vehicles and there has been no limit proposed on buses. Furthermore, buses will concentrate people and vehicles around staging areas, stops and schedules creating concentrations of environmental impacts both within and outside Yosemite Valley.

Any general management plan that seeks to eliminate private day visitor vehicles and/or restrict day visitor activities would have a profound impact upon the gateway communities' economies, especially those communities which depend primarily on private vehicle based visitor traffic for tourism dollars. Neither the 1980 GMP, nor the four implementation plans address socio-economic impacts beyond Yosemite National Park's boundary.

The Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) underscored the inter-relation of resource decisions being made by land management agencies throughout the Sierra Nevada. Even John Muir spoke of the connection that all resources have to one another. Specifically, the various Yosemite plans have yet to relate themselves to the SNEP report. Nor does the National Park Service take into account how Yosemite National Park policy changes will impact the surrounding National Forest lands.

In the last nineteen years, there has been a tremendous change in the demographics of the State of California. These changes have been mirrored in the changes in the socioeconomic climate of visitation to Yosemite National Park, tourism in general, and in the population of the United States as a whole. The presumption that the general public's response today on the Valley's desired condition is the same as it was in 1980 is dubious. A summary analysis of what the public responses were for the 1980 GMP should be provided along with a summary of the planning assumptions that were circulated in preparation of the 1980 GMP.

We note that in the Yosemite National Park's January 1999 newsletter, a summary of the public responses for the four draft implementation plans is provided. The newsletter requests that the reader review these summaries to see if there are any issues not covered. The summary provided on public input for the VIP appears to not include certain key concerns raised by Tuolumne County in its VIP response. Therefore, we are resubmitting our VIP response letter into this scoping process (see attachment).

The National Environmental Policy Act, Section 101(42 USC Subsection 4331) states that Congress declares that it recognizes "the critical importance of restoring and maintaining environmental quality to the overall welfare and development of man, declares that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments, and other concerned public and private organizations, to use all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans."

We ask the National Park Service to cooperate with our local government by honoring its social, economic and environmental commitments to the public, to serve the needs of the public, and to honor its Federal regulations and statues which are in place today, by readdressing all aspects of the 1980 GMP and its management decisions of the past. Parks are for people and Yosemite Valley is a park, not a wilderness area.

Sincerely,

Mark V. Thornton
Chairman
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

February 10, 1998

Stanley T. Albright, Superintendent
Attn: VIP Planning
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite National Park, CA 95389

Re: Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Albright:

The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors has reviewed the Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (VIP). Below is a summary of key points followed by a general discussion of our principal concerns. Attached to this correspondence is a proposed fifth alternative which is essentially a list of measures we ask the National Park Service to consider when implementing any actions.

Tuolumne County's key concerns:

1) Because the reduction in camping sites and lodging rooms may be targeting lower cost accommodations, which would impact lower income visitors; and because proposed restrictions on vehicle access falls primarily upon day-visitors, which may be comprised largely of working class Americans who cannot afford the luxury of staying overnight in Yosemite Valley, the issue of economic discrimination should be addressed.
2) In-park revenue losses due to permanent campground space reductions is said to be off-set by revenues generated from construction activity. However, construction revenue will last from 5 to 10 years, campground reductions are permanent so why is this considered off-setting?. Furthermore, those working in

construction are generally not the same as those engaged in catering to tourists.

3) A socio-economic analysis needs to be provided on impacts to the "affected region" because of a decline in day-visitors (including both "local overnighters" and "day excursion visitors") to Yosemite Valley due to reductions in private vehicle capacity and/or increases in the expense of visiting the valley.
4) An environmental and economic analysis needs to be provided on impacts that.might occur to the surrounding National Forest lands due to increased numbers of excluded Yosemite day and overnight visitors.
5) A technical analysis of in-valley environmental impacts needs to be provided, including establishing direct links between natural resources restoration and day-use vehicle capacity reductions, cultural resources impacts, and facility remodeling, relocation, and new construction. Percentages of reclamation by habitat type and area should be correlated with losses in cultural resources and changes in visitor experiences. These connections need to be clarified and quantified.
6) Because YARTS is integral to the VIP an economic and environmental analysis needs to be conducted on impacts associated with the implementation of a regional transportation system.
7) A technical analysis of an integrated regional transportation system should be included in the VIP, including the consideration of offering the public an optional rather than mandatory system.
8) An analysis should be provided of how special groups such as senior citizens, young families with small children, people with disabilities, and those with special recreational equipment will be accommodated by a public transportation system or unduly hindered by private vehicle reductions.
9) An analysis of trail capacity, occupancy limits and visitor behavior patterns (for both overnight and day visitors) should be in the VIP with the intent of establishing clearly defendable population limits for the valley and the park.
10) A discussion and an alternative should be provided that addresses the congestion issue on a seasonal or peak demand basis. .
11) An analysis of a day use reservation system or periodic quota closure policy should be provided.
12) The National Park Service needs to correct the misinformation that most of Yosemite National Park is in Mariposa County (page 1 I5). Of Yosemite Park's 747,956 acres approximately 435,847 acres (58%) are in Tuolumne County.
13) Since the State of California once held title to Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Redwoods, a legal opinion should be provided on the applicability of the conditions attached to the transfer of title to these lands from the State of California to the Federal Government in 1906.

The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, in governing their jurisdiction, is charged to protect and enhance the economic and environmental climate of the County of Tuolumne. Two principal concerns have arisen out of our review of the VIP. These concerns are centered on: (a) private vehicle accessibility to Yosemite National Park; and (b) the impacts associated with the building of a regional public transportation system. A significant component of Tuolumne County's economy is dependent on tourism. Much of the County's tourism industry consists of small businesses built upon the seasonal arrival of customers in private vehicles bound for Yosemite National Park. The National Park Service's proposed actions could significantly reduce the total numbers of these customers. The building of a regional transportation system will shift visitor travel patterns leaving "winners and losers" in the restructured pattern of visitor spending. While the VIP does provide some information on the affected region's economic output, the analysis of potential impacts is incomplete. Furthermore, the figures presented in Table 25 of the VIP (page 119) for Tuolumne County, in the aggregate, may be understated by as much as $5O million. Our following comments focus on the connected issues of private vehicle accessibility and regional public transportation.

The VIP is a draft land management plan which presents four alternatives for redesigning the infrastructure of Yosemite Valley. Costs associated with the four alternatives are primarily a result of remodeling, refining and/or reconstructing National Park Service and concessionaire facilities. Many of these proposed construction projects have little direct impact on the County of Tuolumne. However, central to all the alternatives are proposed changes in the traditional vehicular accessibility of Yosemite Valley. Specifically, the VIP proposes to reduce the current inventory of day use private vehicle parking spaces and restrict private vehicle movement within Yosemite Valley. These two proposals equate to a radical change in the traditional auto touring experience now being afforded both day and overnight visitors.

These proposed changes are large in scope, permanent in design and portend a major impact on the tourism economy of Tuolumne County. These actions are also linked to regional transportation strategies, which will also impact the County of Tuolumne.

Auto touring is arguably the number one recreational activity in America. The vast majority of the people visiting Yosemite National Park do so in private automobiles. Some 80% of these tourists are day-visitors, most of whom spend on average only about 4.2 hours in Yosemite Valley. Many day-visitors stay over night in lodging and campground facilities in the "affected region" of Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono and Tuolumne Counties. Still others are residents of the affected region, or central California in general, who pay repeat visits to Yosemite Valley during the course of the year. Day-visitors are accustomed to driving their own vehicles on their own time schedules to Yosemite Valley. Auto tourists also expect to be able to drive to the east end of the valley where the Park Service and concessionaire facilities are located, and where a number of Yosemite Valley's most popular natural features are to be observed and accessed. Day and overnight visitors also enjoy driving the "loop road" system stopping at various locations during their auto tour. The National Park Service plans to change these visitor experiences. These visitor activities are central to the current marketing strategies of the tourism industry of the affected region. The ability to spontaneously visit and tour Yosemite Valley by private vehicle is also frequently cited by the real estate industry in its promotion of property sales within the affected region.

The Park Service has reported that its decision to reduce private vehicle capacity and eliminate auto touring is based on the 1980 General Management Plan (GMP). The GMP states: "Increasing automobile traffic is the single greatest threat to enjoyment of the natural and scenic qualities of Yosemite. In the near future, automobile congestion will be greatly reduced by restricting people's use of their cars and increasing public transportation. And the day will come when visitors wilt no longer drive their private automobiles into the most beautiful and fragile areas of the park. The ultimate goal of the National Park .Service is to remove all private vehicles from Yosemite Valley. [emphasis added] The Valley must be freed from the noise, the smell, the glare and the environmental degradation caused by thousands of vehicles." The GMT was developed in the 1970s as a 10 year plan. It is a dated document based on an out-dated environmental analysis. The VIP acknowledges that noise and air quality issues associated with private vehicles is decreasing as automotive technology continues to advance. Furthermore, noise and emissions caused by public transportation probably is more adverse to the environment than those associated with private vehicles, as the emissions tables in the VIP suggest. Perhaps the only major issue remaining from 1980 is that of traffic congestion in the valley floor.

The VIP uses the word "congestion" throughout the document but it does not define, qualify or quantify its use. The VIP does indicate that traffic congestion, as in private vehicles, is the issue. In addressing this, all four alternatives in the VIP recommend reducing the day use parking space inventory. The alternatives also recommend curtailing or limiting auto touring on Northside and Southside Drives. It is also recommended that day-use parking be consolidated into a limited number of staging areas. The VIP does not analyze all aspects of traffic and congestion, and specifically doesn't indicate where or when traffic congestion is a problem. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the merits of the various alternatives. However, it seems dubious to suggest that congestion will be cured by significantly decreasing private vehicle capacity in the valley unless a day use reservation system or quota closure policy is also to be enacted. The VIP does not address either of these policies which is a serious omission. The VIP also does not provide a complete picture concerning congestion as it relates to overnight visitors, resident employees, commuting employees, service and delivery personnel, and tour bus passengers. All of these groups are traffic generators. The VIP should define objectives regarding traffic congestion, and establish benchmarks. Furthermore, the National Park Service should spread the vehicle reduction burden across all categories of traffic generators, with employees being the first target group and day-visitors being the last. The VIP also provides an incomplete analysis of how a public transportation system would be utilized to reduce traffic congestion. And, the VIP does not address any limit to total bus numbers, which could rise substantially over current levels and introduce exponentially more people into Yosemite Valley as compared to private vehicles.

If the ultimate goal of the National Park Service is for public transportation to replace private vehicle access to Yosemite Valley, then why is the National Park Service promoting Alternative 2 as their "preferred alternative"? Under this scenario there would be one in-valley staging area for day-visitors at Taft Toe. Once

day-visitors arrive at this location further travel in the valley would be by foot, bicycle, or public transportation. However, there is no basis of support for an in-valley staging area (*i.e.* parking lot) in the GNP. The GNP's stated goal was to remove all vehicles from the entire valley. The Taft Toe concept, as well as the idea of limiting traffic movement and consolidating day use parking, apparently stems from the findings of a 1994 transportation study conducted in Yosemite Park. A summary of the study is found in Appendix D of the VIP. This study concluded that an "in-valley staging area strategy" would be the most effective way of addressing the increasing number of automobiles that are crowding into Yosemite Valley. The reasons for selecting an in-valley staging area strategy are also set forth in the summary.

Those reasons came about as a result of considering two plans for a remote staging area strategy. Under one plan, staging areas (*i.e.* parking lots) would be located at Crane Flat, El Portal, and Badger Pass. The other plan considered constructing staging areas near the Big Oak Flat Entrance Station, El Portal, and the South Entrance Station. The reasons against building either network of parking lots were the same. Two major factors were that from 40 to 62 more buses would be needed for a remote vehicle staging system than for an in-valley staging system and, secondly, the remote system would cost from $10.8 to $16.5 million more annually than an in-valley system. Another significant finding was that only 21 % of the visitors enter and exit Yosemite National Park via the same gate. The pattern of travel for the other 79% would be greatly challenged by a remote staging system. Other findings included: "Remote staging areas would limit visitors' ability to stop at features along the park roads for sightseeing and other activities. Potentially higher levels of particulate and nitrogen oxide emissions would be generated by buses. Increased noise levels would be associated with high volumes of bus travel. Complex visitor communications and management systems would be necessary at many sites to sort non-valley, valley day use, and valley overnight traffic. Similar functions would need to be accommodated at the entrance to the valley as well as the remote staging areas." In short, the National Park Service abandoned the idea of establishing a remote private vehicle staging network because of high costs, adverse environmental impacts, and negative impacts to the visitor experience. Thus, the National Park Service's preferred alternative in the VIP promotes an in-valley staging area strategy centered on the construction of the Tart Toe facility.

The factors that led to the rejection of an in-park remote staging area strategy will also serve as serious impediments to constructing a regional transportation system. The building of a regional transportation service is the focus and purpose of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy (YARTS). The VIP briefly addresses the interrelationship between Yosemite Park and YARTS. Specifically, the VIP states that the National Park Service will "seek" to "complement and encourage" the development of a regional transportation system. The VIP also states that the National Park Service "will implement a transit shuttle service in Yosemite National Park and Yosemite Valley..." It is apparently proposed that this would be coordinated with the YARTS system and private tour buses. Two points need to be considered about YARTS. First, the five counties, and several agencies that comprise YARTS are only held together by a memorandum of understanding. This is a fairly weak arrangement for a public transportation program that promises to cost millions of dollars if it is ever constructed. Second, there is no YARTS transportation system in place today. Studies on the nature and extent of a regionally operated YARTS shuttle bus system have only begun. The current proposal is to set up staging areas along the Highway 41, 140, and 120 corridors in the vicinities of Oakhurst, Mariposa and Groveland. This concept has essentially taken the in-park remote staging area strategy studied in 1994 and moved it to the "gateway communities." Because of the greater distance from Yosemite Valley, the negative factors associated with the in-park remote staging strategy will be exponentially more severe. No doubt this is why the VIP contains the following statement: "In the event that the YARTS process leads to a determination that a regional transportation system is not feasible, the National Park Service will proceed with projects consistent with the Draft Valley Implementation Plan that will reduce traffic congestion yet ensure visitor accessibility."

Evidence is mounting that the YARTS system will not be feasible. If the system of travel to Yosemite Valley to replace private vehicle access is a full service, year-round gateway-community-based shuttle bus system, the costs will be enormous. The price to build such a system is currently estimated by the YARTS consultant to be upwards of $200 million. Annual operating costs could run as high as $17.5 million. At this time no funding source has been secured to build, much less operate, the YARTS bus service. If funding is based on bus fares, the cost for going to Yosemite National Park in the future will be far greater than it is today via private automobile. On the other hand, if entry fees are raised for private vehicles to sub-

sidize the bus system, a drop in private vehicle entries will result, thus negating any potential revenue increases. In either case, these actions would damage the tourism industry of Tuolumne County, which raises questions about economic discrimination. If a regional revenue system is adopted, the surrounding counties will be severely impacted. If YARTS applies for existing state and federal grant programs it will be competing with the affected region's other transportation needs. Costs will not be the only deterrent to establishing and operating a regional transportation system.

Another area of concern is the issue of visitor experience. Private vehicles offer a degree of flexibility and convenience which is very difficult, if not impossible, for buses to mimic. Returning to Yosemite National Park's 1994 transportation study, the report listed several reasons why an in-park shuttle system could not readily accept overnight visitors. One reason was the expense attendant to maintaining a bus fleet capable of carrying luggage and camping gear. The study also stated that overnight visitors would resist being separated from their additional luggage and equipment left behind in their cars. Another concern was providing security and protection for remotely parked vehicles. These concerns no doubt played a role in formulating the VIP. All four alternatives allow overnight guests to drive to their lodging or camping areas at the east end of the valley. These and other factors will weigh against overnight visitors riding into Yosemite Valley aboard a regional bus system. But the transporting of belongings is not exclusive to overnight visitors.

From anglers to photographers, from picnickers to rafters, most day-visitors have a myriad of things in tow when heading for a day in Yosemite Valley. In addressing impacts on recreational activities the VIP states: "Private cars would be unavailable for transporting and storing picnic food and equipment. This could make picnicking more difficult for some visitors and would change the experience for others." Later the VIP states: "Photographers would have to carry equipment and supplies with them on the transit system and while walking to sites. Reduced mobility would seduce and restrict the ability of photographers to respond quickly to changing conditions." The VIP adds: "Transport of hang gliders, skis, and other equipment would be a challenge." Other equipment could include bicycles, rock climbing gear and kayaks, to name just a few items. The VIP also states: "Day excursion visitors are expected to be most discouraged from visiting Yosemite due to constraints on private vehicle access." This statement is buttressed by these additional comments: "Auto and bus touring are common ways of exploring and enjoying Yosemite Valley..." "While some people access picnic areas with backpacks, most rely on automobiles to transport families, food, and paraphernalia. Frequently, picnic sites become a base for exploring the park." The VIP's response is: "Shuttles would be equipped to handle recreational equipment." It should be clarified that the YARTS buses will also be challenged to accommodate the stuff day-visitors bring. But this isn't the worst of it, the VIP does not allow for YARTS buses to have access to the east end of the valley under Alternatives 2 and 3. This means YARTS passengers would be faced with the major inconvenience of transferring to the in-valley shuttles. Finally, neither the National Park Service nor YARTS has convincing evidence that the proposed public transportation systems will be as user friendly as private vehicles for such special groups as young families with small children, senior citizens, or visitors with disabilities. All of these factors may very well lead to a decline in annual visitation to Yosemite Park if the proposals in the VIP are implemented. This equates to a major impact upon the tourism economy of the affected region, including Tuolumne County.

The National Park Service apparently recognizes that public transportation will create hardships for many day visitors. The VIP states: "Visitors might respond to changes in park facilities and operations by altering their demand for park access, their spending behavior, their use patterns, and their length of stay. Changes in visitor spending patterns represent an important potential impact on the region's economy. Yosemite visitor spending patterns could be affected by factors such as increased spending opportunities, changes in the visitor experience, and shifts in the visitor population if current visitors are displaced by others with different spending habits." In spite of the uncertainty of these statements, they do hint at a change in the demographics of the tourist population brought about by restrictions in private vehicle access and the implementation of a public transportation system. However, the VIP gives no insight into what the anticipated final outcome will be, something that an environment impact statement should address.

Although many of the proposed actions in the VIP deal with non-transportation issues, a principal focus continues to be on private vehicles in Yosemite Valley. This is based on the anti-private vehicle philosophy found in the GNP. The GMP cited the issues of noise, emissions, visual impacts, environmental degradation, and congestion. Technological improvements for private vehicles continues to reduce noise

and emissions far faster than for public transportation vehicles (as indicated in the VIP). Visual impacts can be addressed by proper screening of parking areas with natural vegetation (the strategy proposed for hiding the Taft Toe facility). Environmental degradation includes the specific issues of cars being parked in "out-of-bounds" areas because parking lots are full and to the problem of cars being driven onto road shoulders. These can be addressed by public education and enforcement (something the VIP agrees must be done to mitigate impacts associated with all the proposed parking strategies and in addressing the ongoing problems of crowded trails and viewing areas where people tend to go off trail). Finally, we get to the issue of congestion. Traffic congestion in Yosemite. Valley maybe attributable to many factors other than simply raw numbers. Improper placement of crosswalks and bus stops, buses blocking roads, or pedestrians and bicyclists darting in and out of traffic can constrict vehicle movement even with relatively few cars on the road. There is also the issue of carrying capacity of valley roads and parking areas. If the National Park Service has a precise vehicle limit for Yosemite Valley, then a quota closure policy for day use visitors to the valley should be straight forward and more cost-effective than constructing a' new parking facility. However, this information is not included in the VIP.

The VIP appears to indicate that the day use parking limit in Yosemite Valley is 2,300 spaces. However, both the VIP and GMP state that the day-visitor capacity of the valley is 10,530 people. This figure is said to be based upon the day use parking space inventory. If we take into account the average occupancy of day use vehicles, which the VIP reports as 2.9 per car, and divide this by the population limit of 10,530 this would lead to the conclusion that 3,631 spaces exist in the valley today. Three of the alternatives in the VIP state that day use private vehicle capacity will not exceed 1,800 spaces once the valley floor is redesigned. Until a complete disclosure is made on the current parking space inventory and road capacities of Yosemite Valley, the true impact of capacity reductions for day visitors cannot be ascertained.

Data is also lacking, as the VIP states: "...on the specific conditions and social qualities that visitors seek..." Without an in-depth understanding of visitor behavior, the National Park Service cannot clearly identify how the redesign of Yosemite Valley will affect the visitor experience. Despite this, the VIP states: "No reductions in the number of visitors are expected because any negative responses to changes in park facilities and operations are expected to be offset by people who didn't visit the park because of congestion and overcrowding in recent years." This statement is challenged by the fact that the National Park Service is offering no alternative form of transportation to Yosemite Valley. Therefore, when the private vehicle capacity of the valley is reduced, the National Park Service will have no choice but to turn greater numbers of Yosemite Park visitors away than in previous years. On the other hand, if the intent of the National Park Service is to replace private vehicles with buses then the total visitation numbers won't change and overcrowding of trails, viewing locations, and facilities will continue unabated and many will see little improvement in the visitor experience. In either event, the prospect grows that more auto-tourists will be turned back at the entrance stations to Yosemite Park. Excluded Yosemite-bound tourists represent a potential economic and environmental impact to surrounding National Forest lands. It should be pointed out that, unlike with the Park Service, the Forest Service routinely calls upon county resources to assist in certain visitor needs. Thus, excluded Yosemite-bound tourists also represent an impact on the surrounding counties, as well.

To this point our comments have been confined to the issue of private vehicle access and public transportation. Our position is that the proposed changes to private vehicle access will adversely impact the majority of Yosemite Park's visitors. These impacts will probably lead to a decline in annual visitation to Yosemite National Park and a corresponding decline in Yosemite Park dependent economies. Public transportation in the valley will further decrease the quality of the visitor experience for many Americans because buses are perceived to be noisy, smelly, inconvenient and ugly. Additionally, a regional transportation system will have formidable obstacles to overcome to be successful. And, it will be costly to operate and it will not provide the flexibility, convenience and relatively low cost that private vehicle access does today. A regional transportation system will also probably result in a decline in Yosemite Park dependent economies. A regional transportation system also will cause environmental impacts in gateway communities, *e.g.* noise, congestion and land use conflicts over staging area locations. Because of these anticipated effects, the VIP as an environmental document is deficient in not providing a complete analysis of socio-economic and environmental impacts to the affected region of Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono and Tuolumne Counties.

The other topic to address is the completeness and accuracy of the environment assessments used to justify the redesigning of the developed areas at the east end of Yosemite Valley. Once again, conflicting statements, vague reasoning and a serious lack of hard data make it difficult to ascertain the benefits and need for the many changes being offered. Rather than go at length in dissecting the VIP on this issue, a call for further study is.requested coupled with a clear analysis of how restoration and preservation of natural resources directly relates to impacts on cultural resources. The VIP proposals must be clearly correlated to the 1992 Concession Services Plan, the 1996 Draft Yosemite Valley Housing Plan and the 1997 Draft Yosemite Lodge Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment. These actions also need to be directly linked to visitor experience. Particular attention should be paid to the suggestion that lower rent lodging and camp sites are targeted for reduction while higher cost accommodations are not, thus impacting lower income groups not the wealthy.

In closing, while flood recovery is what prompted Congress to allocate a large appropriation to Yosemite National Park, two concepts seem to be driving the VIP. One is "visitor experience" and the other is "natural resources restoration." In regard to the former, the National Park Service and various special interest groups have gone to great lengths expressing their opinion that traffic congestion is the number one problem facing Yosemite National Park. They assert that many people are not going to Yosemite because of this problem. The problem has been characterized as chronic, pervasive, and growing. However, the VIP states that only in 1995 was the National Park Service forced to restrict vehicle access to Yosemite Valley for seven weekends between May and July because of "high" traffic volumes. August of 1997 saw the highest 30-day visitor count in Yosemite Park history. The count exceeded previous 30 day totals by nearly 100,000 visitors and yet there were no gate closures. This fact plus the reality that peak loading in Yosemite Valley is only occurring during the summer months appears to be lost on many people. The VIP offers no seasonal or peak-demand approach to addressing traffic congestion. Nor does the VIP address restricting any of the other traffic generators in the valley (specifically employees). No one disputes that traffic congestion is occurring in Yosemite Valley but this problem has been overstated. If cars were degrading the visitor experience then people would not come back; just the opposite is happening. Yosemite National Park continues to post a gain in annual visitation. Most of this increase is attributable to day-visitors in private vehicles, many of whom pay repeat trips during the course of the year. Unfortunately, while the VIP does address the issue of traffic congestion, it does not confront the problem of overcrowding. Ultimately, whether visitors come via private vehicles or on public transportation population limits will have to be defined and maintained for the valley and the park as a whole.

The other idea driving the VIP is natural resources restoration. Part of the National Park Service's mission is the "...preservation of the resources that contribute to Yosemite's uniqueness and attractiveness— its exquisite scenic beauty; outstanding wilderness values; a nearly full diversity of Sierra Nevada environments..." If the actions proposed in the VIP were truly centered on natural resources restoration it would be difficult to take issue with this document. However, there is no base-line data to clearly show what the natural conditions should have been in Yosemite Valley if structural intrusions had not been installed. Furthermore, the VIP is vague on whether the natural conditions sought are pre–Euro–American or pre–Native American. If we ignore . the failure to substantiate presumptions on habitat evolution and river hydrology we're still faced with the meager amount of actually proposed natural resources restoration. Even under the preferred alternative, only 115 acres of upland communities may be restored (out of over 3,100 acres of this habitat type in the valley). An additional 21 acres of aquatic, riparian, and meadow communities are projected for restoration (out of some 506 acres of these habitat types). The VIP gives no clarity on whether or not these are "net gains" because other actions under the preferred alternative, such as the Taft Toe facility and the Tenaya Creek Walk-in Campground will impact previously undeveloped areas. Furthermore, if aquatic, riparian and meadow community restoration is a top priority then the VIP is remiss in not discussing the feasibility and benefits associated with other methods of restoration such as reconstructing the terminal moraine at the west end of the valley, removing trees that are encroaching upon historic-era meadow lands coupled with establishing a frequent fire regime, and the curtailment of ground water use for the development at the east end of the valley.

Most of the activity proposed in the VIP (and costs) will not go toward natural resources restoration. The majority of the expenditures are aimed at new construction, "refining," and rebuilding of National Park Service and concessionaire facilities. The retention of two grocery stores, a pizza parlor, and gift shops indicates that

the de-commercializing of Yosemite Valley is not a priority in the VIP's objectives. This is particularly frustrating since so many significant cultural resources will be adversely impacted by the redevelopment: Besides natural resources and visitor experience, the National Park Service is charged to protect and preserve cultural resources. But cultural resources seemed to have taken a back seat in the formation of the VIP alternatives. The National Park Service should provide a complete disclosure on the direct links between natural resources restoration and all other proposed actions. Benchmarks and percentages need to be provided so that a true assessment can be made of the trade-offs proposed between natural resources, cultural resources, and visitor experience. Meanwhile, it would be a serious mistake to go forward with a redesign of the infrastructure of Yosemite Valley if only a minority of people will benefit, especially if it is at the expense of the majority.

In summary, the VIP raises far more questions than it provides answers in how the various alternatives to redesigning the infrastructure of Yosemite Valley will effect natural resources, cultural resources, and the visitor experience. The VIP also does not adequately address socio-economic and environmental impacts to the affected region of Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono and Tuolumne Counties caused by implementation of any of the proposed alternatives. The National Park Service appears to be piece-mealing the NEPA process by not providing a comprehensive, integrated plan that correlates all previous individual planning documents in a master plan of Yosemite National Park. (A master plan of Yosemite National Park should also be placed in context with the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project). Additionally, the support for the VIP's NEPA review is based on an outdated General Management Plan and its outdated supporting documentation.

Sincerely,

Larry A. Rotelli
Chairman
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

A FIFTH ALTERNATIVE:

A "Fifth Alternative" needs to address the needs of the majority of the public over the wishes of the minority. The National Park Service's final plan of action for Yosemite Valley shall include these measures:

1) Flood recovery projects shall proceed where a) previously undeveloped areas will not be impacted, b) no significant cultural resources will be adversely impacted, and c) popular visitor activities will not be overly degraded.
2) National Park Service and concessionaire building projects shall proceed where a) previously undeveloped areas will not be impacted, b) no significant cultural resources will be adversely impacted; and c) popular visitor activities will not be overly degraded.
3) Flood recovery and building projects shall be divided into appropriate phases. A regular re-assessment of environmental impacts shall be made. Such periodic reassessments should occur upon completion of specific projects or every year, which ever is most frequent.
4) A comprehensive traffic and transportation analysis, as well as a technical analysis of trail capacity, occupancy limits and visitor behavior patterns (for both overnight and day visitors), shall be completed prior to any changes in the existing road system and prior to any reductions in the day use private vehicle parking space inventory.
5) No development shall be allowed in areas currently undeveloped.
6) No significant historic buildings, structures, cultural landscapes or archaeological sites shall be impacted until further studies are conducted, and with consultation of the California State Office of Historic Preservation. Of specific concern is the proposal to remove three historic bridges, two historic orchards, residence one, and the degradation of the historic districts.
7) An analysis of the specifics of a day visitor reservation system and/or quota closure policy shall be conducted prior to any road and parking lot infrastructure changes being implemented.
8) All previous planning documents, including the 1980 General Management Plan shall be revised and updated, and then integrated into a comprehensive 10-year master plan of Yosemite Valley.
9) The National Park Service shall establish an ongoing, public collaborative process which builds upon the "Presidio" meetings.

10) All visitors arriving in private vehicles shall be allowed access to the east end of Yosemite Valley for both day and overnight visitor use. Traffic congestion is a periodic and seasonal problem, and shall be alleviated with peak-loading and seasonal remedies.
11) The National Park Service shall strive to find a fair and equitable balance between the protection of natural resources, cultural resources and visitor experience.
12) The National Park Service shall undertake further study to locate the majority of Yosemite Parks archives, artifacts and collections in a centralized facility outside of Yosemite Valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much, Mr. Oliver. I get to question you all by myself.

Mr. Gilbert, I, too, have expressed frustration with this planning process and, again, what has been signed into law, or into the Record of Decision, is not something that I support. There are some problems to a complete termination of the Plan and scrapping it and starting all over again, which would result perhaps in nothing being done, as you might have heard the Park Service say, and years and years before anything is finished.

Tell me, are you still in that position of starting over again, or at least opening public hearings to look into a portion of the Plan?

Mr. GILBERT. Congressman, I think the first thing is you have to make the decision of is it a legal plan. When you look at some of the documents and how it has been formalized, I believe it would be shown in a court of law that it would be illegal. But that's a decision that somebody else is going to get to make.

If the decision is made that it is a legal plan and has to be implemented, then I believe you need to reopen those public hearings if you're proposing some kind of implementation here.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And you may have learned during the course of this hearing that all of the flood money that's available, $106 million plus another 40 from gate receipts, is available to spend on projects. You probably were exposed to some of the projects.

Although I don't want to hold you exclusively to that, it seems like there is somewhat of a consensus on those projects going forward, that are implemented already, to the exclusion of perhaps the campgrounds. Would you support spending that money on what you might know to be available projects right now?

Mr. GILBERT. I believe there is $30 million that was identified in that 1997 report back to this Committee. The actual numbers was probably over $100 million. But of that balance, there is at least $30 million in there identified for transportation, and I believe that should be returned and completely be looked at, to what is the transportation study, what is the system that the Yosemite National Park is going to apply, and how does all that come together. But I would definitely hold that $30 million back on transportation.

Mr. RADANOVICH. In discussions with the Park Service, is there a collaborative effort on the part of Madera County with the Park Service to address issues perhaps within Madera County but outside the Park, with regard to housing and some of these other issues, visitor stations in Oakhurst, those types of things?

Mr. GILBERT. In our comments back to the Park Service, one of our comments was, you know, they have to address their outside housing. We are in the process in eastern Madera County of

redoing a general plan update, which is really an area plan for Oakhurst.

At this point in time the Park has shown no interest or come forward on any of those items, but if they were interested in a joint visitors center or additional housing, now would be the time to put that into our area plan. If they were looking at high density housing in some of our downtown area for a certain kind of housing, we would be more than happy to have a partnership because we would definitely need that assistance.

We do need more Federal assistance there because we are addressing many of those concerns on lodging and the restaurants and things. We have a wastewater treatment plant that we're going to have to update, and I believe that would be an excellent partnership for the Federal Government to assist in.

Mr. RADANOVICH. In that management plan, Mr. Gilbert, there was a housing issue in Wawona that is of some controversy in Wawona. There are some folks that don't want that there.

Has the Park Service made any overtures to you or Madera County to discuss the possibility of relocating that housing element outside the Park and perhaps in Oakhurst or thereabouts?

Mr. GILBERT. There has been no contact on that. The community of Wawona, I know there has been—outside of our country—there has been community meetings with Wawona. I think their biggest concern was with—There was a report done by the National Park Service on the type of people who were going to be living in those houses, and there were some concerns there.

Mr. RADANOVICH. All right. Thank you.

Mr. Balmain, thank you for testifying here today. Mariposa County, as well as Madera, has a long relationship with Yosemite, and there has been issues such as in your planning processes by—you know, with communities of El Portal, Wawona, and Foresta. There are some current issues that need some collaborative work, in addition to past issues. These are employee housing, administrative relocation and solid waste management.

Is there anything the Federal Government needs to do to get those cooperative programs underway, and is there any kind of assistance that we in the Congress can provide, or from the Park Service, that can help advance or obtain progress in each one of these areas?

Mr. BALMAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Obviously, the first thing that comes to mind is funding. We can certainly use funding on our compost management plan, you know, that we're working in partnership with the Park and also the State of California.

The general plan update that involves the communities of El Portal and Wawona Foresta, I believe financial help would help there, and also working in partnership with the Park Service to make those things happen that are both good for the Park and the county both.

The Park refers to rules a lot. They say we can't do this with the country because it's against the rules, and the county is not privy to those rules. We don't understand the rules. If the Committee and Congress could make those rules flexible enough so that the Park could work with the gateway communities, it would certainly help.

Mr. RADANOVICH. All right. Thank you.

Mr. Balmain, YARTS was created in 1991, and the bus service has been operating at various levels since then—of course, more diligently this last year or so.

What is the commitment of Mariposa County toward YARTS, and how would you like to see YARTS operate over the next couple of years?

Mr. BALMAIN. Well, Mariposa County is committed to YARTS. I would have to tell you that my commitment has been —I've kind of been like an anchor on the YARTS program. I was insistent it be voluntary. I don't think the American public is ready to be mandated to ride a bus, particularly in places like Yosemite.

I think a bus ride can be a real advantage in Yosemite if it fits your needs. It can diminish your pleasure of that magnificent valley if you had small children, cameras, back pack equipment. There is all kinds of different needs for transportation in that Valley. So, from my point of view, it is most important that it's a voluntary system.

I think, in order for a voluntary system to be successful, it has to be attractive to a certain degree. For example, right here, you know, I ride a mass transit system right here because it's must more convenient than your own automobile. But until it becomes a reality in Yosemite Valley, it ought to be a voluntary system.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Also, one last thing, Mr. Balmain. You had mentioned that Mariposa County has begun a land use planning process. Yosemite certainly has impacts on your planning efforts.

What impacts do you see that you would like to have and what kind of impacts in that planning process would you like to avoid?

Mr. BALMAIN. Well, obviously, it would be a great advantage to our socioeconomic condition in Mariposa County if, in fact, the Valley Plan is implemented and they do move employees and administrative headquarters and visitor centers outside the Park. Mariposa County certainly would address that in their general plan and plan for that. I think we're obviously the area that could plan for it and we have the facilities, the utilities and infrastructure. We also have private industry that's willing to work with the Park on that.

The thing I would not want to see is that we aren't at the table and aware of those impacts that are going to come to the county, so that we can prepare for them. We really don't want mandates.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right. Thank you.

Mr. Oliver, I appreciated your comments. I agree with you. I think that busing should be an alternative choice for people who want to go to Yosemite. It shouldn't be the sole choice and it shouldn't be used to limit people in the Park. So I want to thank you very much, all three of you, for coming here today. I would like to excuse you and move on to the next panel.

Thank you very much.

The next panel is Mr. Ed Hardy, who is the owner and operator of Bass Lake Lodge, Bass Lake, California; Mr. Dennis Szefel, who is President of Delaware North Parks Services, the concessionaire to Yosemite from Buffalo, New York: Mr. Jay Thomas Watson, who is the Regional Director of the California-Nevada Wilderness Society in San Francisco; and Mr. George Whitmore, who is Chairman of the Sierra Club's Yosemite Committee, from Fresno, California.

Welcome, gentlemen, and thank you so much for coming. I appreciate your patience as this has gone on a little bit longer than what we thought.

Mr. Hardy, if you would like to start, we will start from right to left. Please give us your statements, or summaries of them, and then we will open it up for questions. I'm glad to see I'm joined by my friend from Indiana, who can help me out with some of these.

Welcome.

STATEMENT OF ED HARDY, OWNER AND OPERATOR, BASS LAKE LODGE, BASS LAKE, CALIFORNIA

Mr. HARDY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished Member and staff. It is a pleasure to be here, especially to talk about beautiful Yosemite Valley.

My family has been involved with the Valley since my mother first went there in 1908, and I have been there every year except for World War II, and had the privilege of living and working in it as the president of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company for 20 years.

Having been through the master planning process and dealt with the various parts of balance of preservation and use, I'm not going to read my testimony, which you already have. I thought I would cut right to the chase and talk about some fine-tuning.

I think, overall, the master plan and document was done in good faith by the Park Service. I think it needs some fine-tuning. I was present in the spring of 1974 when Undersecretary Nathaniel Reed walked into Camp 6, tore up a master plan and threw it in the wind as a media event, and the present process commenced. During that time, our operations moved many things to Fresno, such as warehousing and freight lining and repairs, laundries and so forth.

I live on the perimeter of the Park now at Bass Lake, but as I go into the Park, I am disappointed in the lack of friendliness, the lack of the ability for the Park to welcome us as Park owners, as taxpayers. I draw that conclusion from several things. First of all, someone traveling today or going to the Park and wants to get information as early as possible—weather, roads, activities—they can bring their right wearing apparel, they're aware of what's going to happen, they know what roads are open, what areas they can get to, and whether camping, hiking or horseback riding and so forth are going to be available. So information is a major thing for me.

Also, staff friendliness. I find an aloofness amongst the people I interact with in the Park. I think along the way it has been forgotten that the visitors are the reason the employees are there, and that they really need to address friendliness.

Camping really needs to be restored. You know, I heard John Reynolds briefly mention 4,000 feet, but if you know Yosemite, the only two flat areas that are friendly to people and can be retained as friendly are Wawona and Yosemite Valley at 4,000 feet. From there it goes up.

As you spread out into this seasonal parts of when it can be used, to take campsites away from Wawona, which is part of the Plan, which is a very popular place for RV family camping and so forth, and upper and lower river campgrounds, you really move

away from the majority of the year of when people want to camp, plus people on vacation like to have available to them a water activity, with the Merced River, of course, going right alongside upper and lower river. I believe when you take the campgrounds away, all you're doing is encouraging another set of people, whether it's day users or people from the lodgings, to enter the rivers along that same area and still be using it.

As far as the flood, having been in Yosemite for many years, in and around it, the Yosemite Valley has the Merced River running through it, which is a flood channel. For many, many years it was managed that when logs fell in that flood channel, they were taken out. It was cleared. It was kept open as a water course.

In recent years, just before the flood, that channel was not maintained. Logs were allowed to accumulate in it, which floated, turned sideways, came to the bridges and formed dams. That's not a reason to take the bridges out. It's a reason to take the logs out and keep the channel open. The water that goes over the upper and lower river campground, when it does, which is very occasional, is inches of water. Once the water subsides, there is an opportunity with a rake and a crew of a few people to restore the campgrounds back to their usable condition. There is amphitheaters there, there is infrastructure, and to move away from those into areas that are not friendly to the public, and out of that climate, really is a disservice to the owners again.

Air quality. I heard that discussed quite a bit today. For years, we owned the shuttle bus fleet and we drove it, we managed it, we operated it, we repaired it, and it ran on propane. Propane was relatively quiet and much less polluting than diesel.

We also managed Yosemite Valley for years with fireless camping. Most of Yosemite National Park is fireless camping today, as soon as you get into any kind of elevation off the Valley floor. But Yosemite Valley without fire in the campgrounds means that, when you wake up in the morning, you look right at Half Dome, the falls, and it's a photographic opportunity all day, instead of the campfire smoke hanging in the Valley.

The transportation issues I think have resolution that do not have to be nearly as expensive and need to recognize that there's only a few days a year that there's any real transportation concerns if you have a couple of thousand parking places besides the lodging, but for day use parking in Yosemite Valley. Those days are Memorial Day, the 4th of July, Labor Day weekend, and the second Saturday in August, which most people forget about. It's the most heavily traveled time by private automobiles because, for some reason, tour buses don't operate that week as much. California schools and businesses are on break, and that's when the majority, the biggest number in quantity of automobiles, want to enter Yosemite Valley.

YARTS has been discussed, and transporting people in and out of Yosemite Valley at 4,000 feet at Mariposa does make some sense. I think an experiment—my light is on.

Mr. RADANOVICH. That's not your buzzer.

Mr. HARDY. It says stop, so I—

Mr. RADANOVICH. You're at stop, but if you want to close up, Ed, we will have time to come back and get comments.

Mr. HARDY. Anyway, I believe a joint agency center between the Federal, the State, the county and private sectors should be built 45 miles west of Yosemite Valley, at the intersection of historical Highway 49 and 140, the low entrance road into Yosemite Valley.

In that center there would be a museum, which I happen to work with the California State Mine and Mineral Museum, but also offices and shops, food services, visitor services, parking and a bus area for volunteer bus passengers, can be there.

I request that the Federal Government make available for that project—it's a $9 million project. We would like to see you fund $3 million of it. The State is working on $3 million, and the local people are raising $3 million.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hardy follows:]

Statement of Ed Hardy, Owner and Operator, Bass Lake Lodge, Bass Lake, California

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members and Staff, it is a pleasure to appear before you to speak about one of the most beautiful places on earth which I had the privilege of living in for 20 years.

In the spring of 1974 Undersecretary of the Interior Nathaniel Reed held a media event in camp 6, which I attended. At that ceremony he tore up the Yosemite Master Plan that had been in development since 1965 and declared a new planning effort will begin. After 15 years of planning the 1980 General Management Plan was signed. Throughout this period and until 1993, I was President and Chief Operating Officer of the Yosemite Park & Curry Company, the principle concessionaire operating inside this great National Park.

Many planning ideas have been suggested and some modeled. A model was built in the 1880's with full size visual aids that remained in place for several years. The project was to build an aerial tram from Happy Isles to Glacier Point. The 196 Yosemite plan included a bridge styled similar to the Golden Gate Bridge that would span the Merced Gorge from the area known as the Rostrum south of the Wawona Tunnel on Highway 41 to Highway 120 west of the third tunnel. Obviously each of these proposals and many others had their champions and critics. Fortunately neither of these two projects was built.

The reason I mention a little of the past is to demonstrate that professional park planners and managers have prevailed in the past to protect the balance of preservation and use. In recent years Yosemite Valley has become a less friendly place for people, tax-paying owners are being made to feel unwanted. The 2000 Yosemite Valley plan was done by professional park planners and is basically a good plan which needs to be fine tuned to make Yosemite Valley a little more people friendly.

Congestion

Yosemite Valley is only busy about 10 days per year [Memorial Day weekend, 4th of July, the second weekend in August and Labor day weekend]. Traffic directors in six locations can expedite the flow of traffic. Management can make the valley friendlier.

Since 1970 thousands of automobile parking places has been removed from Yosemite Valley with out NEPA requirements being met. Hundreds of parking places can be relocated in the Valley with minimum impacts. Small satellite day use parking areas that are only needed on busy days, that park 30 to 80 cars, can be located along the free shuttle bus route. These lots can be covered with pine needles and should be inexpensive to create or maintain. They are not needed in bad weather periods so mud and snow management are not required. The Curry dumpsite is presently used for long term parking with proper design this lot can easily be enlarged. Camp 6, the mall and the Village parking areas all need organization and beautification. Visitors staying in campgrounds, lodging and employee housing should park as near to their destination as possible. Commuters should ride a bus. Expanding the valley shuttle bus system will help decongest the valley 10 days a year. Planning for 10 days should be just that. Bus service along highway 140 is appropriate with the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System [YARTS] type service.

Upper and lower river campgrounds must be restored. These areas are necessary for the mental health of the tax paying park owners. Families bond in this desirable climate. Bike, hike and equestrian trails need to be expanded.

Matinee style fees will help to spread park use through the year. Charge higher entrance and camp fees on the busiest days like your lodges do.

One-way roads in Yosemite Valley presently are operating with an entrance road on the south side and an exit on the north side of the valley. This traffic flow system allows for emergency exits; roads do close from avalanche, tree fall, accidents, fire and swollen watercourses. Visitors stop in the roads to view animals and majestic scenes, two lanes each way greatly enhances the visitor experience. More viewing turnouts will improve the experience.

Today's traveling public expects to make contact with their destination before arrival. Joint agency visitor centers that can provide general information about Parks, Forests. State and County facilities, educate the visitor making their experience "more people friendly".

Facilities are needed outside the park to support vehicles that choose not to enter the valley. The staging area that will serve the most visitors to the Yosemite region and reduce commutes is a joint agency project in Mariposa County 45 miles west on highway 140 the only all year entrance road to Yosemite Valley. This is the intersection of Historic Highway 49 that travels through California's Mother Lode and scenic highway 140.

The National Park Service, California's State Parks, Mariposa County and the private sector are jointly developing a staging center that includes a visitor center, State Park Mining & Mineral Museum, educational interpretive theater, food and beverage service, offices, retail shops and vehicle parking for staging the YARTS transportation system. This $9 million project needs $3 million from the federal government; the state and local contributors make up the difference. A similar joint agency center must be developed on highway 41 in the Oakhurst area.

Thank you, it is a pleasure to be here. I am happy to take questions.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Szefel, welcome.

STATEMENT OF DENNIS SZEFEL, PRESIDENT, DELAWARE NORTH PARKS SERVICES, INC., BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Mr. SZEFEL. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Dennis Szefel. I am the President of Delaware North Parks Services, which through our Yosemite Concession Services Corporation unit operates lodging, food, beverage, retail, interpretive programs, recreational activities, and transportation services for the National Park Service at Yosemite National Park.

We also provide services at Sequoia National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, the Kennedy Space Center Visitors Complex, and several other notable parks across the country.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify today on the issue of the Yosemite Valley Plan, particularly as it relates to our role as park concessionaire and our ability to provide quality services to guests of the Park.

Our precedent-setting contract with the National Park Service began in 1993, a contract based on the assumptions and provisions present in the 1980 general management plan. In the time we have been there, we have seen some of the most unusual and traumatic events in the Park's history. Challenges we could have predicted—catastrophic floods, rock slides, government shutdowns that closed the park, four different superintendents, attendance that has ebbed and flowed from record levels to precipitous declines, and murders outside the Park that generated intense negative publicity—all have contributed to our understanding of the Park from a perspec-

tive shared by few. Without the slightest hesitation, we can say that we have seen the Park at its best and at its worst.

Throughout the term of our contract, and despite these challenges, we have remained committed to our goal of enhancing the experience and exceeding expectations of those who visit Yosemite. And we have done this in full partnership with the National Park Service, together seeking to add long-lasting value to the Park. At the conclusion of our contract, not only will we have left behind over $100 million in buildings and other infrastructure, we also have established a new and higher standard for what is expected from Park concessionaires.

Despite the challenges we have faced, or perhaps because of them, as I look back on the past eight years, I can honestly say that for Delaware North our work in the Park has been among the most professionally satisfying assignments we have had the pleasure to undertake. As the largest employer and taxpayer in Mariposa County, we take great pride in being both a good corporate citizen and contributing to the educational, social and cultural life of the county and the gateway communities.

What's more, the keen sense of responsibility we feel as a steward of the park has had its own influence. Our award-winning environmental practices in Yosemite have been a source of pride for the entire company and now serve as a model for all of our business lines. The spirit of Yosemite has, in many ways, transformed our company, affecting us in the same profound way as it has millions of Park visitors.

As I have said, our history at Yosemite gives us a unique perspective through which to view the Valley Plan. We, more than most, understand just how daunting a task was the development of this document. The remarkable treasure that is Yosemite serves many constituents, some of whom have conflicting interests, yet the Plan had to be developed in such a manner as to address a wide variety of needs without compromising the integrity of the Park. Yosemite Concession Services Corporation served as just one of many resources available to the National Park Service in the process of developing the Valley Plan, and we were proud to do so.

Our role in the Park is to provide goods and services to Park guests, with the goal of enhancing their overall experience, all while performing as a steward of the Park. In this testimony, I will not attempt to look beyond that scope, but limit our comments to those issues related to our role as concessionaire.

First, let me say that we are supportive of the Plan and recognize the value it provides in protecting Yosemite National Park. We fully understand are in total agreement with the need to preserve this resource for future generations and limit our impact on the ecosystem that has made Yosemite such a wonder. That notwithstanding, we do have some concerns that merit further discussion and review, concerns that we believe can be resolved without compromising the integrity of the Park.

Perhaps our biggest concern involves employee housing within the Valley. Our ability to deliver guest services at a level consistent with our mission in Yosemite is highly reliant on being able to assemble a quality workforce. Relocating a majority of our employees to areas outside the Valley will remove the highly desirable incen-

tive of living in the Park and jeopardize our ability to recruit and retain the type of individual we need to give our guests the level of service consistent with the stature of the Park.

What's more, we believe that relocating employees outside the Valley will have another unintended negative consequence. Considering that most of our employees commute to work by walking, bicycling or riding on the existing Valley shuttle, the final Plan will have the unwanted effect of placing a significant new demand on transportation systems. Over 1,000 employees will need to be transported to and from the Park on a daily basis during the peak season, adding to congestion on roads that are already prone to closure and rock slides.

We also have concerns with the amount of lodging called for in the final Plan. Representing a dramatic reduction from existing conditions, such reduction does more than limit our potential as a concessionaire. It limits the opportunity of many who wish to experience Yosemite. We believe that revisiting certain elements of the Plan, such as the configuration of Yosemite Lodge and Housekeeping Camp, could present opportunities to provide more sustainable accommodations and further the guest experience, without placing additional stress on the Park's environmental balance.

Finally, we are concerned that the Plan as currently communicated is giving rise to a perception that Yosemite National Park is not open and accessible to private vehicles. We suggest that a comprehensive signage and communication program be implemented to help clear up this confusion.

While we are not yet able to quantify the consequences of the Plan on our business, we can anticipate that there will be some significant financial impacts under the terms of our existing contract. It is fair to assume that reduced lodging and camping facilities, increased operating costs, union issues with respect to new employee work requirements for travel and housing, increased costs relating to recruitment and retention, and circumstances yet unforeseen, will continue to produce a negative financial effect on our operations.

Does that mean that we view our position as untenable? No, we don't. Absolutely not. We have an outstanding relationship with the National Park Service and are confident that we can work together to ensure that our ability to make a fair profit on our operations is not compromised by the necessary actions that comprise the Valley Plan.

Our confidence is born, in part, by our previous experiences. After the devastating flood in 1997, for example, we were able to work with the National Park Service to restructure certain elements of our contract to create an equitable solution for all parties. What's more, we have already seen that the National Park Service is open to modifying elements of the Plan in response to sound thinking.

An excellent example is the medical/dental clinic. Originally scheduled for relocation, the clinic was restored to its place in the Valley when several interested parties pointed out that removal of the facility would compromise the safety of a wide range of guests and residents, many whose association with outdoor activities carries a risk of injury.

We also believe that a key to this Plan will be in the nature of its implementation. How the individual elements of the Plan will be phased in is critical. In our view, it is absolutely essential, absolutely vital, that any new infrastructure is completed before that which it is intended to replace is demolished. Equally vital is consistent and reliable funding for the implementation program. And lastly, we cannot stress how important we feel an ongoing outreach program will be toward combating public perception that the Park is not open, or at least not accessible.

It is our contention that a plan that is not enacted is not a benign thing. Plans meant to define direction produce paralysis, or worse, when set aside or delayed. In the spirit of partnership that has always been a strong point of our relationship with the Park Service, we again state our willingness and desire to contribute to the ongoing implementation of this Plan.

Our mission in the Park has always been characterized by the respect we hold for the singular beauty and grandeur of Yosemite. From the very beginning, we have been aware of our responsibility to protect this special place. We understand what a privilege it is to be a part of the Yosemite National Park and are profoundly grateful for the opportunity.

We thank the National Park Service for its efforts in restoring and safeguarding the Park through the development of this Plan and look forward to being a part of its successful implementation.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Szefel follows:]

Statement of Dennis Szefel, President, Delaware North Parks Services, Inc.

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Dennis Szefel. I am the president of Delaware North Parks Services, which, through our Yosemite Concession Services Corporation unit, operates lodging, food, beverage, retail, interpretive programs, recreational activities, and transportation services for the National Park Service at Yosemite National Park. We also provide services at Sequoia National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, Kennedy Space Center Visitors Complex and several other notable parks across the country.

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Perhaps our biggest concern involves employee housing within the valley. Our ability to deliver guest services at a level consistent with our mission in Yosemite is highly reliant on being able to assemble a quality workforce. Relocating a majority of our employees to areas outside the valley will remove the highly desirable incentive of living in the park and jeopardize our ability to recruit and retain the type of individual we need to give our guests the level of service consistent with the stature of park.

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open to modifying elements of the plan in response to sound thinking. An excellent example is the Medical/Dental Clinic. Originally scheduled for relocation, the clinic was restored to its place in the valley when several interested parties pointed out that removal of the facility would compromise the safety of a wide range of guests and residents, many whose association with outdoor activities carries a risk of injury.

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It is our contention that a plan that is not enacted is not a benign thing. Plans meant to define direction produce paralysis or worse when set aside or delayed. 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.

Our mission in the park has always been characterized by the respect we hold for the singular beauty and grandeur of Yosemite. From the very beginning, we have been aware of our responsibility to protect this special place. We understand what a privilege it is to be a part of Yosemite National Park and are profoundly grateful for the opportunity.

We thank the National Park Service for its efforts in restoring and safeguarding the park through the development of this plan and look forward to being a part of its successful implementation.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Szefel.

Mr. Watson, welcome.

STATEMENT OF JAY THOMAS WATSON, CALIFORNIA-NEVADA REGIONAL DIRECTOR, THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Mr. WATSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and staff. On behalf of The Wilderness Society, thank you for the chance to testify on the Yosemite Valley Plan.

My name is Jay Watson, and as California/Nevada Regional Director for The Wilderness Society, I have also been asked to represent at today's hearing the National Parks Conservation Association,. the American Alpine Club, and the Central Sierra Environmental Resources Center, located in Twain Harte, just north of Yosemite.

More than four years ago, the floodwaters of the Merced River presented the National Park Service with a historic opportunity—the chance to transform into reality what had long been an elusive, yet majestic vision for Yosemite. The central question was whether or not the Park Service was up to the task. The Valley Plan answers that question with a resounding yes. It is a grand plan that strikes an elegant balance between protecting natural values in the Park, and allowing people to use and enjoy Yosemite.

Yosemite Valley has limits. For years, a cacophony of development was stuffed into its 4,480 acres. As a result, sensitive habitats and ecosystems were damaged, while a summer visit became an exercise in frustration and not a restorative visit to a crown jewel of the Park System.

The Plan was produced through an exhaustive and open and honest planning process, and it enjoys considerable public support. I have appended to my testimony 34 editorials from around Cali-

fornia from 14 different newspapers that support the plan and/or YARTS.

The legitimacy of the process is borne out by changes made in the Plan as it progressed from draft to final, changes that unequivocally show that the Park Service not only welcomed public comment, but that they listened to it. Nowhere is this more observable than in overnight accommodations, camping, and parking.

When the draft plan was released, there was an outcry about the types of overnight stays possible in Yosemite Valley. Simply stated, they cost too much. In response, under the final Plan, camping and rustic units account for 50 percent of all overnight stays in the Valley. If you include "economy" cabins, it jumps to 81 percent.

Therefore, assuming a two-night stay during the four months of June through September, almost 71,000 families or groups of friends can camp in a campground or stay in a tent or economy cabin in the Valley at costs ranging from $15 to $80. The Park Service listened.

As for camping, under the plan there will be 500 campsites in Yosemite Valley. Again assuming a two-night stay over the same four months, 30,000 families will be able to camp in Yosemite Valley, and there are another 1,060 campsites outside the Valley but still in the Park. That is enough for another 64,000 families to camp in Yosemite during those four months.

The final Plan also recognizes the historical value of Camp 4, the undisputed birthplace of American rock climbing. The Plan protects Camp 4 by ensuring that the reconstruction of Yosemite Lodge will not encroach on it or its historical values.

On day-use parking, the Plan provides 550 sites in a centralized location, a decrease that is of elemental importance if the reductions in the overall vehicle congestion that so degrades the human experience in the Valley are to be realized.

The draft plan allowed this parking facility to be built at Taft Toe. The Wilderness Society and many others questioned the need to turn a pristine area into a parking lot and, in response, the Park Service shifted parking and transit to Camp 6 in Yosemite Village, locations that are already heavily impacted. Again, the Park Service had listened.

Reductions in overnight accommodations at Yosemite will only serve to increase occupancy levels at places of lodging outside the Park. Moving employee housing into the community will lead to new, additional home sales and rentals, and moving Park Service and concessionaire offices into local communities will provide new commercial real estate opportunities.

The adoption of the Yosemite Valley Plan makes the beginning of the all-important implementation phase for the grandest of plans for Yosemite. But the Plan's promises will only be fulfilled if it is put in place on the ground. Only then will the millions of people who visit each year forever remember the Park for its waterfalls, its granite, and it's vibrant meadows, and not for a cacophony of development, gridlock and asphalt.

But actions speak louder than words, so we call on the United States Congress and the administration to make the resources available to actually do what the Plan calls for. Failure to implement the Plan will put at risk the very things that bring millions

of visitors to Yosemite and through gateway communities every year. In other words, Yosemite's time has come and it's time to get the job done and put an end to planning.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Watson follows:]

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

On behalf of The Wilderness Society, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Yosemite Valley Plan. Please note that I am also here on behalf of the American Alpine Club, and the Central Sierra Environmental Resources Center located in Twain Harte, California, just north of Yosemite.

Almost four years ago, the floodwaters of the Merced River presented the National Park Service with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—the chance to transform into reality what historically had been an elusive, yet majestic vision for Yosemite Valley. The central question at the time was whether the Park Service was up to the task. The Final Yosemite Valley Plan answered that question with a resounding yes!

The Yosemite Valley Plan is a grand plan that will protect the natural values of Yosemite Valley and allow the American people to use and enjoy the park. The plan sets forth a vision for Yosemite that is as strong as the park's legendary granite and as clear as the waters of the Merced River.

The time has come to realize that at 4,480 acres, Yosemite Valley is a finite place with real limits. For years, Yosemite Valley was expected to be all things to all people, with a cacophony of things stuffed into the Incomparable Valley—parking lots, roads, pizza parlors, a bank, a beauty parlor, a gas station, campgrounds, offices, hotels, snack bars, restaurants, gift shops, a maintenance shop, bathrooms, bridges, a museum, a church, hiking trails, bike paths, tent cabins, grocery stores, swimming pools, skating rinks, signs, stables, employee housing, water systems, sewage systems, and a laundromat.

As a result, terrestrial and river ecosystems were severely altered, while a visit during the summer became an exercise in frustration, not a restorative visit to one of the crown jewels of our National Park System. Something had to change.

And that is what the Yosemite Valley Plan is all about—making positive changes for Yosemite, its visitors, and for gateway communities.

The Yosemite Valley Plan (YVP) is the product of an open, honest, and accessible planning process. It allowed for meaningful public comment. Dozens of workshops and public hearings were held throughout California. Additional hearings took place in Chicago, Denver, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. Every weekend, on-the-ground tours with park staff were available in Yosemite.

Not surprisingly, the plan has been met with considerable public support. As an expression of that support, I have appended to my statement 34 editorials from 14 different papers expressing support for the Yosemite Valley Plan and/or the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS). These papers are the: Los Angeles Times, San Diego Union–Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle, Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee, Contra Costa Times, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, Reno Gazette Journal, San Francisco Examiner, Oakland Tribune, Stockton Record, New York Times, and USA Today.

The legitimacy of the planning process was borne out by any number of changes made in the plan as it progressed from draft to final. Changes that unequivocally demonstrate that the National Park Service not only welcomed public comment, but that they listened to it, responded by making several very important modifications in the final plan.

Nowhere is this more readily observable than in how the agency addressed the issues of overnight accommodations, campgrounds, and centralized parking.

Overnight Accommodations

When the draft plan was released for public comment, there was an outcry about the types of overnight stays possible in Yosemite Valley. Simply stated, they cost too much.

However, in response to this criticism, under the final plan, camping and rustic units account for 50 percent of all overnight stays in the Valley. Include "*economy" cabins, and it jumps to 81 percent. Most overnight stays in Yosemite Valley will range in cost from $15.00 for a campsite, to $45.00 for a tent cabin, and about $80.00 for a simple cabin.

Assuming a two-night stay, during the four months of June through September, almost 71,000 families or groups of friends can camp in a campground or stay in a tent or economy cabin in Yosemite Valley. The Park Service listened.

Campgrounds

As for camping, under the YVP, there will be 500 campsites in Yosemite Valley. Again assuming a two-night stay, over the same four months, 30,000 families or groups of friends will be able to camp in Yosemite Valley. Moreover, there are another 1,060 campsites outside of Yosemite Valley, but still within the boundaries of the park. That is enough for another 63,600 families or groups of friends to camp in Yosemite over a four-month period.

The plan also recognizes the unique, historical values of Camp 4—the birthplace of American rock climbing. Reconstruction of Yosemite Lodge will not encroach on Camp 4 and the campground will be slightly enlarged.

Yes, when all is said and done, there will be about 300 fewer campsites in Yosemite Valley than before the 1997 flood. The reason for this is that those sites are now located in what once was sensitive meadow, river, and black oak habitats, which the plan proposes to restore. Campgrounds aren't benign, particularly when they erase critical habitats.

Parking

On parking, the plan adopts a proactive approach and limits day-use parking to 550 sites. This reduction is of elemental importance if the restoration of sensitive habitats is to be realized and reductions made in the overall vehicle congestion that so degrades the human experience in the valley.

The draft plan allowed for a centralized 550-car parking facility at Taft Toe, an undeveloped area still in its natural state. The Wilderness Society, and many others, questioned the need to develop a pristine area for a parking lot. In response, parking and transit operations were shifted to Camp Six and Yosemite Village—locations that are already heavily impacted. Again, the Park Service had listened.

Other Issues

Earlier, I mentioned that the plan makes changes that will benefit gateway communities. It goes without saying that reducing the number of overnight accommodations in Yosemite Valley will lead to increased occupancy levels at places of lodging outside Yosemite. The same can be said of employee housing. And, moving Park Service and concessionaire administrative offices out of the park and into local communities will provide new business opportunities in those communities.

Some have said the YVP is a sweetheart deal for Yosemite Concession Services. This statement is puzzling, when you consider that YCS will realize lower revenues under the plan. Dramatic improvements were made in the YCS contract as compared with the previous contract—which was truly a sweetheart deal.

Conclusion

The adoption of the Final Yosemite Plan marks the beginning of an all important implementation phase for the grandest of plans for the park. And yet, the grandest hopes and promises of the plan will only be fulfilled if it is put in place on the ground. Only then will the millions of people who will continue to visit Yosemite each year forever remember the park for its waterfalls, its granite, and its vibrant meadows and not for its cacophony of development, gridlock, and asphalt.

At the end of the day, actions speak louder than words. Therefore, we are thrilled to see the Park Service commit itself to moving aggressively forward with key restoration projects described in the YVP. These actions will set an all-important tone for plan implementation.

We now call on the United States Congress and the Administration to make the resources available to actually do what the plan calls for. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Welcome, Mr. Whitmore. We look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF GEORGE W. WHITMORE, CHAIRMAN, SIERRA CLUB'S YOSEMITE COMMITTEE, FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

Mr. WHITMORE. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and staff. Thank you for this opportunity. I am George Whitmore, Chair of the Sierra Club's Yosemite Committee.

I was born in central California and have been fortunate enough to have lived there, near Yosemite, most of my life. I have experienced Yosemite intensively and extensively over many years, starting as a child in the 1930's, and including many memorable years in the 1950's as a rock climber.

We agree with the stated intent of the Yosemite Valley Plan and are pleased that the Park Service did respond to public comments on the draft plan, to some extent, by cutting back on planned expansion at Yosemite Lodge and softening the draconian cuts in lower-cost accommodations.

However, we still have some very large concerns. Those concerns focus largely on transportation issues and on the impact which unceasing, infinite growth in day visitor usage has on a very finite Yosemite Valley. These two concerns are obviously closely interrelated. Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's often stated view that, "there is room for everyone in Yosemite, they just can't bring their cars" was overly simplistic. Unfortunately, it was the mandate the Park Service was given and it resulted in a flawed plan.

The new Valley Plan has abandoned the concept of limits which was in the 1980 general management plan. At the same time, no program has been put in place to address the consequent problem of ever-increasing stress on the visitor experience and on the natural resources. The only response to more and more day visitors seems to be planning for more and more buses, without acknowledging that buses can become the problem instead of cars.

Buses obviously could be part of the solution. Our concern is with the excessive focus on them which fails to recognize that they are already well on the way to becoming a worse problem than the cars.

There are several different bus systems serving Yosemite now—the long distant excursion or tour buses, the regional buses, including YARTS, which operate from the gateway communities, the in-Valley shuttle buses, and those which transport people to other points within the Park. In general, our comments apply to all types of buses.

These existing buses are already having an impact which needs to be reduced. They need to be cleaner, meaning fewer air-polluting emissions. Quieter, smaller, to reduce the demand for wider and straighter roads. And generally, less intrusive. There is a serious need to convert from diesel to a less harmful technology, and that is one area which probably would benefit from increased funding. But especially in the absence of cleaner, quieter, smaller and less intrusive, we object to the seeming acceptance of buses as being a cure-all.

Of course, what is driving the demand for more and more buses is the given parameter that "there is room for everyone in Yosemite". The concept of limits is certainly not foreign to the public. We encounter it routinely in so many aspects of everyday life and we adjust accordingly. To take an extreme example, even with an operation such as Disneyland, in which large crowds and crowding are accepted, sometimes the demand threatens the quality of the visitor experience, so the company takes steps to manage the

demand. It totally escapes us why this is considered not acceptable for Yosemite Valley.

We believe that if the Park Service would try a reservation system for day use, they would find it accepted by most people, especially if some of the available space were set aside for those who plan to visit at off-peak times or simply choose to take their chances. Such a system would eliminate the need for degradation of both the visitor experience and the natural resources which this Plan would allow—a degradation, incidentally, which would be in violation of the Park Service's own Organic Act.

We feel that the concepts employed in this Plan, while undoubtedly well-intentioned, have generally been taken too far. The zeal to improve the Yosemite Valley has resulted in a massive urban redevelopment plan. But this is not a city. It is the crown jewel of our National Park System, the incomparable valley, a world heritage site, the holy of holy. It deserves much better of us.

I would be happy to take any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Whitmore follows:]

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

We offer our reactions to the final Yosemite Valley Plan.

We recognize that changes were made in the final Valley Plan in response to comments that we and many others made. We are particularly pleased that the Park Service recognizes that "restoration of highly valued natural resources is a priority, especially along the length of the Merced River." We are glad to see there is now essentially no net increase in number of accommodations at Yosemite Lodge. And we welcome the decision not to move forward with the idea of constructing a new parking facility at Taft Toe.

ASSUMPTIONS

However, we continue to question many of the assumptions that underlie this Plan.

Because too many sites have already been degraded, we do not believe it is wise to shift development to new areas (even if the overall footprint were to be reduced). The Plan does not confine development to existing sites.

Moreover, the Plan is far from clear in limiting the factors that impose stress upon the Valley's environment. These stresses include vehicles, emissions, roads, parking places, facilities, and unlimited visitors. While it would limit the space for automobiles, it would leave open growth in bus traffic, particularly tour and YARTS busses, and satellite parking in other areas of the Park. And after casting doubt on the validity of the 1980 General Management Plan's (GMP) visitor limit, this plan would look to a future Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) process to define new parameters, which might, or might not, be more effective in protecting the visitor experience and natural resources.

We feel it is a serious mistake to have eliminated the 1980 GMP's approach to the ever-increasing demand for access to Yosemite Valley without having some other mechanism in place to deal with it. Unless the problems created by infinite stress on a finite resource are resolved, the Organic Act's mandate for enjoyment by the public while leaving the resources unimpaired will be violated.

And the plan for restoration in the Valley is far from clear. The Plan does not enable one to see what the aims are for each parcel to be restored, nor to what standards these areas would be restored, nor how fragmentation would be overcome.

Furthermore, it appears that much of this restoration should move forward regardless of whether other parts of the Plan are ever implemented.

Finally, we are disappointed that this plan was developed in such haste, before it was clear that a legally compliant plan for the management of the Merced Wild and Scenic River was in place. The River Plan, which should stand as the foundation for all planning in the Valley, is still under litigation. Questions still exist as to whether adequate planning has been done to identify, enhance and protect outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) for the river. And the Valley Plan seems to confound these ORV values with Highly Valued Resources, which seem to stand in their place. We strongly recommend that the Park Service recognize the possible

need to make relevant changes in the Valley Plan if court decisions require revisions of the River Plan or a new River Plan.

CHANGES FROM THE DRAFT

However, we do note changes, some of them for the better, that were made in developing the final Plan. We are glad to see that, overall, there will be twenty fewer lodging units than in the draft Plan, and the number at Yosemite Lodge would go down by 135 (though that would still. constitute six more than are there now). And we welcome the effort to retain more low-cost units at Curry Village and Housekeeping.

We also note, however, that some elements in the final Plan are less satisfactory than in the draft. More bus trips would be expected each day during peak periods (285 instead of 231), while the saving in energy use would be less (37% instead of 52%). And more employee beds would remain in the Valley (723 in contrast to 683).

VALUABLE GOALS

But we do recognize that the Plan would be designed to achieve some very important goals compared to the existing situation:

—A reduction of nearly 300 overnight lodging units (with 164 to be removed from the flood plain);—A reduction of 554 employee beds in the Valley;—And a net gain of 71 acres that would be restored in the Valley (though we regret the loss of 75 acres of undeveloped land in the process.)

We applaud plans to remove unnecessary developments and facilities, including:

—The Cascades Diversion Dam;—Rip rap, along the banks of the Merced River;—The village garage;–The concessionaire headquarters; and—The tennis courts at the Ahwanhee Hotel.

PROBLEMS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

But, nonetheless, we see some problems in the Plan that still need to be addressed in a satisfactory manner.

(1) DIESEL BUSSES

While we welcome the pledge to use "the best available fuel and propulsion system technology to minimize noise and air pollutant emissions," additional busses should not be added until satisfactory technology which will reduce air and noise pollution is in hand and will be used for existing and any new busses. We recommend immediate replacement of existing shuttle buses with new buses with much lower emissions. We note in Table 4–31 (p. 4.2–123) that if diesel fuel is used that NOx emissions in 2015 would be worse with the shuttle bus system to remote sites than under the "No Change" alternative. NOx emissions would increase by 32%.

We cannot agree with any change that would increase, rather than decrease emissions and produce worse air quality or move impacts to new-or expanded areas. The discussion in the EIS of air quality is conspicuously silent on the question of whether air quality standards would be met with this increase in NOx emissions. Diesel fuels are also high in sulfur content. Both NOx are precursors of ozone. Exceedances of air quality standards for ozone have occurred in recent years in Yosemite Valley. Moreover, diesel fuel emissions contain deadly carcinogens as well as dangerous small particulates, and few diesel engines are operated with any serious emission control systems. Unlike cars, which have gotten cleaner, diesel busses have not.

We continue to urge that busses bringing visitors into the Valley need to use clean fuel technologies. Fuel cells or propane seem to be the most promising technologies along this line (see table 4–31). The door needs to be closed on the growing number of busses using dirty fuels, rather than be opened. We believe that there should be a moratorium on the growing number of tour and YARTS busses, and their arrivals need to be scheduled at appropriate intervals.

And busses coming into the Valley need to be less noisy. Some of them now produce noise at 16 times the natural sound level (for those standing within 50 feet). Moreover, the noise they produce can be heard within nearby wilderness areas of the park (on valley cliffs and on the rim).

Finally, such busses need to be smaller so that they fit within the design parameters of the existing road system. Otherwise, the growing number of such busses will exert constant pressures to build larger and larger roads, to the detriment of park values and visitor experience.

(2) UNCONTROLLED GROWTH.

As indicated earlier, the Plan fails to come to grips satisfactorily with the growth in the factors that stress the environment of Yosemite Valley. Limits are addressed only indirectly, with the question deferred for up to five years while the VERP process is pursued, with no conclusion being promised even then.

This is particularly so with respect to growth in bus traffic. Busses can bring far more visitors to the Valley than can cars. Total visitation via car is more easily limited by congestion and limited parking space. But if busses displace cars, the potential number of visitors is far greater. They can suddenly produce crowds that overwhelm special places. And as their numbers increase, so also will the pressures for more accommodations, facilities, and infrastructure. While we suspect that the carrying capacity of Yosemite Valley is likely currently exceeded only a few days during the year, without an analysis and setting of limits those days could increase rapidly over time.

Once remote parking lots are built, it will be all too easy to expand them. New centers of development can all too easily sprawl out around these lots. Not enough research or planning has been done to determine whether sites can safely be developed at Hazel Green or Foresta. One rare plant and one plant of federal concern are found at Hazel Green, as well as habitat for the California Spotted owl, which is under consideration for inclusion in the federal endangered species list. Even Badger Pass is problematic because of its inadequate sewage system.

We are quite concerned with construction of a bus depot with 16 bays being developed in the heart of Yosemite Valley. This does not fit in with the goal of reduction in impacts nor of increasing the quality of the visitor's experience of the natural values of Yosemite. The Plan assumes that the number of bus bays will de facto limit the number of busses arriving from out of the Valley. But pressures will grow from tour companies and outside commercial lodge owners to increase the number of such bus bays. Such bays might be taken from either the allocation for day use auto visitors, or from habitat.

Once again, we urge the National Park Service to establish a moratorium on granting permits for any more tour busses or YARTS busses, and to establish limits on the number of busses entering the Valley, as well as for automobiles. Under the Plan, at peak periods a bus would be expected to arrive at the visitor center every 1.3 minutes. Busses would be arriving practically in convoys.

These limits would be the necessary counterparts of limits on overnight lodging units, camp sites, parking spots, and employee housing. All of these sources of pressure need to be controlled simultaneously to prevent pressures from transferring themselves from one point to another. Busses can be part of the solution, but unless their numbers are tightly controlled, they will also come to be the problem.

Work on satellite parking facilities should not go forward until limits have been established on bus traffic into Yosemite Valley, and even then only if siting problems have been resolved (in terms of limiting environmental impacts and containing sprawl at the sites).

(3) SOUTHSIDE DRIVE AND OTHER ROADS

We remain concerned about the plan to shift traffic entirely to Southside Drive. Closing Northside Drive to traffic will not produce any habitat gain, merely seasonal respite from noise. But it will result in habitat loss along Southside Drive as all traffic pressures focus on it. The EIS informs us that the park does intend to widen it, with "the extension of pavement over strips of habitat alongside the road" [p.4.2–54]. We understand that the plan is to improve it to the same level as accomplished in rebuilding the E1 Portal road, which was so controversial. Moreover, if the proposed traffic check station is built at E1 Capitan crossover, then even more habitat will be lost.

Moreover, we do not agree with relocating Northside Drive along the south side of Yosemite Lodge (closer to the river), and building a new bridge across Yosemite Creek. Again, this will produce a needless loss of habitat, with little, if any gain in the visitor experience.

We do not understand how this plan advances the restoration agenda. Very little is gained, while a lot is lost.

(4) SEGMENT D

We understand that attention will not be given to the issue of Segment D of the El Portal Road until the Cascades Diversion Dam has been removed, the river bed has stabilized, and until compliance with environmental laws has been pursued. (We ask that Cascade Dam be removed in an environmentally responsible manner, with appropriate scientific appraisals of the best manner in which to remove the dam completed first.)

We do want to observe that, while widening of Segment D is not necessary, there may be a desire by the Park Service to engage in roadbed stabilization, intersection redesign, sewer repair, paving, or other types of construction activity. In such an event, compliance with environmental laws should be pursued in good faith, with an appraisal of the potential impacts of various alternative designs helping to guide the Park Service to the least harmful alternative. Because of obligations under the

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, that design should be aimed at keeping construction out of the bed and off the banks of that river. The EIS admits that stabilization materials are now in the river channel "and interfere with the free-flowing condition of the river" [table 4–39, p. 4,2–167].

We are troubled by the ambiguities of the Plan with regard to whether good faith compliance will be attempted. Many comments are made that suggest no more than pro forma compliance and a definite intent to re-construct regardless of what is found. The EIS actually states that the non-conforming material will "remain in the river channel after the-road is constructed" [table 4–39, p. 4.2–167]. The Park Service seems to assume that study, and notice of intent to obstruct a wild river's free-flowing condition under Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, will meet the requirements of the Act. But we assert that the administering agency has a positive duty to keep obstructions out of the bed of such rivers. We share hopes expressed in the plan that it will be found feasible "to design and construct the road in a manner that would avoid direct and adverse impacts on the values for which the river was designated" [p. 4.2–175]. We hope that deficiencies in legal compliance will not continue to shadow whatever additional work on this road may be proposed.

We note that all the above concerns would be vastly reduced if the Park Service would recognize that Segment D does not need to be widened. The combination of gradients and curves that were felt to be a problem on Segments A, B, and C do not exist on Segment D. The problem appears to be one of blind insistence on uniform standards as an end in itself.

IN CONCLUSION

It strikes us that the tasks ahead ought to be tackled in a certain order. At the outset, priority should be given to resolution of the court case regarding the Merced Wild and Scenic River plan and developing a legally compliant River Plan since that provides the basis for so much else. Next, we urge that a process be initiated to promulgate a moratorium on issuing any more licenses for tour busses entering the valley, and any other busses which would create additional air, noise, sprawling impacts, or runoff pollution.

Then various relatively non-controversial tasks ought to be pursued: downsizing the level of accommodations in the Valley, continuing to move non-essential facilities out, and increasing the pace of restoration work. At the same time, efforts should be made to clean up the emissions of existing busses that enter the valley through establishing a schedule for conversion to cleaner fuels. And upgrading and renovating the sewage system for the Valley would seem to-be relatively non-controversial, especially if it diverts money from more harmful projects.

Over the next few years, further efforts should be made to set limits on all of the sources of stress on the valley's environment. Limits should be adjusted based on containing and decreasing, not increasing, the existing stress on the Valley's environment after an analysis on the capacity of the valley to withstand various stresses. We are not entirely clear on whether the contemplated VERP process is everything that is needed, but we urge use of a pragmatic process that tests various levels of management to see whether desired improvements ensue, with adjustments to get needed results.

Finally, we urge that any further consideration of satellite parking lots be placed on hold until clean, quiet, non-intrusive alternate transportation is in place, operational, has secured funding, and has proven to be successful. And, even then, it should be considered only if some mechanism is in place to limit ALL vehicular traffic, including busses of all kinds, based on the carrying capacity analysis. And that is assuming problem-free sites can be found.

We look forward to working toward a process of better protecting the very special values of Yosemite Valley and the Merced River.

Mr. RADANOVICH. All right. Thank you very much for your testimony as well.

Mr. Hardy, I would love to ask you a couple of questions regarding this Plan. You were here and I think heard much of the testimony of the Park Service when they were here before. A couple of things I would like to ask you about.

Two questions with regard to the upper and lower river campgrounds. You had mentioned that those campgrounds, as well as others, serve the mental health of the public. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. HARDY. Certainly. The family unites, a chance for the family to come together and gather in those areas, has been traditional, historic, and it's a respite from coming out of the city life or wherever they came from, and gather in a family unit. I believe that it truly helps.

I think Yosemite Valley is really like a giant "couch," and the people working there are the "shrinks", and the chance to send people home restored is important. Those campgrounds played a major role in that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. You have long been an advocate of the reopening of those campgrounds. In fact, in your testimony, as you just said a minute ago, it requires a little bit of maintenance to go in and get rid of the sand and rocks that were deposited by the increased water levels and then move on.

But we have become aware, or at least you are aware, that the Park Service has said both campgrounds are entirely within the flood plain of the river and it comes within the Wild and Scenic designation. How do you figure overcoming something like that in order to get them restored?

I support reopening the campgrounds. Maybe a barrier of 100 feet, 150 feet, from the river—the historic edge, not the flood edge, but—

Mr. HARDY. First of all, I think they're kidding themselves, anyone is, who think that people aren't going to use the river by declaring it a flood plain.

Secondly, the Congress wrote the law that created the flood plain. Let's adapt it, let's make some meaningful adjustments and fine-tune the Plan and allow the people that own the Park the ability to continue to use it.

Mr. RADANOVICH. There are a lot of lawsuits prolonging the thing. I mean, that's what you're up against basically, an onslaught of lawsuits.

Mr. HARDY. I really feel that when you leave the 4,000 foot level of Yosemite Valley and you go to other parts to impact other parts of the Park, you're doing the preservation side of the Park management plan a disservice. This is already impacted. It gets washed periodically. That's even better. But I would stick with trying to find a way to adapt the law to reopen those campgrounds, and Wawona the same thing.

Mr. RADANOVICH. A lot of the controversy in planning this thing is the number of parking spaces in the Valley. Can you kind of give us some idea of what has been there historically and where we've been heading with the issue of parking spaces?

Mr. HARDY. Well, if you want to go back far enough, there were periods of times when we parked at Mirror Lake. In fact, there was a boat dock and boats and Easter service was done out on the lake. You could drive all the way there. Of course, there was parking in front of the post office for many, many years. There was parking in back of the post office for many, many years. Both of those are not available at this time.

The parking throughout the Valley has been diminished by thousands. I notice that someone said 3,300. When I was there, we counted 6,000 that had been torn out since the 1960's. I don't believe you ought to put all those back, but I do believe in small sat-

ellite parking lots along the shuttle bus route, 30 to 80 cars in a spot. The areas where you pull in, like where the old Chinese laundry was, there are several spots along that side of the Valley, you just cover them with pine needles. I'm not talking about black top. You don't need them when it's wet and sloppy and the weather is bad. The public doesn't come anyway. So you don't need mud and snow management or snow removal.

But in the summertime, when the Park is heavily visited, they use the Curry dump site, small satellites along the shuttle bus route, all managed with pine needles—and, of course, Camp 6—and a reorganization of the areas around the village store. I believe you could put parking back in very nicely without impacting new areas.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Szefel, as you are well aware, the flood of January 1997 created some problems. It also impacted your employee housing needs. I'm curious to know how you dealt with that and how this Plan may affect your ability to house your employees and what your concerns are with regard to employee housing in this Plan.

Mr. SZEFEL. Well, since the flood, we lost quite a number of employee housing units. We have had to make do with several temporary—actually, they are miner camp portable outlets that created small villages. They are temporary at best, and they are certainly not the way we would like to be able to house our employees for going forward.

As I stated in my prepared remarks, that's a concern with the Plan, the impact on employees. I think there's a lot of advantage to having employees live in the Valley. That's a part of the allure of the job. Many of them walk to work, bicycle to work. So that's an issue that clearly we see as something that requires conversation as we go forward with the Park Service.

I would just reemphasize that our ability to work with them throughout all of this process has been terrific. I'm sure we'll be able to resolve it. But it's an issue that is uppermost in our mind.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Do you have involvement with the gateway communities? Is there discussion—For example, the concessionaire administrative functions being moved to gateway communities, or some of your employee housing, especially with the opportunity of YARTS being there, is that something you have discussed or is in planning?

Mr. SZEFEL. We now have our entire central reservation system, that does our reservation work not only for Yosemite but for all of our other properties, in Fresno. We also do a number of our administrative support functions out of that building already, and that clearly would be an area that might make some sense for us to do. But we do some of it already.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Are you concerned about any loss of employee housing as a result of this Plan, or—

Ms. SZEFEL. Oh, sure. That's one, as I mentioned. Again, we have a good experience working with the Park Service, through some pretty catastrophic occurrences, and I'm sure we'll get through the planning process with them as well. But employee housing is uppermost in our mind.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Mr. Szefel.

Mr. Watson, you heard the comments that there were probably up to as many as 6,000 parking spaces in the Valley, and we're looking at a plan that has about 550, and then the idea of busing the rest into the park—at least that being the focus for day-use visitors.

Where is your line? Is it 550 spaces, or would you like to see zero? Could you accommodate 1,200? What are your thoughts?

Mr. WATSON. I don't believe there were 6,000 parking spaces in Yosemite Valley. If there were, that would equate to about, I think, 80 acres of asphalt. I don't think 80 acres of asphalt has been removed from Yosemite Valley.

In addition to the 550 car parking lot for day use, you know, there are—I'm going to say over 1,000 parking spaces for campgrounds and overnight units, that sort of thing.

I think the reduction to 550 day use parking spaces in the Valley itself is of critical importance, but it will only work if either YARTS is in operation or, if YARTS isn't in operation, then those out-of-valley parking lots are constructed at each of the entryways into the Park, each of those corridors. Obviously, you have to provide people a way to get into the Park, and that's either in their own automobiles to their overnight units, to a day use parking lot, or to a satellite lot, and then on a clean fuel shuttle into the Valley.

But I think 550, you know, is somewhat of a magic number, because it's large enough to accommodate off-season visitation levels without any reductions in those. So that's sort of the magic number.

Mr. RADANOVICH. I see.

Mr. Whitmore, the Sierra Club has been, I guess, a pretty outspoken opponent of the Plan, particularly in the area of YARTS. I know Mr. Brower, who is now deceased, prior to that had mentioned a real objection to relying on diesel buses or relying on a Park plan that requires more people to go on diesel buses in order to enjoy Yosemite.

If I'm accurate in that description, and I think I am, what would be your plan, knowing that if you don't rely on a busing system, instead looking at 550 spaces, if you're less reliant on one, you're looking at more parking spaces in the Valley.

Mr. WHITMORE. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

I would like to clarify one point. The Sierra Club has actually never taken a position on YARTS, as such. We like a regional approach to things, and to the extent that YARTS is a regional program, we think that it's a good idea to approach it that way. So we never—

Mr. RADANOVICH. I stand corrected, then.

Mr. WHITMORE. We never endorsed YARTS, as such, even though we were asked to, because we didn't know what they would come up with. They then came up with a fleet of diesel buses.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Were Mr. Brower's comments basically his comments?

Mr. WHITMORE. Those were his personal comments, yes. And then when they came out with a fleet of diesel buses, this was one of the things we had feared. That can be changed, I presume.

As far as what we would like to see to deal with the problem, we have limitations on practically everything I can think of in

Yosemite, except for day use. My impression is that this was Mr. Babbitt's fixation, that we are not going to limit day use. Well, if you don't limit day use, you're going to end up with more people than you can handle at certain times. Eventually, maybe that would be a very large amount of days out of the year. Currently, it's a rather small number of days out of the year.

So we feel that most of the year you don't have a problem.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. WHITMORE. And during those times that you do have a problem, I think you have to accept the idea that Yosemite Valley is finite and you are probably going to have to implement a partial reservation system. I don't think it should be totally reservation, because this is a little too restrictive. I don't think people are ready for that. But just as with the wilderness permits, there are advance reservations for some of it and then some of it is on a walk-up basis. I don't know why that couldn't be done with people who drive up to the gate.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Did the Sierra Club support the concept of gate closures, that when there was a certain amount of people in the Park, they would shut the gates?

Mr. WHITMORE. I wasn't on the scene at the time, but I have seen enough congestion in the Valley at peak times during the summer that I can well imagine the problem got out of hand. There were too many cars in the Valley at one time, so the Park Service had to do something.

I think their way of handling it left something to be desired. They should not have done it so abruptly. I think there needed to be more public education, more advance notice. It doesn't make sense that you have large lines of cars waiting at the gate because it has been closed unexpectedly. That leads to the matter of congestion in the Valley itself, not just at the gate. But there are a lot of things the Park Service could do to relieve congestion in the Valley, simple things that would not take a lot of money.

We find it inexplicable that the Park Service has not done a lot of planning for traffic management in the Valley. There are some problem intersections that could be redesigned. There is too much confusion over this business of, well, is it a one-way loop, or are we putting the northside traffic back on southside temporarily, and if so, at least cover up the signs that say get in the left lane if you're going to cross over Stoneman Bridge. If you do get in the left lane, you'll have a head-on collision. I have run into that personally twice. Just the most elementary things that display a certain level of adequate management.

Mr. RADANOVICH. To me, the obvious example is rerouting the road around Yosemite Lodge and getting it on the same side as Yosemite Falls, lower Yosemite Falls, where your parking is there. You could relieve easily one bad bottleneck in the Park.

Mr. WHITMORE. Yes. I'm not sure that the Plan the Park Service is talking about now, for running the road around the south side of the lodges, is the best way to go. But certainly that intersection is one of the major problems and it needs some thought about how to redesign it to deal with that situation.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hardy, would you comment on one thing for me. You know that there is already money that is appropriated for the implementation of this plan to the tune of about $140-145 million. By what you've been able to gather from the hearing, not holding you to it, do you agree with some of the things the Park Service would like to do right now with that money, except for the river campground issue?

Mr. HARDY. I think their utility upgrades are a must, and to improve some of the roads and continue to maintain them, I think that's going the right way.

I'm glad there is not money in there to remove the bridges. That's a plus. So I'm amazed at that huge pot of money. I mean, in all my years working with the Park Service, they never had that kind of funding. In the past, the funding that did come to the Park Service came through you, as elected officials, and now so much of it comes from other routes, such as they talked about entry fees, campgrounds, special events, concession moneys, Yosemite fund, the Yosemite Association, Yosemite Institute. There's millions of dollars coming to the Park Service without any elected officials oversight.

I would say it would be nice to have that instead go to a general fund, just the opposite of what the Park Service spoke of today, that they're relieved it doesn't go to the general fund. I believe it's a public park and it does need elected officials oversight on what money and how it's spent.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Well, I can rest assured that the rest of the $441 million will have to be appropriated, so we're looking forward to having some say in how the balance of this might be spent, if it's spent at all.

Gentlemen, I want to thank you for being here and for your testimony. With that, I will go ahead and conclude this hearing. Before that, people have up to 30 days to submit recorded remarks.

Again, thank you all very much. We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1: 10 p.m., the Subcommittee adjourned.]

[A statement submitted for the record by the Natural Resources Defense Council follows:]

NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

March 28, 2001

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
House Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

Attention: Allen Freemyer
VIA FACSIMILE: 202-226-2301

Dear Mr. ~~Freemyer~~ Allen:

Attached is the Natural Resources Defense Council's statement of support for the final Yosemite Valley Plan. I would appreciate it if you would include this statement in the record for the oversight hearing on the Valley Plan that was held yesterday, March 27, 2001, by the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands.

If you have any questions about this statement, please do not hesitate to call me at 415-777-0220.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Johanna Wald

Johanna H. Wald
Director, Land Program

encl.

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STATEMENT OF SUPPORT
FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE FINAL YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), a national environmental advocacy organization with more than 400,000 members and contributors, supports the final Yosemite Valley Plan and urges Congress and the Administration to work with plan supporters to begin implementing it. Yosemite National Park is a place of priceless beauty and natural wonder. For too long, the heart of the Park, Yosemite Valley, and its outstanding natural resources have been threatened by the lack of sound solutions to serious problems. The solutions identified in the final Valley Plan have tremendous public support precisely because they will protect the resources of this incomparable park and improve the experience of those who visit it.

In 1980, the National Park Service acknowledged that automobile traffic is "the single greatest threat to enjoyment of the natural and scenic qualities of Yosemite." Since then, the number of cars and visitors to the Park and especially to the Valley has skyrocketed. As the result, far too many visitors experience the Valley while sitting in traffic, driving around looking for parking spaces and standing in long lines for food. In addition, parking lots have replaced meadows, the natural flow of the Merced River has been blocked by bridges and campgrounds, and other unnecessary development has been constructed in the Valley. The Park Service's General Management Plan, completed in 1980, was intended to address these challenges, but few of the strategies it identified were implemented due to lack of political will and needed funds.

Following the major floods that occurred some four years ago, the National Park Service seized the opportunity to -- at long last – achieve the broad vision established in 1980. Virtually as soon as the flooding had stopped, the agency set about developing solutions to the problems threatening Yosemite's world famous resources.

The planning/decision-making process that the National Park Service followed was inclusive, open and honest. Not only did the agency allow for extensive public involvement, but also, as documented in the testimony of Jay Thomas Watson representing The Wilderness Society and other concerned groups, it made major changes in proposed actions as the Valley Plan went from the draft stage to the final. In this process, agency staff revisited assumptions previously made and, in some cases, jettisoned them. Options discarded in the past were re-evaluated in light of changed circumstances. Rather than laboring to justify previous choices, Yosemite's planners repeatedly proved themselves committed to creating alternative solutions to the serious problems threatening the Valley, to identifying the tradeoffs inherent in each, and listening carefully to the public's reactions before deciding what to do.

The final plan will, among other things:

- reduce the number of cars entering the Valley by more than half, while providing an extensive shuttle system for its exploration as well as a bus system to transport people from outside parking lots and the Valley.
- increase the number of traditional campsites and housekeeping units in the Valley over what is there today while reducing the number of in-Valley motel accommodations and housing for non-essential employees.
- restore almost 200 acres of ecologically-significant habitats within the Valley, including sensitive meadows and river banks.
- provide new business opportunities for communities and entrepreneurs in the region.

The final Valley Plan and these changes have garnered enormous public support, as The Wilderness Society's testimony has shown. Indeed, polling that NRDC, National Parks Conservation Association and Yosemite Restoration Trust carried out during the public comment period on the Plan revealed that 80% of Californians backed reducing the number of cars in the Valley and providing shuttle busses to get around.

As experience with the Park Service's 1980 plan reveals, however, no matter how sound or well-intentioned plans are, they are useless if not implemented. The problems confronting Yosemite are real and we have failed to resolve them for far too long. The Valley's awesome beauty and the quality of the visitor experience there depend on the Congress and the Administration embracing the Valley Plan and committing to its implementation. We respectfully request that Congress do its part now, by allocating needed funds for this purpose.