

YOSEMITE RESTORATION

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC
LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

**THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PLANS FOR RESTORA-
TION OF YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK FOLLOWING
THIS WINTER'S FLOODING**

MARCH 22, 1997—EL PORTAL, CA

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YOSEMITE RESTORATION

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 1997

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS, COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES,

El Portal, CA.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 12:30 p.m., in Cedar Lodge, 9966 Highway 140, El Portal, California, Hon. George Radanovich, presiding.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Good afternoon and welcome to Cedar Lodge. We are here for, of course as you know, the House Committee on Resources' Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands oversight field hearing on the Yosemite restoration.

Before we officially open the hearing, what I'd like to do is invite Senator Monteith to make a presentation as somebody in the community who has done a remarkable job in aiding those who did not benefit so well from our recent visit by Mother Nature on January 1st.

Dick, please, come on up.

Senator. MONTEITH. Jerry Fischer, would you step forward, please?

Jerry, it is my pleasure to present to you a resolution from the State Senate of California for the tremendous service that you've done the people. During a difficult time in this area where we had the flood and the problems, he opened up his lodge to all the people in the surrounding community and afforded them an opportunity to have a warm bed, a place to sleep in, and realize that they were important.

And so, it is with a great deal of pleasure to present this resolution to you to prove once again that the people in the Sierra and the people of California have the strength to raise up, to rise up to the occasions that we're confronted with and continue on and our life will be a success, and it gives me a great deal of pleasure to present this to you at this time.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Many of you may know I was a County Supervisor in Mariposa County for about four years. What you may not know is that during that tenure my associates presented me with a plaque before I left the Board of Supervisors that, basically, said I could do whatever I wanted to do in a 24-hour period. And, I did want to say, this is my first opportunity to be able to run a meeting without even four other members of the Board of Supervisors to worry about. So, it's a real pleasure and honor to be back home.

We are very, very fortunate to be joined by Senator Barbara Boxer, who will be giving testimony and then joining us on the

platform to hear the concerns of the local citizens with directing the future of Yosemite National Park.

So, Senator Boxer, you are very welcome here and thank you for coming today.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BARBARA BOXER, A U.S.
SENATOR FROM CALIFORNIA**

Senator. BOXER. Thank you, Congressman. I won't be able to join you up on the stage there today. What I will do is stay to hear some of the testimony. I must, unfortunately, drive to Fresno and take a flight to Los Angeles, so I wish that I could join you up there, but you are doing a great job, and I wish you well as the hearing proceeds.

Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to be back. In the tough times we have to work together. I was right here in Cedar Lodge in January, '96, after the government shutdown, and I know how difficult that was for the local community. And, this time it's Mother Nature who caused the shutdown, and we have to work together to pick up the pieces and bring this park back to its pristine condition.

According to the National Park Service, over 350 damage assessments have been completed by engineers, architects, resource specialists and other technical experts.

Their first damage assessment report shows serious damage to the four main routes leading into the park, major electrical and sewer systems, 224 units of employee housing, over 500 guest loading units, over 350 campsites, 17 restoration projects and over ten archeological sites.

Mr. Chairman, I know full recovery will take a long time, but there is no reason that we can't put our heads together and get these roads up and running. We did it at the Los Angeles earthquake, and we must do it here.

If there is any truth to the rumors that I hear of some kind of a permanent year shutdown of our roads, that is unacceptable, and I am very hopeful that our wonderful B.J. Griffin will put our minds to rest on that score.

I want to commend her, as well as all the Park staff and local community leaders, all of your efforts have been herculean, to help people who have been devastated by floods, and we—State Senator Monteith just honored one of these wonderful people.

It is to your credit that the Park has already reopened. Understanding there has been an enormous amount of progress, let's remember that there are many outstanding issues that need to be dealt with in the days ahead. We need to redouble our efforts to improve and nurture communications between the National Park Service, our local community, and the general public.

To further the work done so far, the Congressional appropriations of emergency funding is urgently needed. And, Congressman, I'm so pleased I can be now on the Appropriations Committee, so after you do your fine work on the House side, we'll get it over on the Senate side, we can team-up to get this done.

On March 19th, President Clinton announced his emergency request to Congress for \$177.8 million for the National Park Service to repair and replace facilities at ten national parks, including Yosemite. We will have to see whether this proves to be sufficient. It

may not be. The current National Park Service estimates of the cost of recovery at Yosemite alone is approximately \$178.5 million, and damage assessments have still not been completed.

Congressman, I want to really congratulate you on your leadership in putting together a bill that we must have. Last week, I introduced a bill called the "Yosemite Emergency Restoration and Construction Act." The primary purpose of introducing my bill is to set a benchmark for recovery and clean-up efforts at Yosemite.

This is what the bill does:

It authorizes emergency funding.

Second, it authorizes a specific amount—\$200 million in emergency funds in fiscal year 1997.

Third, it specifies that funds shall only be spent in a manner that is consistent with the Yosemite General Management Plan, the Concession Services Plan, and when adopted, the Yosemite Valley Housing Plan, and the Valley Implementation Plan.

Fourth, it specifies that funds spent on repair and rebuilding of concessions facilities shall be recovered by the Secretary of Interior to the greatest extent practicable according to the Department of Interior's contracts.

Fifth, it authorizes emergency grants to satellite communities around Yosemite to provide mass transit visitor transportation into the park during repair and restoration activities on access roads.

Sixth, it authorizes emergency appropriations for other California parks that suffered flood damage including Redwood National Park, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park and others.

Seventh, it authorizes \$7 million to be appropriated in fiscal year 1998 and such sums as may be necessary for each fiscal year thereafter, for the establishment of a mass transit system for Yosemite. I know that you are working on this, I know that it's extremely important to all the people here and to these communities. It is also very important to preserve our environment.

The importance of emergency funding for Yosemite cannot be overstated. I know you and I agree on this point. It is a unique national treasure, recognized all over the world for its spectacular natural beauty. We have 1.4 million people visiting the Park every year, including tens of thousands of international visitors who travel to California for the sole purpose of staying in the Park to experience this incomparable nature.

John Muir, one of our nation's founding leaders of environmental conservation, first encountered the majestic Yosemite Valley in 1864 and immediately realized the importance of preserving its natural wonders. His foresight and passion resulted in the establishment of Yosemite National Park in October of 1890. At its onset, the Park included 60,000 acres of scenic wild land.

Today, some 106 years later, the park embraces over 761,000 acres of granite peaks, broad meadows, glacially carved domes, giant sequoias, and breathtaking waterfalls. I don't think anyone who has ever visited ever forgets that first visit. It is awe inspiring, and it is our responsibility to work together to assure that it stays so.

So, we will work together to ensure that we repair our treasured Yosemite as quickly and as intelligently as possible.

Congressman, I want to make one more important point here, which I hope you will agree, but we haven't had a chance to discuss this. We all know our Federal budget must be balanced, and, of course, that puts great pressure on us to carry our concerns to our colleagues at this time, and convincing them that these funds are so important that they'll absolutely have to cut funds elsewhere to make these repairs.

I also know there are several questions surrounding park policy, such as Dames Reservation Plan, parking garage and other very contentious issues. I have a strong message for my friends at the National Park Service, for whom I have the greatest respect, let us not adopt any new policy or program without the broadest consultative process, and let us see that if the surrounding communities are unhappy we lose the key component of a successful and efficient park operation.

I strongly advise all of us to concentrate our efforts toward getting this appropriations bill through for Yosemite. It will take all of our focus and cooperation. What we are seeing we can do now is to turn this appropriations thing into an argument about park policies and issues that are divisive. Let us pass this appropriations to fund the things that all of us agree are crucial to Yosemite's future.

That is what I told Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, just Thursday, on the phone; I am very pleased that he is coming to Yosemite tomorrow, that is my understanding, because it shows his commitment to this magnificent place. But, again, I want to say to you that we are moving together as a team across party lines. I can't stress how important this is, because we have many colleagues to convince on both sides of the aisle, Working together, I am convinced we can do this.

Thank you so very much for this opportunity to appear before you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Senator, for being here today, too, and I would like to thank you for the introduction of your legislation on the Senate side.

I think that working together to convince the other Members of the House and the Senate to support this emergency appropriation is certainly something you and I can do, and also in working together we can help bridge whatever gaps there might be between the Park Service and the outlying communities into developing a mutual solution that's a win/win for both, too. So, I look forward to working with you on that, and very much appreciate you being here at the hearing.

You are welcome to join us, or, I know I understand you are on a time schedule.

Senator. BOXER. Thank you very much for the invitation to join you. I will sit here as long as I possibly can, and, again, my deepest thanks for including me in this hearing.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, you are welcome.

Before I read my statement, I do want to mention, too, that the Chairman of the Resources' Subcommittee on the National Parks and Public Lands, Congressman Jim Hansen from Utah, was planning on being here with us as well.

Unfortunately, he had a leg injury that kept him from doing very much traveling, other than going from his office in the Rayburn, back down to the Floor to vote. So, he was very limited in his ability to walk and could not be here this evening.

I've got a statement, I'm going to read it, it's going to take a little bit of time. I hope you'll understand, but by the way that we do these hearings it's very, very important to get our information down into a record, which is the best way to reflect what was said and done here, and the concerns of the citizens, the concerns of the Park system with regard to Yosemite, so that it can be equally expressed amongst the other 435 Members in the House of Representatives and the other 99 Members in the Senate.

So, if you'll bear with me, I would like to do that, but I also want to say thank you to the National Park Service and also the members of the communities. In addition to Jerry Fischer doing such a wonderful job during this disaster, there were many other people in this community who dealt with this, and put the best face on what was a natural disaster. And, I think that we can all speak to it with a great deal of pride, that we are dealing with this problem in a positive way and not in a negative way.

And, B.J. Griffin, from the Park's standpoint as well, I appreciate your concerns for the welfare of the outlying community and also your concern for getting the park up and running just as soon as you possibly can.

So, with that, I'm going to read my very, very long statement, and then after that we're going to invite up four different panels to give testimony into the record.

So, that is the way these hearings work, and I will go ahead and start off with mine.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GEORGE RADANOVICH, A
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM CALIFORNIA**

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much for coming today to this hearing of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands to discuss the National Park Service plans for the restoration of Yosemite National Park following this winter's flooding.

Before we begin, I would like to thank my colleague, Jim Hansen, the Subcommittee Chairman, for recognizing the importance of this hearing. I know that Jim had planned to be here today, but unfortunately, he could not make it. I would also like to thank and recognize, as I did, Senator Barbara Boxer, for taking the time to be here, and look forward to her support on the other side of Capitol Hill. Finally, I want to take the time to thank B.J. Griffin for her leadership in this critical time for the park. I'm looking forward to our continued excellent working relationship.

As everybody here is aware, the record flooding of late December and early January has caused extensive damage to Yosemite National Park. Normally calm, the Merced River blazed a path of destruction along its banks as raging waters swept up campgrounds, sewer lines, employee homes, roads, and other facilities. This event resulted in the Park Service feeling compelled to shut down Yosemite for the longest consecutive timeframe in its 107 year history.

The effects of this shutdown have been dramatic. More than 1,000 employees of Yosemite Concession Services were laid off,

with only 400 returning to work in recent days. Nearly 350 rooms, over 400 campsites, and miles of backcountry trails remain closed. In addition, the concession service, from whom we will hear today, has reported losses between \$8 and \$10 million. This has been the third major shutdown since 1995.

Equally devastating are the impacts borne by the gateway communities surrounding the park, many of which I represent and live. Small business owners and their employees are suffering an unprecedented amount of hardship due to the closure and the limited access caused by the damaged portions of Highways 120, 140, and 41. As of the end of January, estimates of the impact show a 40 percent decline in lodging projections, 15 percent for dining, and an over 25 percent decline in retail expenditures. In short, the problems experienced with the shutdown of Yosemite are continuing for the surrounding communities.

But, with every cloud there is a silver lining. Out of this disaster comes a rare opportunity to address many of the long overdue changes identified in park plans and the relationship of the park to the surrounding communities. Moving campsites out of the floodplain and onto higher ground, for example, is the right thing to do. In addition, using the resources to reduce the backlog of rehabilitation and reconstruction of substandard facilities is also a laudable goal. Finally, money from the Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads fund, commonly referred to as ERFO, along with additional sources, can be used not only to repair existing road damage, but also to address some of the long-term stabilization needs, including the widening of Highway 140 and helping to implement a regional busing plan, as a step toward the long-term solution of reducing congestion in the Yosemite Valley.

However, just as there exists a number of positive benefits to be derived in the aftermath of this tragedy, so too is the potential for problems. Addressing the long-term transportation needs of the park and the surrounding communities is an issue that can, and should, be included in the restoration of Yosemite. However, the proposal to implement a day-use reservation system as a means to reduce traffic in the park is a subject of great concern. Already the effects of this proposed system have been felt. The mere mention of restricted vehicular access to the park has triggered cancellations of a number of reservations in nearby hotels. This has, in effect, produced a negative double whammy for our communities who have come to depend on the increased tourism that the summer months bring.

I express my concern for day-use reservations not because I fail to recognize the need for a reduction of the congestion both during construction and afterwards in Yosemite Valley, but because I believe that there is a better way to achieve these reductions without the loss of visitorship to the region.

The Administration, as part of its supplemental appropriations request, has suggested spending \$21 million to address short-term and long-term transportation needs in the Valley. The combination of a day-use reservation system and a parking facility in the Taft Toe region is essentially how they intend to spend this money. I say there may be a better way.

In the short-term, there is no need for a day-use reservation system. Instead, the Congress, the Park Service, the State of California, and the surrounding local county officials should work together to construct and implement a transportation plan that addresses the needs of the park and the local communities without reducing people or paving the Valley floor.

Given the importance of developing a regional transportation system which includes both local communities, the State, and park needs, we will work to ensure that any funds that are saved due to the construction efficiencies will be retained by the park as a commitment toward the ongoing regional and in-park transportation systems. It is important that both the regional and park needs are addressed with these funds.

I challenge the Clinton Administration today to drop its day-use plan and work with the stakeholders to ensure that America's park is accessible to all Americans all of the time.

On Wednesday, the Congress received the long-anticipated emergency supplemental appropriation request from the White House. I look forward to a thorough review of this plan and to working with the Administration as this process moves forward in the coming weeks.

Thank you all, again, for coming here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony, as well as that of the elected officials and, most importantly, the citizens of the surrounding communities on the single most important issue facing our community today, the restoration of Yosemite National Park.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much, and with that I'd like to invite the first panel to come before us, and all we need on that first panel is one person, and that's B.J. Griffin, who is Superintendent of Yosemite National Park. B.J., it's all your's.

Oh, let me do one thing, too, before we start. You'll notice there's three light bulbs on the counter here, they are all different colors. The green is for go, the yellow is get ready to stop, and red means stop. So, at best we can do, we'd like to adhere to that. I will not be real demanding on that, unless things would get out of hand, and I'm sure they won't. So, I would ask that you do your best to abide by the clock, and that would be on every panel that comes up here.

STATEMENT OF BARBARA JO GRIFFIN, SUPERINTENDENT, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK; ACCOMPANIED BY KEVIN CANN, CHIEF, MAINTENANCE AND ENGINEERING

Ms. GRIFFIN. Thank you very much, Congressman. It is, indeed, a pleasure to join you today to talk about the needs of Yosemite National Park, a park which is so near and dear to all of us certainly in this region and to the Nation.

Joining me at the table, and would be ready to answer any detailed questions maybe in better detail, is Bob Andrews, Chief Ranger at Yosemite, and Kevin Cann, Chief of Maintenance and Engineering, but is also now acting as our Recovery Team Manager.

As 1996 came to a close, Yosemite had a particularly heavy snowpack. On January 1st, a warm tropical storm moved into California. Heavy rains fell throughout the park. The combination of

the rain and the warm weather and that deep snowpack resulted in one of the largest floods that the park has had. We have had many comparable events over the last 100 years, but this was the largest one in the last five. There were 900 park visitors in the park and 1,200 employees that were trapped on three islands within the Valley. Employees and residents in El Portal, the primary administrative support facility for the park, were also isolated and cut off from the Valley and received significant damage.

The natural environment of the park is adapted for periodic flooding. The structures and the infrastructure we have built in the park are not so well adapted. We lost major utility systems, we lost our sewer lines, there's a photograph of that up on the mantle, we lost the lift station that is associated with that sewer system, the water supply for the park was destroyed, and only one of three access roads was available to us at the time. We had a precarious electrical system and we were definitely in a tenuous and emergency state.

In El Portal, the water system was severely damaged, and residents had to use bottled water. The sewer line to the housing and trailer village was destroyed. Highway 140 leading to the park and to Mariposa was impassable, and, indeed, is under construction as we speak today. Several other roads were severely damaged, but we have been able to repair those, and we reopened the park on March the 14th, using Highways 41 and 120.

Late on January 3rd, 900 visitors in the park were evacuated by convoy. Then we began to understand the full magnitude of what we were facing. We did three things. We called in a Type 1 Incident Command Team to deal with the emergency that faced us. We could not get many of our employees to the park, because they were trapped in El Portal. The second thing we did was we began to talk with the leaders of the community and congressional delegation and showed people the extent of the damage, because we knew we were in for a long haul, and we wanted people to understand what we were faced with doing, and what it was going to take to mend it. The third thing we did was evacuate 500 of the Concession employees that were not directly involved in the emergency recovery effort. The problem we had with people that were not in the Valley employed on the emergency was the fact that it overburdened the non-functional sewage system and the water system, and we had to get down to minimum numbers in order to survive. By the end of the first week of January, the population in Yosemite Valley was reduced to about 300 emergency personnel.

From this point one of our main goals was to make the park safe for a reopening. On January 21st we did, indeed, open the southern end of the park. Shortly after that, Cinquapin and Badger Pass, and then the northern end of the park up to Crane Flat. And, as I said, on March the 14th we were able to open Yosemite Valley to visitors. Highway 140, however, was so damaged that the reconstruction of that road is going to take quite a while. We will work on it until Memorial Day weekend when we'll have two temporary lanes in, then we will be able to have normal traffic, and then there will not be a one-year closure, we will always have controlled traffic on Highway 140, when after Labor Day we will start the permanent fix of that road.

Mr. RADANOVICH. B.J., say what you need to say, don't worry about that yellow light, we're going to just turn that thing off.

Ms. GRIFFIN. The one thing I know that everybody is concerned about is the day-use reservation system, and it is not the way that we would go about business in designing the system that we are considering. Because of the emergency, we were not able to get out to the communities and take public comment as we would on any major policy change. I welcome the opportunity to mention the details of the system so that people will better understand what we are talking about, but I think the important thing for people to understand is that we are not trying to reduce the numbers of visitors to Yosemite National Park, we are trying to reduce the number of vehicles. Because of the recovery effort and the parking problem, we will not be able to recover as fast if contractors are not able to get around on the roads. We have to do something to limit the numbers of vehicles that are on the congested areas of the Valley.

We don't intend also to, like I said, limit visitors, because the main thing we want to do is let people come in on a bus if they can't get a reservation to bring their vehicle in. Also, we are looking into a weekend reservation system only, rather than the seven-day, full-time reservation system that we had originally thought about.

This is a lot of money that we are asking for, and we recognize that. Some of the money, probably over \$90 million of it, represents constructing facilities in the proper place, rather than going back into the flood plain and repeating mistakes of the past. It is a lot of money, I appreciate everyone's support, and I think we all can agree that Yosemite is worth it.

I do have a statement to enter for the record, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.

[The statement of Ms. Griffin may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Great, thanks, B.J., and I've got a number of them just to lay a few things down in the record, and then wanted to bring up a few others, perhaps. A number of concerned citizens have suggested that the appropriations request, at least in the emergency legislation, is inflated. Can you provide data that shows what you used to develop your request, so we can back it up and verify it and provide it for the record?

Ms. GRIFFIN. Yes, absolutely.

As I mentioned, we brought in professional engineers, architects, road engineers and resources people immediately to start looking at some 350 separate facilities that needed to be repaired. We had some very good estimates, because pre-flood we had been working on the Valley Implementation Plan, some elements around the rim here, and we had just had those facilities estimated, many of which were damaged in the flood. So, we had very fresh and good estimates on that.

Fifteen to 20 percent of it is a normal remote site factor that would go into any of our estimating. We have used 30 percent, and the reasons for that are that California, the extent of the flooding in California has caused widespread demand for contractors and materials, and that makes a difference. The remoteness, again, is a problem here in Yosemite. When the roads are impassable and contractors loaded with materials have to wait to get through for

convoys and things like that, it adds to the cost. So, we have used a 30 percent remote factor.

Of the \$176 million, \$123 million is previous flood—due to previous floods for various projects and plans, like I said, it was estimated, so a good majority of it had professional estimates, even pre-flood.

Thirty-one percent of the money is for the supervision and contingencies that we put on all of our projects, so we've built in the remote factor and the factor of the lack of competition that's out there right now because of what's happened to California state-wide.

Mr. RADANOVICH. B.J., what if, you know, down the road we get this appropriation approved, it's in the law, you got the funds that you requested, I guess my question is what happens if any of those funds are not used for a particular project, can they be set aside for, perhaps, designated purposes, like a Yosemite transportation system or something that is a use that stays within the park but can be used for such projects that might lead toward the solution of the day-use traffic problem or the congestion in the park, is there any set-up to do that right now, or what's the possibility of being able to do something like that?

Ms. GRIFFIN. The budget process in Washington is one that I don't know the fine points of. However, normally what happens is that each of these is treated as a line item in itself, and that if we didn't do a project, or it came in under bid, then that money would just go back to Washington. So, it could be that something would need to be written into the appropriation to allow for that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And, if it was written in the appropriation, you would support, I'm sure, funds to be used for—that would work toward the overall solution of the traffic problem in Yosemite.

Ms. GRIFFIN. Oh, absolutely, that's our goal in all of our planning, and has been for the last 17 years.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

What incentives are you intending to include in any proposed contracts to ensure that the proposed work is completed on time, or sooner, and within budget or below budget, are there any special incentives that you will be offering to contractors in order to speed the recovery along a little quicker?

Ms. GRIFFIN. We will take advantage of any opportunities and authorities that we have for sole source, design/build, things of that nature, but Kevin Cann can probably speak to that in more detail.

Mr. CANN. Well, specifically, for the larger projects, and the road projects in particular, we are trying to build in contractor performance incentives, which have proven, as our report referred to earlier in the Northridge earthquake, to cut project development and performance times as much as in half. So, we have built that into our estimates right now.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

Mr. CANN. On the larger projects, not so much for the \$15,000.00 projects.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

Time incentives as well, in order to give bonuses for earlier due dates, those kind of things?

Mr. CANN. Time incentives primarily.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK, very good, thank you.

What portion of the proposed funds are for the recovery from the January flood, as opposed to improvements proposed under the GMP or related documents? Do you have a figure, a percentage figure, as to what goes where?

Ms. GRIFFIN. About \$94 million of the money is to build things according to the General Management Plan that were damaged by the flood. In other words, instead of going back in and repairing in place, build them outside. There's about, as far as the Valley Implementation Plan, which is the Valley portion of the General Management Plan, there's about an estimate of about \$299, call it \$300 million, to complete that General Management Plan detailed study, and probably—there's about \$108 million in this request, so you are accomplishing about a third of what the General Management Plan called for to happen in the Valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK, thank you.

Also, recognizing that the General Management Plan was developed about 17 years ago, at least that was the beginning of the General Management Plan, are there any changes that have happened since then, and do you see a need to—in your belief, does the General Management Plan affect or incorporate the outlying communities of, perhaps, Sonora, Oakhurst and Mariposa, as being means of solving problems like transportation, do you think that's adequately addressed in the GMP, or is it something that if it's not do you propose ways to incorporate the outlying communities into some of those solutions?

Ms. GRIFFIN. Yes.

Mr. RADANOVICH. For example, traffic.

Ms. GRIFFIN. Right. The General Management Plan, go back to that, talked about having parking lots, used examples, Crane Flat in the park, El Portal, and remote sites that were within the boundaries of Yosemite National Park.

The refinement of that thinking over the last several years has been that we would love to be able to get day-use automobiles eventually out of Yosemite National Park. Therefore, we would look to a regional transportation system that's now being studied by YARTS, Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy, to deliver people to Yosemite National Park, and then we would put them on a Valley shuttle system so that we would have an automobile free park. That would be the vision.

Mr. RADANOVICH. B.J., too, in discussions we had even earlier before this meeting, there was discussion and relative consensus, I think, can be reached between the outlying communities and the Park Service as to the overall traffic solution and transportation solution to Yosemite Valley inside the park, which would be a combination, I think, of improvements that would be developed through this emergency appropriations for you to solve your traffic problems inside the park boundary, but also something—and would be done in such a way that would dovetail with the regional transportation program developed by the outside communities, for example, through YARTS, and one would dovetail with the other, that would in the long run provide an answer to probably one of the most difficult problems facing the park, and that is congestion, particularly during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

And, I guess not so much as a question, but as a statement, that I think that we are in sync with the development of a long-term plan such as that. When I was confronted by some of my constituents in communities that had a problem with the imposition of a day-use reservation system immediately, was that the short-term solution, by using a day-use reservation system, may lend to further devastating the economies of Mariposa and Oakhurst, Mariposa and Madera Counties in particular, because of the immediate impact.

And, while I think that there's consensus on the development of a long-term program, which I know we can work toward, there is the problem of how do we take care of the park's needs, being limited by the damage from the floods, but also the community needs of Mariposa and Oakhurst, by making sure that they can recover just as quickly as possible from the park closure of January 1st.

I guess my question is, are you willing to take a look at this and give some flexibility in negotiating over these next couple of weeks to ensure that we can devise a plan that meets the needs of the Yosemite Valley, but also can enhance the economies at the same time in Mariposa and Madera Counties?

Ms. GRIFFIN. Yes, I think there's two things that I'd like to talk about. The reservation system that we are considering, and it should be mentioned here that the transportation element that's in the funding leads us to that long-term goal, albeit a phased approach, the Valley Implementation Plan will be a full public involvement planning process. That will include the transportation plan and how to solve it in Yosemite, and we'll have a range of options that we will lay before the public some time in May, that will go through the normal process in reaching a consensus conclusion. And, I think the communities will definitely be a part of the dialog and a part of the solution.

As far as the day-use reservation system is concerned, what we are faced with is, basically, two options. We can do a reservation system, as we have talked, and be happy to talk about the details of that, or we can fall back on what was not a very satisfactory process that we've used in the past, and that was gate restrictions. In other words, when the numbers of car that can be tolerated before you get complete gridlock passed through the gates, then we just simply closed the gates, and the unfortunate thing about that is that's also economically devastating to the communities.

So, we were trying our very best to deliver the best service to the visiting public, which I think really is the win/win for everybody here, and in doing the reservation system, we felt that the public would be better served by knowing before they left home if they were going to have to take a bus into the park or if they were going to be able to bring their automobile in.

And, yes, there are many details and aspects of restricted access to the park that, again, is for vehicles, not for people, that we can talk about.

Mr. RADANOVICH. B.J., we were discussing the possibility of providing an emergency bus system actually this summer, as a means of, you know, in approaching the National Park Service and saying that, why don't you use an emergency bus program, rather than a day-use reservation system, as a means of alleviating the traffic

concerns, but, in turn, being able to bring as many people into the park and enjoy the park on a daily basis.

What if we were able to develop a bus system tomorrow that brought all these people in and turned them loose in the park, would you be able to handle a facility like that?

Ms. GRIFFIN. No, that's actually what the extra money, between the \$178 original proposal, and the one that's before you that the White House introduced, is for, because the fact that if you were to bring in all visitors, day-use visitors into Yosemite on a bus, you would, basically, drop them at the village, right there, you would put them in that parking lot.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Ms. GRIFFIN. At the Village Store, and there they would be with their bicycles, and their coolers, and their rafts, and all the things that they bring for a day visit, and no place to put them, no place to get them around on shuttle buses. We are not equipped on this end yet to deal with busing people in total into Yosemite, and that's one thing that would be solved by the extra money. It would put a facility in place that could deal with the bus traveler and everything that they bring.

Mr. RADANOVICH. But, you agree, too, that once your transportation situation is fixed inside Yosemite, that the best way to deal with the traffic problem is by complementing your interior system by a well-developed regional system along the outside of the park boundaries.

Ms. GRIFFIN. We agree on that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Exactly, OK.

Now that we agree on the long-term solution for the park, I guess the question is how to best meet the needs of the outlying communities and the park's traffic problems during this upcoming tour season, and, frankly, I can't tell—I could not say whether gate closures would be better than day-use reservation systems, hopefully, we'll hear that from members of the community as we begin to work forward to develop the best, the very best solution that we possibly can for the park and the outlying communities for these next six, seven months.

So, with that, I thank you very much for your testimony, and appreciate your being here.

Ms. GRIFFIN. We look forward to hearing from that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK, fine.

Thank you, and I will now call the next panel up, that consists of Senator Dick Monteith, Senator from the State of California from the 12th Senate District; Garry Parker, Supervisor, Mariposa County, District 4, a familiar one to me, and those are our two witnesses. And also I would like to recognize other members who are here, Assemblyman George House, the 25th Assembly District, George, if you'd like to be recognized, and also the 4th District Supervisor for Tuolumne County, Mark Thornton. Mark, you are here somewhere, I think, and also, Harry Baker, Supervisor of Madera County. Harry, welcome.

Dick, do you want to get things rolling?

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR DICK MONTEITH, STATE OF
CALIFORNIA, 12TH SENATE DISTRICT**

Senator. MONTEITH. Congressman, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be involved in this forum. As you know, the Yosemite area is a very important portion of the 12th Senate District, in fact, all the entrances, except for one, are in the 12th Senate District. And, we are aware of the value of the park, everybody in the surrounding communities, everyone in the State, and I believe everyone in the Nation is aware of the importance.

What we are concerned about is the economic situation involving the people in the surrounding communities. We have concern, and I have concern with the daily-use reservation system, as what has been discussed slightly before. I do understand that we need long-term planning. One concern that I have is the fact that, are we going to have to come up with a plan before we let people in? Is this long-term planning going to prevent people from participating within the park for a year, two years, three years? Tourism is set up on an annual basis, and as time—people feel they do not have the accessibility, tours are set up into other portions of the State, so we are not looking at just a viable situation for six months. Six months can mean that people will not be back for another two years, so we have some feelings and questions of how long that may take.

Everyone is concerned about restoring Yosemite, and we are concerned about how the appropriations are going to go, we are concerned about the long-term benefits of the park, and the surrounding communities. We also have some concern about the traffic plan, and we believe that in all of these concerns that I'm mentioning that the surrounding communities should be involved. I'm hoping that we don't end up in a situation where it's an either/or situation, which means this is how it's going to be done, take it or leave it. I believe that we should realize it is a partnership with the park and surrounding communities, so that we can address this as a unit together, and not end up in squaring off, if I may use that term, but to work beneficially, and I think that's extremely important.

There, perhaps, may be several different goals, as far as the park is concerned, and maybe some of the goals as far as the communities, but the basic goals are the same, that we all realize that the value of Yosemite Park is extremely important, and everyone is trying to look out for the best interests of the park, but I believe with that is included in the interests of the community, because whether or not some people want to recognize it or not they are part of the park today. It's not a question of if they will be, but they are. And so, those are the major concerns that I have and people that I've talked to, and we are hoping that with this hearing, and the possibility of sitting down and discussing various solutions to the problems, that we'll be able to go forward and work in a cooperative partnership manner.

Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Senator.

[The statement of Senator Monteith may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Garry, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF GARRY PARKER, SUPERVISOR, MARIPOSA
COUNTY, DISTRICT 4**

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, before I begin, we have submitted a long version of our testimony, with supporting documentation, due to the time restraints I'm going to give yourself, the panel, a shorter version of that, so if I might just read this.

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Oversight Committee.

Welcome to Mariposa County, home of Yosemite National Park.

My name is Garry Parker, and I'm a Mariposa County Supervisor. I represent District 4 and the majority of the town of Mariposa.

The floods of 1997 have been devastating to Mariposa County, as well as Yosemite National Park, particularly the economy of our County and its residents. For your information, in Mariposa County, on an annual basis, the transient occupancy tax derived from tourists staying in lodging facilities represent 14 percent of our County's total budget, which is about 50 percent of the County's discretionary income. There are a number of issues being proposed by the Park Service that could potentially be as devastating as the floods themselves, to the economic well-being of the surrounding counties. The primary issues which are creating a tremendous adverse effect on the surrounding communities are: (1) The Park's announcement of a day-use reservation system to be effective in May, although it is clear that there is no organized plan for a day-use reservation and there was no plan of any kind for the day-use reservation system at the time the announcement was made; and (2) The proposed restriction on use of Highway 140 by the public.

Park Service officials have stated that surrounding communities should not be dependent upon Yosemite Valley for their economic survival. It appears that without substantial tourist-oriented investments in the surrounding communities there would be overwhelming pressure to change the very nature and use of Yosemite National Park to better cater to the visitors within the park boundaries. In truth and in fact, the surrounding communities are partners with the Federal Government, relative to Yosemite National Park. It is time the Park officials recognize this fact and act upon it. It is time the Park officials take into consideration the impacts their decisions have on surrounding communities, and it is time to stop making decisions without appropriate input. I believe that the Federal Government does have a responsibility to ensure park officials do not make arbitrary decisions which have had no public input and which adversely affect our citizens.

Regarding the proposed day-use reservation system, which is being highly publicized, there are presently no answers to the questions of implementation. I do not believe that Park officials have the understanding of the tremendous adverse effect their statement that a day-use reservation system will be implemented by May has had on the surrounding communities.

On March 11, 1997, the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a resolution taking the following position: (1) opposing the fast track implementation of a day-use reservation system in the immediate future and offering to work with the Park

Service for future implementation so that it can be a viable project; (2) supporting an incentive for public transit such as a \$2.00 entrance fee per person riding a public transit vehicle; (3) Highway 140 should be open to all traffic by use of a private car system every day of the week for a two hour period in the morning and again in the evening, with a suggestion of keeping the highway open until 8:00 a.m., commencing on March the 15th, and continuing until Highway 140 is open to unrestricted traffic; (4) a commitment that the County will continue to support public transit alternatives and lobbying for long-term funding for a transit system, whether it be in support of YARTS or any other mechanism; and finally, (5) requesting a meeting with Park Service officials that have authority to make decisions and provide answers with local, State and Federal representatives. The March 11 action shows the total commitment of Mariposa County to work with the Park Service to resolve these problems in the best interests of, not only Yosemite National Park, but the surrounding communities as well.

Mr. Chairman, what we are asking for is not unreasonable. We are simply asking to be included in any major decisionmaking process that directly affects our citizens. No agency or department should be allowed to become an entity unto itself. We must all work together to achieve a united goal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to address our concerns.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Garry.

[The statement of Mr. Parker may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Let me ask a couple questions. A bus with 30 people, it probably is not going to have the same impact as 15 cars with two people in them each on Yosemite Valley, would you agree?

Mr. PARKER. Right, I would agree.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right, and so, if currently the entrance fee or the gate fee is \$20.00 per vehicle in the Yosemite National Park, you would see an incentive if that fee was, perhaps, maintained on vehicles, but at the same time be a token, little or no, fee for buses that take people in the park eventually.

Mr. PARKER. Yes, Mr. Chairman, as long as that was tied in to an actual transit system.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. PARKER. The incentive, of course, would be to get people out of their vehicles in the surrounding communities and get them on to a public transit, so they can come in and enjoy the park.

Also, the issue there is what to do with the vehicles, the buses, once they are inside the Valley. If it's a well-organized transit system, those buses will not just be brought in and parked as a tour bus might be, it would actually be making routes and so forth. So, I could see that where it would be of tremendous benefit to the park, as well as the surrounding communities.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Another issue, Garry, then is with regard to day-use reservations or the day-use reservation system. Do you agree that it's not so much the consideration of the day-use reservation as it is it's a consideration of the day-use reservation system during this upcoming tour season, and I guess my question is, if you agree, is that, the idea of implementing a day-use reservation system may not be a bad idea if it were, perhaps, started next

summer instead of this summer, or after this upcoming tourist season, which is so critical to everybody after the park being closed down. Do you agree with that?

Mr. PARKER. Yes. Mr. Chairman, yes, I do. To expand on that a little bit, I think what I'd have to say is, it's very confusing to the public out there. They really don't understand. It's very difficult for the lodging industries to try to book tours, if that's what it comes to. They don't have any answers to give anyone. I think that, ultimately, we could move in toward that kind of a system, but it needs to be a well-planned system.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

Mr. PARKER. And, instead of implementing it immediately, I would much rather see us work together and come up with a program that is workable for all, and if that takes a year, so be it.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Yes, and it could be that a day-use reservation system is the answer.

Mr. PARKER. It could very well be.

Mr. RADANOVICH. But, we need the time to be able to work into it, and certainly not when it impacts us starting Memorial Day of this year.

Mr. PARKER. Absolutely.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK, great.

Senator, thank you so much, Garry, thank you very, very much.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator. MONTEITH. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

With that, we'll call panel three, Gary Fraker, President, Yosemite Concession Services; Tiffany, if I'm correct, Urness, Research Program Manager for the California Division of Tourism; and also Peggy Kukulus, please correct me if I'm wrong, Executive Director of the Yosemite Sierra Visitors Bureau.

Peggy, did I get your last name right?

Ms. KUKULUS. Kukulus.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Kukulus, sorry.

Ms. KUKULUS. Close.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And, Gary, welcome. I do want to point out, Gary Fraker, as well, has done a remarkable job, being severely impacted and having to lay off an incredible amount of people, the service that you provided during the disaster of January has just been remarkable as well, and I really want to mention that to you now as you begin your testimony, but you are much appreciated by a lot of people, and we thank you very much.

Gary, you may begin.

STATEMENT OF GARY FRAKER, PRESIDENT, YOSEMITE CONCESSION SERVICES

Mr. FRAKER. Yosemite Concession Services is the primary concessioner in Yosemite National Park. Prior to the flood, we employed 1,800 people in peak season and generated nearly \$100 million in annual revenues. This is the third year of a 15-year contract with the government to provide a variety of services.

Without a doubt, our company and its employees have suffered and continue to suffer direct and staggering losses as a result of this flood. Up to this point, we've lost approximately \$10 million in

revenue over the course of this event. Over the course of the year, we stand to end up between \$30 and \$40 million less than our projected revenues. Our future revenues are even more alarming. The bulk of our earnings are derived from overnight guests.

We knew coming into this contract that there would be changes in operations, and we embraced those as part of the contract, but the understanding, I think, was always that we would probably build and we would use the old facilities until the new were built, then we would move into the new and we would remove the old facilities. Well, obviously, that can't happen here, so it has the impact of having a kind of a double knock-out punch, a reduction in our facilities and at the same time a lengthy wait before replacements are built. Combined with anticipated reductions in day use, the potential earnings are a shadow of what we expected in our contract.

On the human side, many employees suffered great personal loss, 250 lost everything but, literally, the clothes on their back. The majority of these employees were mostly hourly, paid between \$6.00 and \$8.00 an hour, and most were uninsured. Compounding their personal losses was the loss of their jobs. In less than a week, our staff went from 1,100 employees to 100.

Fortunately, after these ten weeks have passed, 750 of these employees have returned to work. Others are still waiting, some I doubt if we'll ever have jobs for. We estimate that our peak summer work force will be about 1,300 employees this year, which is about 70 percent of normal.

The impacts to our operations are so wide ranging it's very difficult to summarize. We have purchased 84 modular employee units that we are transporting into the park and will be erected in the next couple of weeks. This will help juggle with some of the problems in housing that we have, and which jobs will be necessary.

In addition to this, we estimate that we are going to need about 100 to 150 guest facilities to house our employees on this temporary basis for the next year or two. This will come out of existing facilities in Curry Village.

Due to the uncertain conditions of Route 140, many of our employees that are available to us as commuters no longer can depend on that as an option. We feel that that's going to have an impact and reduce our labor pool.

On top of that, just the psychological impacts of the flood have been significant as well. We've lost many fine managers and employees as a result of this that have found other employment, and they've just decided to stay out of the park, and I think many employees are just so worried about all the unknowns that they have just made the choice not to return.

In lodging, nearly 250 guest rooms and cabins at the lodge, half the property's inventory, 20 percent of our park-wide rooms were affected by the flood. In addition, 400 campsites in Yosemite Valley will not open this year. We don't manage the campgrounds, but the reduction in overnight guests will translate to fewer people enjoying the restaurants, the tours and the shops, facilities that recently we spent, in conjunction with the Park Service, millions in refurbishing.

At this time of the year, our reservations office would be answering thousands of calls a day, guests trying to book rooms for spring and summer. Since 250 of the rooms that are normally available and booked are out of service, in addition to 10009150 rooms that we'll have to use foremployee housing that belong to guests normally in Curry Village, our reservations agents are replacing calls to guests with reservations to help them adjust to the changes. We estimate that 200,000 guests will be impacted this year alone. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in refunds are presently being processed and returned to guests that we're canceling reservations for.

The high country, as you all know, with the average snowpack and the amount of water so far above where it was before, we don't know what's going to happen up there. That could impact another 10,000 guests.

In recreation, many of the guests are asking, what can we do. Trails and bridges destroyed, which reduces recreational opportunities, the stables operation will not open in Yosemite this year, or Wawona, due to the heavy snowpack we don't know at this point what will happen in Tuolumne. We'll not be able to offer bicycle rentals probably until April 1st, due to the condition of some of the bike paths and the repairs that are ongoing right now.

In summary, we are just, we, like everyone else, are faced with many challenges—many factors that affect our operations are undecided. It's extremely difficult for us to develop an operating plan and to keep our customers informed. Our immediate goal, within the confines of our agreement with the National Park Service, and, of course, all the plans that are involved, is to just return to providing a full array of services for the park guests as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Fraker may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you. I'm going to reserve questions until the whole panel is done speaking, so with that, Tiffany, welcome to the hearing.

**STATEMENT OF TIFFANY URNESS, RESEARCH PROGRAM
MANAGER, CALIFORNIA DIVISION OF TOURISM**

Ms. URNESS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The California Trade and Commerce Agency, Division of Tourism, acknowledges Yosemite National Park as one of the State's most renowned and cherished attractions. We consider it one of California's most memorable icons, and recognize it as a world treasure that deserves special protection.

We appreciate the efforts to repair flood damages and restore public access to the Park, and express thanks to Superintendent B.J. Griffin for her considerate response to affected communities in the aftermath of this disaster. Fortunately, not all the consequences were negative. Nature has washed away facilities that were planned to be phased out anyway.

But, we are very concerned about the suddenness of their removal and the effect this will have on California visitors, communities and businesses that are dependent upon access to Yosemite National Park.

Our two principal concerns today regard the eventual restoration plans and their implementation. First, we urge that in planning for immediate Park operations every consideration be given to the impact on surrounding communities and counties. Communities along each access route to the Park have had close economic ties to Yosemite even before its establishment as a National Park, serving as a source of supplies, guide services, emergency services, food and lodging, public services and communication with the outside world. Many decisions that are well within the discretion of Park management can affect thousands of jobs and businesses in outlying regions as well as important local services that are supported by tax revenues generated by people traveling to and from the National Park.

Our purpose in testifying is not to tell the Park Service how to manage its facility. Our emphasis here is that since the Park Service affects the lives of so many beyond Park boundaries, the needs of the surrounding communities must be taken into account. We feel that by working and planning in consultation with these communities, their needs can be accommodated without significant detrimental impacts on sensitive resources.

Second, we are concerned about the effect of this disaster on businesses which arrange and facilitate travel bookings, such as tour and motorcoach operators. The travel and tourism system depends on good communication and advance planning on the part of numerous parties. Booking contracts are typically made two years or more ahead of the travel seasons. If this system is interrupted, disrupted, or appears unpredictable, tour operators could very well decide to book elsewhere, resulting in significant economic losses to the entire State. This is because Yosemite is often a key itinerary element in multi-destination tours. Operators will not want to risk developing and promoting a tour which includes Yosemite unless access to the Park can be guaranteed. If these advance guarantees cannot be given, through a system of booking advance reservations for rooms and park admissions, communities and businesses in the immediate vicinity and many hundreds of miles away, which otherwise would have been on a six or 14 day California itinerary, may become victims of the cancellation of these tours.

We support the need for controlled access. Our concern is for how it is implemented. There needs to be coherently, considerately, and consistently-applied policy, that will give assurance to hotels, motels, and motorcoach operators that their guests will have reasonable access to Yosemite.

Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

Welcome, Peggy.

**STATEMENT OF PEGGY KUKULUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
YOSEMITE SIERRA VISITORS BUREAU**

Ms. KUKULUS. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of our Supervisor, Harry Baker, District 5.

I submitted a document which outlines the losses of the Madera County area, which would be the Oakhurst Area, Highway 41 Corridor has experienced over the last 90 days. Basically, we're missing about 20,160 tourists that would have generated about

\$919,000.00 in lost revenues for domestic travelers, and our international, which is a big concern to us, we're missing about \$532,000.00 that they would have spent in the area.

I also agree with Tiffany, in that the tour operators often will book National Park sequence, and I am very concerned if they lose one of the parks that there would be an inclination, I'm sure that they would, perhaps, not experience the whole tour.

I'd also like to read briefly from a letter that was submitted to you by Steve Welch, which is basically in agreement with what we are feeling. Two recent articles, one in the recent Fresno, and one in last weekend's USA Today stated a day-use reservation system will be implemented this season in Yosemite, but the Park Service still does not know how it would actually work.

Apparently, they have ignored logic and the many pleas from the surrounding communities to at least postpone the implementation of a system until an adequate shuttle alternative is in place and there is sufficient lead time to notify all the affected visitors.

The Park Service's insistence on a hastily thought out day-use plan creates an emergency in itself and creates the impression that they are seizing on January's natural emergency to implement their own agenda at the expense of the park visitor and the surrounding communities.

For various political and fiscal reasons, most provisions of the 1980 Master Plan have not been implemented. Are we going to be forced now, under the guise of an emergency, to accept a solution thrown together in a few months, when one has not been completed in the last 17 years?

With the funding that you have proposed, this is an ideal opportunity to find an overall comprehensive solution to the vehicle problem in Yosemite that will serve the visitor, the surrounding communities, the concessionaire and the Park Service. However, a simplistic, last minute day-use reservation system for this season is not the answer, since I believe it will create more problems than it will solve.

For the sake of all of us in the surrounding communities and the thousands of unrepresented visitors, whose stay will adversely be affected by this, we would appreciate your continued opposition to a day-use reservation system this year.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

Gary, I do have a question, and that is, given the problem the Park Service has this summer, due to the fact that the damage will exist in the Park for a while, and so, therefore, need to limit the traffic in the Valley, do you support the 5,100 per car limit in there, or do you have suggestions of how the Park Service might be allowed as many people as they possibly can to come and enjoy the services of Yosemite Concession Service, while not, you know, overburdening the infrastructure, the damaged infrastructure that's there. Do you have suggestions? Do you support the 5,100 per car limit, or do you have other ideas of how they might be able to do it?

Mr. FRAKER. Well, I support overall the guidelines that have been in place for some time, and I think those numbers are pretty much holding.

What we, of course, didn't realize, like everybody else, is that we would be looking for some reduction to that in conjunction with all the construction that's going on, and also in conjunction with the waiting until Tuolumne Meadow opens to get back up to that count. So, that certainly will have a negative impact, yes.

Mr. RADANOVICH. And, the existing policy was basically the swing the gate policy or the gate closure policy, as it reached a certain amount of cars. I think prior to that it was up around, if I'm not mistaken, about 7,000 vehicles, now being reduced to 5,100, once that was reached then the gate would close?

Mr. FRAKER. Well, I think originally it was based more on the people, as opposed to cars, and so you have to come up with a formula to equate it to cars, and I think what the Park Service has done is—the formulation appears to me to be sound, so it looks like the numbers are approximately the same as what was in those plans.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Would you agree to a gate closure policy rather than a day-use reservation system?

Mr. FRAKER. I personally think that we should be looking toward the longer range, and looking toward a day-use reservation system. I have concerns, like the surrounding community, with regards to the speed of bringing in a temporary system, but when I look at the alternatives, i.e., you come to a certain point in the morning, 10:00, 11:00, and you slam the gates shut, well, that's not a very good alternative either.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Mr. FRAKER. So, I would think the longer range solution is to try and come up with a more effective plan.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK, thank you.

Tiffany, as a reaction, I think, to some of the frustration the lodging industry is feeling right now, they are booking, as you may know, through the Office of Tourism, motels generally book their rooms in advance by three, four, five months sometimes with tour groups that are either coming in overseas and such. Do you agree that with a day-use reservation system that it would make it very, very difficult for the lodging industry to be able to guarantee their residents, who are coming in to see Yosemite, that, in fact, they would be able to see Yosemite?

Ms. URNESS. I don't think we are going to comment on the specifics, but if you are working in consultation and coordination with the surrounding communities, and with the affected businesses, that will be the best way to come up with a plan.

We know what the characteristics of a system would have to be: it would have to be predictable and it would have to allow for advanced bookings. It would have to allow for visitors that are some distance away to know ahead of time that they are going to get in.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right, and that's—which, basically, outlines the need of a typical lodging industry, they work things far in advance, and so they need those guarantees, I think, going in.

Ms. URNESS. Right.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Peggy, I did have a question, if you were given a choice of swinging the gate at 5,100 cars, or a day-use reservation system, what would you think would be better for the citizens of Oakhurst, and, of course, Goldfish Camp?

Ms. KUKULUS. That's really a tough one, because I was at a recent community meeting where probably two thirds of the folks in attendance said we'd rather you swing the gate. I can't personally say I believe that. I believe, as Gary said, that I think that we should look more for the long-term, but we aren't seeing the visitors, they just aren't here. I mean, the gates are open now and are counts, from what we can tell, our early counts are awfully down.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Tiffany, as reference to that, too, it was mentioned by John Palmer, who I think is with the Office of Tourism, and he's a good person, knows the area well, had mentioned that the Office of Tourism was there ready to help once the Park got open in promoting, and I'm not referring particularly to that, but in the more effective communication of whatever restrictive use policy might be adopted by Yosemite National Park.

I think sometimes in the past the wrong impression has been given to the visiting public that the park was closed, you know, periodically or sporadically any time during the year when, in fact, it was only—the gate was closed about nine times over the last couple years.

Does the Office of Tourism stand ready to be able to help us develop whatever system that we develop, a better way to communicate it to people, so that they are actually discouraged from coming away during those—or, coming to the park during those peak periods, but are rather encouraged to be up there during the non-peak periods, like the middle of the week and off-season times?

Ms. URNESS. Certainly with regard to whatever plans are adopted, we will work with the visitor bureaus and with all affected entities, to get the word out through the media and through our overseas contacts; we have direct liaison with the Visit USA Committees in most of our major markets. Our media relations manager makes press visits, talking with media all over the country. So, in these ways we would support all the efforts to get the word out.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right, OK, thank you.

Also, Peggy, I had a question, and that is, do you believe that there's the possibility of developing a system that might be a combination of bus use, gate closure and days reservation system, say, for example, requiring days reservations for Memorial weekend, July 4th weekend, and Labor Day weekend, perhaps, the parking subject to gate closures during the day, but then also moving forward toward the long-term solution, which in my view is a regional bus through YARTS system, and working at all three at the same time and thereby maximize the use of the motel industries and tourist industries outside the park?

Ms. KUKULUS. I think that's—it's an excellent solution, which is where we all should be focusing, on the transit systems into the park, and we are all working on those right now. One of our biggest concerns, and if we could get the additional funding, would be to look at how we would work with the staging areas, which are very much needed.

I think the important thing we can say to all of our visitors is that no matter what, you can see Yosemite National Park, and I think we can live with that bus system.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

And, I think if the lodging industry might be able to put together a bus system, their own systems, with the park agreeing to let the buses in, at least with those amount of numbers, then the lodging industry may be able to guarantee their visitors the opportunity to see the park.

Ms. KUKULUS. That's what we are working on right now.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

Gary, I do have one more question, and that is, kind of off the wall but I'm going to ask you, Yellowstone manages campgrounds as well, and I know that Yosemite National Park and Yosemite Concession Services does not. If you could manage the existing campgrounds that are under about five feet of sand right now, would you go in and fix them up and have them operational this year?

Mr. FRAKER. Tomorrow.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Is that right?

Mr. FRAKER. Yes.

Mr. RADANOVICH. All right.

Well, thank you very much, I appreciate this.

On the next panel, I would like to invite up Patti Reilly, who is the Supervisor for Mariposa County from District 1, and also Jerry Fischer, who is President of Yosemite Motels.

Welcome, Patti, you are welcome to start off.

**STATEMENT OF PATTI REILLY, SUPERVISOR, MARIPOSA
COUNTY, DISTRICT 1**

Ms. REILLY. OK, thank you.

I am Patti Reilly. I serve as the Supervisor of the First District of Mariposa County, which includes Yosemite Valley and El Portal where we are meeting today. I am Chair of the Mariposa County Local Transportation Commission and the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy group (YARTS). It's in my capacity as Chair of the YARTS group that I make my comments to you today.

In the aftermath of the flood, transportation to and from Yosemite is a critical issue, both in the immediate future and in the long-term for the surrounding communities, the National Park and the traveling public.

A few years ago, my predecessor on the Board of Supervisors spoke to another Federal committee stressing the importance of transit planning for the Yosemite area, advocating for an innovative regional approach and encouraging the funding of such an effort. I'm glad to report that today it's generally understood that the need for a transportation system does not end at the park boundaries. Collaboration with the National Park Service, gateway communities and the regional transportation planning agencies is essential to developing and implementing a transportation system which can manage the visitor travel demands within the region without adversely impacting the natural resources of the park. This approach was strongly endorsed by the transportation experts at last year's Yosemite Transportation Symposium.

YARTS was formed to provide the structure for such collaborative efforts. The policy board includes elected officials from the counties surrounding the park and the Yosemite National Park Superintendent, and is supported by technical staff and citizen advi-

sors. Funding was appropriate by Congress to accomplish the first phase of this transportation planning effort.

There are five points I'd like to make regarding the funding for park restoration and transportation:

1. Funding must be provided for repairs and long-needed improvements to Arch Rock Road (Highway 140). All routes into the park must be a viable transportation corridor. Failure to fund the improvements will result in a significant barrier to implementing a near-term transportation plan.

2. Superintendent Griffin has a vision of Yosemite emerging as an even better place in the aftermath of the January flood. Her approach is the right one and deserves your support. Transportation and traffic management must be a focus of all park planning efforts. The transportation plan that provides attractive alternatives to the private automobile for both the visitor and employees, and improved visitor experience, an alternative to building parking infrastructure in Yosemite Valley, and economic viability in surrounding communities cannot be developed by the Park Service alone. We ask for the continued support of the YARTS process to ensure this coordination of effort.

3. In announcing its plan to implement a vehicle reservation system, Park management has stated that the goal is to limit automobile entry as needed, but not public access to Yosemite. This can only be accomplished if a viable transportation system is available as an alternative. Short term or long-term, this can only be accomplished through coordination planning and adequate funding.

We believe an expansion and enhancement of the transit system similar to the one currently being provided by Mariposa County can be the basis of a short-term solution.

We suggest that the best type of transit system to implement near-term is one that consists of clean-fueled, rubber-tired, well appointed rolling stock utilizing the existing highway system:

It has very little environmental impact, being able to rely to a large degree on existing resources and infrastructure including existing parking facilities in surrounding communities.

It is relatively cheap in the near-term and can provide the foundation of a more advanced system in the future if that's what is desired.

It can be designed to be equitable to all entrance communities and be adaptable to each community's needs as well as to the needs of Yosemite National Park.

4. It must be understood that policy decisions, including those made in Washington, are pivotal to the success or failure of local transportation planning efforts. Decisions on access and entrance fees are prime examples. YARTS provides an existing proven institution to coordinate such policy decisions with the overall transportation planning efforts.

5. Funding for transportation must be as integrated as the planning. We seem to be playing a new game with old rules. We know that the transportation plan which is most likely to accomplish the park's goals will extend beyond the park boundaries, but yet are told that funding cannot. We need a seamless, convenient, cost efficient system that will get people from where they are, home, hotel, satellite parking center, to where they want to be, Yosemite Na-

tional Park. This must be done in a manner that is respectful of the natural resources of the whole area. If funding dollars cannot cross jurisdictional lines, we will require unnecessary transfers and unnecessary dollars spent for transfer facilities. Quieter, clean-fueled vehicles are no less important outside the park boundary than in, and should be funded accordingly. In short, I urge you to help provide funding and a funding mechanism for a transportation system that best accomplishes the goals of Yosemite National Park, that is most cost efficient, and which strengthens the economic viability of the surrounding communities while they contribute to these important efforts.

Thank you very much.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Patty.
Gerry?

**STATEMENT OF GERALD D. FISCHER, PRESIDENT, YOSEMITE
MOTELS**

Mr. FISCHER. Thank you.

Eight weeks ago today, this conference room was vacated by the Vietnam Veterans, who had been running the Evacuation Center for El Portal. I think it's interesting to see the progress that's been made in that length of time. It's only been 11 weeks since I went up to the great entrance here with my children and watched much of the property called Yosemite View Lodge being destroyed by the floods, and we're close to restoring it and anxious to be back in serving the public.

All of this brings me to a topic of conversation, as opposed to day-use, but I'm going to combine the two if I may. It seems to me that when we talk about the day-use reservation system, we talk about it as if it's the foundation of a new Yosemite visitation program, and I think instead it's more the roof. The foundation of any successful system, I think, is going to require that we have a good, solid shuttle system within the park, and the ability to get there.

To put the day-use system in front of that I think jeopardizes the concept of the day-use system, because we all sell a successful visit, we sell the idea that you have a satisfied guest, one who appreciates what he's just seen, and to go into the park and not have access to reasonable transportation destroys that notion. We must, first, I think, build that shuttle system.

The conversation about day-use reservation has centered around the need to do it immediately, and I appreciate the need for some action quickly, but it seems to me that the conversation has been based on the build-out, requirements for a staging area. I know too much about staging areas recently, and I have an appreciation for how much room it takes to begin a new structure or to restore one, and it seems to me, if we look at those areas that are now accessible to us, the upper campground, the lower campground, camp six, the Ozone, the stables, Curry Down, and look at utilization of those areas as a staging area for the proposed construction, which is contemplated now over a period of three or four years, that we may, in fact, be able to provide the staging areas and keep the existing level of parking.

And, during that time period, that we can work toward an effective day-use reservation system that will serve, ultimately, to tie

into the system of shuttle service that we need and regional transportation.

I would propose to you that our industry, and I'll speak for Mariposa County in terms of the fact that I serve as Chairman of the Lodging Group, would support the concept of a day-use reservation system if, in fact, we have a transportation system in place in the park, and the opportunity to take another one to it. That's critical, I think, to any conversation we would have.

Lastly, I would like to say that I also want to recognize the efforts that the Park Service has put in place throughout this community and in working with us, I think we are challenged sometimes to recall the good things that happen, and we get way too focused on the problems that we have. The level of cooperation I saw in this building, in this community, directly after the floods, with B.J., with Hal, and, particularly, with Harry Steed and his staff in implementing what needed to happen, was very positive, and I could tell you honestly, the biggest single story that was missed, I think, in the flood was the level of cooperation that was shown day in and day out. We literally couldn't find anything to complain about, and I commend them for that, and I commend B.J., for the level of support that she's given us in trying to communicate. And, I think the road that she has taken us on, since she's been here, has been the right one. I think she's worked to bring new levels of communication to our outlying communities.

The flood seems to have temporarily interrupted our ability to communicate on a regular basis. I appreciate that, I appreciate all that she's been put through, and I hope we can get back to the period of time when we can adequately discuss these things and get, if you will, onto the positive side of things again. I look forward to that day.

[The statement of Mr. Fischer may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Gerry, thank you very much.

Patti, I've got a couple questions for you. I personally want to go on record as thinking that YARTS is the best thing since sliced bread. I think that that is going to be a remarkable concept for providing the longest solution to the longest problem in this area, and that has been traffic congestion in the Yosemite Valley.

I understand, and after being briefed and such, you know, that it will be a while before the Valley is in a position to be able to dovetail into what might be developed by the Yosemite Regional Transportation Plan.

I guess, one thing is, how fast can you plan for us? I mean, how quickly can this group get together and start putting something substantial, so that we can be a viable solution to this problem?

Ms. REILLY. Well, not—we are not going—

Mr. RADANOVICH. How much money do you need?

Ms. REILLY. Currently, we have just started the first stage, first phase of evaluating different alternatives long-term, and which would arrive at three to five different options, and we hope to have that done by September. That's, obviously, not fast enough. But, those are the more long-term.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Ms. REILLY. That takes us on the road there.

But, and I must say, even in looking at long-term, I think that what we are looking at is a phased approach, where you can start off using a lot of your existing resources, looking at a flexible system that can be built upon in the long-term.

There's many, many ideas for transportation plans for Yosemite, as you well know, but those are—many of them are costly and they will take longer to develop. So, if we can have a phased approach and build on those, that's, you know, probably where we want to go.

But, in the meantime, I think we can probably take the approach that Mariposa County took as we started this process many years ago, in looking at both short-term and long term, and what Mariposa County did was put the Yosemite connection service in place, a transit service that to some degree allows people to get—they can travel by train even to Merced and then get a connection to Yosemite, it serves the employees and visitors from the hotels and so forth.

I think short-term you could use that as a basis, and expand on that, expand that into the different communities.

But, I think bottom line, short-term or long-term, you have to have—you have to coordinate those efforts. I mean, what we can't do is have someone standing at Buck Meadows Lodge waiting for the bus to Yosemite and be told, no, that's the Tuolumne County bus, you've got to wait for the Mariposa County bus.

And also, what I think won't work is to have the park planning an internal transit system with the idea of, once we get it done we'll tell you guys what it is, and so you can connect up to it. We really all need to be at the table at the same time to do the most integrated system.

But, we found, I think, all the communities have shown a commitment to getting a transit system on ground as quickly as possible, especially in reaction to the days reservation proposal, but we were somewhat stymied because there were too many missing links. You know, we need to be able to, just like we need to be able to tell people how a days reservation system would work, we need to tell them what would happen when they get on the bus, where are they going to go, how are they going to get to where they want to go, if they want to go to Glacier Point, how do they get there on our bus.

And, if you separate the entities all doing their own things, you have constant missing links. It also takes money to do that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right.

Ms. REILLY. And, that's been a substantial problem.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Do you agree that a well-thought-out, and a plan, a regional plan that was integrated with the needs and dovetailed with the plan inside the National Park Service would probably be the very best way of alleviating the traffic problem in Yosemite?

Ms. REILLY. Yes, I believe it would be, and I think there's some argument about how much option you can give people, but I think ideally what the American people want are alternatives. And, if we can put a good, attractive transportation plan in place, that serves the needs of many of the visitors, and yet, allow some options for

those that might not serve the purposes, I think that best serves the American public.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you.

Right now, the Park Service is requesting approximately \$21, perhaps, a total of \$35 million, for the development of what could be either a parking structure in Yosemite Valley, or, which could very well be the case if there is not a regional transportation plan built and put into place, if it is it would serve as an inter-connector of two bus systems, one being the inter-park bus system, and the other being a regional park bus system. I would like to see it that way, but in order for that to happen, YARTS has to be something that's funded, we have to come up with a workable bus plan to allow the Park Service to encourage, eventually, all of the day-use traffic be directed to buses, so that there would be no person in the park enjoying the park for a day that didn't come there and leave on a bus.

All of that depends on the development of a working transit system outside the park, and, I am fully convinced that it should be under the YARTS structure.

Currently, in the emergency appropriation, all of that \$21 to \$35 million is allocated for park interior transportation uses. Now, what we would like to do is to do two things. One is to make sure that in that study there was money appropriated in a particular fashion, also to speed the development of YARTS and the outside regional bus plan. If it's not specifically mentioned, what we would do is encourage incentives to the National Park Service and give B.J. the ability on money saved to be able to redirect that as well to regional park structure, so that this might be the Federal commitment to a problem that does solve the traffic problem with inside Yosemite National Park. Would you be supportive of either one of those initiatives, Patti?

Ms. REILLY. Well, absolutely. I would be supportive of that.

I would just like to add, though, just to reiterate the comments that I made, I think what needs to be funded is the overall plan that serves the needs of everyone, and I would caution again against the Park Service doing a plan, predetermining what the regional plan has to be. That may be the solution, but maybe by all working together we could find some alternatives for even a more integrated plan that might not necessarily require a Taft Toe parking area.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Right. But, ideally, what you'd want to do is move both the park plan and the YARTS plan together incrementally, so that they both become a working unit at the end.

Ms. REILLY. Yes, absolutely. I mean, I believe that's what has to happen, in order for the plan to be successful.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Very good.

OK, Gerry, now that we have the long-term problem solved, how do we solve the short-term problem of providing some kind of a system. I would imagine it would be a combination of, perhaps, gate closure, reservation, maybe not. I don't know, what are your thoughts, Gerry?

Mr. FISCHER. Well, Mariposa County made one proposal that was that, as the park reached, if you will, a saturation level, that guests would be notified that they could be diverted to a temporary

parking area outside the park. Several were projected as potential, one was the idea that on 41 Badger Pass might be used as—the parking area there could be used as a temporary staging area, so cars would be diverted to that area, and then a shuttle would be put in place that would take them from that location to the Valley in time for the existing shuttle. Another proposal was to take the Rush Creek site, which is located just outside the park on Highway 120 and do the same thing. As they got to the gate, if the parking levels were too high, if the car count was too high, that they would be turned around, which is approximately one mile, and be diverted into a shuttle that would tie into the existing park system.

One issue that came up very quickly was money. The other one was whether or not we could put the system in place with lease buses. The county contracts with VIA, Curtis Riggs is in the back of the room if you want to pick on him. Curtis said he thought it would be possible to lease enough buses to consider staffing those routes.

The third highway, and the one, quite frankly, that we saw as the most challenging, was Highway 140—140 being challenging because it's more difficult to find a reasonable parking site that we can divert cars to, so we looked on 140 as utilizing existing hotel parking lots, like the one here at Cedar, and then tying back to a temporary location in Mariposa, which would increase the cost because it's a further commute.

But, we do think that that would be possible, and that would allow us effectively to tell people they are assured access to the park. They may not be assured that they can drive into the park, but they would have assured access, and there would be no reason then to go to the day-use reservation system.

If I could, let me just try and explain one of the challenges with the day-use reservation system, Bob Andrews has done a good job, I think, of determining that there are companies out there that can develop the hardware and the software to put a day-use system in place. But, what happens is, there are a great number of people that have to interpret it to the public. There are the reservations that would be under contract with whoever is running that system, there's the employees for the Park Service, there are the people that work for the concessionaire who field many calls, there's our staff, but then there's the travel professionals locally and statewide throughout the Nation and the world, and these people are all sold into existing systems.

In my company, which does 700 rooms outside the park, is tied into more than 20 reservations systems worldwide. Comfort Inn and Best Western are two of those. The Sierra Services is a company that we deal with, so we are actually tied to the concessionaire. But, each one of those people feeds a certain level of information into that computer, which is referred back to their guests and their agents, and when you talk about creating a new system, such as is being discussed, and then disseminating all that information out to each of these people, having it fed into that system, and then having that further explained to the guests that they bring into the system, it's a very, very challenging prospect. We need, more than anything else, time if we are going to develop a system like that.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, thank you very much, Gerry.

Just one last question before I let you all go home, you are not necessarily opposed to a day-use reservation system, and I think I've heard you say that previously, but rather, as long as it fits in later, as long as it's not imposed too soon, as long as it's not imposed on this, and you'd be very open to work to develop, if the day-use system that we think might get imposed this summer were lifted, you'd be at the Park Service's beck and call to work up a system that both serves your needs and the lodging industry's needs, as well as meet the limited access to the park.

Mr. FISCHER. We would be happy to be at the park's doorstep tomorrow morning to work on that. I think what I have said pretty consistently is that in order for us to look at a day-use reservation system, you have to have in place those key elements, and I think that the master plan, I think the park staff have felt all along that you have to have a better shuttle system than we have.

One of the exciting things that's happened in the last five or six days has been that we see Senator Boxer, as well as your legislation, and President Clinton's comments, calling for additional funds to make that happen.

If that's the case, and the shuttle system can be built, I think that the day-use system will work fine, given adequate time to prepare it and put it in place.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Great. Thank you very much, Gerry. Thank you so much, Patti.

Ms. REILLY. Thank you.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Before we call our next panel up, I want to mention that the Highway Patrol is ready to take a convoy right now for those people who need to get back up there, so you are all welcome to stay, but you may be spending the night.

Our next panel is Linda Wallace, who is the Chairwoman of the Yosemite Committee of the Sierra Club; Brian Huse, Pacific Region Director of the National Park and Conservation Association; and Garret De Bell, Executive Director of the Yosemite Guardian.

OK, we're going to need to get some order here. Brian, welcome, Garrett, thank you for coming, and also, Linda, thank you for being here. Brian, if you'd like to start off, please.

**STATEMENT OF BRIAN HUSE, PACIFIC REGION DIRECTOR,
NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION**

Mr. HUSE. Thank you, Congressman.

My name is Brian Huse. I'm the Pacific Region Director for the National Parks and Conservation Association. NPCA is America's only private, non-profit citizens group dedicated solely to protecting and preserving and enhancing the National Park System. Today I'm speaking not only on behalf of NPCA, but the Wilderness Society and Yosemite Restoration Trust. Together, our organizations have been working continuously to protect Yosemite National Park, and have over 810,000 members nationwide.

To be sure, the flood event took a significant toll on the developed areas in Yosemite Valley and seriously disrupted people's lives. In addition, the resulting closure has impacted local economies, stressing many small businesses to the breaking point. We've heard in great detail today the tremendous devastation that has re-

sulted from the flood, as well as the tremendous opportunities that are now awaiting us to restore the park and help bring better partnerships between the Park Service and the local communities.

I think a lot of things have been said today that point to tremendous opportunities to build these relationships between the National Park Service and the communities, and I don't want to repeat things that have already been said, but I would like to point you, sir, to a few opportunities that might have been missed. Our written testimony goes into them in greater detail, but starting with infrastructure in the developed areas of the park.

I just want to reiterate the need to use the planning processes that are already in place. The GMP developed in 1980 has set forth an appropriate vision for Yosemite National Park. I think the Valley Implementation Plan and the housing plans that are now in production can help us fulfill that vision, if we use the money wisely to allow the Park Service to finish this process.

If we were to simply determine what gets built and what doesn't through earmarking of these funds, we may end up ten years down the road having to do a lot more redevelopment at significantly greater expense to the Federal Government and the taxpayer.

In the area of transportation, I think we are unanimous in our desire for a regional transportation system. I think many people have spoken very eloquently today for using YARTS as the vehicle to develop this, and I think the funds that you, sir, Senator Boxer, and the President have afforded for transportation can help make that a reality.

I would also hope that along with any new ideas, such as your desire to, perhaps, use extra money or leftover money to go in your regional plan, that we leverage these Federal dollars with ISTEAs money and use those to also move this process more quickly along, and we may be able to resolve some of the issues with the day-use reservation system that way as well.

With respect to employee housing, I think another economic opportunity exists here in the communities. Right now, the public is reviewing a draft amendment to Yosemite Park's Employee Housing Plan. It calls for doing some significant development here in El Portal on both sides of the river, but last year, as Congress was closing, in the 1996 Omnibus National Parks and Public Lands Management Act, some new authorities were provided to the Park Service to work with the local communities outside of parks to develop and lease housing in the private sector. I think this would be a tremendous boom to these economies which have been hit so hard in the past few years with closures and disasters, and I urge the committee to direct the Park Service to using these new authorities under Section 814, I believe, of the Omnibus Parks Bill, to further along the need to remove the housing from Yosemite Valley and remove some of these jobs.

It would be inappropriate to conclude without talking about the Organic Act, because as important as it is to use this as a tool to help restore the park and to improve the community's relationships with the park, we must all remember the Organic Act is the mandate the National Park Service must uphold to preserve the resources unimpaired for, not only ourselves, but for future generations. And, we urge this process to allow the Park Service to use

our parks, not as economic engines, but as the repositories of our national and cultural heritage.

[The statement of Mr. Huse may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Great, thank you very much.

OK, Garrett.

STATEMENT OF GARRETT DE BELL, YOSEMITE GUARDIAN

Mr. DE BELL. Hi. Do I get the green light?

Mr. RADANOVICH. Don't start until it's green. I'm sorry, go ahead.

Mr. DE BELL. Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this oversight hearing on the important topic of the restoration of Yosemite.

My name is Garrett De Bell, and I am Executive of the Yosemite Guardian, a project of Earth Island Institute.

We work to ensure the continued existence of Yosemite's magnificent forests and meadows with their biodiversity intact. The environmental issues that concern us most include the need for an adequate control burn program, and we're very happy to see a burn going on as we speak now, to protect and restore the mid-elevation forests and the need for a research and restoration effort sufficient to understand and reverse the alarming disappearance of frogs from the wilderness of Yosemite.

We bring up these issues today in the context that these important needs continue to receive inadequate attention, while issues in the developed area of Yosemite Valley and its fabled gridlock receive the lion's share of attention and money.

We are thrilled with your efforts and Senator Boxer's efforts to introduce bills for more funding. We fully support that. We fully support the idea of doing more to implement the General Management Plan. We are concerned that this part of the General Management Plan, the Natural Resources Plan, has not gotten as much attention as the part dealing with facilities, that's our main mission, or one of our main missions, as we work on Yosemite issues.

Secondly, we vigorously support the right of access to the park by visitors without undue restrictions, and in terms of process we advocate a completely open decisionmaking process which allows all people, and, particularly, all stakeholders, a voice in the decisions that affect them.

We are very heartened by this hearing today, as part of that whole process, and we are working to expedite that process and maintaining a web site to make it easier for people to participate in this process. We've had a very heartening response from people throughout, particularly, the immediate Yosemite region, from Oakhurst to Sonora.

We applaud, as I stated, your efforts to get more money for Yosemite. \$200 million is a lot of money, even more could be spent, if you support spending more, to do all the things that Yosemite needs to bring it to the excellence it should have in infrastructure, facilities, guest services and, most importantly, environmental protection. But it is important to us that this money be spent wisely, and it's important that any restrictive measures, such as the day-use reservation system, that restrict visitation and may harm the surrounding communities are not implemented casually, and,

again, have the full input at all stages of the planning process of the affected stakeholders.

We are alarmed with the rapid rush by the Park Service to implement a day use reservations system without public hearings or input as well as the rush to go forward with some new changes that aren't proposed in the GMP and are part or part of the new housing plan and Valley Implementation Plan, which have just been spoken of.

While the GMP authorizes many of these actions, the ones that tread new ground concern us. These include the closing of the Rivers Campground, which is not called for in the 1980 GMP, and the proposed Taft Toe parking area and the related elimination of the excellent one way loop road that was one of the major accomplishments of the recent past. But the push for reservations seems particularly misplaced. We realize these projects are well intended, we fully recognize the good intentions of the Park Service, and they want to help reduce Yosemite's automobile congestion. We know they are well-intentioned, but we are afraid some of these things will be counterproductive.

The hasty imposition of a reservation system will certainly harm the surrounding communities, as we heard very much already today. These communities provide accommodations and other services outside the boundaries, as called for specifically by the NPS and its visionary General Management Plan. These communities should be viewed as partners by the Park and included in the planning. It is necessary to remind ourselves that the GMP clearly states on page ten the goal of "encouragement of private enterprise outside the Park" as a key element in providing accommodations outside, rather than inside, Yosemite's boundaries.

We would like to also stress other alternatives. We favor alternative views, voluntary ways of reducing overcrowding of vehicles in the park. Some of the alternatives we support can be put into place without high cost and without the regimentation of a proposed reservation system, and some of the proposed changes can go along with the Taft Toe parking lot.

A real and very important long-term need is to reduce the number of cars driving to Yosemite, we think this should be done by providing quality and voluntary alternatives that people will use, similar to the successful Valley Shuttles and the Badger Shuttle, which are funded by add-ons to various fees such as lift tickets, these could let many visitors leave their cars in Mariposa, Fish Camp, Buck Meadows or other logical points on the three highways, by taking the shuttle instead of the cars.

We've included other measures in our written comments, and we'll leave those in the interest of time.

We concentrate particularly on the transportation issues in the Park, because they divert attention from the ecological threats which we think need more attention if Yosemite is ever to be truly protected. If the transportation issues could be dealt with in the most common sense and cost effective manner then there would be money left over to restore Yosemite's forests and protect its wildlife. We look forward to participating in this process. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. De Bell may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you, Garrett.

Hi, Linda.

**STATEMENT OF LINDA WALLACE, CHAIR, YOSEMITE
COMMITTEE OF THE SIERRA CLUB**

Ms. WALLACE. Thank you, Congressman, for the opportunity to speak here today.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Linda, just one second, though. Can everybody hear Linda? OK, we need to adjust that mic, too.

Ms. WALLACE. Thank you, Congressman, for the opportunity to speak here today.

I'm Linda Wallace, I chair the Yosemite Committee of the Sierra Club, which is a volunteer committee.

I'd like to begin by echoing the support that Mr. Fischer expressed for the Superintendent and her staff. I'd like to extend that also to Mr. Fraker and his staff. Members of my committee have been particularly impressed with how rapidly the Park Service and the concessionaire have worked to get the park open again, to assess the damage and let the public know much of what had happened. So, we appreciate all their good work to date.

The flood along the Merced River in January of '97 served as a wake-up call for all those who care about Yosemite National Park. Since the park's visionary General Management Plan was adopted in 1980, we have let 17 years slip by, doing very little to solve the problems of overdevelopment and traffic congestion it addresses.

Yosemite is now at a crossroads. Because of the river's decisive action, Congress, the Administration and the National Park Service can now act to turn this disaster into an opportunity. We can make the visitor's experience of Yosemite a better one than what we've experience during this decade.

The legislation proposed by Congressmen Radanovich and Doolittle, Senator Boxer and the Administration's request for supplemental funding demonstrate that there is bipartisan support for putting things right in Yosemite. This funding was originally called for when the GMP was adopted back in 1980 and that hasn't occurred. The flood has now provided us with a physical opportunity; the legislation provides the political opportunity to make now the right time to implement the GMP.

It will not be enough, and not fair to the American public and our international visitors, if we simply repair and replace the development that was in the flood plain. This would be a poor use of our tax dollars. We need to invest for the long-term with the appropriation that comes to Yosemite. This must be about protecting the natural resource and providing a better experience of this natural setting for the American public to whom this park belongs.

Because it is important to open all of the park to the public as soon as possible, the needs assessment and cost estimates are being developed very rapidly. While we enthusiastically support the proposed funding measures, we also believe it is necessary to give the Park Service flexibility to spend the funds where they are really needed when the flood-related damage is better known. We recommend that the legislation not mandate or prohibit any specific details about Yosemite restoration; rather, the details of implementation be developed through a collaborative planning process involving public input.

It is very important for the Park Service to be open to public input about the planning and implementation of changes. At the same time, let us not become mired in arguments about specific details of the restoration and lose this long overdue opportunity. What I've heard today suggests that that's not what's happening. There's a lot of common ground among us all, and it's been gratifying to hear that expressed today. Let us keep our eyes on the objective of protecting and enhancing this national resource. At the same time, we think that the economies of the gateway communities will also benefit and thrive by providing more visitor services than they currently do.

As a component of the legislation Sierra Club urges Congress to include funding for resource management and interpretation.

Interpretation is an essential component of the quality of the visitor's experience.

It has become increasingly obvious in the 90's that the answers to managing the crowding and congestion of the park revolve around how we manage private vehicles. Sierra Club advocates a regional transit system which includes a shuttle bus system from gateway communities and a day-use reservation system for vehicles as options to solve the congestion problem.

Congestion has grown steadily in Yosemite ever since the GMP was adopted in 1980. In 1996, in spite of the Park closure during the government shutdown, overall visitation was still up from '95. Every indication is that the numbers will climb as America's national parks continue to be a prime destination of people from around the world.

Private vehicles actually compete with people for space in the Valley. If people use mass transit instead of private vehicles to enter the Valley, then they can enjoy Yosemite without congesting it.

The YARTS group, a collaborative effort of local governments, is already in place to administer a regional transit system. But they will have to move quickly and decisively now to capitalize on the opportunity afforded them in the wake of the flood.

Although some suggest that a day-use reservation system for vehicles will scare people away, Sierra Club believes such a system would provide insurance that visitors will not be turned away at the gate, or have to sit for hours waiting in line for parking spaces to be freed up, losing hours they could have spent enjoying the park.

In the long-term, a day-use reservation system has the potential to be better for visitors and to provide for a more stable economy in the neighboring communities. People and their dollars will be brought to the gateway communities. A day-use reservation system for private vehicles can also help pave the way for a comprehensive mass transit and shuttle system between Merced, Fresno, the gateway communities, and Yosemite.

In conclusion, Sierra Club trusts that the 105th Congress will heed the warning sounded by the flood, and provide the full appropriation for the crown jewel of the National Park System. We urge flexibility in the use of these funds, an open public planning process, funds for resource management and interpretation, a day-use

vehicle reservation system, and the planning and implementation of a regional transit system.

Overdevelopment in Yosemite, increasing congestion and crowding need to be addressed now. We must take advantage of this window of opportunity afforded by the flood.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Wallace may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. RADANOVICH. Thank you very much.

I have one question to ask all of your, basically, the same question, before I ask B.J. back to provide a few brief remarks before we close, and that is, it's very hard to imagine a multi-level parking structure in Yosemite Valley. It just doesn't seem to fit. But, would you support an intermodal facility that was actually connected to a regional well-designed and laid out regional transportation facility that received buses from outside the area and connected with the interior Park transportation facility? Would you support something like that, Brian?

Mr. HUSE. Since we are already on record as supporting an intermodal transit transfer station, if you will, yes, we would, so long as that was on the smallest scale possible, and placed in an appropriate place within the outer-most portion of the Valley.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Great, thanks.

Garrett?

Mr. DE BELL. I agree generally with Brian. The only thing I would say is, I'd maintain an open mind on these things, but I'd want to see the whole system.

What worries me is piecemeal advocacy of little parts and pieces, you have to see the whole system to know if you support it or don't support it.

Mr. RADANOVICH. OK.

Mr. DE BELL. But, I would say an open-minded approach, again, full public participation.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Very good, thank you.

And, Linda?

Ms. WALLACE. Sierra Club also supports the idea of a transfer facility. I think the question is how it's done and where it's placed.

Mr. RADANOVICH. Where it's located, all right.

Thank you all very, very much for coming.

B.J., I wanted to invite you back up, if you wanted to make a few remarks before we close.

Ms. GRIFFIN. Thank you, Mr. Congressman.

There were a couple things mentioned that probably bear a little clearing up. The vehicle reservation system, it seemed to me that some of the testimony indicated that buses would be somehow restricted or subjected to reservations. That is not our thought.

In considering the system, we have wanted to encourage the use of bus transportation in the Park as much as possible. So, under the system we have considered, the people riding buses, whether tour buses or transit buses, would not be subjected to a reservation.

We have also requested consideration from Washington for fee incentives that would allow people riding buses to be encouraged to do so.

The other thing, I heard a lot of reference to Taft Toe parking lot today, and I just wanted to reiterate one more time that the

Valley Implementation Plan that will go out for full public review this summer will talk about options for transportation solutions.

There is nothing in the requested money before you that pre-determines any of those decisions. That will be subject to the full planning process.

I appreciate the hearing today. I am very interested in the comments, and I want to thank Tuolumne, Madera and Mariposa Counties for their help throughout this very special challenge.

Mr. RADANOVICH. All right, thank you very much, B.J., and, again, I appreciate everybody from the community for coming out, and the hearing is closed.

Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 2:38 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned; and the following was submitted for the record:]

STATEMENT BY SENATOR DICK MONTEITH, 12TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

First I would like to thank all of the Members of Congress who are members of the Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands for allowing me to testify today on behalf of my constituents.

Yosemite National Park is an important geographic area in the 12th Senate District of California which I represent. All of the access points leading into Yosemite are in the 12th Senate District except for the Eastern entrance in Lee Vining. For that reason, I would like to comment on some of the issues my constituents and I feel are important for the future of Yosemite and its surrounding communities.

The first issue is that of the proposed "day-use reservation system." I feel that there is a need for more community input into this proposal. The "day-use reservation system" could possibly affect our local communities that depend on Yosemite visitors for their economic wellbeing. I am strongly opposed to any proposals to implement the day-use reservation system program this year, and likewise, I strongly urge the National Park Service and Congress to include the local communities in any future plans of implementing any programs such as this.

The second issue I am interested in is how the money to restore Yosemite National Park is going to be appropriated. These decisions must be carefully thought out. Number one, we must restore the natural beauty of Yosemite. However, there are other important decisions to consider. We must make certain that the appropriation of these funds will have long-term benefits for Yosemite as well as the communities that surround it. Equally important is to make certain the funds are not used as a vehicle to deny public access to Yosemite by the tax-payers of our nation. Again, we must consider the economic ramifications that are possible if the funding is not appropriated in a rational manner.

And finally, I would like to comment on the "traffic plan." Again, this plan needs community input as it could have a direct economic impact on our local communities. There needs to be a joint effort between legislators and communities to be certain the economic ramifications are adequately addressed. I have spoken with officials from all the communities in the 12th Senate District that surround Yosemite, and they have all expressed their grave concern of their economic vitality and future. Additionally, I have received letters from all the Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Bureaus in these "Gateway Communities"—including large communities—and they are all concerned that due to the economic and tourism depression prevalent in these areas, there is a need for a program of "Total Access" from all areas surrounding Yosemite.

Again, I would like to thank the Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands for giving me the opportunity to testify and express the views of the 12th Senate District, and the need for our legislators to make every effort and insure that taxpayer funds are appropriately spent.

TESTIMONY OF GARRY PARKER, MEMBER, MARIPOSA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Oversight Committee.

Welcome to Mariposa County, home of Yosemite National Park, and thank you for this time.

My name is Garry Parker, and I am a Mariposa County Supervisor. I represent District 4 and the majority of the town of Mariposa.

The floods of 1997 have been devastating to Mariposa County as well as Yosemite National Park, particularly the economy of our County and its residents. For your information, in Mariposa County, on an annual basis, the transient occupancy tax derived from tourists staying in hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts represent fourteen percent of the County's total budget, and a whopping fifty percent of the County's discretionary income. It has been estimated that the losses to our local business community as a result of the closure of Yosemite National Park, including restrictions caused by day use reservations, will be as high as sixty-three million dollars. In a county with a population of sixteen thousand, those figures are staggering. These are not just cold statistics but represent real problems for real people in Mariposa County and the surrounding communities. To put this on a personal note, I will give the Committee an example of the devastating economic effect, the flooding and the Park officials' reaction to the flooding has caused residents of Mariposa County: The local Chevron service station, located in downtown Mariposa, is owned and operated by the LeDuc Family. Before the closure of Highway 140 into the Park, the LeDuc's employed ten people and the station was open twenty-four hours a day. The business now operates on a reduced hourly schedule and employs only five people, all family members. This is typical of what is happening to our businesses throughout the County.

There are a number of issues being proposed by the Park Service that could potentially be as devastating as the floods themselves to the economic well-being of the surrounding counties. The primary issues which are creating a tremendous adverse affect on the surrounding communities are: 1) The Park's official announcement of a day use reservation system to be effective in May; although it is clear that there is no organized plan for a day use reservation system, and there was no plan of any nature for a day use reservation system at the time the formal announcement was made; and 2) The proposed restriction on use of Highway 140 by the traveling public both from now until Memorial Day, and from Labor Day for the next one year or longer. Those two issues will be more fully discussed below.

Park Service officials have stated that surrounding communities should not be dependent upon Yosemite Valley for their economic survival. The Park Service has consistently over the years refused to acknowledge that the tremendous economic investments made by business persons in the surrounding communities is every bit as important to the survival of the Park as the Park's presence is to the survival of the surrounding business communities. It appears to me to be elementary that, without the substantial tourist-oriented investments in the surrounding communities, there would be overwhelming pressure to change the very nature and use of Yosemite National Park, to better cater to the visitor within the Park boundaries. In truth and in fact, the surrounding communities are partners with the Federal Government relative to Yosemite National Park. It is time that Park officials recognize this fact and act upon it. It is time that Park officials take into consideration the impacts of their decisions which directly affect those surrounding communities. It is time for the Park service to treat the surrounding communities as full partners and allow its partners full and complete participation in decision making, it is time to stop making decisions without appropriate input. I believe that the Federal Government does have the responsibility, not only to Mariposa, Madera, Tuolumne and Mono Counties, but to the State of California itself, to ensure that Park officials do not make arbitrary decisions which have had no public input and which adversely affect citizens of the surrounding communities and citizens of the State of California.

Regarding the proposed day use reservation system which is being highly publicized, there are at the present time no definitive answers to the question of implementation. Even as we sit here today, I do not believe that Park officials have any fundamental understanding of the tremendous adverse economic effect their formal statement that a day use reservation system will be implemented in May has had upon the surrounding communities of Yosemite National Park. To have made such a formal representation to the general public without a plan of some kind to go along with the announcement was unfortunate. As I am sure this Committee understands, a day use reservation system which by necessity, will involve well over four million visitors per year, will also have to handle many times more than four million inquiries, is a system that cannot, and should not be designed by Park officials behind closed doors. A day use reservation system that works for Yosemite National Park, the surrounding communities, the State of California, and the citizens of the United States of America must be a well planned, well reasoned system with much public input. Lodging reservations, which is addressed by another speaker, Mr. Jerry Fischer, is a complex and finely tuned business tactic and art. To formally announce that a day use reservation system will be implemented in May without any information or plan to go along with that announcement has had, and will continue

to have incredible adverse economic effects to all of the surrounding communities, lodging industry and other tourism industries. The manner in which Park officials handled, and continue to handle, the proposed day use reservation system makes it impossible for anyone in the lodging industry to provide accommodations to the visitor because they are unable to assure them access to the Park. The Mariposa County Board of Supervisors was prepared to institute a public transportation system to guarantee lodging industry clientele entry into the Park. However, because the Park officials have absolutely no idea, or if they do they are not sharing it with Mariposa County, how the day use system is proposed to be implemented, it is absolutely impossible for Mariposa County or any other surrounding community or county to prepare a workable public transit system under these circumstances.

On March 11, 1997, the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a resolution taking the following position; 1) opposing the fast track implementation of a day use reservation system in the immediate future, and offering to work with the Park Service for future implementation so that it can be a viable project; 2) supporting an incentive for public transit such as a \$2 entrance fee per person riding a public transit vehicle; 3) Highway 140 should be open to all traffic by use of a private car system every day of the week for a two hour period in the morning and in the evening, with a suggestion of keeping the highway open until 8:00 A.M., commencing March 15, 1997, and continuing until Highway 140 is open to unrestricted traffic; 4) a commitment that the County will continue to support public transit alternatives and lobbying for long range funding for a transit and transportation system, whether it be in support of YARTS or any other mechanism; 5) requesting that a meeting be scheduled with the Park Service officials that have authority to make decisions and provide answers with County representatives, our Congressmen, Senators Boxer, and or Feinstein or their representatives, our State legislative delegation, and with representatives from the lodging industry, Yosemite Concession Services, and VIA Adventures. A copy of that Board action is attached hereto marked Exhibit "A" and by this reference incorporated herein. I believe that the action taken by the Board of Supervisors on March 11, 1997, shows the total commitment of Mariposa County to work diligently with the Park Service to resolve these problems in the best interest of not only Yosemite National Park, but of the surrounding communities themselves.

Relative to Highway 140 closure, we now hear that Highway 140 is scheduled to open to unrestricted traffic on Memorial Day of this year, and that the Highway will then be closed again in September. Just as Mariposa is struggling to recover, the gates will close again. We've also heard that Highway 140 may remain closed with restricted access for up to 18 months. This would further devastate the local economy. We protest that these decisions have not occurred during an open public process. While we fully support the repair and rehabilitation of areas within the Park boundaries, we believe this can occur only through a reasonable and joint effort of all affected parties. We must take into consideration the impact every decision we make has on our citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to say to the Committee that what Mariposa County in particular, and the surrounding communities in general, is asking does not seem to me to be in any way unreasonable. We are simply asking that all of the affected parties be consulted and be treated as equal partners in the decision making process that directly effects those parties. Additionally, the public itself should have full input relative to major decisions such as a day use reservation system. We ask that you assist us in being treated as full partners, the status which we hold, with the Park Service relative to the decision making process which directly affects us and other surrounding communities. No agency or department should be allowed to become an entity onto itself, we must all work together to achieve a united goal.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity to address our concerns.

STATEMENT OF GERALD FISCHER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, YOSEMITE MOTELS

Thank you for allowing me to participate in this oversight hearing on Yosemite National Park.

My name is Gerald Fischer. Twenty years ago my family and I purchased a 12 unit motel in El Portal called the Rapids. Little did I know that our future would become so entwined with Yosemite National Park. Over the years, we would purchase existing motels and develop new ones to now operate over 700 rooms in the gateway communities surrounding Yosemite National Park. Last year we had over 310,000 guests enjoy Yosemite using our properties as a base. I feel a need to represent those public interests as well as my own. Certainly, any issue that involves

the Park affects the livelihood of my family, our over 150 employees and our vendors and lenders.

During this 20 year period, we have faced many challenges, some man-made and some at the hands of nature.

The recent floods provide such an example. Damage done at one of our properties, Yosemite View Lodge, is estimated to exceed \$2 million. In a matter of hours, we watched the water rise and remove concrete decks estimated to weigh more than 20,000 lbs. tossing them like pillows in the air. A concrete spa large enough for 8 persons was lifted as a single unit and moved nearly 50 feet away. These most visible signs of damage are also the most easily corrected. By the end of this month, we shall have either removed or repaired all damaged buildings. A new restaurant is currently under construction to replace the one destroyed by the flood.

The more challenging task is to recover from the larger issue of Park wide damages, its closure and projected impacts of continuing construction.

Prior to addressing these issues, I would like to state, as I have many times before, that the performance of the combined local, state and federal agencies during the emergency was extremely impressive. I have never seen a better example of cooperation in action, and I have no doubt that significant benefits came to the local communities as a result. B.J. Griffin, Hal Grovert, and their staff, under the immediate supervision of Harry Steed, were wonderful. I believe the El Portal community in particular benefited from close cooperation during this crisis.

For me, the most significant story of the 2 or 3 week period after the initial incident may be in what did not happen. As a company, we did not have a single complaint to voice about the attitude, performance or priorities of those on the ground in El Portal. From flagman and law enforcement officers to social services, Park Service and FEMA wonderful things happened. Those local state and federal agencies and their staff deserve great praise for their efforts, particularly in those first few difficult days.

More significant obstacles developed for us and our industry as the Park worked towards a possible solution for the challenges they faced both in the valley and on issues of access. The most significant challenge came with the news in early February that the Park was planning to implement a Day Use Reservation System. While I accept the Park's explanation that this announcement was inadvertent, it was the first of a series of statements that has caused our industry great anxiety.

Over the last 4 or 5 weeks, significant numbers of cancellations have come in. Call volume is down nearly 30% and the calls we do receive are answered inadequately as we don't have reasonable information. Obviously, we searched for answers.

One of our first concerns was how the establishment of necessity was reached. As explained in several area meetings, a shortage of parking areas would require such an action. This parking area shortage was reported as two fold. First, it might be needed as a site for alternative housing for concessionaire employees, and second, as a staging area for construction. Several alternative areas were suggested for potential housing and staging areas that would not require loss of parking or alternatively could provide replacement parking. These areas included camp six, the area known as the O-Zone, the upper and lower campground areas, the stable area, which is closed for the current season and the Badger Pass parking area. We were told that no budget existed to allow for an evaluation of these areas or of the total staging area that would be needed. It appears then, that a worst case scenario was developed in anticipation of maximum construction needs, and this number has driven the issue of Day Use Reservation. I would suggest that funding be allocated to identify the staging capacity of each of these sites and any others that may be identified and as well the staging area needs, for each proposed construction project. If, as has been stated, these projects are to be developed over a 3 or 4 year time span, it seems likely that the potential need for staging areas have been overstated.

If in fact these alternative staging areas are more than adequate, the cost and confusion associated with a temporary DURS can be averted. This study deserves serious consideration and is one that can be developed quickly and at a reasonable cost.

The Day Use Reservation System that is being referenced publicly exists only as a vague concept for us. I am not aware of any document that has been made available for review either to the press, the public, or Congress for that matter that allows for reasonable comment. At the public meetings I have attended, there have been numerous and sometimes conflicting statements from National Park Service. Our industry has offered up many comments of their own. Absent a specific proposal this is an inadequate process. We are reduced to commenting in general terms about something that has its power in the specifics.

B.J. Griffin was quoted as saying that one reason she can't answer major questions about how such a plan would work is that as of Friday, March 14th, she still

hadn't seen the proposals from the private consultant under contract to design the short term system. In this respect, we share her problem. We are unable to answer to our customers as to what impacts will result. The list of unanswered questions runs the gamut from how will handicapped visitors be allowed entry to what can be done about reservations already booked. We have been asked if the 7 day ticket allows for 7 days entry, or if you now need 7 day use passes. Will those scheduled to enter on one highway and exit on another be allowed to do so? Will translators be available, at least by phone, to deal with those who cannot understand the new policies or need assistance in booking.

Quite simply, no one can say. As a result, we spend a great deal of time on the phones without success trying to interpret a policy, a direction or a system that is unclear. This damages our credibility as well as that of the National Park Service.

Supporters argue that nearly 8 out of 10 Americans support a Day Use System. I will take a leap of faith and suggest to you this is based on the premise that such a system will work. I am unaware of any place in the world where such a proposal has been implemented within similar time frames. Aside from the relatively simple issues of software and hardware, on-site locations need to be generated in local communities with hours of operation established, signage and staffing arranged. Do you expect all this to happen and to be producing a quality product within the next 30 days? Nothing in my life experience supports such optimism.

If such a plan is to succeed and be accepted by the Yosemite visitor, it must be effective from day one. I believe the issues I raised and many others create too great a risk. We must face the fact that many travel professionals and tourists will evaluate not only Yosemite but the entire National Park Service by the effectiveness of the program. The value of this system should not be judged only by its ability to limit guest visitation. I am confident it will be successful in that regard. We should look to this as a demonstration project for how we might choose to deal with autos in the future.

The Park Service will be able to establish clear policies and procedures for a DURS in time. Hopefully, our industry will have time to properly evaluate and comment on the plan. But for those policies to be effective they need to be clearly understood and presented not only by the day use reservationists as contracted for by National Park Service but also the National Park Service staff, those employed by the concessionaire, the hospitality industry of the gateway communities and those travel professionals, wholesale and retail throughout the state, the nation and the world. Given the time constraints that is unreasonable. The resulting confusion will be rising numbers of dissatisfied visitors, and a strong argument against a future DURS. There is simply not adequate time to prepare.

Before any DURS can be effective we must first enhance the current shuttle system, both with an updated and expanded fleet and with longer hours of operation. In addition, we need a wider area of coverage, particularly during peak season. To maximize the benefits of this system will also require shuttle service from outlying communities and incentives to move into alternative transportation. These incentives need to include such things as oversize lockers and reasonable rest areas. The concept, "Build it and they will come" has value. If we create a user friendly transportation system, a DURS can be implemented to provide a positive guest experience and over a relatively short period of time we can guide people into a new way to see the Park. People will choose this alternative, not be forced to accept a lessor option as a last alternative.

The perception exists on the part of many that private sector and the Park Service are miles apart on most issues. I strongly disagree. I know that B.J. and her staff place a high priority on a positive guest experience. Certainly we do. Preservation of the Park is a Park Service responsibility. For us it is an economic necessity. We too cherish the Park.

The continuing challenge over my 20 years in El Portal has been to bring to the table those whose long term goals are for the most part in sympathy one to the other, and deal with the very real short term issues that can often polarize.

More commonly, we seem to intuitively know the position, we assume antagonistic, of others and speak about each other, rather than to each other.

This serves no one. The 1980 Management Plan clearly calls for the gateway areas to have a role in the future of Yosemite when it calls for encouragement of private enterprise outside the Park.

This requires of the gateway communities a constant presence and concern. To often we only react to emergencies or park actions, rather than attempt to actively participate in the Parks on going planning process. This involvement must go beyond narrow self interest and extend to long term issues.

The Park Service must also look to the gateway communities in a different light. We are by nature an independent lot, often outspoken, and seldom organized to full

effectiveness. At the same time we can be instrumental in preparing guests to be sensitive Yosemite visitors. We can become an effective arm of the Yosemite interpretive services.

The National Park Service should continue to work towards a more public review of proposed policies. It should more fully involve the gateway communities early on in those issues that will have significant impacts.

The more public the process the more likely it is to be ultimately accepted. Superintendent Griffin has made tremendous strides in this direction. They must be continued and receive the full support of her staff in order to produce maximum benefit.

TESTIMONY OF BRIAN HUSE, PACIFIC REGION DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARKS AND
CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Introduction:

My name is Brian Huse and I am the Pacific Region Director of the National Parks and Conservation Association. I am speaking today on behalf of the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), America's only private non-profit citizens organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving and enhancing the National Park System. I am also speaking on behalf of Yosemite Restoration Trust and The Wilderness Society. Together, our organizations have worked continuously to protect Yosemite National Park with the support and backing of over 810,000 members nationwide.

We would first like to thank the subcommittee for holding this hearing today. This gathering represents the culmination of the first phase of Yosemite's recovery—the immediate stabilization of the Valley's infrastructure, assuring public safety, and reopening the park to visitors. We can now begin the next phase, which is planning for and implementing the restoration of the flood damaged areas.

To be sure, the flood event took a significant toll on the developed areas in Yosemite Valley and seriously disrupted many people's lives. In addition, the resulting closure has impacted local economies, stressing many small businesses to the breaking point. The continued economic vitality of these gateway communities needs to be addressed as a part of this committee's review, and we stand with the subcommittee in our commitment to assist the communities in regaining their footing. But along with this upheaval, the New Year's flood has provided an unparalleled opportunity to address some long-standing issues facing Yosemite in a way which will result in a healthier park and, thus, a higher quality park experience.

I am pleased to offer testimony today detailing our perspective on how the Administration's supplemental funding request can be the catalyst for a visionary and comprehensive restoration program which not only corrects the damage from the flood event, but also helps achieve many of the goals long envisioned in the park's 1980 General Management Plan. Given appropriate goals and the latitude to involve the public in a comprehensive planning and environmental review process, the National Park Service will be able to apply this authorization in such a way as to resolve many of Yosemite's outstanding issues including: 1) transportation systems within the park, 2) the relocation of jobs and employee housing outside the park, and 3) the restoration of Yosemite Valley's natural processes. Moreover, we feel that these goals can be accomplished in a way which will bolster gateway communities' economies and strengthen these localities' partnerships with the park.

In 1980 the public affirmed a new direction for Yosemite. Through the General Management Planning process, we committed to goals for a more natural national park experience. By decreasing the developed footprint, reducing the impact of the private automobile, and moving nonessential jobs and services outside the park boundary, the Park Service will enable the visitor to better appreciate the resources, both subtle and spectacular, for which this park is renowned. Though terribly destructive, this year's flood places many of these long-standing goals on the table for consideration and implementation now. The subcommittee is to be commended for seizing this opportunity. In helping bring the necessary funding to achieve these goals, it has shown both vision for a better Yosemite and the understanding that this authorization, if well spent, is an investment in the future.

Infrastructure and Development:

The New Year's flood resulted in substantial damage to campgrounds, concessioner facilities, employee housing, and much of the Valley's infrastructure, demonstrating the risks of building facilities in the Merced River flood plain. From a functional perspective, redevelopment of facilities within the flood plain will result

in future damage to park facilities and disruption of visitor services, requiring regular expenditures for rehabilitation and reconstruction of water damaged facilities.

Drawing on guidance from the 1980 General Management Plan, the Park Service has been engaged in the development of a Valley Implementation Plan. Though the alternatives are still being finalized, each alternative recognizes the need to reconfigure development in the Valley by siting facilities in the safest, least environmentally sensitive areas. The original plan would take many years to implement. Now, using the recent demonstration of the extent of the flood plain as a guide, these funds will facilitate a more rapid and more environmentally sensible plan for implementation.

We therefore urge the members of the committee to provide the flexibility necessary to complete the planning and public review process for the Valley Implementation Plan. Don't provide for specific earmarks for separate development projects. Direct the Park Service to pursue a planning process with time-lines and goals for each phase of planning, public review and implementation. We are concerned that any development projects authorized outside this Valley Implementation Plan process could impede this larger planning effort. Moreover, the construction of poorly planned projects will likely result in the need to redesign, reconfigure, or remove development at unnecessary additional cost.

Transportation:

Access and visitor circulation issues remain both a serious management problem and a flash-point for conflict between the park and the gateway communities. Although there is little disagreement over the need to reduce impacts on resources and the visitor experience that result from private automobile congestion, there are innumerable, firmly held opinions on how the park should address them. Years of study, however, have shown that Yosemite's transportation needs are inextricably linked to the surrounding counties. In 1994 the Congressionally mandated *Alternative Modes Feasibility Study* stated:

"The National Park Service recognizes the value of integrating the planning of transportation systems within the parks with the efforts of surrounding communities to address transportation issues."

Happily, approaching transportation from this perspective is already underway within the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy (YARTS). YARTS is a joint local, state and federal planning effort directed to find remedies for the region's complex transit needs. Recent advances within the YARTS should remind us that the potential exists to develop a true regional transit system designed with Yosemite day use visitation in mind. The study further states:

"Undoubtedly, many opportunities will be available to enhance the economic development potential of gateway communities and to reduce the impacts of transportation on park resources by providing innovative transportation systems based in gateway communities."

With the Administration's supplemental funding request, just such an opportunity exists. We urge you to make funds available to facilitate comprehensive regional transportation planning. This will fulfill two purposes. First, a regional transportation solution will eliminate the need to build unnecessary transportation-related facilities inside the park boundary. Properly implemented, a regional system can provide staging, visitor orientation, and mass transit into the park, while focusing facility development outside the park boundary. Second, by focusing development opportunities in the gateway communities, local economies will more directly realize the benefits of their location adjacent to the park boundary, concentrating tourism directly on those communities. This approach will provide a badly needed boost to the local economies after two consecutive years of park closures.

In addition, this subcommittee should support the provisions of the Administration's legislation to reauthorize ISTEA, that would allow the Park Service to use its direct appropriations, as well as its Federal Lands Highway Program funds, to match state ISTEA allocations for non-park transportation projects that benefit the parks.

Employee Housing:

The concept of relocating nonessential jobs and housing was initially expressed in the Yosemite 1980 GMP and was developed in the 1992 Yosemite Valley Housing Plan. Currently a draft amendment to that plan has been circulated for public comment. As is the case with visitor facilities and infrastructure, the supplemental request has the potential to leverage this existing plan to relocate jobs, and the housing associated with them, outside the park. The relocation will reduce the developed area inside the Valley and allow for restoration of natural areas enhancing the resources of the park and improving the visitor experience.

In addition, Section 814 of the Omnibus Parks and Public Land Management Act of 1996 has provided added incentive to accelerate the implementation of this important goal. Section 814 grants new authority to the National Park Service for improving the quantity and quality of housing for field employees by:

- expanding alternatives available for construction and repair of essential government housing;
- allowing the private sector to finance or supply housing to maximum extent possible, in order to reduce the need for Federal appropriations;
- ensuring that adequate funds are available for long-term maintenance needs of field employee housing; and
- eliminating unnecessary government housing and locating such housing as is required in areas which minimize impairment of park resources.

By taking advantage of this new authority, the Park Service will be able to develop resourceful partnerships with the private sector, reducing or eliminating the need to construct and maintain new employee housing at significantly greater expense. The savings should be directed toward more projects or activities which benefit the public and improve the visitor experience. We recommend that members of the committee direct the Park Service to work cooperatively with local governments to research the relevant issues and develop a plan to house as many NPS and concession employees as feasible in gateway communities.

Protection of Park Resources:

In providing funding for Yosemite's Restoration, however, this committee, the Appropriations Committee and the National Park Service itself must all be vigilant in observing the Organic Act to preserve park resources unimpaired. A fundamental precept of the 1980 General Management Plan was to reduce the amount of development inside the park and restore natural habitat. This precept is incorporated into the recommendations we offer today. The relocation of facilities outside the Valley or in more appropriate places within the park will allow for the rehabilitation of the Merced River's riparian habitat. Establishing a regional transit system will eliminate crowding and congestion of private automobiles and therefore require fewer roads in Yosemite Valley. As development is reduced and natural processes are allowed to return, the public will benefit by a higher quality park experience.

Conclusion:

As disastrous as the New Year's flood itself was for Yosemite National Park and for the surrounding communities, it has left in its wake opportunities for restoration of the park and revitalization of the communities unparalleled in the park's 133 year history. The redevelopment which should proceed under the guidance of the 1980 GMP and this supplemental funding can and should be a model for future park planning in which the needs of the park, the needs of the visitor and the needs of the surrounding communities are simultaneously addressed in a manner which leverages none of these against the interest of another.

In closing, however, we should all recognize that these plans for proactive redevelopment have not appeared overnight. The General Management Plan which forms the basis for implementation was written 17 years ago by park professionals, and carefully considered through a public review process. It carries a vision for the park which many of us are only now beginning to appreciate. Similarly, the Valley Implementation Plan had been developed over years, prior to the flood. What the flood provides is opportunity. If we have even a glimmer of the vision of the original planners in 1980, we will seize this opportunity and make the New Year's flood of 1997 remembered not as a disaster for the park and the surrounding communities but as the beginning of a new paradigm of economic success, resource protection and skilled park management.

STATEMENT OF GARRETT DE BELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE YOSEMITE
GUARDIAN—A PROJECT OF EARTH ISLAND INSTITUTE

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this oversight hearing on the very important topic of the restoration of Yosemite.

My name is Garrett De Bell and I am Executive Director of the Yosemite Guardian, a project of Earth Island Institute.

Introduction:

Yosemite Guardian works to protect Yosemite and to achieve fair and considerate treatment for visitors and area residents. We work to ensure the continued existence of Yosemite's magnificent forests and meadows with their biodiversity intact. The environmental issues that concern us most include the need for an adequate

control burn program to protect and restore the mid-elevation forests and the need for a research and restoration effort sufficient to understand and reverse the alarming disappearance of frogs from the wilderness of Yosemite. We bring up these issues today in the context that these important needs continue to be ignored while issues in the developed area of Yosemite Valley and its fabled, but exaggerated, gridlock receive the lion's share of attention and money when simpler measures could manage the problem.

We vigorously support the right of access to the Park by visitors without unnecessary restrictions.

We advocate a completely open decision making process which allows the people a voice in the decisions that effect them.

We are heartened by this hearing today, as we recognize a need to increase Congressional oversight of NPS plans and actions as well as to increase the level of informed public involvement. We are working to ensure that both these avenues of "quality control" stay open.

Our views, information resources, and new programs to help citizens become better informed and more powerful supporters of Yosemite can be found on our web site at <http://members.aol.com/YosemiteOL/>

The fresh attention to Yosemite and possibility of more money, following on the tail of the new infusion of money from increased entrance fees, the new concession contract, and the continued success of Yosemite Fund efforts, makes it very important that we see the money is spent in ways that best achieve the NPS mandate of preserving Yosemite for all time while providing for its use and enjoyment by present and future generations.

\$178 or \$200 million is a lot of money—even more could and should be spent to bring Yosemite up to the excellence it should have, in infrastructure, facilities, guest services, and most important environmental protection. But it is important that it be spent wisely. It is also important that restrictive measures that unnecessarily restrict visitation and harm the surrounding communities are not implemented casually. The details of the NPS's request have not been made public, so we cannot comment on the details—and this is an issue.

Without access to reliable and official NPS cost estimates, I will concentrate on a few of the major items that seem to be "on the table" currently, but first I will briefly summarize my background and set forth some overall concerns.

Background:

I am a biologist with primary interests and concerns in the ecology of plant and animal communities. My training was at Stanford and U.C., Berkeley. I have been privileged to work with some of the great ecologists including Starker Leopold whose work still is the foundation of much NPS wildlife and wildland policy. I have a home near Yosemite part of which is rented on a nightly basis to Yosemite visitors—perhaps the smallest rental unit in the area.

I have been in love with Yosemite from childhood. I hiked the High Sierra Loop many times in my early teens and hiked from Mt. Whitney to Yosemite Valley on the John Muir Trail by myself when I was sixteen. I have climbed many of the walls and peaks of Yosemite, skied the trails, and kayaked the rivers. My wife and I were married in a snowstorm on Henness Ridge overlooking the Merced River and its South Fork.

After finishing graduate school at U.C. Berkeley, my first major work was with David grower, who asked me to put together The Environmental Handbook, which was the unofficial handbook for the first Earth Day. The NPS bought many copies to help their managers to better understand increasingly complex environmental issues—and they have grown much more complex since then.

As an environmental consultant for the Curry Company, I was privileged to be able to play a key role in many lasting environmental projects in Yosemite. Some of these were the establishment of a comprehensive recycling and beverage container deposit program, elimination of CFC containing products from the Park, ensuring protection for the Merced River in the Wild and Scenic River System, removing many obsolete structures, and writing the environmental assessments for major projects including the removal of the sewer plant from the west end of Yosemite Valley.

Concern with the rush to implement Reservations and other restrictions on use:

We are alarmed at the rapid push by the NPS to implement a Day Use Reservations System without public hearings or input as well as the rush to go forward with other newly proposed major changes in Yosemite Valley. While the GMP authorizes many of the actions, many others are treading new ground and require public review and NEPA compliance. We are including here the closing of the Rivers Campground which is not called for in the 1980 GMP, and the proposed Taft Toe parking

area and the related elimination of the excellent one way loop road that was one of the major accomplishments of the recent past. But the rush for reservations seems particularly misplaced. We realize these projects are intended to help reduce Yosemite's automobile congestion. We know they are well-intentioned, but nevertheless we feel they will be counterproductive.

What is the need for a day use reservations system, in normal times or in this year of "highwater"? In spite of the rhetoric about Yosemite "having reached its saturation point" etc., the fact is that even Yosemite Valley is rarely "full" as defined by the NPS car counts and the capacities set by the NPS after a comprehensive planning process. In fact the Valley should never be full unless the NPS goofs, because the Day Use Traffic Management Plan cuts off access in the rare event that the Valley capacity is approached—only a few days at most a year.

Perhaps there is a temporary need for reservations this year, due to the flood, but this is not obvious. One would assume that visitation will be down due to the publicity and the closure of some campgrounds and many overnight units—eliminating all those cars from the roads, trail heads, and parking lots.

The ability to accommodate these day users wouldn't seem to be a problem. The problem with the broken sewer has been fixed, the wells work—at least on manual control. There should be plenty of parking for the reduced number of visitors.

What is the problem that requires the reservations system? The justification from the Park has been very sketchy and it sounds like another "closure for the convenience of the government", a trend that has been growing over the past decade which has seen many closures, such as when the government shut down. But there is a rash of less extensive closures: closing the Glacier Point road to Badger pass until the ski area is declared open; denying people the right to hike or ski on the trails in early and late season, and the closure of the river to kayakers below El Cap Bridge for no apparent reason, and the closure of campgrounds along the Merced River.

But if there are reasons the NPS should tell people what they are and formulate their policy publicly and work with the stakeholders, with all concerned constituencies, to minimize the unintentional harm done by a poorly conceived system. The goal and result of public involvement is better policy. Yes it takes time, but it is fundamental to a free society.

The hasty imposition of a reservation system is certain to harm the surrounding communities which provide accommodations and other services outside the boundaries as called for by the NPS and its visionary GMP. These communities should be viewed as partners by the Park and included in the planning. It is necessary to remind the Park of its own GMP which states on p. 10 the goal of "encouragement of private enterprise outside the Park" as a key element in providing accommodations outside, rather than inside, Yosemite's boundaries.

Any reservation system should be imposed only if there truly is a need and the system should be designed to be minimally harmful to visitors and the region. There are options that could make the system less burdensome on visitors and the community—we shouldn't make visitors regiment their Yosemite experience unless it is really necessary and simpler and less restrictive measures have been tried and failed.

Is the system mandatory or voluntary? A voluntary system—to assure a visitor of entrance even if capacity is reached—might be no big problem. But if a reservation is required in order to enter the Park, whether it is full or not, then the system will be very harmful, and unnecessarily so, to visitors and the community. Popular restaurants admit guests without reservations whenever they are not "full". You are never "required" to have a reservation.

What is the number of Cars and busses allowed? A reservations system should not be used to arbitrarily lower the number of vehicles allowed without a public process.

What will the fee be? Will it be in addition to the entrance fee, which has just been quadrupled, or part of it? Will the fee be charged to all, or just those who want guaranteed admittance. Will a visitor staying in the nearby communities need a day use permit for each day, or one for the entire visit? Will the hotels in the gateway communities be able to issue reservations—acting as agents for the reservations system?

What provisions will be made for those who do not have credit cards to purchase a reservation by phone, or who don't speak English? Will there be options such as pay at the entrance if reservations are available? If not why not?

Alternatives:

There are alternative ways to reduce crowding and automobile use without the high cost and regimentation of the proposed reservation system and proposed

changes in the Valley. A real and important long term need is to reduce the number of cars driving to Yosemite, but we think this should be done by providing quality and voluntary alternatives that people will use. The free or low fare shuttle proposed by local businesses, on a funding model similar to the successful Valley Shuttles and Badger Shuttle (which are funded by add-one to various fees such as lift tickets) could let many visitors leave their cars in Mariposa, Fish Camp, Buck Meadows or other logical points on the 3 highways. By taking the shuttle instead of cars everyone wins.

Reducing or eliminating completely the counterproductive \$10/passenger entrance fee for bus passengers seems essential to the goal of encouraging use of public transit.

Incentives and disincentives used elsewhere to smooth peaks in use should be tried—develop a tiered fee structure with higher peak day fees and lower off-peak along with a carpool incentive to waive the fee for carpools of 4 or more occupants. This will create a powerful, but voluntary, incentive for people to carpool for day trips—particularly on peak days.

Provide a free shuttle or free passage on regional transit for commuting employees, saving them money while getting their cars off the road.

Improve the existing information system to provide consistently accurate information on park access regarding capacity, closures, etc. so people can plan their visits knowing if the Park is “full” or not. It usually is not.

And implement common sense measures to eliminate the 7 or so bottlenecks where most of the “gridlock” occurs—the 3 western entrances and 4 key intersections in the Valley. Adequate staffing of entrance stations and someone directing traffic would do a world of good. The media frequently prints the sensational photographs of the long lines at the entrance station on holidays like Memorial Day—not telling the whole story that it is just a bottleneck that could be easily opened.

Valley transpiration issues:

We believe that the major transportation need in Yosemite is to encourage more people to voluntarily leave their car and take busses or shuttles—and Yosemite benefits most from the visitor who takes public transportation all the way to Yosemite from home—Amtrak to Merced and then the bus to Yosemite. Leaving a car in the Gateway communities to take a shuttle is highly advantageous as well—in terms of air pollution and energy use as well as the congestion, parking, and “gridlock” issues.

We understand that the concept of a parking area at Taft Toe at the west end of Yosemite Valley is about to surface again as the restoration effort and the inter-related Valley Implementation plan goes forward. Compared to the benefits of the shuttles from the gateways and beyond, we see no benefit to this proposal which would have people drive all the way to the West End of Yosemite Valley only to be forced to transfer to a shuttle for the last three miles of their trip. The costs and inconvenience will be huge, the environmental impact large, and the benefits small and largely symbolic.

Ecological issues:

We concentrate so much on the transportation issues in part because they divert attention from the ecological threats which we think need more attention if Yosemite is ever to be truly protected. If the transportation issues could be dealt with in the most common sense and cost effective manner then there would be money left over to restore Yosemite’s forests.

We have an ongoing concern that the major ecological threats to Yosemite’s forests, meadows, and wildlife get short shrift as attention always focuses on the real but very infrequent “gridlock in Yosemite Valley”. As the flood recovery goes forward we are seeing clear indications that the NPS wants to implement actions that will make it more difficult or expensive to visit Yosemite—with no clear reason.

We hope the Congress and the Park will look at the big picture of the need to protect and restore Yosemite, all of it, not just the developed areas. And the costs for some of the major programs needed to protect and restore the wilderness are minor compared to many of the items on the table because of the flood, or soon to be on the table as the VIP or Valley Implementation plan finally goes public.

Let me take one very important specific. The mid-elevation forests of Yosemite have been put at risk by well-intentioned, but misguided management actions, just as the floodplains should not have had employee tent housing, the forests should not have been protected from fire for 50 years. The tragic result of this overprotection has set the stage for ecological and human disaster.

In 1990 Yosemite saw the disastrous Steamboat and Arch Rock Fires which burned from highway 140 to Badger Pass on the South and almost to Crane Flat, consuming most of Foresta on the way on the North side. The stage is set and gets

worse each year in the remaining forests mid-elevation forests. The NPS understands these issues very well, and is very competent at conducting the controlled burns to restore the forests, but the money or the will isn't there to treat the acres that need it.

While the focus today is on spending money to do the right thing in the flood plain and damaged infrastructure, and we support that, we also believe this is the time to widen the focus to correct the dangerous and environmentally harmful impacts in the forests. Either more money should be appropriated or at least an oversight process set that ensures that any funds left over after the flood damage and restoration is complete goes to the highest priority items.

The need is to burn a total of about 140,000 acres on a ten year rotating cycle or 14,000 acres per year. At a cost of about \$100/acre to prepare and management the burn—costs which decline as the forest is restored and becomes less of a “dog hair thicket” ready to explode—we are looking at \$1,400,000 per year, maybe more, maybe less—but the number is probably as good as many in the damage assessments.

Compare this to the costs in the NPS housing plan to move each employee from the Valley where they work now to El Portal of over \$300,000 per employee including moving offices and duplicating infrastructure. As we implement money to restore Yosemite we need to ask questions about how best to spend the money. If a tent village such as the Terrace or Boystown were improved and retained, the savings over building upscale dorms, whether in the valley or El Portal, would be enough to fund unmet environmental needs.

Summary and concern with oversight:

In summary we hope these hearings will lead to increased ongoing oversight by the committee, as was common years ago when staffers Dale Crane and Clay Peters made frequent visits and kept in touch by phone in between. It is only through democratic give and take and oversight by Congress and citizens that government can do its best. Yosemite needs vigorous and well informed discussion to ensure that the best and fairest decisions are made with full public involvement.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. For more information contact: Garrett De Bell Executive Director The Yosemite Guardian, a project of Earth Island Institute YosemiteOL@aol.com <http://members.aol.com/YosemiteOL/> 415 991-0102

STATEMENT OF LINDA WALLACE, CHAIR, YOSEMITE COMMITTEE, FOR THE SIERRA CLUB

A Window of Opportunity

The flood along the Merced River in January of 1997 served as a wake-up call for all those who care about Yosemite National Park. Since the Park's visionary General Management Plan (GMP) was adopted in 1980, we have let 17 years slip by, doing very little to solve the problems of overdevelopment and traffic congestion it addresses.

Yosemite is now at a crossroads. Because of the river's decisive action, Congress, the Administration and the National Park Service can now act to turn this disaster into an opportunity. We can make the visitor's experience of Yosemite a better one than what we've experienced during this decade.

After natural disasters there is often a window of opportunity for change—for example, the removal of the Embarcadero double deck freeway along San Francisco's waterfront after the Loma Prieta earthquake, which had been previously discussed by the public, has now opened up views of the Bay from the City without major traffic impacts. Because of this and other experiences, we believe that the public is now open to seeing us change the way things work in Yosemite.

The legislation proposed by Congressmen Radanovich and Doolittle, Senator Boxer and the Administration's request for supplemental funding demonstrate that there is bi-partisan support for putting things right in Yosemite. This funding was originally called for when the GMP was adopted back in 1980 and that didn't occur. The flood has now provided us with a physical opportunity; the legislation provides the political opportunity to make now the right time to implement the GMP.

It will not be enough—and not fair to the American public and our international visitors—if we simply repair and replace the development that was in the floodplain. This would be a poor use of our tax dollars. We need to invest for the long-term with the appropriation that comes to Yosemite. This must be about protecting the natural resource and providing a better experience of this natural setting for the American public to whom this Park belongs.

Flexibility and Collaborative Planning

Because it is important to open all of the Park to the public as soon as possible, the needs assessment and cost estimates are being developed very rapidly. While we enthusiastically support the proposed funding measures, we also believe it is necessary to give the Park Service flexibility to spend the funds where they are really needed when the flood-related damage is better known. We recommend that the legislation not mandate or prohibit any specific details about Yosemite restoration; rather, the details of implementation be developed through a collaborative planning process involving public input.

It is very important for the Park Service to be open to public input about the planning and implementation of changes. At the same time, let us not become mired in arguments about specific details of the restoration and lose this long overdue opportunity. Let us keep our eyes on the objective of protecting and enhancing this national resource. At the same time, we think that the economies of the gateway communities will also benefit and thrive by providing more visitor services than they currently do.

Funding for Resource Management and Interpretation

As a component of the legislation Sierra Club urges Congress to include funding for resource management and interpretation.

Resource management will allow the Park to return to a more natural state while promoting an improved visitor experience. Specifically, we want to see funds for habitat restoration, scientific study, and ecological research. These are the types of activities that we believe are highly important to protection of the resource but which have not been adequately funded.

Interpretation is an essential component to the quality of the visitors' experience.

Managing Vehicles in the Park

It has become increasingly obvious in the 90's that the answers to managing the crowding and congestion in the Park revolve around how we manage private vehicles. Sierra Club advocates a regional transit system which includes a shuttle bus system from gateway communities and a day use reservation system for vehicles as options to solve the congestion problem.

Congestion has grown steadily in Yosemite each year since the GMP was adopted in 1980. In 1996, in spite of the Park closure during the government shutdown, overall visitation was still up from 1995. Every indication is that the numbers will climb as America's national parks continue to be a prime destination of people from around the world.

Private vehicles actually compete with people for space in the Valley. If people use mass transit instead of private vehicles to enter the Valley, then they can enjoy Yosemite without congesting it.

The Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy (YARTS), a collaborative effort of local governments, is already in place to administer a regional transit system. But they will have to move quickly and decisively now to capitalize on the opportunity afforded them in the wake of the flood.

Although some suggest that a day-use reservation system for vehicles will scare people away, Sierra Club believes such a system would provide insurance that visitors will not be turned away at the gate, or have to sit for hours waiting in line for parking spaces to be freed up, losing hours they could have spent enjoying the Park.

If we provide a number of options for how to enter the Park, people will choose the one that works best for them. If it is to drive our own vehicle, we'll need to make a reservation. We already make reservations for lodging in the Park, the gateway communities, for campgrounds and for restaurants. A reservation option eliminates the risk that we'll get to Yosemite and be turned away. There are ways to design a reservation system so that those who are staying in gateway community lodging, park lodging, or using buses are guaranteed entry.

In the long term, a day-use reservation system has the potential to be better for visitors and to provide for a more stable economy in the neighboring communities. People and their dollars will be brought to the gateway communities. A day use reservation system for private vehicles can also help pave the way for a comprehensive mass transit and shuttle system between Merced, Fresno, the gateway communities, and Yosemite.

Let's keep in mind also that there is the possibility in the next decade that California will begin building a high speed rail system serving the Highway 99 Corridor between the San Francisco Bay Area and San Diego, including a stop in Merced. This rail system has the potential to deliver an enormous number of visitors without vehicles to Yosemite. This argues for planning now to bring a comprehensive shuttle

bus system to the Park and for having it up and running before high speed rail is in place.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Sierra Club trusts that the 105th congress will heed the warning sounded by the flood, and provide the full appropriation for the crown jewel of the National Park System. We urge flexibility in the use of these funds, an open public planning process, funds for resource management and interpretation, a day-use vehicle reservation system, and the planning and implementation of a regional transit system.

Overdevelopment in Yosemite, increasing congestion and crowding need to be addressed now. We must take advantage of this window of opportunity afforded by the flood.

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 BOB SCHAPIRA, COLORADO
 JIM GIBBONS, NEVADA
 MICHAEL D. DRAPO, ILLINOIS

**U.S. House of Representatives
 Committee on Resources
 Washington, DC 20515**

March 12, 1997

GEORGE MILLER, CALIFORNIA
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 CHIEF COUNSEL
 JOHN LAWRENCE
 DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable George Radanovich
 Member, Committee on Resources
 213 Cannon HOB
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear George:

Thank you for your recent request to hold an oversight hearing on restoration and repair of Yosemite National Park following the floods earlier this year. There is no question that this is a significant event, worthy of careful consideration by the Committee on Resources.

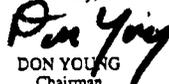
I fully agree with you that Congress should take every possible step to ensure that millions of Americans are not denied the opportunity to visit Yosemite National Park this year. Therefore, you will have my support in ensuring that funding is appropriated on a timely basis to make necessary short-term and long-term repairs.

At the same time, it is critical to ensure that funds are spent in a manner which will ensure that the park continues to meet its dual mission of visitor enjoyment and resource protection. With respect to any funding decisions which may impact the nature and amount of future visitor use, those are clearly policy decisions within the jurisdiction of the Resources Committee. I will insist these funds be spent efficiently and funding decisions remain consistent with this Committee's long-term vision for the agency.

I know I can count on your leadership to ensure that the vital interests of the Committee on Resources in these areas are protected. Due to the overall importance of these issues to the Committee, I have discussed this matter with National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee Chairman Hansen. Chairman Hansen fully agrees on these issues and has agreed to hold a field hearing in El Portal, California, on March 22.

Please keep me informed of your progress in restoring Yosemite National Park.

With warm personal regards, I remain

Sincerely,

 DON YOUNG
 Chairman

RADANOVICH RELEASE

Congressman George Radanovich • 713 Cannon House Office Bldg. • Washington, DC 20515 • (202)225-4540 • FAX (202)225-3-

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, March 3, 1997

Contact: Will Dwyer II
(202)225-4540

RADANOVICH GETS 'OK' FOR HEARING IN EL PORTAL ON YOSEMITE REPAIRS

WASHINGTON— The chairman of the House Committee on Resources, Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), has approved Rep. George Radanovich's (R-Calif.) request for a congressional oversight hearing on Yosemite repairs. Radanovich, who asked for the hearings last week, said they would be held in El Portal on Sat., March 22.

In his letter to Radanovich (full text follows), Young said, "an oversight hearing on restoration and repair of Yosemite National Park following the floods earlier this year . . . is a significant event, worthy of careful consideration." Young added that he would "count on" Radanovich's "leadership" in seeing that funds are spent "in a manner which will ensure that the park continues to meet its dual mission of visitor enjoyment and resource protection."

Young's letter also notes that he "will insist these funds be spent efficiently and funding decisions remain consistent with the Committee's long-term vision" for the National Park Service. In fact, the El Portal hearing will be conducted by the National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee, which is chaired by Rep. James V. Hansen (R-Utah) and of which Radanovich is a member.

To assure funding for Yosemite restoration, Radanovich and a colleague, Rep. John Doolittle (R-Calif.), co-sponsored a bill authorizing money for the reconstruction of roads and buildings and other repairs.

Yosemite Valley is scheduled to re-open tomorrow. The Park Service has told Radanovich that Highway 140's full two-lane "emergency stabilization" is expected to be completed by May 23 to accommodate Memorial Day visitors. Some seven and a half miles of Highway 140 are inside Yosemite National Park. It follows the Merced River canyon and was damaged at 21 locations by the record flooding in January.

STATEMENT BY WESLEY J. GRIFFIN, SUPERINTENDENT, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, FIELD HEARING CONCERNING THE FLOOD RECOVERY EFFORTS IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK.

MARCH 22, 1997

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules, and spring recess, to visit Yosemite to see firsthand the work we have been doing. I appreciate the opportunity to testify about how the National Park Service is responding to the recent flooding in Yosemite National Park.

As 1996 came to a close, Yosemite held a particularly heavy snowpack. On January 1st, 1997, a warm tropical storm moved into California. Heavy rains fell throughout the park. The combination of warm weather and widespread prolonged rain over a deep snowpack caused flooding at lower elevations. Particularly hard hit was Yosemite Valley. On January 2, much of the Valley was transformed into a large lake. At that time approximately 900 park visitors and 1,200 employees were trapped on three islands within the Valley. Employees and residents in El Portal, the primary administrative support facility for the park, were isolated and cut off from the Valley.

The natural environment of the park is adapted for periodic flooding. The structures and

infrastructure we have built in the park are not so well adapted. As the water started to recede on January 3rd the full impact of the flood began to emerge. The sewer line that runs from Yosemite Valley to the waste water treatment plant in El Portal was inoperable. A 300 foot section of the line was completely obliterated, and large sections of the remainder of the system were inundated with flood waters. This caused raw sewage to flow into the Merced River or out onto the Valley floor. As the water receded, the sewer lines became clogged with debris. The flood also disabled the electrical systems that operate the sewage pumps in the Yosemite Creek lift station, rendering the pumps inoperative. In addition, all three of the Valley's water wells were submerged. As a result, the Valley's potable water supply reached dangerously low levels. **Three of the four support legs on a tower carrying the 69,000 volt high voltage line feeding Yosemite Valley were damaged. The tower tipped at a precarious angle, threatening the Valley with a loss of power. The water reached a depth of 8 feet in 189 rental cabins and 172 motel rooms at the Yosemite Lodge, as well as in the living quarters for 224 concession employees. Only one of the three access roads remained passable. And still there were 2,100 people in the Valley.**

Elsewhere in the park damage was just as severe. In El Portal the water system was severely damaged, forcing residents to use only bottled water. The sewer line to employee housing in a trailer village was destroyed. Highway 140 leading into the park and to Mariposa was impassable. Several other key roads through the community were destroyed or severely damaged, limiting movement. In Wawona the damages threatened

the potable water supply. Highways 41 and 120 had debris on the roads and significant structural damage.

Late on January 3rd, the 900 visitors were evacuated by convoy. As we began to understand the full magnitude of the repair and cleanup work we took action. To start we immediately requested a Type 1 Incident Command Team to come to the park to manage the emergency repair operations. Secondly, we knew that it was going to take weeks, if not months, to get the park back into full or partial operation. With this realization, and the impact it would have on local economies, we immediately started to talk with leaders of the local community, including members of the congressional delegation. Third, as it became clear that the damaged utility system could not support the 1,200 employees that were living in the Valley, we asked Yosemite Concession Services on January 4th to **evacuate 500 of its employees. We also took a thorough look at the number of NPS employees that needed to be in the Valley.** Many employee dependents and non-emergency staff voluntarily left the Valley. By the end of the first week of January the overnight population of Yosemite Valley was reduced to approximately 500 emergency personnel.

From this point one of our main goals was to make the park safe for a reopening. By January 21st it was safe to open the southern end of the park, including the Mariposa Grove, Wawona and some backcountry trailheads. Shortly thereafter we opened the area between Chinquapin and Badger Pass, and then the northern part of the park up to Crane

Flat. Finally, we had completed enough emergency repairs by March 14 to open Yosemite Valley. Highway 140, however, remains closed. We will work on it until Memorial Day weekend so that it can be opened for the summer.

A tremendous amount of long-term repair and reconstruction that is dependant upon supplemental appropriations needs to be done throughout the park. To fully understand the scope of this work we needed a thorough and accurate picture of the damage. Expert assistance, at unprecedented levels, has enabled the park to compile a comprehensive and detailed inventory of the damage. After the water receded, engineers, architects, construction managers, and resource specialists from the National Park Service and the Federal Highway Administration began to assess the damage and develop alternatives for long-term solutions. **By January 21st over 350 individual damage assessments with class C cost estimates had been completed. These cost estimates are based upon the actual cost of similar work that has been completed in the region.** Several important factors have been taken into account in these cost estimates. The extent of flooding throughout California has caused the price for materials to increase; the damaged areas are a long way from the nearest community; and roads are damaged and subject to traffic delays. These three factors make it more difficult to get materials, equipment, and qualified contractors from the surrounding communities. It is standard practice in the construction industry to add a cost for this remoteness and this cost is reflected in our estimates.

We have identified most of the damage to park infrastructure that rests below 6,000 feet in elevation. The damage above this elevation, however, cannot be assessed, and will not be fully understood until late spring. Over 62 miles of main park highway, 4 minor and 2 major water and sewer systems, 235 seasonal housing units, and most of the park's 800-mile trail system, are buried under snow. We do know that there are at least 30 damaged or destroyed trail bridges and one section of the Tioga Pass Road that is washed out. But other damage remains to be discovered as the snow melts.

The spring thaw is very much on our minds. At the moment the water content of the snowpack is approximately 200% of normal. There is a very real danger of another flood before this summer. **If that occurs, long-term costs may rise and some of the emergency repairs, particularly to the roads, may not hold.**

Though this flood has been devastating to many individuals and to the local economies, there are some benefits that will come from the effort to recover. Many of the structures and facilities that were destroyed or severely damaged were in the floodplain and areas of sensitive riparian habitat. Yosemite has a comprehensive nationally debated and supported General Management Plan that is guiding recovery efforts. Since the GMP was approved we have spent a lot of time working through the details of implementation. We have an approved Concession Services Plan. We have a draft Housing Plan that is currently undergoing public review. We are close to completing a draft Valley Implementation Plan that will be out for public review beginning in late April. Taken

together, these long-term plans provide details about where infrastructure should be placed in Yosemite Valley. These plans identify the need to remove infrastructure from the floodplain for the purpose of protecting both natural resources and expensive taxpayer-owned park infrastructure.

In the process of moving these facilities we can make long-called-for improvements to visitor facilities and services. The flood recovery plans, damage assessments, and cost estimates are more definitive than you might expect after a major incident because they incorporate this work. Park facilities destroyed or damaged by the flood will be restored in scope, scale, and function to a condition that will not be damaged by a future flood of this magnitude. **The added cost of relocation will be minimal compared to the cost of rebuilding in-place and then later relocating these facilities in accordance with the General Management Plan. Also, many of the facilities that will be replaced were substandard and already a part of the large backlog of work.** The recovery effort will reduce this backlog.

Since the flood the public has been telling us to do the repair work in accordance with these plans and to do it quickly. To accomplish this we will need a supplemental appropriation.

What we are doing now and what the park will be like this summer.

We continue to manage the emergency, short-term, repair work under the Incident Command System. Short-term expenses have included: contracts with local companies for emergency services, repairs and construction; rental of equipment; temporary lodging; removal of flood debris; and overtime, along with travel and per diem costs for federal government employees and emergency hires. We anticipate that we will continue to manage the emergency short-term response under the Incident Command System until the end of May, or until funding for long-term contracting is received. Though we have significantly reduced the number of emergency workers there are several ongoing functions that must continue during the short-term period. We need a finance team to coordinate procurement, payments, and track expenditures; a resource unit to manage and **track people working on the incident; and a documentation unit to track the work that is accomplished. We expect the cost for the short-term, emergency response and repairs, to be \$13,402,000.**

The long-term repair and reconstruction work will be an enormous management challenge. To meet this challenge I have created a temporary "Flood Recovery Team" to oversee contracts for repair and reconstruction activities. Comprised of existing park employees, this team will be overseen by a Project Manager, and will monitor and ensure that park resources are protected.

Park visitors will experience a different Yosemite in the near future. The extensive damage to a significant number of lodging units and campsites means that fewer overnight accommodations will be available in the park this summer. Some trailheads may be closed and others will have difficult stream crossings due to bridge damage. The damage that will be exposed by the melting of snow will also impact the visitor experience.

There is a lot of road work underway. Visitors this summer will encounter traffic delays and temporary closures throughout the park. Some areas previously used for parking will be transformed into staging areas for construction. Traffic congestion has been a problem in Yosemite for many years. Fixing that problem is a main goal of the 17-year-old **General Management Plan**. **Over the past five years we have tried to reduce the impact of traffic gridlock by instituting a Restricted Access Plan. Under this plan when gridlock is imminent we have closed the gates to automobile traffic until the congestion eased. In some cases this has taken up to 7 hours. The combination of road repair work and other construction, along with the reduction in the number of parking spaces, will create intolerable gridlock this summer unless a restricted access system is put in place.**

The system we are considering is an emergency vehicle reservation system. Under this system visitors in private vehicles would need a reservation to drive into the park for day use. Visitors would not need a reservation if they had overnight accommodations in the park (including campgrounds or backcountry use) or were staying at private

accommodations in Wawona, Yosemite West, or Foresta. Tran-Sierra traffic would also be exempted from the system's reservation requirement.

If implemented this system would limit the number of private vehicles entering the park for the day and would work in coordination with a shuttle bus system that would bring visitors to the park from gateway communities. The day-use system would be operated by a private company with an established track record in managing reservations. It would be funded by a service charge to visitors which would cover the cost of operating the system. An adjustment in the park entrance fee would be made to accommodate the service charge. To obtain a reservation a person would simply call a toll-free phone number. **With a reservation in hand, an individual would be assured of access to the park before he or she left home. We believe this proposed system is far better than forcing visitors to wait outside the park for intolerable lengths of time before they are allowed into the park.** Since the number of reservations would be limited there would be an economic incentive for private industry to create and operate shuttle buses from gateway communities. It is important to note that the vehicle reservation system would be aimed at reducing the numbers of private vehicles that enter the park, not the numbers of people that wish to enter the park. There would be no restriction on the number of shuttle buses that may enter the park. We are currently working with these companies and the communities to try to coordinate this transportation system. One way we are trying to help is through a modification to the park entrance fee. The Secretary of the Interior is considering a proposal to reduce the per-head entrance fee for shuttle bus riders if the shuttle bus

system is implemented this summer. The shuttle bus system would impact park resources to a far lesser degree than individual automobiles and should be encouraged. For this reason park admission should be less expensive for a person on a shuttle bus than in a private car.

The idea of limiting the number of vehicles that enter the park is advocated by the 1980 General Management Plan, and has been discussed for many years. The general public has repeatedly expressed support for this idea. However, concerns have been raised about this idea by individuals in our gateway communities. Before we would implement a long-term system we are committed to thorough public review.

Unfortunately the flood has forced us to consider implementing an emergency system this year. In doing so we have met with representatives from the gateway communities to listen to their concerns. Several individuals suggested that local hotels be given a pool of day use reservations to distribute to their customers. This would not be fair to all of the people who want to visit the park. Because Yosemite is a national park and owned by all taxpayers, reservations should be available on an equal basis to all, on a first-come, first-served basis.

We support a vehicle reservation system because it will enhance our ability to protect park resources, and lead to a better experience for park visitors. When coupled with a shuttle bus system, it will also provide business opportunities in the adjacent

communities.

The flooding has provided us with a field test to confirm the wisdom of the plans for the future of Yosemite. We now have a chance to make long-called-for and widely supported changes in Yosemite. Nature has already begun a process that people have only talked about. We want to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Early this week the administration submitted an emergency supplemental request that included \$176 million to repair the damage in Yosemite. Of this amount, \$30 million would be available contingent upon a budget request from the President to Congress. These funds would be set aside to give us time to work with the concessioner, **Yosemite Concession Services, to determine the amount of its contractual obligation to replace or repair concession facilities.**

Approximately \$14 million would also be provided from the FHWA Emergency Relief Program to repair damage to the National Park Service's roads in Yosemite as a result of the flooding. In addition, the administration proposes to provide \$21 million for a valley transportation system to be derived from 2 sources: a \$10 million offset with funds rescinded from a Department of Energy program and an allocation of \$11 million from the National Park Service's portion of the Federal Lands Highway Administration's program.

From the start we have been committed to opening the park as soon as possible. We continue to be concerned about the economic health of individuals and communities surrounding Yosemite. We want to restore facilities as quickly as possible. We want to do it right.

I would like to thank all of the employees of the National Park Service and all our partners, for their hard work and perseverance during and after the flood. The employees of Yosemite Concession Services were a great help throughout the past several months, and through the hardships, performed above and beyond the call of duty. I would also like to thank the State of California, particularly Caltrans and the Highway patrol for their assistance. **Special recognition must be given to California's Type I Incident Command Team, the NPS Type I All Risk Management Team, the Federal lands Highway Program and the Denver Service Center. I would also like to thank Madera and Mariposa Counties and the towns of Oakhurst, Mariposa, and Groveland for their help.**

Thank you again for this opportunity. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

MARIPOSA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MINUTE ORDER

TO: STEVE HAYES, VISITORS BUREAU DIRECTOR
FROM: MARGIE WILLIAMS, Clerk of the Board *MW*
SUBJECT: DAY USE RESERVATION SYSTEM

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA,

ADOPTED THIS Order on March 11, 1997

ACTION AND VOTE:

B) Request for Board Resolution/Position Clarification Regarding the National Park Fast-Tracking of the Day Use Reservation System (Continued from 2/25/97)

BOARD ACTION: The following persons provided input:

- Jerry Fischer/Yosemite Motels, stated he felt there are four issues facing the industry: 1) day use reservation (DUR) system and its impacts; 2) Highway 140 access and gate fees; 3) status of access for Highway 140 after September -- stated he feels the Board should take a position of what process would best serve the community; and 4) the on-going relationship with the Park should be strengthened.

- Neal O'donel-Browne, KOA Campground, stated he supports the comments provided by Jerry Fischer, advised that they are not accepting reservations currently because they cannot tell their customers what is happening with regards to access to the Park; existing reservations are being canceled; stated he feels the issue of access to the Park by bus is important; he feels citizens need to be involved in what is happening; and stated he feels the focus should be on getting results.

- Harold Wesley/Yosemite Westgate and Tourism Advisory Board member, asked about the results from the meeting held last week with the Park Superintendent and the Board subcommittee -- report was given later during this discussion.

- Ann Sparks/Chamber of Commerce, advised of the Chamber's letter to the Park Superintendent opposing the DUR system, and requesting that the Chamber be made a part of the process before any system is implemented.

- Jerry Fischer responded to Supervisor Reilly's question relative to the preferred option for Highway 140 access, advising that he felt that a two hour period in the morning for entrance and a period in the evening for exiting is preferred.

- Candy O'donel-Browne, KOA Campground, noted that longer afternoon/evening hours would allow people to come to Mariposa and patronize establishments; and expressed concern with the unknowns relative to access to the Park.

- Supervisor Balmain asked that other routes to the Park be considered (i.e., Highway 120) when Highway 140 is not accessible.

- Supervisors Parker and Reilly reported on their meeting last week with Superintendent Griffin and advised that it was a good meeting; however, issues are still

unresolved; the Park has contracted with a traffic consultant to look at the transit system within their confines; they are proposing an entrance fee for those using public transportation of \$6/person not to exceed \$12/family, tour bus fee of \$100 for this year and \$300 for 1998, and effective March 15th a vehicle fee of \$20; the Park proposes that staging areas tie in with Yosemite Concession Services; the DUR system was not discussed in any detail; with regards to Highway 140 -- the Park is proposing a 20-minute window period at 6:30 a.m. for up to 10 buses, with 2 to 3 buses designated for employees, and returning at 6:00 p.m., the Park intends to have Highway 140 open May 23rd to September 2nd for two lanes of unrestricted travel, and then close it again in September with a two-hour (6:30 to 8:30) window period for travel in the morning and a return period in the evening while they are working on a permanent fix of the seven bad curves/areas, and continue with this schedule until May 29, 1998.

- Steve Hayes reviewed recommendations, and discussion was held.

- (M)Parker, (S)Balmain, Res. 97-76 adopted: 1) opposing the fast-track implementation of the DUR system in the immediate future and offering to work with the Park Service for future implementation so that it can be a viable project; 2) supporting an incentive for public transit, such as a \$2.00 entrance fee per person; 3) taking a position that Highway 140 should be open to all traffic by use of a pilot car system every day of the week for a two-hour period in the morning and evening, with a suggestion of keeping the Highway open until 8:00 a.m.; 4) lobbying for long-range funding for a transit and transportation system, whether it be in support of YARTS or another mechanism; and 5) requesting that a meeting be scheduled with the Park Service officials that have the authority to make decisions and provide answers with County representatives, our Congressman and State Senators or their representatives, and with representatives from the lodging industry and Yosemite Concession Services and VIA Adventures. Further discussion was held relative to asking that the Park participate in the transit funding and on-going participation and authority of the Board's subcommittee. Ann Sparks asked that the Chamber of Commerce be included in the meeting process. Jan Hamilton, Board of Realtors, stated she supports the proposed action. Motion was amended, agreeable with maker and second, to clarify in item 3 that this period commences March 15th and continues until Highway 140 is open to unrestricted traffic; item 4 was amended to state that the Board resolves to continue to support public transit alternatives; and item 5 was amended to include our legislative delegation/Ayes: Unanimous. Supervisor Reilly requested that a letter be sent to Superintendent Griffin thanking her for the meeting last week and advising of this further action taken as a result of that meeting, with the letter to be copied as appropriate -- Board concurred. Further consideration of the subcommittee's on-going participation and authority was continued to be scheduled on a future agenda. Ann Sparks asked for clarification of the motion with regards to participation by the Chamber of Commerce. It was noted that no meeting has been scheduled at this time.

cc: Supervisor Reilly, Board Subcommittee
 Supervisor Parker, Board Subcommittee
 Janet Hogan, County Administrative Officer
 Jeff Green, County Counsel
 Ed Johnson, Planning Director
 Mike Edwards, Public Works Director
 File

GARY C. FRAKER, PRESIDENT
YOSEMITE CONCESSION SERVICES

YOSEMITE CONCESSION SERVICES
FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR TESTIMONY BEFORE
THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS
MARCH 22, 1997

Disclosure Data on NPS Contracts since October 1, 1994

Special shuttle during March 1995 Highway 140 Road Closure	8,928
Meals and Showers for firefighters during 1996 Ackerson fire	64,492
Meals and Showers for White Wolf Soil Remediation in 1996	4,183
Special shuttles during 1997 incident. Amount to date	67,098
Lodging during 1997 incident. Amount to date	157,431
Meals during 1997 incident. Amount to date	152,295
Standby tow truck driver during 1997 incident	2,720

Impacts of Flooding on Yosemite Concession Services

Yosemite Concession Services Corporation (YCS), the primary concessioner in Yosemite National Park, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Delaware North Companies of Buffalo, New York. YCS provides a variety of guest services to the park's 4 million annual visitors including, hotels, restaurants, transportation, sightseeing tours, conferences, recreation, and merchandise.

YCS's operations are regulated by 150 governmental and private agencies, including the National Park Service, the National Transportation Safety Board, the California Public Utilities Commission, the Structural Pest Control Board and Mariposa County. The contract under which YCS is operating is considered revolutionary for park concessions notably for the higher revenues it will generate for the park and federal government. The National Park Service estimates as much as 20% of revenues generated in the park will be returned to the government as compared to .075% under the previous contract.

CONTRACT: 15 years, began Oct. 1, 1993

PRESIDENT: Gary Fraker

STAFFING:	Preflood Summer	1900	Post Flood Summer	~1300
	Preflood Winter	900	Post Flood Winter	?

OPERATIONS:

LODGING

Before the flood, YCS operated 1785 guest rooms ranging from rustic tent cabins operated seasonally in wilderness areas to the impressive National Historic Landmark Ahwahnee hotel which is popular year-round. The average daily stay is just under 2 nights.

Most accommodations are sold out a year in advance for the summer months, weekends and holidays. Reservations are handled off-site at a central reservations office in Fresno, California. Reservations are accepted 366 days in advance of arrival for most accommodations. The demand for some accommodations (the High Sierra Camps) is so high, they are assigned by lottery. Our reservations office staff of 16 clerks will respond to as many as 2,500 calls per day during peak season. Of the 1,785 rooms in the park, 684 (38%) have private bathrooms. The remainder have shared or central bath facilities.

Yosemite Valley:

The Ahwahnee:

	99 hotel rooms
	<u>24 cottage rooms</u>
Total	123 rooms

Yosemite Lodge:

64 standard hotel rooms
 16 rooms without bath
 100 cabins with bath
89 cabins without bath
 Total 495 rooms

Curry Village:

18 standard hotel rooms
 103 cabins with private bath
 80 cabins without bath
427 unheated canvas cabins
 Total 628 rooms

Housekeeping Camp:

266 units (16 were removed this year per CSP)

Wawona:

50 rooms with bath
54 rooms without bath
 Total 104 rooms

High Country:

White Wolf: 28 cabins and canvas cabins
 Tuolumne Meadows: 69 canvas cabins
 High Sierra Camps: 204 beds in 56 canvas cabins

Post Flood Lodging Impacts:**Overall Impact:**

- The flood has effectively eliminated 19% to 23% (330 to 400 rooms) from our park wide inventory. This has multiple effects. It reduces potential earnings, workforce, and contributions to the Mariposa County tax base and the park Capital Improvement Fund (CIF).
- At this time of year, our reservations office would be answering thousands of calls a day--guests trying to book rooms for the spring and summer. Since 250 rooms that are normally available and booked are out of service, our reservations agents are busy placing calls to guests with reservations to help them adjust to the changes. 200,000 guests will be impacted this year alone.
- Hundreds of thousands of dollars in refunds will be processed for those guests, not to mention for meeting planners and tour operators.
- YCS expects that planned revenues will be reduced between 30% and 40%.
- The expected workforce will be 70% of pre-flood levels.
- Additional impacts have yet to be determined in the high country.
- The GMP called for a similar parkwide reduction in accommodations, though the bulk of the units that were slated for removal under that plan, roughly 50% (150 rooms) of the facilities to be removed were seasonal units, unheated, and without plumbing. Under the present situation, all of the rooms that are out of service and slated for relocation are heated for year-round use and enjoy a 92% occupancy rate.

The Ahwahnee:

No impact to the facility. Refurbishment work was delayed due to the park closure.

Yosemite Lodge:

	Flooded Rooms
	51* out of 245 deluxe hotel rooms
	41 out of 64 standard hotel rooms
	16 out of 16 rooms without bath
	100 out of 100 cabins with bath
	<u>89 out of 89 cabins without bath</u>
Total	297 out of 495 rooms (51 were refurbished for use)
Net Loss	245 out of 495 rooms

- 60% (297 rooms) of the property's inventory flooded.
- 10% (51) of the 297 flooded rooms, located in the newest and highest priced (\$101 peak, \$85 non-peak) facilities at the Lodge, were refurbished and will be used in 1997.
- 50% (246 rooms) are currently off the market and slated for relocation out of the floodplain. The earliest we would be permitted to use them, if at all, would be May 1.

Immediate Impact:

- The closed rooms represent 20% of our park wide inventory.
- The impacted cabins are booked to capacity between mid March and November with a year-round occupancy of 92%.
- The loss of those rooms will affect 200,000 people per year.
- The cabins without bath (\$56 peak, \$43 non-peak) are our most economically priced, heated accommodations.
- The cabins with bath (\$72 peak, \$66 non-peak) are our most economical facilities with indoor plumbing.
- The cabins without bath are utilized by Yosemite Institute for housing their students in Yosemite Valley.

Long Range Impact:

- The current proposal calls for the impacted cabins to be relocated out of the floodplain. Realistically, that translates to 246 rooms being off the market for at least a year, probably two. When considering plans to build, it is reasonable to assume that new facilities would be built before old ones were taken off the market.
- Even when the new facilities are built, the Concession Services Plan calls for an 11% reduction at Yosemite Lodge (55 rooms), which mean we will have a smaller revenue base when all facilities are operational again.

Curry Village:

- Minimal damage to facilities.

Immediate Impact:

- Most of the impact will be lost revenue since we will need to use facilities for housing employees. We anticipate that room inventories at Curry would be reduced between 80 and 150 units.

- Between October and May, the rooms used by employees would all be heated accommodations, the most popular at Curry Village.
- From May to October, we anticipate using unheated tent cabins to house our employees.

Long Range Impact:

- Our revenue base will be reduced between 13% and 25% depending on housing needs for our employees.

Housekeeping Camp:

266 units

250 of 282 units (89%), one laundromat, ten restrooms, and two shower houses were flooded two to ten feet deep. Debris and sand deposition was extensive. 16 units were removed as directed in the CSP. The remaining 266 units will be used this season.

Immediate Impact:

- Crews are working around the clock to dig out the debris, wash out each unit and set up canvas, tables. Projected opening is April 18.

Long Range Impact:

- The CSP goal is to reduce the number of units to 232, which will reduce the lodging revenue base.
- The area was slated for a complete redesign.
- The heavy snowpack may result in additional flooding this spring right about the time we are scheduled to open.

Wawona Hotel:

Minimal impact.

Immediate Impact:

- The hotel served as the alternate campus for Yosemite Institute midweek during the closure.

Long Range Impact:

- Anticipated business levels are difficult to predict given the uncertain nature of park visitation.

High Sierra Operations:

Full impact unknown. Season could be delayed or cancelled due to excessive snowpack.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

YCS operates twenty-three food and beverage services ranging from seasonal snack stands to the fine dining of The Ahwahnee hotel. In the course of a year, the facilities combine to serve over 2.5 million meals annually to Yosemite visitors.

Immediate Impact:

- The flood resulted in the total cancellation of The Chefs' Holidays, a four week culinary series held at The Ahwahnee which is designed to encourage visitation in the off-season. Well-known chefs and culinary experts are invited to instruct. Guests attend free tasting and cooking seminars that lead up to five course banquets prepared by the Guest Chef. This heavily booked event was marketed through thousands of dollars in advertising and promotions.
- Construction on the \$2 million dollar upgrade of the Mt. Room and 4 Seasons restaurant was delayed for months.

Long Range Impact:

- The bulk of our food service staff live outside the park along the route 140 corridor. The poor condition of the highway and lack of efficient, economical transport makes it nearly impossible for this segment of our work force to report for their evening shifts.
- The loss of 300 to 400 guest rooms and over 400 campsites will greatly reduce projected business levels in the restaurants.
- Most core operations will be open this summer. Outlying food service units will open only as business levels justify their operation.

RETAIL

YCS operates six grocery stores, ten gift shops, six sport shops and an assortment of vending machines. From fresh produce to camping supplies, functional clothing and unique park collectibles, our operations try to anticipate every park visitor's need. Under the new contract, the Retail Division worked closely with the National Park Service to develop a gift mission statement and recently refurbished The Ahwahnee Gift Shop. Other shops currently under development include The Nature Shop (replaces The Indian Shop) and Yosemite Kids (replaces Degans Nature Crafts).

Immediate Impact:

- All retail operations in the park shut down with the exception of the Village Store which served the remaining members of the Yosemite Community.

Long Range Impact:

- The reduction in campsites and overnight accommodations, and anticipated day-use restrictions will have a negative effect on sales.
- Core operations are expected to be open, but outlying shops will open only as business levels justify their operation.

GUEST RECREATION & TRANSPORTATION

YCS offers year-round recreational opportunities from hiking, horseback rides, rafting, guided tours, biking and rock climbing in the summer to downhill and cross country skiing, ice skating and snowshoeing in the winter. The Guest Recreation division of YCS operates three stables, the internationally-known Yosemite Mountaineering School, and California's first downhill ski area, Badger Pass. The Transportation division operates the innovative and free Yosemite Valley Shuttle Bus, garage, four service stations, and a variety of guided tours including two-hour, half-day and full day trips.

Overall Impact:

- One of the most frequent questions we're asked these days is "What can we do in the park?" Unfortunately, the flood has left more questions than answers.
- Many trails and bridges were destroyed which reduces the recreational opportunities of our potential guests.
- Our stables operation will not open in Yosemite Valley or Wawona this year, and due to the heavy snowpack, plans for the Tuolumne Stables this season are uncertain.
- The rafting operation is also a question mark with many trees now obstructing the river channel.
- We will not be able to offer bicycle rentals until April 1st due to damage to the bike paths.

Stables:

400 head of stock in use at three locations (Yosemite Valley, Wawona and Tuolumne Meadows). Two-hour, half day, full-day, four-day, six-day and custom trips are offered and the stock also haul supplies and recyclables in and out of the famed High Sierra Camps.

Immediate Impact:

- Floodwaters and rockslides destroyed the trail and both bridges on the Mirror Lake loop eliminating the only approved route for two hour rides in Yosemite Valley. Combined with the fact that the half day and full day route was compromised last July by the Happy Isles rockslide and additional damage to bridges during this flood, and the shortage of employee housing, the stables will not open in Yosemite Valley or Wawona.
- The saddle operation in Tuolumne Meadows is subject to the whims of the weather. An above average snowpack remains in the high country and trail conditions have not been determined.
- 40 employee housing bed spaces at the Yosemite Valley stable will be used to help offset the shortage the flood created.

Long Range Impact:

- Over a year ago, YCS requested permission to close the Yosemite Valley and Wawona Stables due to safety and liability concerns. The decision is pending from the National Park Service.

Badger Pass:

Located 22 miles from Yosemite Valley at an elevation of 7,200 feet is California's original ski area, Badger Pass which opened in 1935. It has grown to a modern facility with five lifts (one triple chair, three double chairs and one surface) and nine runs on 85 acres (rated 35% beginner, 50% intermediate, 15% advanced), a day lodge, full rental shop, two fast food restaurants and sport shop.

Known as a terrific family ski area, Badger has a reputation in the industry as "the" place to learn to ski in California. The ski school, also the first in California, began in 1928 in Yosemite Valley and is headed by Nic Fiore, a veteran of 48 years of teaching at Badger.

The area also features the Yosemite Cross-Country Ski School which utilizes 40 km of groomed track and 90 miles of marked trail for lessons, snow camping and trans-Sierra trips.

Additional activities at the ski area include snowboarding, ranger-led snowshoe walks and NASTAR Ski Racing, a recreational slalom race designed for skiers of all abilities. Free shuttle buses take the skiers to Badger Pass from Curry Village, Yosemite Lodge and The Ahwahnee.

Immediate Impact:

- The bulk of the ski area's business is derived from overnight guests in Yosemite Valley. With those accommodations out of service through mid-March, YCS explored other arrangements including working with businesses in the gateway communities to reopen the area for day skiers. One of the greatest challenges was to find suitable and comparably priced housing for the 60 to 100 employees needed to run the operation. Despite everyone's best intentions, even if housing had been identified, projected lift ticket sales were 20% of what was needed to justify Badger's downhill operation and prevent further financial losses (estimated to be an additional \$250,000 on the \$5 million YCS was losing in revenue per month).
- YCS had invested thousands of dollars in promotional campaigns to generate business for the ski area including radio, magazine, newspaper and television ads.
- Cross-country operations resumed after temporarily shutting down. This was possible because of the relatively small size of the staff and the fact that most of the employees provided their own housing.

Long Range Impact:

- The 246 rooms lost at Yosemite Lodge were the most popular and economical—the cornerstone to our winter marketing efforts. A family of four could stay in a cabin with bath for \$66/night, and each would obtain a lift ticket at the ski area on the YCS midweek "Ski Free when you stay with us" program which successfully filled our rooms in the winter months. The loss of those facilities puts the success of that program in doubt.
- While Badger Pass has a loyal customer base, the long range impact of an extended closure may have significantly reduced the potential for future business.

Transportation:

Yosemite Transportation operates a year-round fleet of twelve shuttle buses, twelve tour buses, seven open-air trams in Yosemite Valley, seven trams at the Big Trees and seasonally adds an additional six shuttle buses to serve guests skiing at Badger Pass. Highlighting the system are the Yosemite Valley, Wawona and Tuolumne Meadows shuttle buses which provide free and frequent transportation in busy areas of the park thereby encouraging Yosemite guests to park their vehicles and reduce traffic congestion. The buses are funded by add-ons to hotel and restaurant rates.

In the course of a year the system ridership for tours and shuttles is in excess of 4 million people, the bulk of which ride the free shuttles. All told, the company's operational fleet of cars, trucks, buses and miscellaneous other vehicles is approximately 200.

The company has experimented with alternative fuels such as soy/diesel combinations and presently has a fleet of four electric trucks. This experience with electric and alternative fuel vehicles has proven especially valuable since the National Park Service acquired two, electric buses in September of 1995 to augment the present diesel fleet. Two additional electrics will be delivered this spring.

Immediate Impact:

- The entire fleet of Valley Floor and Mariposa Grove tour trams, parked near Camp 6, were submerged under 10 feet of water causing extensive damage. Essentially, each tractor is being completely rebuilt from the block up.

Long Range Impact:

- It is likely that any transportation plan proposed will need to integrate with our current operations, potentially requiring YCS to locate additional equipment, drivers and housing for the drivers in an already restricted environment.

EMPLOYEE HOUSING:

YCS provides on-site housing for the majority (approximately 1,250) of its employees ranging from seasonal housing in canvas cabins to dormitories, apartments and houses.

Probably the single most important determinant of our capabilities to serve the public is the quantity and type of housing we have available for our employees. Put simply, housing is the constraint of the workforce.

Immediate Impact:

- 36% of our inventory (448 bedspaces) were lost in the flooding.
- 54% of the facilities (120 canvas cabins) that were lost were considered our primary seasonal housing. Many were heated.
- 46% of the losses (208 bedspaces) were year-round, heated rooms.
- Employees were moved to guest accommodations at Curry Village (80 cabins without bath and 20 cabins with bath).
- The area in El Portal, on the south side of the Merced River, identified for future YCS employee housing suffered extensive damage.

Yosemite Lodge:

- 30 Cabins, 68 rooms in 5 dormitories, 48 canvas tent cabins, 2 showerhouses were flooded from two to ten feet.

Camp 6:

- 80 canvas tent cabins, 1 office, 2 kitchens, 2 showerhouses flooded two to ten feet.
- Extensive damage to facilities, vehicles and contractor trailers

Long Range Impact:

- Between 80 and 150 units at Curry Village will be utilized as employee housing, which reduces our revenue base.
- We have purchased 82 modular units to supplement our housing shortage. The units will likely be sited in the parking lot on the west side of Yosemite Lodge.
- We hope to salvage propane heaters from Camp 6 and Ozone housing areas to install in 59 unheated tents at Boystown, thereby extending the duration of their use.
- Both seasonal housing areas that were damaged were identified as being in the floodplain and long range NPS plans call for them to be relocated.

- The Annex Dorms and cabins had not experienced flooding previously, and in discussions regarding employee housing, had been considered a possible site for expansion. The flooding has altered expectations for their future use.
- The future of the proposed housing area in El Portal is in doubt because of the extensive damage it sustained.

Human Resources:

YCS traditionally employed 1900 people in peak season and 900 the winter months. Loss of employee housing, fewer customers to serve and more difficult transportation translates to a greatly reduced workforce.

Immediate Impact:

- Our employees suffered great personal loss. 250 lost everything but the clothes on their back. The majority of those employees were hourly workers paid between \$6 and \$8 an hour and most were uninsured.
- Compounding their personal losses was the loss of their jobs. In less than a week, our staff went from 1,100 employees to 100.
- 750 employees have returned to work. Others are still waiting, and some, we won't have jobs for. We estimate that our peak summer workforce will be about 1,300 employees, 70% of normal.
- Those that do return, in many cases, are faced with a reduction in the quality of their housing. Nearly 450 employee bed spaces, almost half of an already rare commodity were destroyed. The refugees embarked on a series of moves that initially took them to guest accommodations, and then mandatory evacuation. All but 100 of our staff left the park with no idea of when they would return.
- Their soaked possessions were rotting in the damp rooms requiring our housing staff to videotape the contents, discard perishables and collect and inventory any property of perceived value. That property is now stored in 6 semi trailers awaiting collection by its owners.
- Employees that owned their own home or rented property outside the park were faced with missed mortgage and rent payments.

Long Range Impacts:

- Due to the uncertain condition of route 140, employees that would have been available to us as commuters no longer can depend on that as an option, reducing our labor pool.
- Commuting employees are faced with potentially longer commutes and much higher costs to get to work.
- The psychological impacts of the flood have been significant as well, both for those who lost possessions and those who didn't.
- Approximately 200 years of management experience was lost when employees found other work or decided that the situation in the park was too tenuous to return.

3/22/97

**EASTERN MADERA COUNTY
REPORT OF ECONOMIC IMPACT DUE TO FLOOD CLOSURE OF
YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK
January, 1997**

Prepared by: Noreen McDonald
Executive Director
Eastern Madera County Chamber of Commerce

Peggy Kukulus
Executive Director
Yosemite Sierra Visitors Bureau

On January 2, 1997, Yosemite National Park was closed due to heavy rains which occurred in December, 1996 and January, 1997, causing extreme flooding and subsequent damage. The closure remained in effect until January 22, 1997, when the Highway 41 entrance to Yosemite was reopened, to the Wawona Store. All other access to the Park is restricted to limited personnel and some media. Projections for the complete reopening of Yosemite remains unknown as infrastructure repairs to campgrounds, roads, trails, sewer lines and other facilities continue. The devastation to the surrounding communities has also been tremendous. The following projected revenue losses are based on the lodging occupancy rates, which are approximately 40% down from what would have been a "normal" 4th quarter.

According to the Madera County Tax Collector's office, the Transient Occupancy Tax (T.O.T.) for Fiscal Year 1996/97 to date is \$981,070. This figure does not include the last (4th) quarter. The projected overall T.O.T. for FY96/97 was \$1,060,000.

By comparing 1995's T.O.T. 4th quarter figures, it is estimated that the 1996/97 4th quarter's lodging revenues would have generated \$899,701.22, which translates into \$80,973.11 in T.O.T. Currently, the lodging properties are reporting a 40% drop in business, which equals a loss of \$359,880 in the 4th quarter alone and lost T.O.T. at \$32,389.

Other impacts to the tourism in the Eastern Madera county area are equally significant:

- At an average rate of \$50 per night, a loss of \$360,000 in lodging revenues equals an approximate loss of 7200 room nights. At an average of 2.8 people per traveling party, the loss of 7200 room nights means a loss of approximately 20,160 tourists.
- According to past tourism trends in the area, 80% of the travelers are considered to be "domestic" (from within the United States), which would equal 16,128 "lost" visitors. They would generally spend \$57 each per day in the local area, excluding lodging. 16,128 visitors x \$57 each equals \$919,296 in lost revenues for the area.
- 20% of the area's visitors are international and spend \$132 per day, excluding lodging. This means that 4,032 international visitors are not spending a total of \$532,224 in the local area.

The "multiplier" effect of the lack of tourism dollars in the area is staggering - based on a figure of 7 times, the estimated loss to the overall local economy could be as high as \$12,680,640, or \$140,896 per day over a 90-day period.



Pete Wilson
Governor

Julie Meier Wright
Secretary

CALIFORNIA TRADE AND COMMERCE AGENCY

March 22, 1997

The Honorable James V. Hansen, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Hansen,

The California Trade and Commerce Agency, Division of Tourism, acknowledges Yosemite National Park as one of the state's most renowned and cherished attractions. We consider it one of California's most memorable icons, and recognize it as a world treasure that deserves special protection.

We appreciate the efforts underway to repair flood damages and restore public access to the Park, and express thanks to Superintendent BJ Griffin for her considerate response to affected California communities in the aftermath of this disaster. Fortunately, not all of the consequences of the flood were negative. Nature has washed away facilities that were planned to be phased out anyway. Nevertheless, we are very concerned about the suddenness of their removal and the effect this will have on California visitors, communities and businesses that are dependent upon access to Yosemite National Park.

Our two principal concerns today regard the eventual restorations plans and their implementation. First, we urge that in planning for immediate Park operations every consideration be given to the impact on surrounding communities and counties. Communities along each access route to the Park have had close economic ties to Yosemite even before its establishment as a National Park, serving as a source of supplies, guide services, emergency services, food and lodging, public services, and communication with the outside world. Many decisions that are well within the discretion of Park management can affect thousands of jobs and businesses in outlying regions as well important local services that are supported by tax revenues generated by people traveling to and from the National Park.

Our purpose in testifying is not to tell the Park Service how to manage its facility. Our emphasis here is that since the Park Services affects the lives of so many beyond Park boundaries, the needs of the surrounding communities must be taken into account. We feel that by working and planning in consultation with these communities, their needs can be accommodated without significant detrimental impacts on sensitive resources.

Second, we are concerned about the effect of this disaster on businesses which arrange and facilitate travel bookings, such as tour and motorcoach operators. The travel and tourism system depends on good communication and advance planning on

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95814-3520

the part of numerous parties. Booking contracts are typically made two years or more ahead of the actual travel season. If this system is interrupted, disrupted, or appears unpredictable, tour operators could very well decide to book elsewhere, resulting in significant economic losses to the entire state. This is because Yosemite is often a key itinerary element in a multi-destination tour. Operators will not want to risk developing and promoting a tour which includes Yosemite unless access to the Park can be guaranteed. If these advance guarantees cannot be given, through a system of blocking advance reservations for rooms and park admissions, communities and businesses in the immediate vicinity and many hundreds of miles away, which otherwise would have been on a 6 or 14 day California itinerary, may become victims of the cancellation of these tours.

We support the need for controlled access. Our concern is for how it is implemented. There needs to be coherently, considerately, and consistently-applied policy, that will give assurance to hotels, motels, and motorcoach operators that their guests will have reasonable access to Yosemite.

Sincerely,



Tiffany Urness
Senior Tourism Specialist
California Trade and Commerce Agency
Division of Tourism

cc: John Poimiroo
Deputy Secretary/Director of Tourism
California Trade and Commerce Agency
Division of Tourism

San Francisco Chronicle

THE VOICE OF THE WEST

SUNDAY
717

EDITORIALS

Yosemite's Flood — A Chance for Renewal

THE NEW YEAR'S flood that swept Yosemite National Park's valley floor and closed the park to the public was a stern warning from nature that could be a blessing in disguise.

During the first three days of January, the Merced River, swollen by warm rain and heavy snowmelt, raged through the scenic valley ripping up and undermining roads, washing out bridges as it swamped cabins, campgrounds and parking lots.

The flood ruined the park's sewage system, contaminated the drinking water and generally raised havoc with structures unwisely built on the river's flood plain in defiance of nature and common sense.

The flood offered a rare chance to save Yosemite

It was a humbling reminder that humans are puny interlopers, and man-made structures and infrastructure are small and fragile before the relentless natural forces that gouged and sculpted Yosemite for the past 60 million years and continue today.

On a recent sunny day, we toured the valley to survey the flood damage by truck and helicopter courtesy of the National Park Service. With the park closed to visitors until March 15, the valley appears nearly deserted and serene.

The scene on the ground was a muddy mess, with roads blocked and hundreds of small tent cabins, motel rooms and employee residences wrecked or bearing obvious signs of flood damage. Even the undamaged buildings are eyesores, except for the venerable, stone and timber Ahwahnee Hotel, the only work of human construction that enriches the valley.

But from aloft in the helicopter, the valley, without the usual crowding and clamor, looks like the Yosemite celebrated by naturalist John Muir in his reverential prose poems and made world-famous by Ansel Adams' stunning photographs.

The sun shone on the majestic bulk of El Capitan, rising 3593 feet from the valley floor and said to be the world's largest monolith, sunlight ricocheted down the valley, setting snow-dusted Half Dome aglow and illuminating Glacier Point, Sentinel Rock and the sheer granite bulwarks that soar above the park in imperious indifference. Yosemite Falls, Bridalveil, Vernal and Nevada Falls cascaded down canyon walls delighting the eye and lifting the spirit.

"No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite. Every rock in its walls seem to glow with life," Muir wrote in 1868. His description of Yosemite's dominating peaks, domes and crags remain as accurate and moving today as they were then.

Most of the park's 1,169 square miles remain as pristine as they were when Yosemite became a national park in 1890, but the seven-square-mile valley below is in danger of being ruined by its very popularity. With 4.1 million visitors a year, Yosemite has long since reached a saturation point.

The wilderness experience sought by tour-

ists from around the world is often degraded or lost altogether in traffic jams, crowds, air pollution, commerce and noise. On peak holidays — Memorial Day, The Fourth of July and Labor Day — at 27,000 visitors, most of them in cars, jam the valley and clog the roads, spewing exhaust as they compete for the park's 5000-or-so parking spaces.

Realizing that a natural treasure of incalculable value was being overrun and debased, the Park Service in 1980 — after much study and public comment — produced a General Management Plan (GMP), an ambitious blueprint to restore the park and preserve its natural ecosystems.

In essence, the plan calls for reclaiming the park from commercial, maintenance and administrative uses to allow nature to prevail. It also outlines ways to sharply reduce traffic and parking, which are the key elements to restoring and preserving Yosemite.

"The intent of the National Park Service is to remove all automobiles from Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove and to redirect development to the periphery of the park and beyond," the GMP authors said.

The plan has languished for 17 years of budget shortages and lack of political will, but the flood crisis and park closure have refocused national attention on Yosemite and created a unique opportunity for funding and action to preserve the valley.

Park officials reckon it will take about \$178 million to repair the flood damage and restore the valley to a more natural state. To their credit, Congressmen George Radanovich, R-Fresno, and John Doolittle, R-Roseville, have acted quickly to introduce the Yosemite Restoration Act (HR 528), to pay for the project.

Park Superintendent Barbara "B.J." Griffin says the restoration effort aims to relocate flood-damaged buildings, campgrounds and parking lots beyond the flood plain, cut back automobile traffic and "reduce the human footprint" in the valley.

As chief steward of one of the most popular of America's 374 national parks, Griffin has the difficult — some say contradictory — dual mission of protecting the park and its biotic richness while making it as available as possible to the public.

Jay Watson, of the Wilderness Society, argues that automobile traffic is the "single greatest threat" to the park. The answer, he says — and many environmentalists agree — would be a regional transportation system that moves people around the park in a shuttle bus system operating out of "gateway" communities outside Yosemite's boundaries.

A poll by the National Parks and Conservation Association indicated that 83 percent of Californians approve the plan to limit private vehicles and require day-use reservations for anyone driving into the park.

The flood has given Congress and the Clinton administration a once-in-a-century opportunity to take aggressive action to restore and save Yosemite's wild beauty for future generations. They should act immediately.

January 23, 1997

LOS ANGELES TIMES EDITORIALS

Opportunity in Disaster

Flood opens the door to improvement in management of Yosemite

National Park Service officials should take advantage of the silver lining in the rain clouds that produced record flooding in Yosemite. The havoc wreaked by the Merced River, which runs through the park's valley, has also created an opportunity for change and renewal.

Since it became a national park in 1890, Yosemite has become steadily more popular—and more crowded. Last year's 4.1 million visitors intensified the already extreme pressure on park facilities, especially those campgrounds, concessions and roads in Yosemite Valley. This dynamic has made it increasingly difficult for Park Service officials to maintain the splendor of the valley, which is only a mile wide and seven miles long.

The havoc began after warm rain fell around New Year's on snowpack in the park's upper reaches and produced far more runoff over Yosemite Falls than the river could accommodate. The worst flooding in recent memory inundated the valley, once a glacial lake. Water covered campgrounds, upended park buildings and vehicles, washed out major roads, obliterated popular beaches, forged new channels and flooded meadows.

Although Yosemite's southern entrance opened Wednesday, Yosemite Valley will be closed to the public until at least March as the park staff contemplates how to deal with damage estimated at \$50 million.

The opportunity lies in what comes next. Park officials, along with lawmakers and the Interior Department, are weighing whether to simply repair the damage or whether it is time to implement the bulk of the master plan drawn for the park 17 years ago. Indeed it is time.

Shrinking and concentrating visitor services in the valley, says park superintendent B.J. Griffin, should prevent future flood damage while mitigating problems caused by congestion and deepening visitors' experience of

nature. The 1980 master plan, drafted when crowding already was onerous, suggested keeping the valley's lodgings intact but removing about one-quarter of the remaining buildings, moving worker accommodations and offices out of the valley, relocating campgrounds and outdoor facilities away from the river and letting more than 100 acres of riverfront and meadows revert to nature.

In an effort to meet the master plan's broad goal of reducing congestion, some campgrounds have been closed over the last five years and incoming traffic has been delayed at times.

The result of more of these sorts of efforts would be immediately obvious in cleaner air over the valley, in views unobstructed by knots of fast food stands and motor homes and in the expansion of such naturalist activities as hiking. Yosemite now has a chance to reclaim and preserve more of its priceless natural beauty and give its visitors greater opportunity to enjoy that splendor. Such have been the primary missions of the national parks since 1872 when Congress established Yellowstone as the first.

In 1896, the naturalist John Muir wrote that "thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers but as fountains of life."

A century later, Yosemite superintendent Griffin faces a tough sell, both locally and in Washington, in seeking to reinvigorate Muir's vision at the park. But should she succeed—and we hope she does—Yosemite could be a model for the many other national parks facing the dilemmas created by our need to go home to mountain wildness.



Nature's splendor, nature's fury: employee quarters upset by flood.

January 18, 1997

San Francisco Examiner

Opportunity at Yosemite

Extensive flood damage gives National Park Service planners the chance to move many facilities outside the scenic valley

RARELY would visitors find Yosemite Valley so breathtakingly spectacular — the booming of torrential waterfalls from snow-tipped cliffs, the merciless roar of the super-swollen Merced River and the stunning quietude of vacant roads, empty parking lots and shuttered tourist facilities.

That's nature's first little joke. Because of damage from the New Year floods, gates are closed for at least the next month at Yosemite National Park (annual visitation, about 4 million). Except for rangers, repair crews and maintenance workers, it's almost as silently lovely as when Frederick Law Olmstead visited in 1864.

Largely responsible for New York's Central Park and San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, Olmstead wanted ordinary people to enjoy the glories of nature. His Yosemite report is described by one historian as "the first carefully reasoned statement to support the setting aside of great scenic areas for public ownership and enjoyment."

That year, the valley was declared pub-

lic domain, the first such park in the United States.

Olmstead wrote: "The first point to be kept in mind then is the preservation and maintenance as exactly as is possible of the natural scenery; . . . prevention of all constructions markedly inharmonious with the scenery or which would unnecessarily obscure, distort or detract from the dignity of the scenery."

By eerie pre-flood coincidence, the Park Service already had issued tentative plans to reduce vehicle parking (and, thus, auto traffic). Expected in February were further plans to relocate riverside campgrounds, get rid of some roadways and move employee housing and administrative quarters outside the park.

The floods did \$10 million in damage, wrecking the sewage system, damaging employee housing and sending hundreds of campground picnic tables down the river.

Jay Thomas Watson, regional director of the Wilderness Society, says, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to jump-start that program of restoration."

That's nature's second little joke. Calamity became the mother of opportunity.

The New York Times

Founded in 1851

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 ARTHUR OCHS SULLZBERGER, Publisher 1963-1997

EDITORIALS/LETTERS

Nature's Agenda in Yosemite

Nature has rude ways of complaining when people step too heavily on it. A devastating mudslide on a California hill announces that somebody built too many houses there. A ruinous flood in the Pacific Northwest proclaims that somebody cut down too many trees. When human beings overload the system, the system usually strikes back.

The floods that ravaged Yosemite National Park last month sent much the same message. The Merced River jumped its banks, uprooting cabins, burying parking lots, tearing up the park's sewer system and blocking its roads with mud and rocks. This was the river's way of saying that four million visitors a year are perhaps more than the park can handle, and that the shops, restaurants and parking lots that cater to them should never have been built in the Yosemite Valley flood plain to begin with.

The park will not reopen for months. But it will be worth the inconvenience if officials use this crisis to push ahead with long-delayed plans to restore the park's natural habitat. It will also be worth it if Congress finally realizes that the National Park Service simply does not have the resources to carry out two difficult and often competing mandates — preserving the environmental quality of the parks, while keeping them accessible to the public.

Many of America's 374 national parks are in varying stages of decay. Roger Kennedy, the outgoing head of the Park Service, estimates the maintenance and repair backlog at \$5.6 billion. Yosemite's infrastructure — roads, bridges, government buildings, shops and campsites — was actually in decent shape until the flood. In ecological terms, however,

the park was a mess. The daily tide of cars, trucks and recreational vehicles not only polluted the air but made the mile-long trip through Yosemite Village seem like a Manhattan rush hour.

Although Park Service officials have long known that something has to be done to restore the balance between tourists and nature, a master plan devised in 1980 to do just that went nowhere. January's flood has given this plan new life. With enough money, Park Service officials say, they could move parking lots and housing outside the park, shift campgrounds from the flood plain to higher ground, redirect roads to ease the traffic, restore meadows and return the banks of the Merced to their rightful occupants, riparian animals.

These ideas dovetail neatly with the Clinton Administration's larger strategy to limit the impact of visitors on all the national parks. In recent weeks, for example, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt has announced plans to restrict noisy commercial tourist flights over the Grand Canyon and to eliminate 80 percent of the automobile traffic along its rim by using a light-rail system and buses.

Repairing the damage in Yosemite, and making the alterations necessary to give nature a fighting chance, may cost more than \$170 million, or one-seventh of the Park Service's annual budget. Since all 374 national parks have some claim on that budget, a supplemental appropriation by Congress, spread over several years, may be necessary. Congress has starved the national parks for years. In Yosemite, nature has provided a rare opportunity to set things right.

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LOS ANGELES TIMES EDITORIALS



After the Flood in Yosemite

Fewer facilities, more controls—and probably more enjoyment

Some parts of Yosemite National Park are open again after last month's disastrous flooding in the valley. But the nature of visitor access to Yosemite, one of the most popular American vacation sites, promises to be forever changed by the widespread destruction wrought by the flood. The new reality: less spontaneity, more enjoyment.

Park officials announced last week that come summer, they will require visitors arriving in their own cars to make a reservation even for just a day in the park. The new day-use system could go into effect as early as May although details have yet to be worked out.

Coping with flood damage remains the No. 1 task of park rangers and administrators. Several roads into and out of the valley have been washed out. When the skies finally cleared, about 190 rental cabins, 170 motel rooms and 220 park employee quarters were under several feet of water. For many years park officials have sought to move these facilities farther from the Merced River, which would allow restoration of the meadows along the Merced and reduce overall congestion in the valley.

Given the lessons learned in this year's calamity, it seems right to make these changes now. They would be part of a broader effort to get a handle on the congestion—the vehicular traffic, the exhaust and crowds—that has plagued the park for years and now seriously interferes with the enjoyment of Yosemite's spectacular beauty.

Cars are the biggest problem. In the past

several years, rangers have literally shut the gates when parking lots inside Yosemite filled to capacity or the snaking lines of traffic along the valley roads grew too long. During peak summer months, some families who drove from Los Angeles or other distant points to visit the park have been turned away or forced to wait hours before they could enter.

Day-use reservations are a more sensible approach, providing rangers—and visitors—predictability and control. Under this system, sight-seers who expect to drive their own vehicle into the park will need an advance reservation. Backpackers and members of bus tours will probably be exempt from the reservation system.

Motel operators and merchants in communities just outside the park understandably fear that day-use reservations will cut into their business. They worry that since reservations will guarantee park entrance, fewer visitors will need rooms and meals in the adjacent towns. Yet the proposed system in fact offers opportunities for these so-called gateway communities. Operating shuttles to and from the park, for example, and accommodating those the park can't.

Money, not surprisingly, is the immediate concern. Damaged park facilities cannot be rebuilt nor the reservation system implemented without congressional funding. National Park Service officials in Yosemite estimate they need \$178 million. With summer fast approaching, Congress should act. The payoff will multiply over the years.



Highway 140, leading into the valley.