YOSEMITE COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS
VAMP RECOMMENDATIONS – AUGUST 2023

FRAMEWORK

On Yosemite's busiest days when morning and early afternoon congestion in East Yosemite Valley is a problem, most of the Park remains uncrowded. Given this, access management in Yosemite should focus on the East Valley and not restrict access to the entire Park.

This root problem is best solved by controlling congestion and crowds on busy days in the East Valley with a targeted, dynamic system that addresses key problem areas and times, and which can be adjusted real-time, rather than an inflexible system that limits access to all of Yosemite months in advance.

Reservation System
The Reservation System to enter Yosemite, as previously tested, is not an acceptable or necessary approach, as there are other solutions that better target congested areas during busy times without the significant problems caused by a Reservation System, which:

- Denies the public access to all of Yosemite, not just the East Valley

- Disenfranchises populations with limited technology access and expertise

- Doesn't align with trip planning timelines and needs for international and out of state visitors, who plan trips up to a year in advance and won't book without a guarantee of Park access

- Unfairly advantages in-park lodging guests, who are guaranteed Park access

- Significantly impacts gateway lodging and meaningfully reduces county tax revenues, as evidenced by the return of summer occupancies and occupancy tax revenues to historical pre-entry ticket system levels this year

- Is rigid and cannot dynamically adapt well to real time events (e.g. no shows due to smoke)

Crowding

- Is primarily focused in East Yosemite Valley and at selected sites such as Glacier Point

- Is most significant on
  - Saturdays and selected Sundays from Jun 15 – Aug 15
  - Memorial Day & Labor Day Weekends and special events

Pilot System

- Should minimally restrict day, time and access constraints on visitors, as we otherwise won't know if we have gone too far and restricted unnecessarily

- Should layer multiple solutions that don't restrict Park access, but instead promote good visitor decision-making by better informing guests of non-East Valley experiences, among other things

- On peak summer weekends & holidays, should solve congestion/crowding through a thoughtfully designed, extra layer of efforts that don't deny Park entry to anyone at any time

- Should allow NPS to provide real-time information to Park visitors, and to make targeted, dynamic decisions based on real-time crowd and visitation realities

During and after 2024, with full staffing in place, and upon completing feasible technological and infrastructure upgrades, refine testing and systems to address remaining pressure areas, days & times.

2024 PILOT SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS

A. EXTRA LAYER OF PEAK SEASON CONTROLS USED ON DAYS WHEN PRESSURE IS GREATEST

Saturdays and selected Sundays from June 15 – Aug 15 plus Memorial Day & Labor Day weekends

1. "EAST VALLEY MORNING PASS"

- **Provided at entry gates, first come, first served**
  (all gates share common countdown for a fixed # of passes)

- **Passes allow entrance before 1pm to the East Valley past El Cap Meadow turnaround**

- **Visitors arriving to gates after Morning Passes run out are invited to enter the East Valley after 1pm and are given information on how to enjoy other areas of the Park in the meantime** (and can be texted if the East Valley opens up earlier)

- **Guests overnighting in Yosemite Valley receive a different 'Overnight Guest' East Valley access pass at entry gates**

- **Control occurs at El Cap Traffic Diversion** as is currently done on busy days

  - Staff, lodging guests and visitors with Morning Passes continue on

  - Others turn left across the river and proceed to other Park destinations

- **Parking in West Valley is open to all before 1pm, with West Valley usage and option to walk/bike/shuttle to East Valley encouraged**

BENEFITS

a. Does not deny the public access to Yosemite

b. Alleviates NPS gate agent stress of having to deny entry to visitors

c. Does not disenfranchise disadvantaged populations

d. Does not deter international and out of state visitors

e. Does not unfairly advantage in-park lodging guests

f. Does not cause significant peak season economic losses to gateway lodges and county tax revenues

g. Squarely aligns with the goals of the Merced River Plan to limit peak visitation in East Yosemite Valley, as opposed to all of Yosemite Valley or the entire Park (and to divert traffic at the El Cap Traffic Diversion)

h. Gives Yosemite visitors clear incentive to explore other areas of the park along with guidance in doing so (see below)

i. Spreads visitors throughout the Park and throughout the day, alleviating East Valley parking, road and trail congestion

j. Does not require complicated, discriminating, costly online advance reservation system

k. Avoids problems of hoarding and of unused entry tickets

l. Creates natural incentive to avoid busiest days for visitors with flexibility

m. Can provide real-time 'Morning Passes Remaining' information to help visitor decision-making and minimize gate lines (e.g., encourages potential late morning arrivers to arrive later and enjoy options outside the park, or to plan non-Valley visit options)

n. Eliminates the impact of and the need to manage 'pass-through visitors' transiting the Park via Hwy 120

o. Allows people who don't need to be in the Valley early to self-select and come later

p. Puts pass control and distribution at entry gates where staffing resources & infrastructure already exist

q. Is dynamic, not rigid, and allows NPS to adjust system real-time for specific events that might alter peak season visitation in the short term (e.g. small fires in 2022 that caused huge initial cancellations yet left no entry tickets available for visitors seeking access post-fire)

r. Allows NPS to <u>real-time</u> test and fine tune number of Morning Passes given, days needed and exact timing needed

s. Allows NPS to address congestion of parking, traffic & visitors

2. **ONE WAY LOOPS**

    o   Encourage busiest East Valley hiking trails to be used as one-way loops as was done during Covid (e.g., going up Mist Trail & down JMT for Vernal/Nevada Falls)

    BENEFITS

    a. Relieves crowding in iconic destinations while maximizing enjoyment, safety and access for Park visitors

    b. Allows flexibility for NPS to implement one-way constraints real-time for additional days and locations if needed

B. **DAILY ENHANCEMENTS ON ALL PEAK SEASON DAYS**

1. **Ensure Wi-Fi service exists at all entry gates** (via Starlink as needed) and encourage visitor Wi-Fi use to facilitate NPS goals (e.g., buy digital park pass online, download NPS app, use QR codes to download 'Destinations Outside the Valley' map, receive NPS texts updates…)

2. **Expand excellent Park Nixle text system** to further help people make good decisions about avoiding crowded areas at worst times, and improve cell service along primary roadways to keep guests informed so they can make good decisions that promote dispersal. Since being implemented this summer, the system has already become an extremely helpful visitor communication tool to facilitate NPS goals.

3. **Design targeted traffic congestion solutions for key sites outside the Valley**

    o   Glacier Point: reimplement and promote Glacier Point Shuttle from Badger Pass parking area for overflow parking

    o   Mariposa Grove: bring back shuttle from Wawona to the Grove

4. **Significantly enhance promotion of non-Valley destinations/activities** to get people more dispersed and exploring the whole Park

    a. Further develop and promote NPS Yosemite app and website itineraries and non-Valley recommendations

    c. Provide entry gate paper hand-outs and QR code links to recommended destinations outside the Valley along driving routes, including at-a-glance map with locations highlighted

    d. Promote destinations outside the Valley by adding roadway signage as you approach each attraction, including clarifying where to park

    e. Consider targeted roadside digital signage to highlight sightseeing opportunities and crowd issues to avoid

    f. Leverage morning volunteers and external paid staff (from visitors' bureaus, hotels, etc.) at and inside entry gates to guide and advise on non-Valley alternatives

    g. Provide "Destinations outside the East Valley" maps for hotels/local partners to distribute

    h. Develop 'Yosemite Passport' (akin to NPS passport with stamps) with these destinations

5. **Enhance West Valley destination & activities**

    a. Promote non-driving Valley exploration by offering bike rentals at/near El Cap Meadow Northside Drive parking area (and possibly Bridalveil parking area)

    b. Formalize parking where needed, add additional modest parking areas off Northside Drive (which is in the spirit of compliance with the Merced River Plan), and protect areas of parking concern

    c. Promote West Valley trails, riverside options and other experiences. Consider enhanced trail options, including walks along the base of El Cap or spur trails to viewpoints across the Valley

6. **Avoid summer closure of any Valley parking, sites or trails**

7. **Increase resources to get High Country & Glacier Point open by June 1** to spread visitation (e.g., partner with Cal Trans for snow removal as is done for federal highways, use portable toilets…)

8. **Develop plans & increase resources** to ensure shuttle system and park entry gates operate at full capacity during summer. Don't let COVID hangover staffing and staff housing drive permanent Yosemite visitor access plan. Work with gateways to develop creative seasonal housing solutions outside the park for shuttle drivers and others.

9. **Enhance and create additional dispersed, accessible visitation areas along primary roadways**

    a. Develop "Foresta Naturalist, Cultural & Interpretive Hub" between Big Oak Flat Road and Foresta community, with regular ranger talks, nature exploration, cultural and historical education, potential tribal cultural center, and other activities for families. Add meaningful parking in intensely burned areas and eventually option to shuttle to Valley. Promote Foresta Falls & Little Nellie Falls options and access

    b. Define & refine a series of short roadside hikes and nature exploration areas with modest sized finished parking lots and roadside announcement signage to promote these more intimate Yosemite experiences (e.g., short trails to vista points, waterfall

hikes, meadow experiences,…), allowing peak season visitors to experience uncrowded areas of the Park – see sample list below

<u>**ENTRY GATE EFFICIENCY**</u>

1. **Create express lane**

    a. For use by those with Park passes & CUA's, employees and vendors

    b. Formalize use of exit lanes in mornings as express lanes for those with Park passes

2. **Use rangers walking the line** to sell passes (with handheld devices), answer questions, promote non-Valley destinations and send cars to express lane

3. **Promote and incentivize pre-purchased digital Park passes** (including promotion in Gateway lodges and while in line using entry gate Wi-Fi)

4. **Create carpooling incentives** to reduce vehicle congestion at gates and in Park (e.g. discounted entry or express lane access for cars with 4 or more people)

5. **Use tourism volunteers or paid workers walking the line** during peak entry periods to promote digital pass purchasing and give info about non-Valley and gateway activities

DESTINATIONS OUTSIDE THE EAST VALLEY

Suggested "Destinations Outside the East Valley" to promote along roadways and on a Yosemite roadway map that highlights additional uncrowded, special places to visit beyond the Valley – <u>concept map attached</u>. Map to have interactive digital version on app and be given out by QR Code at entry gates.

Included with many of the suggested destinations below are potential improvement opportunities to enable the most successful visitor usage, although for most destinations, these improvements are not required for immediate visitor use and could be rolled out over a number of years.

The primary addition needed to enable visitors to enjoy these places is just excellent roadside signage announcing each attraction, along with their inclusion on the 'Destinations outside the East Valley' map.

1. **Kolana Rock Viewpoint** – establish hiking trail
2. **Ackerson Meadow** – establish meadow perimeter trails
3. **Hodgdon Meadow** – establish parking and trail
4. **Rockefeller Tract Old Growth Trail** – establish parking and trail
5. **Crane Flat Fire Tower Viewpoint** – improve road/trail (could be ADA accessible)
6. **Crane Flat Meadows** – establish parking and short trails near various meadows
7. **Clark Range Viewpoint** – improve parking and signage
8. **Devil's Dance Floor Viewpoint** – improve parking and trail
9. **Big Oak Flat Road Historic Trail** – improve parking and add historic interpretive info
10. **Little Nellie Falls** – improve road access
11. **Foresta Falls** – consider best road/trail access
12. **Foresta Big Meadow** – establish large parking area and Naturalist, Cultural & Interpretive Hub

13. **Wildcat Falls** – improve parking area and trail
14. **The Cascades Beach** – expand parking and picnic area
15. **Lower Cascade Falls** – improve trail and add interpretive info
16. **Turtleback Dome Viewpoint** – create parking area (could be ADA accessible)
17. **Bridalveil Meadow** – expand parking area
18. **Old Wawona Road** – possible historic road trail to Artist Point
19. **The Old Stagecoach Road** – improve parking and trail, and add interpretive info
20. **Ribbon Falls** – improve trail and signage
21. **Badger Pass** – set up for summer use, including interpretive trails near meadows, etc.
22. **Sentinel Dome Viewpoint** – further expand parking
23. **Chilnualna Falls** – better promote
24. **Pioneer Yosemite History Center** – better promote
25. **Wawona Meadow Loop Trail** – better promote and highlight as dog-friendly
26. **Siesta Lake**
27. **White Wolf**
28. **Lukens Lake**
29. **Yosemite Creek Picnic Area**
30. **Porcupine Creek** – improve parking area
31. **Pothole Dome**
32. **Parsons Lodge & Soda Springs**
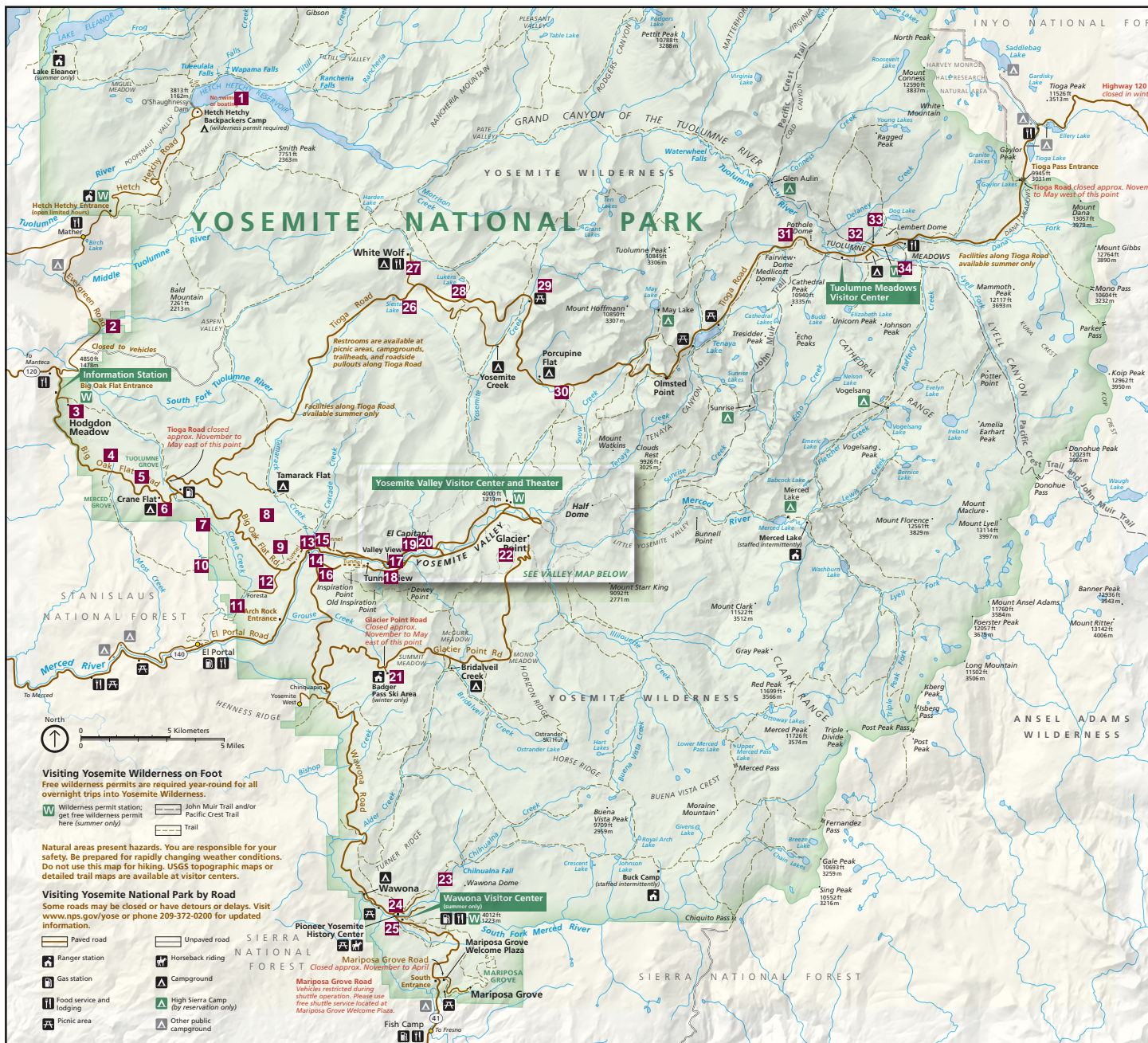33. **Dog Lake**
34. **Twin Bridges**

SUMMER 2023 DATA CAUTIONS

Data from this summer are difficult to use for decision-making given confluence of unusual events. While issues and anomalies exist every year, this season was exceptional

1. Early summer entry gate lines and Yosemite traffic issues driven by
    a. 6 weeks closure of Hwy 120 entrance
    b. March closure of entire Park and ongoing flood closures/warnings
    c. Historic snows creating epic waterfalls
    d. First summer weeks without ticketing system since 2019
    e. High country closed until July 22nd
    f. Glacier Point closed until mid-July
    g. Summer road construction and parking area closures in Valley
    h. Staffing challenges limiting shuttle services, entry gate and other staffing
2. Gate lines dissipated in late June after demand surge abated and texting system was implemented

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YOSEMITE SUMMER VISITATION
PAST 30 YEARS

Yosemite Visitation