

APR 7 1994

Mr. Duane Hall
Acting Planning Director
Mariposa County Planning Department
Mariposa, CA 95338

Dear Sir:

The ongoing development of new motels and other tourism-related infrastructure in the communities surrounding Yosemite National Park has raised the issue of compatibility with the Yosemite General Management Plan (GMP) and its visitor use levels. The increase in park use resulting from recent developments has prompted the National Park Service to seek improved communication with both local government and business communities.

The GMP calls for a reduction of the developed facilities inside the park and their relocation to the park boundary and beyond. As you may know, park employee housing and a central warehousing and maintenance center are currently under construction in El Portal.

Although there will also be a park wide reduction of overnight guest accommodations by 15 percent during the new concession contract, this actually equates to 310 rooms. This eventual reduction has already been more than replaced by the addition of several hundred motel rooms in counties adjacent to Yosemite. In fact, the local Chambers of Commerce report that the number of motel rooms within an hour drive have nearly doubled from 1,163 in 1980 to more than 2,144 today. Over half of the Yosemite day use visitation can be accommodated by lodging within an hour drive, let alone the marketing and development of facilities in cities two hours from the park such as Fresno or Merced. Moreover, if we consider the east side of the Sierra Nevada, the town of Mammoth Lakes alone provides over 8,000 rooms.

The vast majority of growth in park visitation has occurred from day users. The GMP established a maximum day use visitation level of 10,530 people for Yosemite Valley. This number has been exceeded on several summer weekends resulting in impacts on park resources, infrastructure and the quality of the visitor experience. In order to mitigate these impacts, the National Park Service will develop more sophisticated allocation systems in the near future.

A day use reservation program might be one approach which would minimize the uncertainty of access to the park by visitors. The National Park Service concern is that the unchecked growth of visitor facilities outside the park now supports public use levels that exceed the established use levels set forth in the GMP. A Yosemite allocation, or reservation system would not necessarily guarantee a local motel guest access to the park, but would provide an equal opportunity for all visitors to see Yosemite. Many day visitors to Yosemite reside locally or in the San Joaquin Valley or beyond, and do not use area motels or restaurants. These visitors will be in direct competition for Yosemite reservations with the available visitor quotas once taken by people who stayed in area motels. As a result, motels built with the expectation of a certain occupancy rate will be unable to meet business plan goals.

It is not our intent to adversely affect local economies. Rather, it is to inform you that the National Park Service is no longer seeking development of outside accommodations to support park visitors. We cannot be responsible for economic dislocation resulting from future expansion and marketing of Yosemite based tourism knowing that a limit on park visitation to protect park resources will be implemented in the near future.

Local governments and developers need to recognize that Yosemite National Park has a finite capacity for tourism. We recommend that you limit Yosemite based development and marketing strategies in order to prevent eventual market saturation or economic downturn. We wish to work with you, and welcome your suggestions on ways to improve our communications and provide increased resource protection, and a quality experience for our visitors.

Sincerely,

(Sgd.) Michael V. Finley

Michael V. Finley
Superintendent

L30

APR 7 1994

The Honorable Gary Condit
House of Representatives
Room #1123, Longworth House Office Building
Independence & New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Condit:

Enclosed is a letter we are sending to local planning commissions and county governments surrounding Yosemite National Park. We anticipate you may be receiving inquiries about the letter and its ramifications, so we are sending it to you in advance. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt has also reviewed the letter and is supportive of the National Park Service position. Our intent is to improve communications with local government and alert them to potential problems with the unlimited construction of tourism facilities, such as motels.

In recent years, the number of visitors to Yosemite National Park has increased dramatically. This has created impacts to Park resources. The National Park Service plans to implement a reservation system during the next few years to manage the number of visitors to Yosemite within the limits established by the Park's General Management Plan.

The enclosed letter explains the National Park Service's position and cautions local planners and developers about overbuilding transit facilities, as a limit on Park visitors will be implemented in the near future. Although this letter may generate some controversy, to not alert the local communities of these real concerns in advance would be irresponsible. We hope to work with the local governments on this issue to minimize the impacts to the Park and the local economies. Your support of Yosemite National Park is appreciated and we trust you understand our position on this matter. Please call Mr. Frank Dean of my staff at (209) 372-0288 if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

(Sgd.) Michael V. Finley

Michael V. Finley
Superintendent

Enclosure

cc:
The identical letter was sent to the
attached list

The Honorable Gary Condit
House of Representatives
Room #1123, Longworth House Office Building
Independence & New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Doolittle
House of Representatives
Room #1524, Longworth House Office Building
Independence & New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Lehman
House of Representatives
Room #1226, Longworth House Office Building
Independence & New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Unites States Senate
Room #112, Hart Building
2nd & C Streets, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
United States Senate
Room #331, Hart Building
2nd & C Streets, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Mr. Kerry McCants
Manager, Fresno County Development Services
Fresno, CA 93721

Mr. Nick Yovino
Development Manager for Planning
City of Fresno
2600 Fresno Street
Fresno, CA 93721

Mr. Duane Hall
Acting Planning Director
Mariposa County Planning Department
Mariposa, CA 95338

Ms. Kathi Campana, Chairperson
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors
2 South Green Street
Sonora, CA 95370

Ms. Bev Shane, Director
Tuolumne County Planning Department
2 South Green Street
Sonora, CA 95370

Mayor Jim Patterson
City of Fresno
2600 Fresno Street
Fresno, CA 93721

Mr. Dan Paranick, Chairman
Mono County Board of Supervisors
Route 1, Box 1044
Crowley Lake, CA 93546

Mr. Scott Burns, Director
Mono County Planning Department
P.O. Box 347
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

Mr. A. Vernon Conrad, Chairman
Fresno County Board of Supervisors
2281 Tulare, Hall of Records
Fresno, CA 93721

Mayor Mark Scalzo
City of Madera
205 W. Fourth
Madera, CA 93637

Mr. Larry Red, Director
Madera City Planning Department
205 W. Fourth
Madera, CA 93637

Mr. Leonard Garopa, Director
Madera County Planning Department
135 W. Yosemite
Madera, CA 93637

Mr. Jeff Lopez, Chairman
Madera County Board of Supervisors
209 W. Yosemite
Madera, CA 93637

Mr. Jesse Brown
Merced County Association of Governments
1770 M. Street
Merced, CA 95340

Mr. Robert Smith
Director, Merced County Planning Department
2222 M Street
Merced, CA 95340

Mr. Jerry O'Banion, Chairman
Merced County Board of Supervisors
2222 M Street
Merced, CA 95340

Mr. Richard Bernasconi
Mayor, City of Merced
678 W. 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340

Mr. Phillip Block
Planning Director, City of Merced
678 W. 18th Street
Merced, CA 95340

Director
Mariposa County Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 425
Mariposa, CA 95338

Chairman
Highway 120 Association
P.O. Box 1263
Groveland, CA 95321

Director
Eastern Madera County Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 369
Oakhurst, CA 93644