

by Ansel Adams in This is the American Earth

January 15. 1979

Leslie Arnberger, Superintendent P. O. Box 577 - GMP Yosemite National Park, CA 95389

Dear Mr. Arnberger:

The Sierra Club has requested me to provide you with their comments on certain aspects of the draft General Management Plan. Those subjects, on which this letter will comment, are (1) the wilderness proposal.

(2) a suggested boundary adjustment on the south edge of the Park, and (3) snowmobiling in the Park. The following comments are based upon Sierra Club policy decisions made through established channels within the Club.

1. WILDERNESS.

The proposed revision of the Park Service's 1972 proposal is indeed gratifying, and we commend the Park Service for proposing several very important changes.* But we feel the plan could be improved still

further in several ways.

a. Most important, the High Sierra Camps and the Ostrander ski hut should be included within the wilderness rather than being in enclaves which would be excluded from the surrounding wilderness. The legislation (or committee report) which would establish the Yosemite Wilderness could simply acknowledge that, although the camps are non-conforming uses, since they are pre-existing their continued operation will be accepted so long as it does not interfere with the wilderness environment. Reasons for including the camps within the wilderness include--

---Some of the camps are in less-than-ideal locations. (Merced Lake is a prime example.) Establishing an enclave would make it impractical even to consider re-locating any of the camps.

since an act of Congress would be required.

---Even though present plans call for continuation of the camps, there is no assurance that either the Park Service or the concession aire will want to operate them in perpetuity. If they should be discontinued, it would be desirable not to have to return to Congress to add the unused enclaves to the wilderness. (We do not recommend "potential wilderness" for the enclaves, as that would imply that the removal of the camps is advocated, sought, or anticipated.)

---Having the camps within the wilderness would help to ensure that they are operated in a way which is consistent with wilderness values. If they were excluded from the wilderness in separate enclaves, there would undoubtedly be greater pressure to perate them in ways which would be undesirable. Having them within the wilderness would make it easier to resist

pressures for expansion or inappropriate activities.

b. Little Yosemite Valley should be included within the wilderness. The Park Service claims that they want to be free to engage in "management activities" in this area, and therefore it must not be wilderness. But

when asked what kind of activities they have in mind, the Park Service seems unable to elaborate. The Wilderness Act permits great flexibility in management, and it would seem that appropriate management activities would be no problem. If the anticipated activities would not be permitted under the Wilderness Act, then probably they should not take place in Little Yosemite Valley.

Little Yosemite is a prime piece of wilderness which the visitor finds especially refreshing after the big elevation gain coming up from Happy Isles. It would seem especially incongruous for the wilderness visitor to arrive in Little Yosemite after a long, hard hike only to find more development. The natural division between non-wilderness and wilderness is on the crest of the moraine at the foot of Little Yosemite Valley, not after walking along a level valley for two or three miles.

c. The land occupied by the Hetch Hetchy and Eleanor Reservoirs, with their attendent roads and structures, should ultimately be within the wilderness. Some of this system (the acreage occupied by the reservoirs) could be designated as wilderness now, while the dams, roads, and other structures could be designated as "potential wilderness."

d. The May Lake spur road should be obliterated and the area

included within the wilderness.

e. The road north of White Wolf should be obliterated and the area

included within the wilderness.

f. Wilderness boundaries should generally come closer to roads and existing developments than presently proposed. This would achieve wilderness protection of land which would otherwise be deprived of it, would minimize pressure for new developments, and would result in improved administration of the wilderness by facilitating on-the-ground determination of the boundary. This is especially true of---

1'. The Badger Pass area. Since the proposed GMP calls for no more than the present number of lifts, it would be consistent to bring the wilderness boundary to the edge of the existing development. This would help to reinforce the Park Service's

stated intention of not expanding the facility.

2'. The area south of the Chinquapin-Badger Pass road. The utility line in this area has a limited life, and presumably will eventually be replaced. If and when that occurs, we suggest the line could be undergrounded, possibly along the road. In the meantime, the area should be designated as "potential wilderness" so that its eventual inclusion within the wilderness will be ensured.

7. The Grouse Creek area north of the Chinquapin-Badger Pass road. This is a sizeable block of desirable land which has been omitted for no apparent reason. The wilderness boundary should be brought close to the road here, as well

as along the Chinquapin-Yosemite Valley road.

4. East side of the Wawona-Chinquapin road. The boundary should be brought close to the road, rather than following section lines.

5. Portions of the Tioga road. In general, administration of the wilderness would be improved by bringing the boundary closer to the road in many areas.

2. SUGGESTED BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT.

We suggest that much of the Sierra National Forest's Mount Raymond Roadless Area (#5-242) be added to Yosemite National Park, and included within the wilderness. A park (and wilderness) boundary much more logical than the present one would extend eastward from the Mariposa Grove portion of the Park, following the Raymond Mountain ridge. The

lower half of the Iron Creek drainage should be included. The northern portions of Sections 6, 5, and 4 (R. 23 E., T. 5 S.) would logically be included; these areas, although not inventoried by the Forest Service, actually are still roadless and undeveloped. Such additions to the Park (and wilderness) would provide much better protection for the canyon of the Merced River's South Fork. At present, the Park boundary runs along the river at the bottom of the canyon, creating an anomalous situation whereby the north slope is protected, but the south slope—just a short distance away and fronting directly on the Park's backcountry—is open to develop ment.

The Forest Service might very well be receptive to such a proposal.

I have heard some of their employees suggest it, and the Mount Raymond Roadless Area was set aside for "future planning" in the Forest Service's January 4th RARE II announcement largely because the Forest Service recognizes that the area's proximity and topographic relationship to the

Park mandate special consideration in planning.

The Sierra Club strongly supports continuation of the present prohibition on snowmobiling within the Park. We agree that it would conflict with other winter uses of the Park such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and snow play. Snowmobiling would be inconsistent with the mandate to preserve the Park's natural values. Furthermore, there are countless opportunities for snowmobiling on nearby National Forest lands. The National Park System should be kept as a refuge where people can escape from the hubbub of mechanized recreation!

Sincerely.

George W. Whitmore

the Park Service is inclusion of the North Mountain road and Poopenaut Valley in the wilderness. This area is especially significant because it adjoins the Forest Service's North Mountain Roadless Area (#5-256). The Forest Service's roadless inventory map (June 1978) for the California Region indicates that they were not aware that the Park Service planned to recommend the North Mountain road corridor and Poopenaut Valley for wilderness. We urge that you contact the Forest Service immediately and enlighten them, as it could help change their minds regarding the importance of preserving the North Mountain Roadless Area (recommended for develop ___ment in the Forest Service's January 4th RARE II announcement.

bcc. Hon. Alan Cranston (atten. Kathryn Files)
Hon. S. I. Hayakawa (atten. Mary Goedde)
Hon. Tony Coelho

G. Whitmore to L. Arnberger, Yosemite GMP, January 15, 1979

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