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Superintendent Don Neubacher
Yosemite National Park
Attn: Merced and Tuolumne River Plan
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
Sent via e-mail to: yose_planning@nps.gov

Dear Superintendent Neubacher,

We appreciate having the opportunity to comment on the Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plans and Environmental Impact Statements for the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers in Yosemite National Park. Collectively, we are public interest organizations that work to protect, restore and enjoy rivers throughout California. We do this not only for the sake of people from throughout the state, but for those who travel from around the U.S. and the world to explore and enjoy the region's world-class rivers.

As you are aware, boating throughout most of Yosemite National Park has been prohibited for many years, denying the public the truly exceptional opportunity to directly experience the Park's waters and scenery by boat. We encourage the Park to change course and allow the public the opportunity to enjoy Yosemite from the Wild and Scenic Merced and Tuolumne Rivers. We are pleased that the Park is considering a number of alternatives that would allow boating in some areas where it currently is not allowed. However, we disagree with the Park's Preferred Alternatives for both the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers, which continue to prohibit boating on significant stretches of both rivers

We request that Yosemite National Park allow the public the opportunity to directly experience ***all*** segments of the Wild and Scenic Merced and Tuolumne Rivers by boat. Paddling is allowed and fully supported on the 200 (+) Wild and Scenic Rivers across the country, and is a low-impact and Wilderness-compliant way to experience a wild landscape. Yosemite National Park should be no exception. Additionally, as river conservation organizations and conservation-oriented paddlers, we care deeply about the health of the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers, and support management actions that protect the rivers within the Park. This includes placing reasonable limits on recreational use of river corridors to ensure visitor capacities are not exceeded. A user capacity of zero aimed solely at paddling, however, is unacceptable.

While some sections of the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers contain areas of technically challenging whitewater, we feel it is a mistake for the Park Service to eliminate paddling based upon its own determination of the risk. The risks of paddling these rivers are not atypical of many treasured recreational experiences that are celebrated elsewhere in Yosemite and across the National Park System. Boaters should be allowed the freedom to choose whether or not to experience all of the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers given their skills and abilities.

Please re-consider allowing the public to experience all rivers within Yosemite National Park by boat, subject only to well-reasoned limits crafted to ensure visitor capacities are not exceeded. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Dave Steindorf
California Stewardship Director
American Whitewater