



Greetings!

January 22, 2016

Do you desire to one day ride your horse or mule in Yosemite National Park along the park's many Wilderness trails or even the Pacific Crest Trail? Have you been one of the lucky persons who has already visited Yosemite Wilderness, but wants to continue to enjoy the same freedoms that you did during your last trip?

Then please submit public scoping comments for the park's Wilderness Stewardship Plan by January 29th, 2016 (details below). Your voice is needed to ensure that Yosemite Wilderness remains accessible and enjoyable for recreational stock users.

Background

The National Park Service is in the early phases of developing a 10- to 15-year management plan for Wilderness in Yosemite National Park. Located in the Sierra Nevada Range in central California, the park's designated Wilderness encompasses over 704,000 acres and comprises over 94% of Yosemite National Park. As such, there are few trails that don't venture into park Wilderness.

During recent public scoping meetings for the Yosemite Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP), the Park Service made clear that the plan must include a comprehensive look at recreational stock use in order "to allow stock use to continue with minimal impact." That's okay, because we at BCHA want the Park Service to do a thorough job, including learning from us about ways to incorporate Leave No Trace techniques and exploring options to better accommodate access for private users of horses and mules.

Take Action

You can submit scoping comments by January 29th via either email, U.S. Mail or through the Park Service's online planning portal, which is here, then by clicking on the "Comment Now" button. The park email address is yose_planning@nps.gov or mail can be sent to: Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, Attn: Wilderness Stewardship Plan, P.O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389

The park's online planning portal is easy to use. BCHA has included at the end of this Action Alert recommended talking points that you might consider adding to your personal comments to Yosemite National Park. It's important to use your own words and add your own personal story among BCHA's suggested talking points.

Thank you for taking action to ensure the continued access and enjoyment of Yosemite Wilderness by pack and saddle stock users!

Donald Saner, Chairman

Back Country Horsemen of America

Recommended Talking Points

Please note that the Yosemite comment website prompts comments in response to two key topics listed on the webpage. Feel free to enter your comments any way you choose. As always, comments that are courteous and include examples and recommendations for improving wilderness management increase the chance that your comments will be greeted with receptivity.

BCHA's talking points below are arranged to respond to the two key topics and, as such, should be entered separately on the Park's services online portal in response to Question 1 and Question 2.

Question 1: What do you value about the way in which the National Park Service currently manages the Yosemite Wilderness?

- I am a stock owner and trail rider. I look forward to the day I can explore Yosemite Wilderness in the time-honored tradition of traveling with pack and saddle stock.
- I value the long-established tradition of use of pack and saddle stock in Yosemite National Park and throughout the West, and I wish to see this important historical use carried on into the future.
- Seeing Yosemite on horseback is an experience that cannot be replicated by other means. For visitors that are either aged, mobility impaired, or otherwise unable to venture into park Wilderness on their own, the only opportunity to visit the park's Wilderness may be via horseback or mule.
- I place great value in the use of pack stock as a management tool that enables federal land management agencies to maintain and enhance wilderness character. For example, use of pack stock, a primitive mode of travel, in lieu of the use of helicopters for routine maintenance in Wilderness is one means by which the Park Service can maintain historic uses and achieve greater alignment with the agency's recently-adopted "Keeping it Wild" management philosophy.
- I value the relatively primitive and unconfined recreational experience associated with current management of Yosemite Wilderness. The unconfined nature of that experience currently affords pack stock users a modest amount of freedom, in the absence of onerous regulations, to travel, camp and graze my pack stock in park Wilderness.

Question 2: What are the most important issues facing the Yosemite Wilderness today and how should they be addressed?

- I understand that the rate of reported conflict between hikers/ backpackers and pack stock users is low in Yosemite Wilderness. As Back Country Horsemen, we work to minimize visitor conflict in Wilderness through education and the practice of Leave No Trace® techniques. The WSP should avoid the false choice that visitor conflict can be addressed primarily by placing limits on pack stock use or limiting stock use on currently shared trails, in designated camping areas, or via restrictions on open meadow grazing.
- In forming WSP alternatives or measures that might further restrict, reduce or curtail horse/stock use in Wilderness, the Park Service should not be unduly swayed by a lack of tolerance voiced by a subset of Wilderness visitors who object to viewing either pack stock or signs of pack stock use where such use is in keeping with widely-accepted Leave No Trace® principles.
- In order to reduce the potential for visitor conflict, the WSP should include proactive methods of visitor education, including the use of interpretive materials available at Wilderness trailheads, to convey to hikers and backpackers to expect encounters with parties with pack stock. The WSP also should detail methods by which visitors traveling via foot and with pack stock could enhance communication and work toward minimizing "conflict" between

user groups. Changing the expectations of individuals prior to their embarking from the trailhead appears to represent a first step in doing so.

- In areas of known or documented stock-related resource damage, the WSP should consider alternatives beyond simply limiting pack stock use. Such alternatives could include reroutes of trails, hardening of trail surfaces, separation of designated camping areas, and the use of portable electrical fencing or other means to contain pack stock in open meadows.

- Proposed regulations should meet scientific rigor and necessity. The WSP must cite current peer-reviewed studies, and those studies must be made readily accessible for public review, if science is used to justify proposed limits upon trail use, overnight camping, or open meadow grazing.

- Science applied in the WSP must discern between the effects of pack stock use by private users versus the effects of parties using commercial pack stock outfitters versus the park's own administrative use of pack stock. In the absence of such science, the WSP should not seek to disproportionately burden private stock users, who comprise a small percentage of overnight Wilderness visitation.

- The opinion of pack stock users is not adequately reflected in current studies and surveys of Yosemite Wilderness visitors. The WSP should include documentation of the preferences and desired experiences of recreational stock users, whose views might or might not align with views expressed by other Wilderness visitors as documented in existing social science literature.

- Access to the Yosemite Wilderness at present by private horsemen is very difficult. The WSP should consider, and make efforts to accommodate, the logistical needs of pack stock users who do not enter park Wilderness via adjacent national forests or private land. For example, the WSP should address the need for adequate trailer parking at park trailheads and front country camping areas for person who haul their own horses and mules.

- The Park Service may soon find that it has insufficient resources to maintain trails in Yosemite Wilderness to standards that are necessary to maintain visitor safety and resource protection. Given that the WSP represents a long-range (10- to 15-year) plan, it would be prudent to consider in the WSP the option of enlisting additional qualified partners in routine trail maintenance. For example, establishing formal agreements with qualified non-profit organizations, such as Backcountry Horsemen of California and its partner, the Pacific Crest Trail Association, would serve to augment the agency's beleaguered trail maintenance budget and could preclude the need to either close trails or reclassify some trails as either "unmaintained" or minimally maintained.

- Park personnel should work in partnership with Backcountry Horsemen of California (BCHC) to develop a park-wide equine Leave No Trace® (LNT) program that is included in the WSP. BCHC is the sole authorized equine LNT Master Educator trainer for the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region (California). As such, park personnel and the WSP should consider entering into a formal partnership with BCHC for the development of a visitor education and LNT program for equine visitors to Yosemite National Park.

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