

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yosemite National Park
Summer 2016



Wilderness Stewardship Plan & Environmental Impact Statement

Preliminary Concepts & Ideas: Visitor Use & Capacity



Why is this plan being developed?

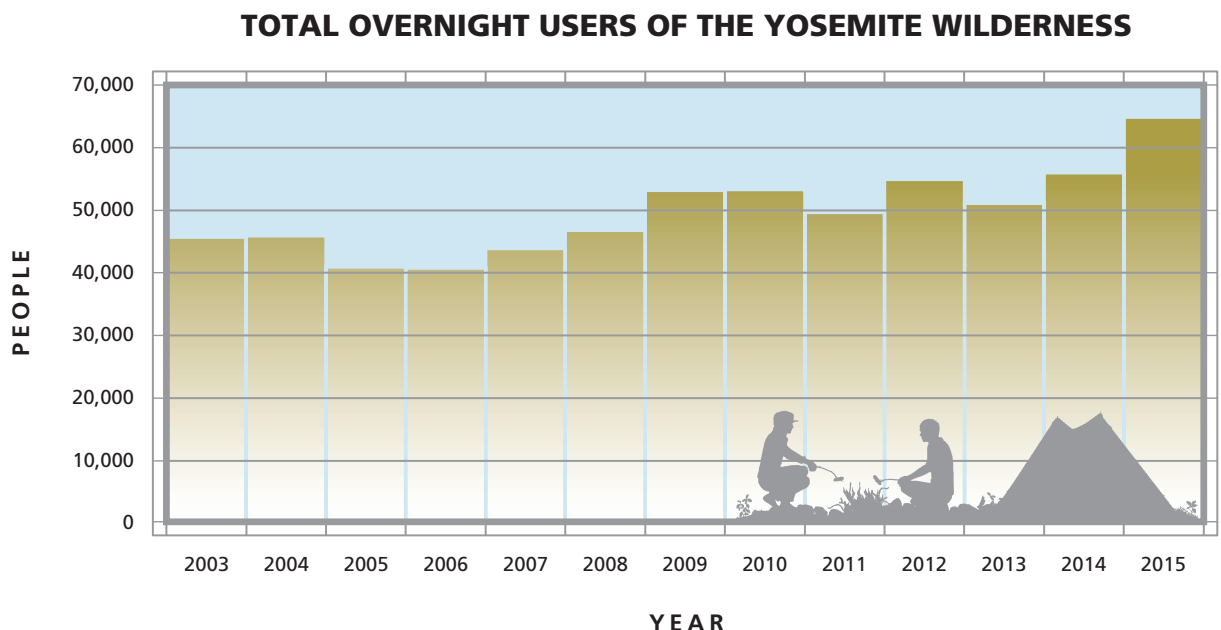
The purpose of this planning effort is to review the management direction in the 1989 Yosemite Wilderness Plan and update it as necessary to better align with contemporary use patterns and National Park Service policy.

When completed, the Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) will include a broad array of management strategies for addressing topics of interest such as natural resource management, ecosystem restoration, and trail maintenance. Due to the high level of public interest in visitor use and capacity and stock use, and due to the complexity of these topics, Yosemite National Park will be hosting a series of workshops to engage the public to focus on these topics. This is one of three newsletters that outlines the issues related to these topics.

Levels and patterns of visitor use have changed since the 1989 Wilderness Management Plan was completed. The stressors facing wilderness resources also have changed. New data and methods are available to better understand travel patterns

and associated impacts to the wilderness. Additionally, new policy guidance will help to identify and evaluate indicators of wilderness character and to monitor and manage conditions before problems arise.

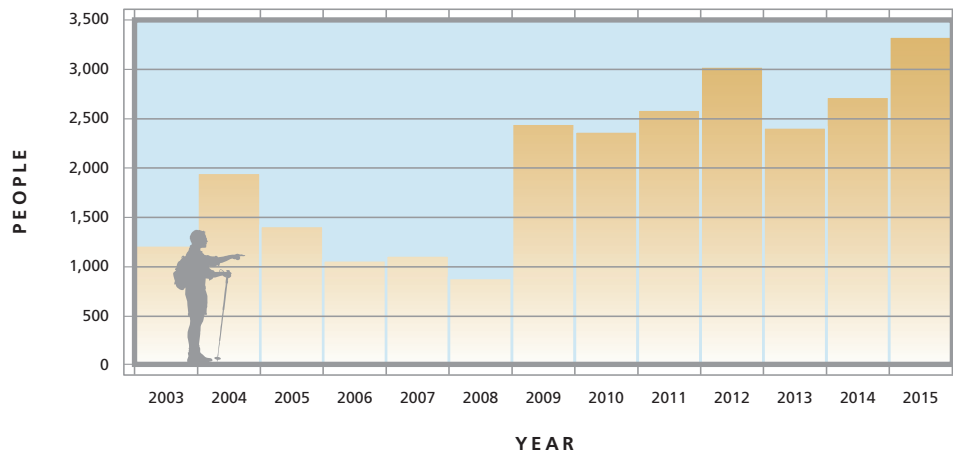
This update to the 1989 plan will provide a valuable baseline by which we can evaluate future changes in wilderness character. It will identify the most effective and adaptable way to manage visitor use in the Yosemite Wilderness, and it will reassess the Park's capacity to set sustainable use quotas. These refinements will better achieve the National Park Service mission to provide a quality wilderness experience for the diversity of today's users, while protecting this special place in perpetuity.



Graph illustrating an increase in overall use in the Yosemite Wilderness.

Data Source: NPS Yosemite Division of Visitor and Resource Protection, 2016

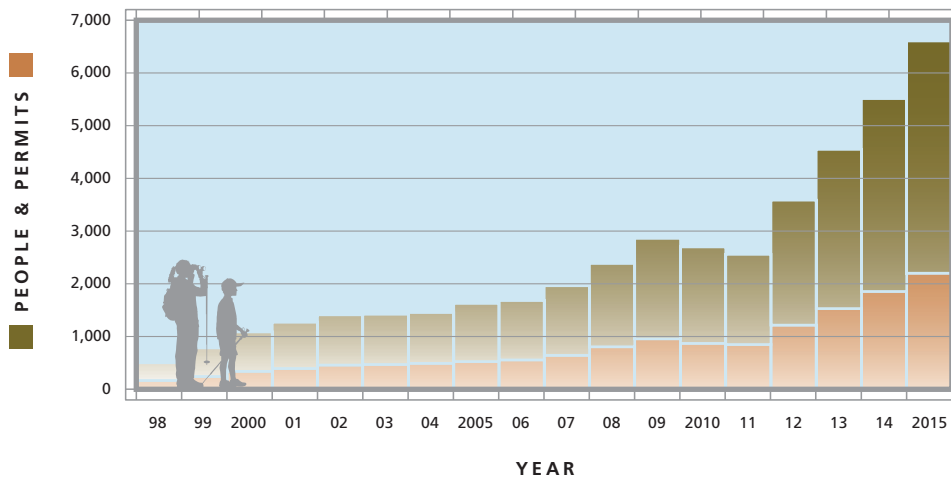
USFS USE IN THE YOSEMITE WILDERNESS



Graph shows that the increase in overall visitation is correlated with an almost tripling of entries by people who obtain their wilderness permit from outside the park.

Data Source: NPS Yosemite Division of Visitor and Resource Protection & USFS, 2016

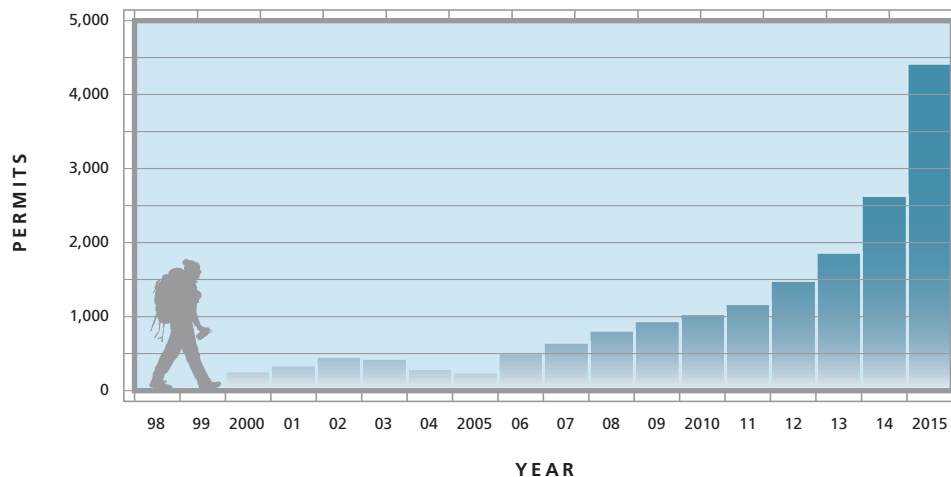
ACCESS TO YOSEMITE JOHN MUIR TRAIL (JMT) THROUGH USFS LANDS



Since 2010, permits and people entering the Yosemite Wilderness via the JMT from non-Yosemite lands have more than doubled.

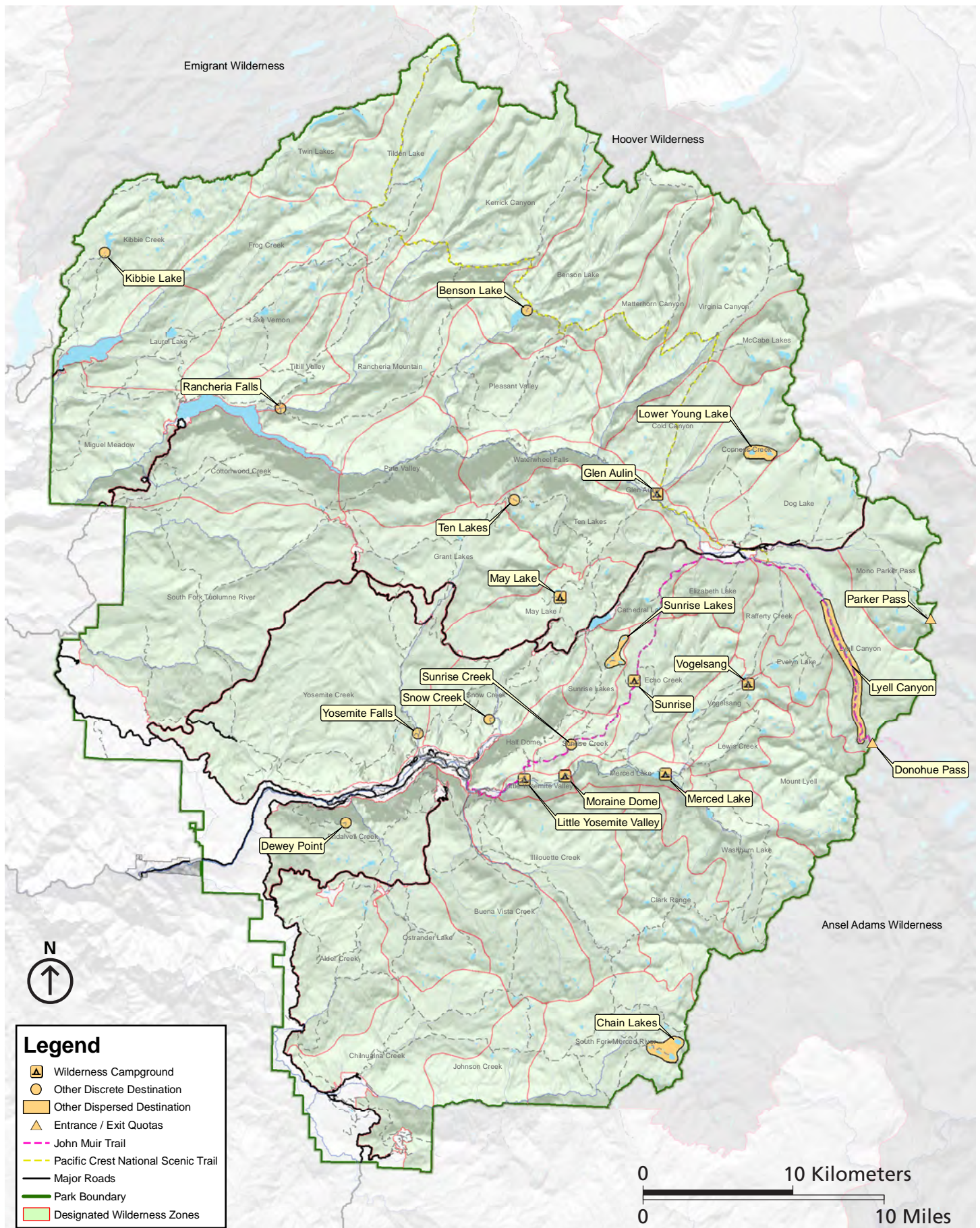
Data Source: NPS Yosemite Division of Visitor and Resource Protection & USFS, 2016

PACIFIC CREST TRAIL (PCT) PERMIT TOTALS



Graph shows the increased popularity of the PCT has impacted use exponentially. NOTE: PCT permits are issued outside Yosemite and are not calculated as part of the quota system.

Data Source: Pacific Crest Trail Association, 2016



Map highlighting the high use destinations within Yosemite Wilderness

How do things currently work?

The Yosemite Wilderness is divided into 53 travel zones that roughly follow the park's watershed drainages. The capacity for each zone was calculated using a model that combines acceptable social density with measures of ecological fragility to determine how many nightly visitors each zone can sustainably support.

These zone capacities are managed indirectly through a trailhead quota system. By studying wilderness visitation travel patterns, managers were able to develop a model that predicts where visitors using each trailhead typically will travel within the wilderness. This system requires visitors to select an available trailhead origin for their trips, but otherwise does not restrict travel plans. By limiting the number of overnight visitors who may enter the wilderness from any particular trailhead on a given day, managers can limit the number of visitors who will reach the zones that are served by that trailhead.

In recent years, use has exceeded established capacities in several zones due to increased use and changing travel patterns. On the following page is a sample user narrative

which illustrates how an individual might perceive the results of these changing conditions.

The overnight visitor capacity for each zone of the Yosemite Wilderness was developed based on the number of acres of wilderness, miles of trails, desired visitor densities within campsites and along trails as well as potential ecological impacts. The diagram shown below illustrates how the current trailhead quota system could, in certain cases such as with the Sunrise Creek Zone, not sufficiently manage use in popular zones.

As part of the WSP, the NPS will be reevaluating zone capacities using current information and revising the capacities as necessary.

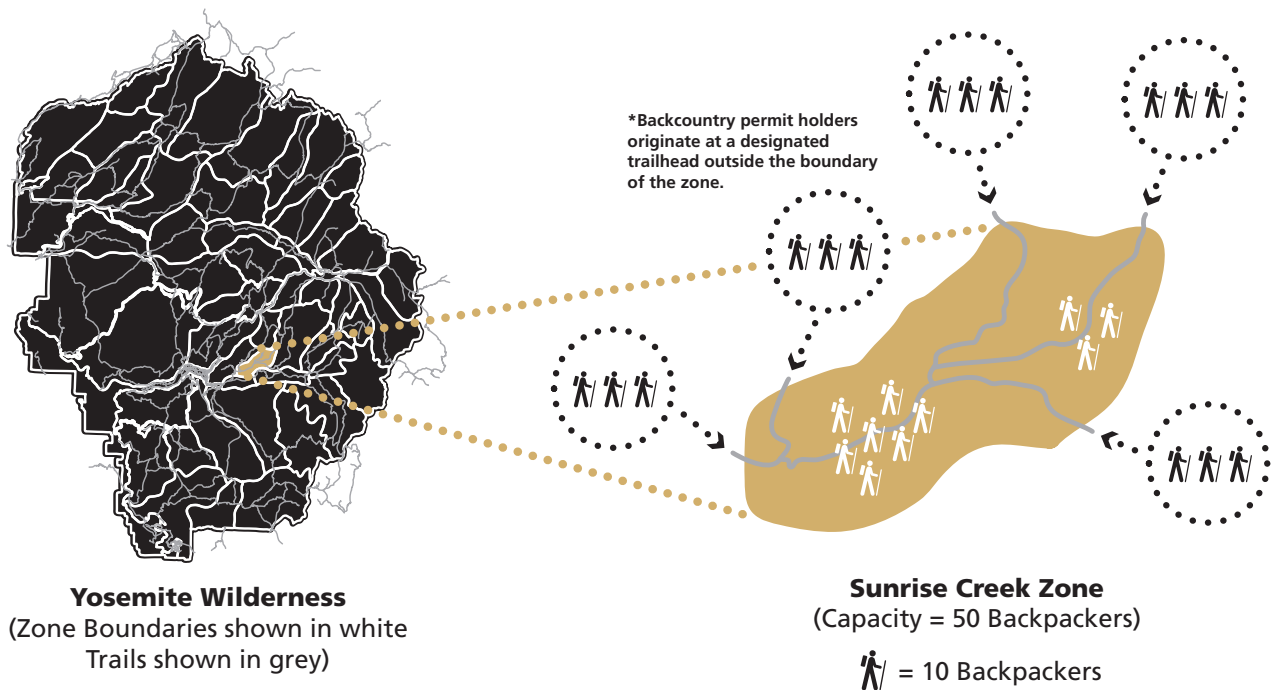


Diagram illustrating the current trailhead quota system and a sample high use zone



What might a wilderness user care about?

"I've been coming out to Yosemite with friends and family for years – or decades, actually. My parents first took me out to climb Half Dome back in the 70's and growing up in the Bay Area, I was just amazed when the sun went down and I saw all those stars in the sky. Every time I've returned, either with my partner and my own kids or with my best old friends, there's that moment when it all just takes your breath away. I really believe there's no place on earth more special than Yosemite."

Nowadays there's a lot more people in California and in the world so I guess I'm not surprised that more people want to come and experience that special moment like I have.

But sometimes now it's more frustrating than rewarding. First of all, you can hardly even get into the park with all the traffic and it's just about impossible to get a permit to go out and escape the crowds in the backcountry. I've waited in line from the crack of dawn in hopes of getting the permit to get back to my favorite places, like Sunrise Lakes, only to be told all the trailheads are full. When we're lucky enough to get a permit, it's like a race with everyone else to beat each other to the limited camp sites.

I want everyone to have the opportunities I have had but something has got to be done. There has to be a balance so that we don't end up ruining the magic we've come to discover."



What tools are available to manage use?

The following are the most common management tools available to provide a variety of concepts for managing visitor use:

Trailhead Quotas

This is the current system used with the Yosemite Wilderness. The trailhead quota system limits use based upon where a user begins their trip. After the first night, this system allows users to go wherever they wish within the wilderness after they start from a specified trailhead. Most destinations are reached from more than one trailhead, so this system provides flexible, but loose control over use.

Pass and Exit Quotas

Pass and exit quotas limit the total number of hikers entering and exiting the wilderness from outside the Park boundary through a specific corridor or mountain pass. Coordination with outside agencies is required to effectively manage this type of quota.

Destination Quotas

Destination quotas work with the trailhead quota system to further manage frequency of use and provide an additional measure to

more tightly manage to the capacity of specific destinations, namely 'hot spots.' Users of these destinations would be required to obtain a permit for both a trailhead and the desired destination.

Zone Quotas

The zone quota offers a tight control of use within specific travel zones by setting limits on how many nights a user can camp inside a specific zone. A maximum quota would be set for the entire zone. Hot spots could require smaller, site-specific zones in order to address areas of high density and use within existing travel zones.

Designated Campsites

Designated campsites function similarly to a destination quota but use are limited and controlled for individual campsites rather than whole destinations. The goal is to concentrate visitor use impacts in a few often-used campsites rather than many rarely used campsites to help improve the social and physical conditions of high use areas. Users are required to camp only at predetermined sites that have been selected to provide a good camping experience and to reduce disturbance at popular destinations.



Above are images illustrating evidence of heavy visitor use

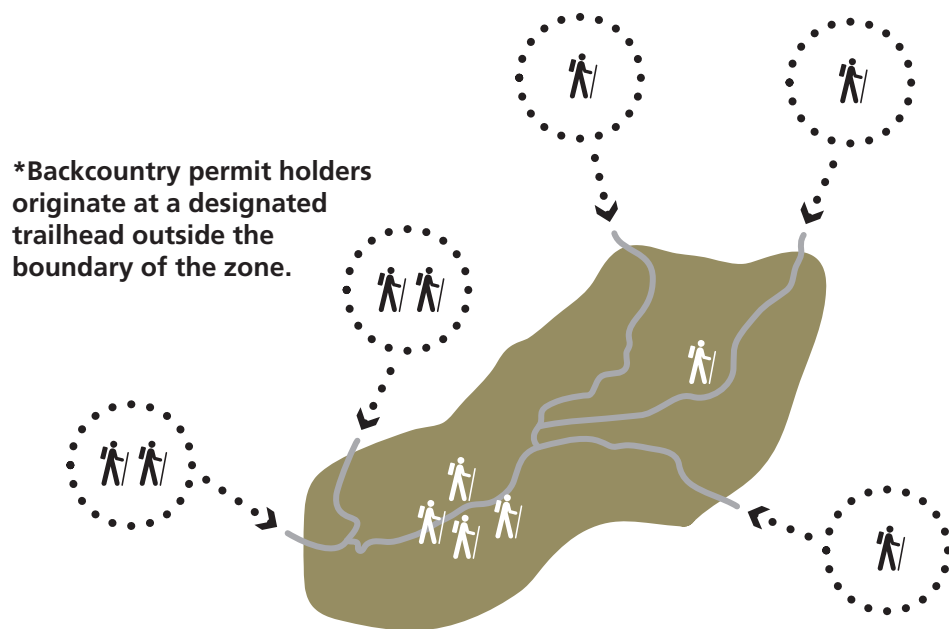
What are the concepts for managing use?

The following are four different concepts designed to manage visitor use. Each benefits the user and the environment differently. When reviewing, consider which concept might work best for you.

Concept One: Revised Trailhead Quota Approach

How would this concept work?

1. Yosemite National Park would continue to utilize the trailhead quota system for all wilderness recreation.
 2. To respond to current use patterns and to ensure capacities of travel zones are not exceeded, the number of permits offered for trailheads used to access high-use zones would be substantially reduced. The result would be that fewer people could access the zone and the high-use areas within it would see a corresponding reduction in visitor density.
 3. Once backcountry permit holders enter the wilderness, they would be free to travel where they wish.
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Concept One: Revised Trailhead Quota Approach

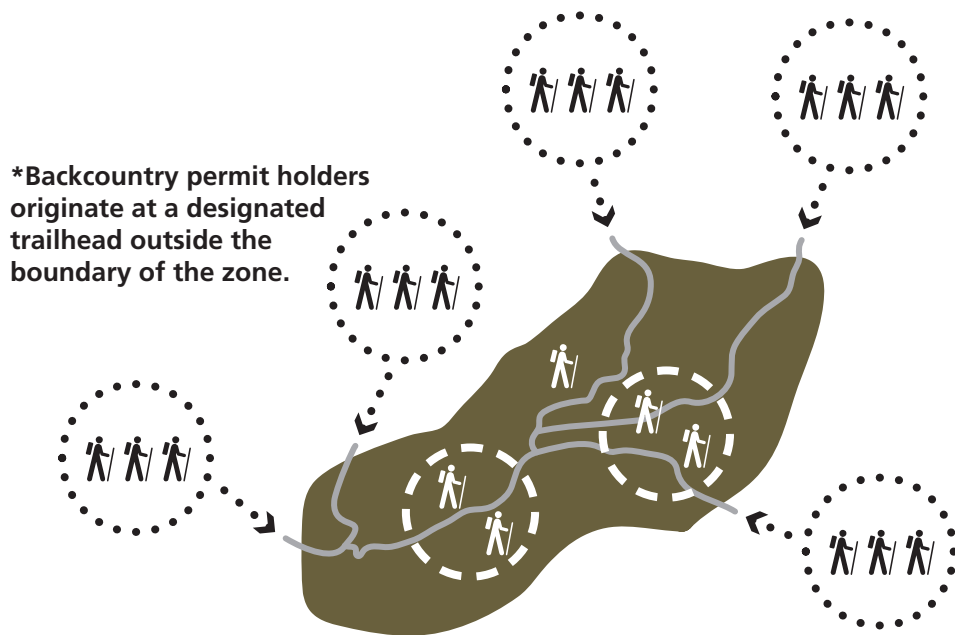
(Sunrise Creek Zone Capacity = 50 Backpackers)

 = 10 Backpackers

Concept Two: Destination Quota Approach

How would this concept work?

1. Yosemite National Park would continue to utilize the trailhead quota system for all wilderness recreation.
 2. Current trailhead quotas would be retained; however, visitors wishing to camp at high-use destinations would be required to obtain an additional “camping” permit. The result would be that the same number of people could access the zone, but there would be direct control over the number of people who could camp at high-use destinations.
 3. Users not camping at one of these high use popular destinations would be able to camp wherever they wish.
 4. Once backcountry permit holders enter the wilderness, they would be free to travel where they wish.
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Concept Two: Destination Quota Approach

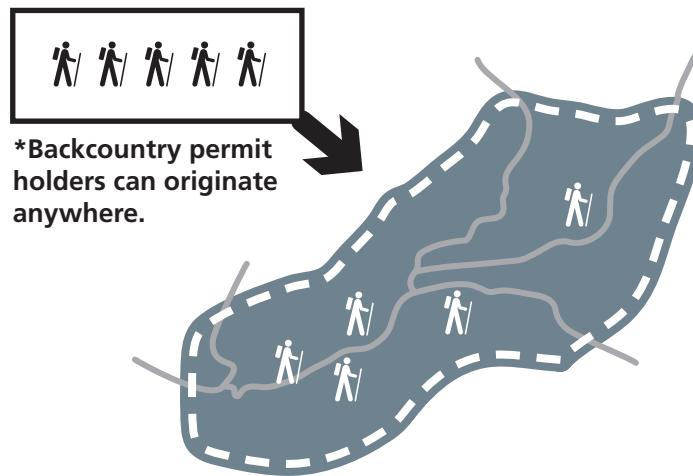
(Sunrise Creek Zone Capacity = 50 Backpackers)

 = 10 Backpackers

Concept Three: Zone Quota Approach

How would this concept work?

1. Yosemite National Park would replace the trailhead quota system for all wilderness recreation with a zone-based system to acquire tighter control over numbers and densities of use.
 2. This system would require all permit holders to reserve specific zones for each night of their wilderness trip.
 3. Users would be free to start their trip from any trailhead, and once they are in their reserved zone, they would be able to camp wherever they wish.
 4. Under this concept, current Yosemite Wilderness zone boundaries would remain the same or could be redrawn to accommodate future changes in use patterns.
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Concept Three: Zone Quota Approach

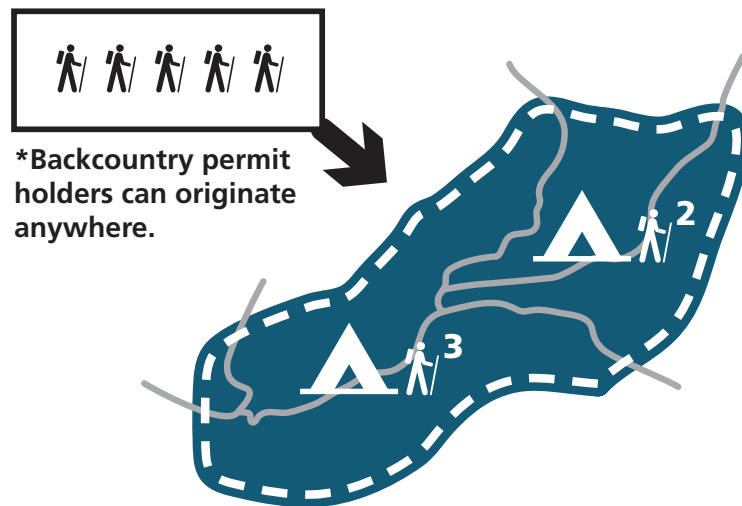
(Sunrise Creek Zone Capacity = 50 Backpackers)

 = 10 Backpackers

Concept Four: Designated Campsite Approach

How would this concept work?

1. Yosemite National Park would replace the trailhead quota system for all wilderness recreation with a zone-based system to acquire tighter control over numbers and densities of use.
 2. This system would require all permit holders to reserve a specific zone for each night of their wilderness trip.
 3. Users would be free to start their trip from any trailhead.
 4. For low- to moderate-use zones, users would be free to camp wherever they wish once they reached their reserved zone. For high-use zones, such as the Sunrise Creek zone, users would be required to camp only at a first-come/first-serve designated campsite.
 5. Under this concept, current Yosemite Wilderness zone boundaries would remain the same or could be redrawn to accommodate future changes in use patterns.
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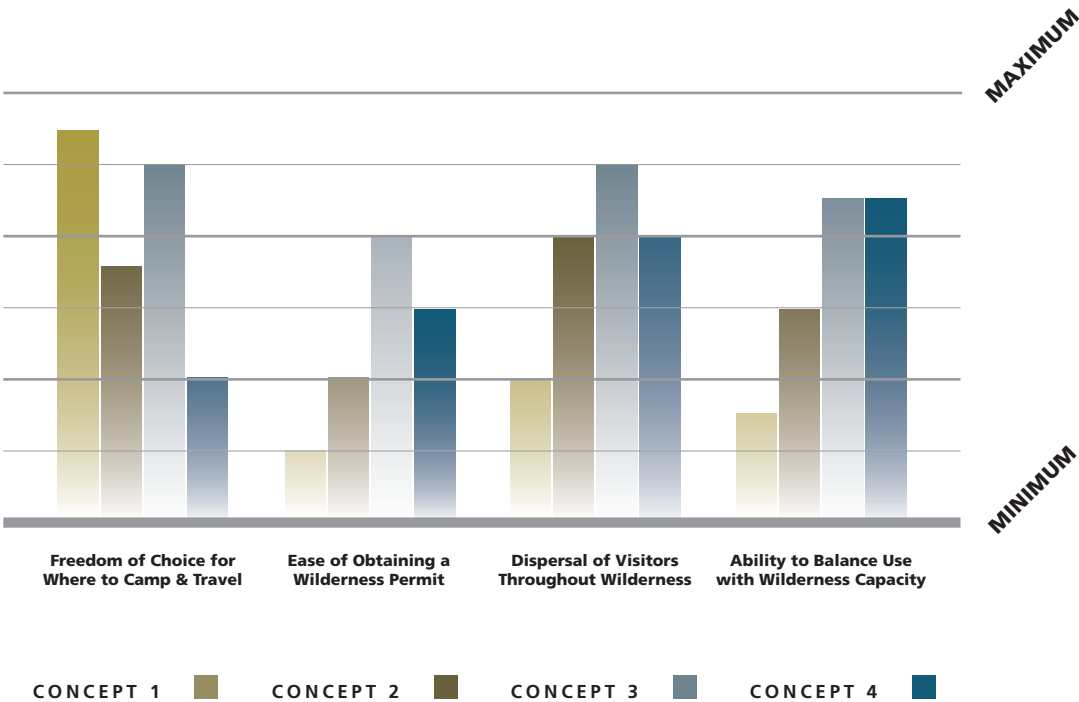
Concept Four: Designated Campsite Approach

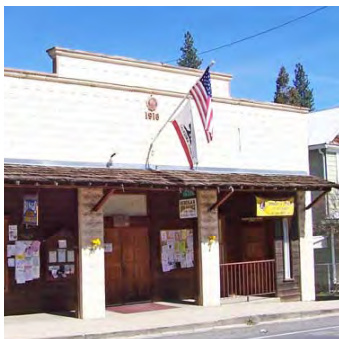
(Sunrise Creek Zone Capacity = 50 Backpackers)

 = 10 Backpackers

How do the concepts compare?

Each of the four concepts designed to manage visitor use have different approaches for how they manage the Yosemite Wilderness. Each benefits the user and the environment differently. Below is a graph illustrating how each concept might compare to the others in its ability to address the four primary issues related to increased use and changing use patterns.





How can you stay involved?

The National Park Service will be hosting a series of workshops and webinars to re-engage with the public and acquire feedback on the complex issues of Visitor Use and Capacity and Stock Use management. The following is a list of dates and places where workshops will be held.

For more on this, please go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yosewild>

- **Webinar #1 | Tuesday, August 9th | 12:00-1:00**
- **Groveland, CA | Groveland Community Hall | Wednesday, August 10th | 5:30-8:30**
- **Lee Vining, CA | Lee Vining Community Center | Thursday, August 11th | 5:30-8:30**
- **San Francisco, CA | Fort Mason, Bldg. C | Monday, August 15th | 5:30-8:30**
- **Oakhurst, CA | Oakhurst Branch Library | Thursday, August 18th | 5:30-8:30**
- **Webinar #2 | Monday, August 22nd | 6:00-7:00**

What to do if you wish to give feedback:

We will be accepting feedback on the preliminary ideas and concepts for **Visitor Use and Capacity** and **Stock Use** through **September 30, 2016**. You may submit your feedback by mail or electronically through the Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) web-based system.

For more on this, please go to: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yosewild>

Please consider the following questions when offering suggestions:

- Have we identified a sufficient range of concepts to address visitor use?
- Have we omitted any key ideas related to visitor use?
- What do you like about the basic concepts? How would you refine them?
- Are there specific elements that should be changed? How would you change them?



What happens next?

- **Preliminary Ideas & Concepts - Current Public Engagement Opportunity**
- **Preparation of Draft Plan and EIS - Fall/Winter 2016**
- **Public review of Draft Plan and EIS - Spring 2017**
- **Analysis of public comment - Spring/Summer 2017**
- **Publish final plan, EIS, and record of decision - Winter 2017**