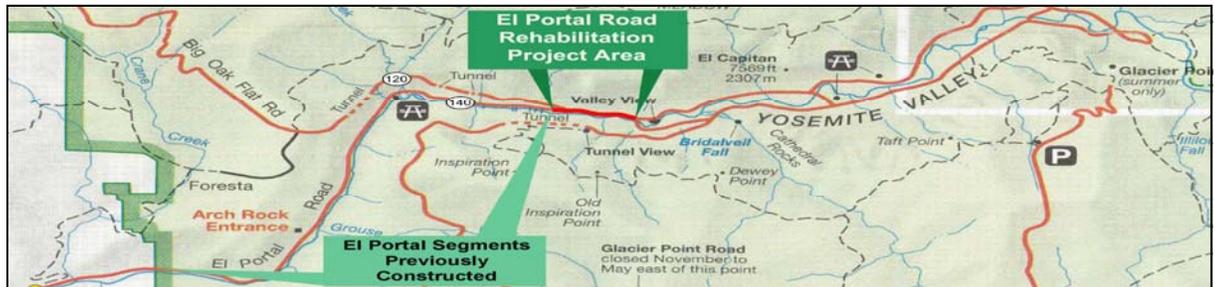




El Portal Road Reconstruction- Pohono Bridge to the Big Oak Flat Road Intersection

Where is the proposed project area located?

The El Portal Road is a park road that begins at the western Yosemite National Park boundary. It is the continuation of California State Highway 140 as it transitions to park service jurisdiction, and proceeds 7.5 miles east to the Pohono Bridge. This road climbs through the Merced River canyon, gaining almost 2,000 vertical feet before it intersects the Yosemite Valley Loop Road at Pohono Bridge. Along the way, this road parallels the cascading Merced Wild and Scenic River and passes Arch Rock Entrance Station. The proposed project would involve the easternmost mile of this road, which lies between the Pohono Bridge to the east and the Big Oak Flat Road intersection to the west. It would focus specifically on those areas of this segment in need of emergency repair.



Why undertake this project now?

Significant damage occurred during the 1997 flood, necessitating an almost complete reconstruction of the El Portal Road. Since then, the National Park Service has rebuilt the westernmost 6.5 miles of the road—referred to as Segments A, B, and C—but prior to completion, reconstruction of the final one-mile segment of the project, referred to as Segment D, was halted as a result of a successful legal challenge. The court decision directed the National Park Service to prepare a comprehensive management plan for the Merced Wild and Scenic River in advance of completing road repairs.

In the intervening nine years, the roadway and embankment have continued to be undermined by the river. As a result, the National Park Service has completed five emergency repairs to the current project area, including three retaining wall repairs to prevent roadway collapse. If a more long-term solution is not put in place, complete roadway failure is likely to occur. Such a failure could endanger motorists, cause a long-term road closure, and potentially sever Yosemite Valley's primary electrical and sewage lines, which would have serious environmental consequences for the Merced Wild and Scenic River. This segment of the road serves three of four park entrances; a roadway collapse would prohibit access to Yosemite Valley from those entrances. In the near future, emergency repairs will no longer be sufficient. Planning now for a long-term solution will not only decrease the likelihood of catastrophic road failure, but will provide the public a chance to participate in the decisions made.



A portion of the undercut roadway bank.

What does this proposed project entail?

The El Portal Road Reconstruction project was originally intended to address various motorist safety and configuration issues in such a way that would align the road structurally and aesthetically with the three road segments previously completed. Since then, the most recent Merced Wild and Scenic River-related court decision has directed the National Park Service to prepare a new, valid comprehensive management plan for the river. In the absence of a user capacity management framework and the river values that such a plan would identify, planning for the reconstruction of the entire final segment of the El Portal Road will be postponed. Instead, the current project will focus specifically on how to address the immediate risk to health and safety and develop a long-term solution for those portions of the road currently being undercut by the river.

Alternative options for this will be evaluated in an Environmental Assessment and will incorporate input from park staff and the interested public. Important considerations throughout the planning process will be to maintain the road’s essential historic character as a winding, narrow mountain road, and to consider the protection and enhancement of the Wild and Scenic River.

What are the next steps and how can I get involved?

Yosemite National Park is looking to you for ideas about how best address the issues explained above while assuring protection of the Merced River’s Outstandingly Remarkable Values and maintaining the historic character of the area. This section of road is heavily traveled, is becoming increasingly degraded, and needs immediate attention.

The public scoping comment period will occur in late fall of 2006, and run for 45 days. Public scoping and associated monthly open houses serve as an opportunity early in the planning process for the public, organizations, and other agencies to suggest issues to be considered by the National Park Service in preparing the Environmental Assessment.

Planning Timeline:

Ongoing:	Internal Agency Scoping
Late Fall 2006:	Formal Public Scoping
Summer 2007:	Public Review of Environmental Assessment (EA)

Public Participation

Public participation is essential for the success of this and all other park improvement projects. Here are some ways to stay involved in this project and its planning process:

- Attend a National Park Service public open house to talk with project specialists and obtain more information on the project. Visit the park’s planning website (listed below) for upcoming dates.
- Add your name to the park’s planning list and receive the *Planning Update* newsletter as well as other planning-related notices. You can also submit your email address to receive the park’s periodic electronic newsletter.

Mail: Superintendent
 Attn: *El Portal Road Reconstruction—Pohono Bridge to Big Oak Flat Road Intersection*
 P.O. Box 577
 Yosemite, CA 95389

Fax: 209/379-1294

E-mail: Yose_Planning@nps.gov

- Visit online: www.nps.gov/yose/planning