



Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation Project

What is the Wawona Tunnel View?

The Tunnel View scenic overlook is a historic site located adjacent to Wawona Road. This overlook affords expansive views of Yosemite Valley, El Capitan, Bridalveil Falls, and Half Dome that have captured the awe of visitors for nearly 75 years. The overlook was constructed in 1932 during an era that heralded a boom in design and development throughout the National Park Service, and helped initiate the National Park Service “rustic design style.” Wawona Tunnel and Tunnel View were determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 because of their exemplary design. Very little physical change has occurred to Tunnel View’s physical features (including rockwork, circulation patterns, and configuration) since it was built in 1933. The site remains one of the most popular scenic overlooks in Yosemite National Park. Tour buses, tram tours, and single-family vehicles bring an estimated five to seven thousand people to the site per day during the height of the tourist season.



Historic Tunnel View, circa 1932

Why undertake this project?

The purpose of the Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation Project is to remedy long-standing vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-pedestrian safety issues, to correct drainage deficiencies and problems, to provide clear circulation patterns for pedestrians and vehicles, to enhance and maintain viewing opportunities for visitors, to provide accessibility to viewing areas, to correct safety problems associated with the Inspiration Point trailhead, and to address sanitation issues, while maintaining the naturalistic, rustic character and integrity of this historic site.

Several factors demonstrate the need for this project:

- Since the Wawona Tunnel was completed in 1933, the NPS has responded to vehicle-to-vehicle accidents, single-vehicle accidents, and vehicle-to-pedestrian near-misses. Drivers traveling east through the tunnel often speed, are blinded by light as they exit the tunnel, encounter ice-patches at the east portal, and are faced with crowds of pedestrians and slow moving vehicles moving in and out of the roadway from the Tunnel View parking areas. Combined, these conditions create a sustained and serious safety problem.
- Visitors who have parked their vehicles in the south parking lot are directed to access viewing areas by crossing Wawona Road at locations that are on blind corners and not clearly visible by motorists.
- Currently storm-water and melting snow drain from the tunnel directly onto the north parking lot. From here, the water flows in sheets over the parking area, and eventually drains down the Wawona Road. In the winter the surface water on the entire parking area often freezes, creating hazardous driving and walking conditions.
- The northern parking area has an indistinct circulation pattern. Drivers of single-family vehicles and tour buses have ill-defined parking.
- The existing viewing area in the north parking lot consists of a 5-foot wide sidewalk, which is insufficient to accommodate the existing pattern of visitor use. Often crowds three to five people deep form to see the view of Yosemite Valley. The problem is further compounded because vegetation such as ponderosa pine and incense cedar has grown and obscured much of the historic view. The vegetation forces visitors to cluster into smaller viewing areas than what existed historically.

Why undertake this project? continued...

- The historic sidewalks and viewing platforms are edged with granite curbing that does not meet accessibility standards.
- The trailhead to Inspiration Point originates at the entrance to the south parking area. The trailhead is excessively steep, is located dangerously close to fast-moving traffic, and is suffering from erosion due to drainage problems.
- The southern portion of the site is used extensively as an open-air bathroom.
- Interpretive and wayfinding displays are limited and do not sufficiently educate, orient and direct visitors.
- Trash receptacles and food lockers are poorly located.

What does this project entail?

Once completed, this project would provide a safer, rehabilitated scenic overlook from which to experience one of Yosemite's most spectacular views.

Potential elements of the project could:

- Restore the historic view by selectively thinning conifers that currently obstruct it
- Provide clear parking areas for cars, RVs, trams, and tour buses
- Improve traffic flow to lessen congestion
- Install traffic calming devices in tunnel to decrease travel speeds adjacent to the overlook
- Install subsurface drainage structures
- Improve visitor safety at viewing platform(s)
- Improve accessibility at site
- Reposition Inspiration Point trailhead to a safer location (just east of the existing location)
- Install new wayside exhibits
- Study the feasibility of adding a comfort station

What is the schedule for this project?

Public scoping for this project is from June 4 until July 9, 2007. Design and the Environmental Assessment will occur throughout the rest of 2007. Public review and comment period on the Environmental Assessment is anticipated in Fall 2007. Construction on this project is expected to occur in 2008.

Where can I find more information about the Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation Project?

Further information about the Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation Project can be obtained by calling Yosemite National Park's Planning Hotline at (209)379-1294 Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. Information is also available on line at www.nps.gov/yose/planning.

Any questions or comments about the Tunnel View Overlook Rehabilitation Project can be directed to:

- **Mail:** Superintendent
Attn: Tunnel View
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
- **Fax:** 209/372-0220
- **Email:** Yose_Planning@nps.gov



THE YOSEMITE FUND
Providing for Yosemite's Future