

Testimony of Bob Asquith
For Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
Tuesday, July 9, 2013

Good morning.

I thank this committee for inviting me to testify about Yosemite National Park, one of our great national treasures. Yosemite has become a very personal treasure since I began traveling to Yosemite and camping in its high country with my family since the 1950s. After working 40 years in Silicon Valley both in technical and sales and marketing positions, I retired to Groveland which is about a half an hour drive from Yosemite National Park. Throughout these many years, I have experienced many changes in the Park.

I travel into Yosemite national Park several times a month and, during the summer, several times a week. In fact, last Thursday – the Fourth of July – I was hiking in a little used and quiet part of Yosemite, enjoying its peace.

I am on the Board of Directors of Yosemite Gateway Partners. This is a 501(c)(3) corporation that is a collaborative, non-advocacy organization that is devoted to supporting communications between Yosemite and its four gateway communities, specifically to, *“collaborate on and address issues of regional importance to create sustainable cultural, natural and economic prosperity”*.

From my personal perspective, there are number of key issues facing the park and its management – none more important that creating a comprehensive plan to manage conflicting goals. Some important issues are traffic and congestion, development of accommodations, and balancing visitor use with protecting Park resources.

Shortly after I retired, I became involved with Yosemite's efforts in planning for the Tuolumne River Management plan. I attended more than 10 meetings for this plan over three years and was a welcome participant in process. During that time, work on the Merced River Management plan began. This followed a very similar process, beginning with a number of public meetings. Key Park personnel, who were very open to suggestions and comments made by those attending, also attended all that I attended.

From Merced River Plan scoping meetings through the most recent presentations of the draft EIS, key Yosemite staff were present, many times including Superintendent Neubacher; there was always a very open atmosphere, acceptance of questions in public dialogue and a willingness to stay until the last question was answered.

I also have attended at least 12 Merced River presentations and meetings. These include meetings at Yosemite Gateway partners, four a year, for nearly 2 years, plus many more in Gateway communities.

In all cases, the park would start with a presentation of the status of the planning process, their current thinking, then opening the meeting to questions for all attendees. Each time, anyone who wanted to speak was allowed to do so, was listened to, and his or her comments recorded.

The planning process is a juggling challenge of competing goals and interests. The Park has met this challenge in earnest. I believe they have created a workable plan out of at least five separate Federal Statutes that often have competing goals.

As an example, if you assumed that the Merced River flowed directly down the middle of Yosemite Valley, then you can map one-year, five-year, 25-year, and 100-year floodplains thereby using almost all of the real estate in the Valley, right to the walls. If you then map the Rockfall hazards of the Valley walls, you start moving the lines back from the walls towards the Merced River, those zones cross each

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other in many places. The question becomes what asset do you place in either the floodplain or the rockfall hazard zone or both because they have overlapped. In short, there is limited real estate for everything and choices need to be made as to what to accommodate safely.

I am extremely impressed with the planning process the Park has undertaken. Beginning with my first participation in the Tuolumne River plan and continuing with the Merced River plan, the Park has found multiple ways and forums for engaging people and helping with the planning process by listening to their comments and suggestions and incorporating them into this plan.

I applaud the Yosemite National Park planners and management for developing a comprehensive, well thought out and vetted plan to manage these great resources, while considering tens of thousands of public comments over dozens of public meetings.