

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony on National Parks Service plans to restore Yosemite National Park Before the Committee on Resources' Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

By Tiffany Urness
California Trade and Commerce Agency
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The Honorable James V. Hansen, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Hansen,

The California Trade and Commerce Agency, Division of Tourism, acknowledges Yosemite National Park as one of the state's most renowned and cherished attractions. We consider it an icon, because it is so strongly associated with California. Its images have been featured in virtually every California state visitor guide, map, and brochures, and video.

We want to express our appreciation for efforts already underway to repair flood damages and restore public access to the Park. Fortunately, not all of the consequences of the flood were negative. Nature has washed away visitor facilities that were planned to be phased out anyway.

We have two concerns today regarding the eventual restorations plans and their implementation. First, we urge that in planning for the future of the Park and its operations, every consideration be given to the impact on surrounding communities and counties. Communities along each access route to the Park have had close economic ties to Yosemite even before its establishment as a National Park, serving as a source of supplies, guide services, food and lodging, and communication with the outside world. Many decisions that are well within the discretion of Park management can affect thousands of jobs and businesses in outlying regions as well important local services that are supported by tax revenues generated by people traveling to and from the National Park.

We do not wish to tell the Park Service how to manage. Our emphasis here is that since the Park Services affects the lives of so many beyond Park boundaries, the needs of the surrounding communities be taken into account. We feel that by working and planning in consultation with these communities, their needs can be accommodated without significant detrimental impacts on sensitive resources.

A second matter that we wish to comment upon concerns the specific needs of businesses which arrange and facilitate travel bookings, such as tour and motorcoach operators. The travel and tourism system depends on good communication and advance planning on the part of numerous parties. Booking contracts are typically made a year a year and a half ahead of the actual travel season. If this system is interrupted, disrupted, or appears unpredictable, tour operators could very well decide to book elsewhere, resulting in significant economic losses to the entire state. This is because Yosemite is often a key itinerary element in a multi-destination tour. Operators will not want to risk developing and promoting a tour which includes Yosemite

unless access to the Park can be guaranteed. If these advance guarantees cannot be given, through a system of blocking advance reservations for rooms and entries, not only communities and businesses in the immediate vicinity may lose, but communities hundreds of miles away, which would have been on a 6 or 14 day California itinerary that will no longer be offered.

We support the need for controlled access. Our concern is for how it is implemented. There needs to be coherent policy, consistently applied, that will give assurance to hotels, motels, and motorcoach operators that their guests will be able to get in. We urge that the Park Service give consideration to the travel and tourism system in their planning process.

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