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Mariposa Democratic Club Meeting Focused on Merced River Plan

At our February meeting, The Mariposa Democratic Club was happy to host Kathleen Morse, Planning Division Chief at Yosemite National Park, and Don Neubacher, Superintendent of Yosemite National Park, as they presented information on the recently released Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Merced River Plan that will govern the Park's efforts to protect and enhance the Wild and Scenic Merced River in Yosemite National Park.

Ms. Morse gave great information about the background of the Plan, the work done to develop it and a brief overview of the various alternatives, in particular Alternative 5, the 'Preferred Alternative.' All proposed alternatives allow access by private vehicles to Yosemite Valley. Alternative 5 reduces traffic congestion by eliminating the current traffic/pedestrian conflicts in the Yosemite Falls area and by re-doing the confusing intersection between Yosemite Village and the day-use parking area. These proposed changes will relieve traffic congestion and enhance pedestrian safety by eliminating the need for pedestrians to cross busy roads, while providing a greater sense of arrival when visitors get to Yosemite Village.

Alternative 5 will slightly increase available lodging and more significantly increase the number of camping sites in Yosemite Valley while also moving various facilities further from the River. Ms. Morse and Mr. Neubacher emphasized that the overriding goal of the MRP is to protect and enhance the River while still providing for public recreation in a way that assures the Valley is sustained for generations to come. Alternative 5 also removes some administrative and industrial functions from Yosemite Valley.

We learned lots of interesting information, including that one reason to eliminate rental bikes is to not only to reduce commercial enterprises and the consequent need for employee housing in the Wild and Scenic River corridor, but also that the rental bikes have caused many bicycle accidents of various types. Don Neubacher assured the audience that there is no plan to prevent private individuals from riding bikes in the park and that the existing bike racks and trails will remain in the Valley. Likewise while the commercial stables are to be eliminated under Alternative 5, there is no plan to ban horses or horse trailers from the Park. Elimination of the skating rink also generated significant discussion. Don pointed out that out of the 4 million visitors to the park, 10,000 use the ice skating rink and he indicated that Park management would be open to other options for skating in the Valley. The presentation generated lots of questions and much discussion. Fortunately, Elizabeth Munding and Woody Smeck, Deputy Superintendent, were there to provide additional input on the MRP.

The slide show presented at the meeting by Ms. Morse is available at the Mariposa Democratic website, www.mariposademocraticclub.org There will be many more public presentations; the club urges everyone concerned to attend at least one. Information is available at http://www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp_meetings.htm.

After the MRP presentation, the club agreed to send a letter to Senators Feinstein and Boxer asking them to oppose against raising the spillway at Lake McClure. We also approved two

resolutions to be sent to the California State Democratic convention, asking the state party to support additional funding for John C Fremont Hospital as a critical resource for our rural area and asking the party to provide for vision and hearing coverage in health care proposals initiated by Democratic legislators.

The Mariposa Democratic Club meets the second Saturday of every month at Miner's Roadhouse Restaurant. Join us at 9:00 a.m. if you want to purchase breakfast or at 9:45 a.m. for the speaker. Call 209-742-1010 if questions. For more information on the club, please visit our website at <http://www.mariposademocraticclub.org/> .