

MARIPOSA COUNTY

Merced River Trail Community Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

DATE: May 20, 2021

TIME: 10:00 AM

LOCATION: 5100 Bullion Street, Board of Supervisors Chambers

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Goralnik called the meeting to order at: 10:04 AM

Members Present: Jeff Gabe, Michael Martin, Tony McDaniel, Art Baggett, Dean Bernacchi, Rosemarie Smallcombe, Wendy Brown, Jessica Thompson, Ralph Mendershausen, Nick Ross-Rhudy
Members Absent: Ben Goger,
Visitors: Jim Donovan, Tara Fouch-Moore

2. **APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE 4/15/21 MEETING:** The minutes from this meeting were unanimously approved.

3. **DISCUSSION WITH YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK STAFF:**

Jim Donovan from the Yosemite National Park attended the meeting to discuss a range of topics related to the trail and river canyon in National Parks Service jurisdiction. Key points include:

- *Several trails already access Yosemite National Park from adjacent public land, including the John Muir Trail and Pacific Crest Trail, meaning that there is a precedent for the Merced River Trail providing access into Yosemite. Logistically, it is important to note that outside of developed campgrounds like Crane Flat, the trail in Yosemite jurisdiction offers almost no areas for camping, given that the trail would almost definitely not occur within Yosemite's designated wilderness areas.*

However, it could be possible to consider opportunities for additional backpacker campgrounds to be established to potentially support backcountry use associated with the trail. These opportunities might be limited by the lack of availability of water, and the steep and rugged nature of landscape. Ultimately, the Superintendent and leadership team would make decisions on this opportunity.

- Does the NPS have jurisdiction on property including roads located outside of the Yosemite National Park boundary, if so where? Can you clarify who owns what property along the roads in El Portal and Foresta? (Private, County, Federal, State, BLM, FS?) And are there maps showing this?
NPS has exclusive jurisdiction in the park itself, and shared jurisdiction in El Portal and Wawona. As for roads, there is no evidence of a public easement recorded for roads in El Portal, but there is an established implicit agreement that the roads are publicly accessible, and are managed by the Park. Outside of the right of way, all of the land is federal land,

including the residential areas (excluding the structures, which are owned by the property owners). The park has no jurisdiction outside of Yosemite.

- Two trails from the USFS jurisdiction are (or will) be connected to YNP: Alder Creek Trail (Wawona) to South Fork Trail and Merced River Trail to somewhere in the Administrative Area, potentially Foresta Bridge and also potentially another location in the park. Is the NPS aware of these projects? Do they anticipate any issues or problems these trails?
The South Fork and Alder Creek Trails are in a bit of a different category, as existing trails that are and have been maintained by local volunteer groups and others. There is a general awareness of the Merced River Trail among NPS staff, including a letter written by the Park to the county in support of the RTCA application indicating that the Park would be a partner in the trail planning process. Additionally, many park employees and residents use the trail recreationally, and the trail has been identified in surrounding public land managers' wild and scenic plans.
- The original vision for the Merced River Trail was to begin in Merced, travel up the old railroad grade through Yosemite, and end up on the east side of the Sierra. There now is some opposition to this vision from El Portal and Foresta residents. Where does the NPS stand on this issue, and will they allow travel into Yosemite using the Merced River Trail?
The original vision for the Merced River Trail could more accurately be described as a trail along the historic rail grade, though the possibility of ending on the east side of the Sierra could perhaps be a possibility by linking to a variety of trails in Yosemite that cross the mountains. The Park's administration does not have a position on the trail given that no formal proposal for the trail currently exists.
- What potential Yosemite entry locations currently exist? Does NPS have an ideal entry point/route for the MRT? If direct "recreational" access to the Park via the MRT cannot be achieved could a vehicular link (e.g. via YARTS or a shuttle) be established? What requirements does the park service have for MRT access to YNP?
Potentially using some of the historic logging roads that exist in Stanislaus National Forest provide opportunities for connections to entry points such as the Merced Grove and the Crane Flat Campground, the latter of which is a particularly promising option given its access to trailhead infrastructure such as developed camping and bathrooms. NPS does not operate YARTS, though it should be noted that the Crane Flat campground is adjacent to an existing YARTS stop, further validating that location as a potential terminus.
- What assistance can the park service provide regarding the MRT?
Current park collaboration has been as subject matter experts, and further encouraging the County to work with local stakeholders to develop a shared vision for the project. Divisions of the Park that are currently aware of/engaged in the project include the Lands Officer, Chief of Staff, the Chief of Planning, law enforcement staff, and Superintendent.
- Does YNP have any joint projects with the FS? How do you manage joint responsibility/jurisdiction?
NPS and USFS do not share jurisdiction, but collaborate to the best of their ability, in particular on issues related to fire.

Potential management issues would be greatly mitigated by a trail that stays to established roads to the greatest extent possible. It is worth noting that the trail could add to the

workload of trail management/maintenance staff, but this work is currently taking place on many historic/existing roads in park jurisdiction related to utility maintenance and road clearing associated with the Mono Wind event and other natural disaster events. However, many of these roads are located primarily or entirely in Stanislaus National Forest, and not in the jurisdiction of Yosemite.

4. DISCUSSION ON PROJECT ACTIONS:

The committee discussed moving on to developing and seeking community input on project actions. Committee members discussed the list of preliminary draft actions, and authorized the subcommittee of Jeff Gabe, Nick Ross-Rhudy, Michael Martin, and Ralph Mendershausen to collaborate to provide a final list of draft actions for the committee to approve, and for that list of draft actions to be commented upon by the public before final adoption by the CWG.

5. DISCUSSION ON MAY COMMUNITY SPEAKER AND ENGAGEMENT SERIES EVENT:

Goralnik shared that he had scheduled the May Community Speaker and Engagement Series event with Amarina Wuenschel, ecologist at the US Forest Service, who will present on wildfire, climate change, drought, and the trail's relationship to these topics in the Merced River canyon and watershed. The engagement component of the event will include a presentation of the adopted project goals, and the process through which they were developed and adopted.

Tony McDaniel and Wendy Brown volunteered to continue spearheading promotions for the event. Rosemarie Smallcombe indicated that the county clerk could support promotions through Mariposa County channels.

6. DISCUSSION ON COMMITTEE PROCEDURES:

This item was tabled for a later meeting.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no public comment.

8. ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned the meeting at 11:36 AM.

Minutes Prepared by: Mikey Goralnik