UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

MAR 11 2013

Don L. Neubacher, Superintendent
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
Attn: Tuolumne River Plan DEIS

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan, Yosemite National Park, California (CEQ#20130003)

Dear Mr. Neubacher:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the above project. Our review and comments are pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA understands that a new Wild and Scenic Management Plan is needed for the protection of Tuolumne River values including water quality, riparian habitats, and visitor experience. The preferred alternative (Alternative 4) would provide a great number of visitor opportunities while still maintaining the integrity of natural and cultural resources. Based on our review, EPA has rated the proposed project as Lack of Objections (see enclosed "Summary of EPA Rating Definitions").

Alternative 4 proposes to eliminate concessioner stock rides to Glen Aulin camp and to reduce stock day rides along the Tuolumne Meadows and Tioga Road corridor (p. 7-88 through 7-89). It is unclear whether the stock rides that transport supplies to the High Sierra camps would be eliminated, as well, or whether they would be reduced or expanded in number. We recommend that the Final EIS provide clarification of the number of commercial versus supply stock rides that would operate in the river corridor under the Preferred Alternative, including the associated impacts.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this Draft EIS. Should you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact me at (415) 972-3521, or contact Stephanie Skophammer, the lead reviewer for the project. Stephanie can be reached at (415) 972-3098 or skophammer.stephanie@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Martyn Goforth, Manager
Environmental Review Office
Communities and Ecosystems Division

Enclosures: Summary of EPA Rating Definitions

SUMMARY OF EPA RATING DEFINITIONS*

This rating system was developed as a means to summarize the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) level of concern with a proposed action. The ratings are a combination of alphabetical categories for evaluation of the environmental impacts of the proposal and numerical categories for evaluation of the adequacy of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE ACTION

"LO" (Lack of Objections)

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

"EC" (Environmental Concerns)

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impact. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EO" (Environmental Objections)

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EU" (Environmentally Unsatisfactory)

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potentially unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

ADEQUACY OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

"Category 1" (Adequate)

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

"Category 2" (Insufficient Information)

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analysed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

"Category 3" (Inadequate)

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analysed in the draft EIS, which should be analysed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the NEPA and/or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

*From EPA Manual 1640, Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment.