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

MAR 29 2013

Don L. Neubacher, Superintendent
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
ATTN: Merced River Plan/DEIS

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan Project; Yosemite National Park, California. (CEQ# 20130005)

Dear Mr. Neubacher:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Merced Wild and Scenic River Draft Comprehensive Management Plan Project (Project), Yosemite National Park, California. Our review is provided pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

Based on our review of the DEIS, we have rated the Preferred Alternative 5 as LO -- Lack of Objections (see enclosed EPA Rating Definitions). The EPA appreciates the National Park Service's (NPS) commitment to protect and enhance the 81 miles of the Merced River within Yosemite National Park. The DEIS articulates well the difficult decisions involved in comprehensive planning to protect the river's free-flowing condition, water quality, and the outstandingly remarkable values that make it worthy of Wild and Scenic River designation. We commend the NPS for the thorough description, in the DEIS, of the possible effects of climate change in regard to the regional hydrologic setting, overall ecosystem resilience, and need for adaptation to climate change.

As my staff discussed with your team in a phone conversation on March 5, 2013, we recommend that the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) include some edits and additional analysis in the Air Quality section. These are described in the enclosed Detailed Comments.

EPA appreciates the communication between our offices and the opportunity to review this DEIS. When the FEIS is released, please send one copy to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3521, or have your staff contact James Munson, the lead reviewer for this project. James can be reached at (415) 972-3852 or Munson.James@epa.gov. For questions regarding air issues, please have your staff contact Dawn Richmond at (415) 972-3097 or Richmond.Dawn@epamail.epa.gov.

Sincerely,

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

Enclosures: Summary of the EPA Rating System
Detailed Comments

EPA'S DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE MERCED WILD AND SCENIC RIVER DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN PROJECT; YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, MARIPOSA, MADERA COUNTIES, CA (CEQ# 20130005).

The Air Quality section includes some errors and omissions that should be corrected in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). EPA recommends that the FEIS include the following additions/edits to the Air Quality section:

- All direct and indirect emissions from both the construction and operational phases of the project should be quantitatively evaluated and compared to de minimis levels for general conformity purposes.

- The document states: "The general conformity rule is currently undergoing revision." The FEIS should be updated to reflect that the rule was revised on 4/5/10.

- Page 9-700 of the general conformity description section incorrectly states that nitrogen oxides (NOx) thresholds are 100 tons per year. This should be updated to reflect that NOx thresholds in the project area are currently 50 tons per year.

- The FEIS should be updated to reflect that Madera County is designated attainment/maintenance for PM10, which has a de minimis level of 100 tons per year.

- Page 9-6708 suggests that increased emissions from traffic would be off-set by improvements to vehicle emissions. The FEIS should expand on this assumption and explain why "exhaust emissions would remain approximately the same." If the National Park Service is planning an electric and or hybrid vehicle visitor discount, the document should clearly state these plans and describe the anticipated benefits to air quality.

- Pages 9-6710 -- 6711 state that Segment 2 could exceed federal standards due to campfires. The FEIS should include mitigation measures to reduce these impacts.

- Chapter 9 and Appendix G of the document should be expanded to include timber harvest and pre-treatment equipment emissions and mitigation measures such as:

  Mobile and Stationary Source Controls:
  - Reduce use, trips, and unnecessary idling from heavy equipment.
  - Maintain and tune engines per manufacturer's specifications to perform at California Air Resources Board (CARB) and/or EPA certification, where applicable, levels and to perform at verified standards applicable to retrofit technologies. Employ periodic, unscheduled inspections to limit unnecessary idling and to ensure that construction equipment is properly maintained, tuned, and modified consistent with established specifications. CARB has a number of mobile source anti-idling requirements. See their website at: http://www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/truck-idling/truck-idling.htm
  - Prohibit any tampering with engines and require continuing adherence to manufacturer's recommendations

- If practicable, lease new, clean equipment meeting the most stringent of applicable Federal or State Standards. In general, only Tier 3 or newer engines should be employed in the construction phase.
- Utilize EPA-registered particulate traps and other appropriate controls where suitable, to reduce emissions of diesel particulate matter and other pollutants at the construction site.

Administrative controls:

- Identify all commitments to reduce construction emissions and incorporate these reductions into the air quality analysis to reflect additional air quality improvements that would result from adopting specific air quality measures.
- Identify where implementation of mitigation measures is rejected based on economic infeasibility.
- Prepare an inventory of all equipment prior to construction, and identify the suitability of add-on emission controls for each piece of equipment before groundbreaking. (Suitability of control devices is based on: whether there is reduced normal availability of the construction equipment due to increased downtime and/or power output, whether there may be significant damage caused to the construction equipment engine, or whether there may be a significant risk to nearby workers or the public.) Meet CARB diesel fuel requirement for off-road and on-highway (i.e., 15 ppm), and where appropriate use alternative fuels such as natural gas and electric.
- Develop construction traffic and parking management plan that minimizes traffic interference and maintains traffic flow.
- Identify sensitive receptors in the project area, such as children, elderly, and infirm, and specify the means by which you will minimize impacts to these populations. For example, locate construction equipment and staging zones away from sensitive receptors and fresh air intakes to buildings and air conditioners.