



Solitude, Recreation, Preservation... Wilderness

Wilderness

Americans have long cherished the dream of the wild frontier and the promise of the unknown.

In 1964, in a nearly unanimous vote, Congress passed the Wilderness Act (Act) “to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.”

The Wilderness Act describes wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

While the Wilderness Act provides descriptions and guidelines, it does not provide use numbers or prescribe specific management actions. For example, the Act states that wilderness provides“ outstanding opportunities for solitude,” but it does not define the number of people allowed before solitude is impacted.

The Plan

To address impacts caused by increased visitor use of the Half Dome trail, the National Park Service is developing a management plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide long-term stewardship of the Half Dome route in a manner that is consistent with the Wilderness Act and the National Park Service Organic Act.

More specifically, the plan will:

- Consider all ways to preserve and enhance wilderness character. This may include a range of alternatives from removal of the cables, to access restrictions potentially involving day-use permits
- Institute management prescriptions that protect and enhance the natural and cultural environment
- Establish thresholds and management prescriptions for appropriate social conditions on the Half Dome trail
- Provide unimpeded travel conditions, so that visitors may manage their own risk
- Commit to a program of ongoing monitoring to ensure the goals listed above are met Data gathered during an interim permit system enacted in 2010 will help inform the plan.

Half Dome

Ever since Josiah Whitney in his 1870 Yosemite Guide-Book called Half Dome “perfectly inaccessible,” Half Dome has stood as a challenge to hikers. In 1919, the Sierra Club developed a cable system that provides access to the summit of Half Dome for visitors without technical rock climbing ability. In 1984, Congress designated Half Dome as wilderness. Today, the hike to the summit of Half Dome is arguably the most iconic and popular wilderness excursion for visitors to Yosemite National Park.

The Half Dome trail’s popularity is taking a toll on its wilderness environment. Initial monitoring along the trail has revealed:

- Vegetation damage and soil loss on and near the trail corridor, including many sections that are very wide and deeply eroded
- Habituation of wildlife along the trail corridor, and particularly at the summit and subdome, from improper food storage and feeding
- Threats to a population of the Mt. Lyell Salamander, a California Specie of Special Concern
- Severe crowding on the subdome, summit and cables, including long lines to use the cables
- Very high encounter rates on the entire trail

Increases in the number of people hiking to Half Dome are impacting the environment so that it no longer reflects the “natural conditions” and “solitude” required by the Wilderness Act. Crowding on the Half Dome cables can increase exit time from the summit and the amount of time visitors are exposed to hazardous natural conditions such as slippery wet rock, extreme temperatures, and lightning.

Help Us

The National Park Service cares for Half Dome and Yosemite National Park on behalf of their true owners, the American people. Public interest and participation in this plan to manage and secure Half Dome and its wilderness setting is always welcome. To find out more about the Half Dome Trail Stewardship Plan:

Visit the park’s planning website at www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/planning.htm

Write to:
Superintendent
Attn: The Half Dome Trail Stewardship Plan
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389

Attend a Public Meeting:

May 26th 2010	1-6 PM	Yosemite Valley Auditorium during Open House
June 5th 2010	4-8 PM	Fresno REI store 7801 N Blackstone Ave, Fresno, CA (559) 261-4168
June 16th 2010	4-8 PM	Berkeley REI store 1338 San Pablo Ave, Berkeley, CA (510) 527-4140

Half Dome Trail Stewardship Plan