



# What is User Capacity?

## How is User Capacity Defined?

In national parks, user capacity refers to the level of use (both type and amount) that an area can accommodate without having unacceptable impacts on the area's values. These values are not limited to an area's natural and cultural resources, but also include the quality of the visitor experience and other social factors.



Photo Courtesy of Bruce Wong



NPS Photo

The Wilderness Trailhead Quota System is one example of several successful user capacity programs in Yosemite. Another example is the Visitor Experience Resource Protection framework (VERP), an NPS program that the park has adopted to monitor and manage user capacity within a Wild and Scenic River corridor.

## How is User Capacity Determined?

In a place as vast and diverse as Yosemite, no single approach is sufficient to address the range of uses and use impacts in the park. Therefore, a variety of methods are employed to determine what levels of use can be accommodated while maintaining conditions that are consistent with the purposes of the park and the goals of its mission. These methods are usually expressed as limits, whether they are limits based on environmental conditions, limits on specific activities, or limits of available facilities.

## Some Conditions and Factors that Help Determine User Capacity

### Resource conditions and limitations



NPS Photo

- Location, type, and condition of natural and cultural resources
- Resource protection mandates, such as federal laws and NPS regulations

### Facility conditions and limitations



Photo courtesy of Phil Hawkins, www.yosemitefun.com

- Overnight lodging and camping capacity
- Available parking

### Social conditions and limitations

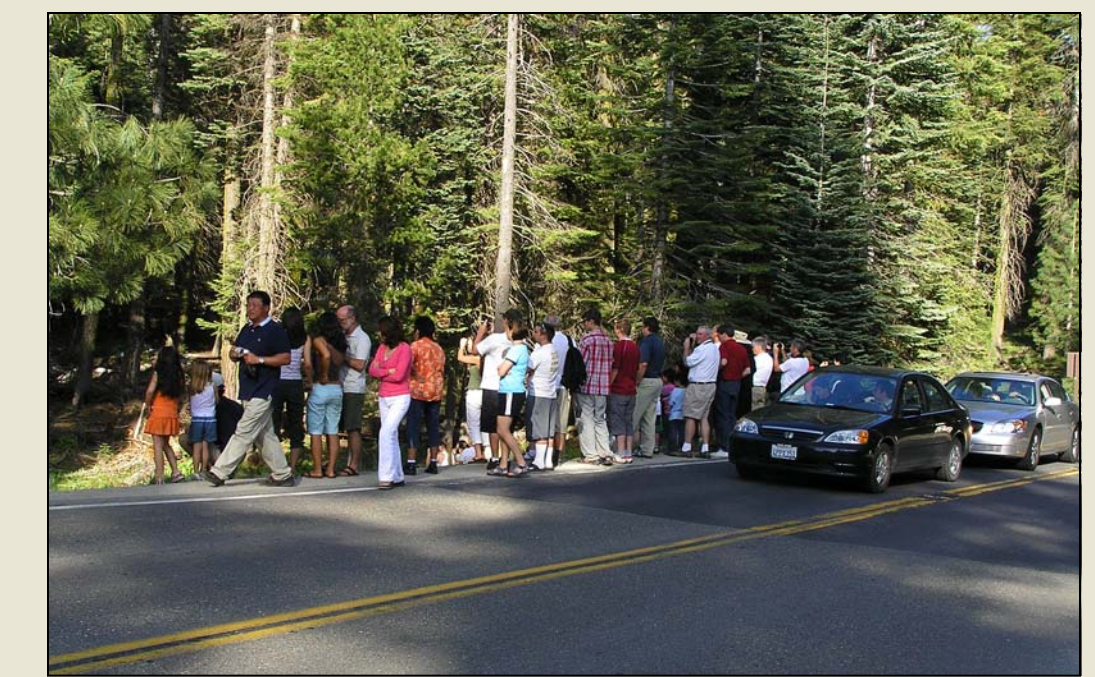


Photo Courtesy of Edie Howe

- Visitor services
- Perceived crowding
- Traffic congestion

## User Capacity and Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act calls for the protection and enhancement of river values while allowing for some level of use, but only to the extent that this use does not adversely affect the river values for which the river was designated Wild and Scenic.



Photo Courtesy of Bruce Wong