

Meeting Summary

Yosemite National Park – Merced River Hydrology Study

12:30 – 4:30 p.m., May 16, 2016
Cliff Room, Yosemite Valley Lodge

Meeting Goals

- *Understand the focus for the Research Study.*
- *Understand the goals and approach of the Research Study.*
- *Provide input to research questions, methods, and approach.*

Webinar Links

Direct link to the recording of this webinar:

<https://yose.webex.com/yose/lr.php?RCID=04cca4c53882586375d023b34fcbbd53>

The recording is also available on Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC), the Park Service's Public Comment site. The link to the hydrological study page on PEPC is:

- <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/Merced-hydro-study>
- To view the recording, click on the Meeting Notices link on the left-hand side of the screen. Then click on the webinar link to view the recording.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- Participants would like to provide input to the criteria for success, and would like to discuss those criteria during Phase 2. The discussion could occur after the Research Team releases its preliminary drafts of the river characterization reports in late winter or early spring of 2017.
- If future meetings occur during high season (May-August), they could take place outside of the Park.
- The Section 106 Consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act will take place Monday, May 23 in Sacramento.

Meeting Highlights

- **Derek Booth reviewed the research project**, designed to understand Merced River hydrology and geomorphology, develop restoration and mitigation options, and assess the degree to which those options will improve riparian and river conditions.
- **Questions, comments, and suggestions about the research project and the decision-making framework for Sugar Pine Bridge** included:
 - Goals of the study, and implications of the study for bridge removal or mitigation.

- The need for the study, given previous evaluations of the river that showed significant bridge impacts.
 - Relationship of the study to the decision-making process, including the Merced River Plan, the Wild and Scenic River Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act.
 - Protecting bridges as Outstanding and Remarkable Values (ORV's) under the Wild and Scenic River Act.
 - How and when the research project will identify criteria to evaluate success of restoration and mitigation approaches.
 - Participants' interests in protecting the free flow nature of the river and avoid overly engineered mitigation options.
- **Comments on public engagement** included:
 - There is less need for public involvement if removing the bridge is not an option. If bridge removal might be possible, participants would like to be involved more frequently.
 - The importance of transparency about the goals and possible outcomes.
 - Public engagement should be event-driven, not according to a fixed schedule.

Discussion on Public Engagement

When should the Research Team and Park Service engage the public?

- Derek Booth reviewed the project timeline and major milestones:
 - There will be a draft product on the physical characterization of the river in about one year, aiming for late winter 2017. That phase will not be asking specific questions about how the bridge affects flow or would respond to treatments.
 - If there is agreement that we need to develop the criteria and framework for the cost benefit analysis in Phase 2, that should happen in winter 2017-2018 to feed into Phase 3, which will run from 2018-2020.
 - Dr. Booth suggesting suggested a public meeting on the release of the draft and/or final characterization reports. He also asked if participants would want or be interested in a progress report sometime next fall/winter, before the Park releases the final versions of the reports.

Dr. Birkhoff recapped the discussion. In April or May of 2017, Dr. Booth's team will have a product. That can be beginning discussion on framework and criteria for success.

- **Comment:** Public engagement should be event-driven, based on what the Research Team has developed.

- Comment: It makes sense to engage the public when the Research Team finishes the first technical reports. At that point, it will time to begin the discussion about criteria and the decision-making framework. Public engagement then will allow the public to contribute without having to be too deeply involved in the technical discussion.
- Comment: Many groups are not here today that are interested in this process. The Park should also include and update those groups.
- Comment/Discussion: It is fine to meet in the Park during off-season, but if we meet between May and August (high season), it should be somewhere else.

Participants

Mark Beason, State Historic Preservation Office, (Via Webinar)
Derek Booth, University of California, Santa Barbara
John Buckley, Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center
Rosemarie Smallcombe, Mariposans for the Environment and Responsible Government
Steve Smallcombe, Mariposans for the Environment and Responsible Government
Scott Carpenter, Yosemite National Park
Kimball Koch, Yosemite National Park
Randy Fong, Yosemite National Park
Brye Lefler, Yosemite National Park
Linda Mazzu, Yosemite National Park
Joe Meyer, Yosemite National Park
Kathleen Morse, Yosemite National Park
Jim Roche, Yosemite National Park
Madelyn Ruffner, Yosemite National Park
Greg Stock, Yosemite National Park
Eirik Thorsgard, Yosemite National Park
Juliana Birkhoff, Center for Collaborative Policy
Sarah Di Vittorio, Center for Collaborative Policy