PARK MANAGEMENT AND THE GROWTH OF COOPERATING ASSOCIATIONS
IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

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Jonathon R. Bartlett
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PARK MANAGEMENT AND THE GROWTH OF COOPERATING ASSOCIATIONS
IN YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

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In January 1997 a 100-year flood destroyed buildings, campgrounds, roadways, and bridges in Yosemite Valley, the most visited part of Yosemite National Park. The advent of the flood gave park managers an opportunity to rethink the built environment of Yosemite and create a new approach to managing the park by drafting environmental plans and utilizing partnerships with cooperating associations. This thesis uses historical documents, current data, and illustrations to trace the management of Yosemite since it was founded in 1890. This study is the first to report on the growth of cooperating associations operating within the national park system, which originated in Yosemite. Over time, these associations have become more intimately involved with the operation of Yosemite. The study proves that without cooperating associations park staff cannot operate Yosemite National Park and serve the public according to the NPS mission statement as outlined by the 1916 Organic Act.

Approved: Geoffrey Buckley

Assistant professor of Geography
Acknowledgements

From the moment I first came to Yosemite I had been searching for a way to express my concern, love, and experience of this place. I chose to document Yosemite from my first moments in the park until my most recent (I don’t dare say last). This thesis is a way to examine the park and its current status as it enters its 139th season. It is said that Yosemite will always touch your soul. In the short time I have spent there, it has become a part of my soul. Along with others my soul has become concerned.

I want to especially thank my family for their unconditional love and support, Dr. Geoff Buckley for his positive feedback and patience, and Linda Eade and Jim Snyder for educational afternoons in the park research library. In addition, I want to thank volunteers like Kathy Orr, who deserves a gold medal for her 20 years as a volunteer in the park. This thesis is for Yosemite park staff, volunteers from the Yosemite Association, the Yosemite Fund, and the future of the park.
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Introduction

In January 1997 a 100-year flood destroyed buildings, campgrounds, roadways, and bridges in Yosemite Valley (Figures 1 and 2). The federal government shut down this portion of the park and declared a state of emergency (Yosemite Association 1997). At the time of the flood, Yosemite Valley contained more than one thousand buildings, including homes, shops, garages, apartments, lodging facilities, and restaurants. The valley was also bisected by more than thirty miles of roadway. Decades before the flood occurred it was clear that pollution, traffic, and overcrowding were adversely affecting Yosemite’s natural environment and diminishing visitor experience (NPS 1980). The park service recognized this and was in the process of drafting new environmental plans to address these and other issues when the flood occurred (NPS 1997). The goals were to restore the natural integrity of the valley and improve visitor enjoyment. Ironically, the flood gave managers an opportunity to completely rethink and redesign Yosemite’s built environment (NPS 2000).

Prior to the 1997 flood, which caused over $176 million in damages, groups other than the park service were actively working to protect Yosemite’s natural, cultural, and scenic resources in order to provide a high quality recreational experience for visitors (NPS 1999). Facing budget cuts, inadequate staffing, and the need for environmental improvements the park service increased the roles of cooperating associations to help implement change (Blair 1954; National Parks Conservation Association Staff Report 1972; Livermore and Hansen 1998; NPS 1997; NPS Financial Report 2000).
Fig. 1. Yosemite Valley during the flood of 1997 (NPS photo courtesy YNPRL).

Fig. 2. Most of the infrastructure within the valley and downriver was damaged, such as this tent cabin near the Curry Village area (Geoff Green/ Yosemite Association 1997).
Today, efforts to restore Yosemite are underway. A new environmental impact statement (EIS) is being implemented and the park service is working with three major cooperating associations and the park concessionaire to accomplish restoration and management efforts. The Yosemite Association (YA), the Yosemite Fund (YF), the Yosemite Institute, and the Yosemite Concession Services Corporation (YCS) together provide funding and staff for park projects and educational initiatives. Yosemite’s most pressing problem continues to be coping with high visitor use. To address this issue the park service is working to redesign the built environment in Yosemite Valley. They are only able to accomplish the restoration efforts by working together with the cooperating associations. The two main goals are to provide a meaningful experience to a diverse audience and to protect the natural environment (NPS 2000). To better understand this new approach it is necessary to identify how the park has been managed in the past and how cooperating associations are building a sustainable future in Yosemite.

Yosemite National Park is one of the most visited national parks in the world. Roughly equivalent in size to the state of Rhode Island, it is located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of northern California. Approximately 94.45% of the park is designated wilderness; the remaining 5.55% comprises the most visited parts of Yosemite and is the focus of this study. Tourists visit Yosemite for its rich history, spectacular waterfalls, 3,000-foot granite cliffs, and natural scenic beauty. No place has more of these characteristics on display than Yosemite Valley, a seven-mile-long and mile-wide cleft which is the heart of the park (Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6) (NPS 2002).
Fig. 3. Location of Yosemite National Park (NPS 2000).
Fig. 4. Yosemite National Park Boundaries (NPS 2000).
Fig. 5. Map of Yosemite Valley (NPS 2002).
Fig. 6. Map of eastern portion of Yosemite Valley (NPS 2000).
This thesis will recount history to trace park management and the growth of cooperating associations in Yosemite National Park. The history gives context to the role cooperating associations play in the current management of Yosemite National Park. Yosemite is an ideal park to situate this study because it was here that the first cooperating association within a national park was established in 1923. The development of the first cooperating association in Yosemite led to the creation of more associations within the park and throughout the national park system (NPS Training Manual 2002). Another reason to study cooperating associations in Yosemite is that the role of these organizations has expanded over time. Today much of the work goes beyond education to provide staff, money, and commentary for park initiatives.

This study shows how and why these organizations became involved in park management. More specifically, it illuminates the role they have played in the park’s recent development and restoration efforts. Until now, no study of cooperating associations within the national park management regime has ever been conducted. This study is important because it is the first to record the history of a national park cooperating association. And not just any national park; but Yosemite, where the national park idea was born (Roney 2002). Historical evidence shows that Yosemite has been more intensely managed than any other park in the system. This study offers a new way to interpret the park’s management history and provides insights into how cooperating associations have helped the park to overcome the many challenges it has faced.

The thesis of this study is that the National Park Service could not perform the duties necessary to operate Yosemite National Park without aid from cooperating associations. In this study I show how the park has learned from its management history,
how the park service and cooperating associations are partnering to restore Yosemite while serving the public, and why cooperating associations play a key role in helping the park service achieve its mission in Yosemite. I argue that the responsibilities cooperating associations have assumed in Yosemite National Park are critical to the park’s successful management. Without their assistance in completing park projects, providing staff and funding for park initiatives, and educating visitors about Yosemite National Park, the park service would be overwhelmed by high operational costs and high visitation (Figures 7 and 8) (NPS Budget Report 2002; NPS 2002). This thesis examines the recent management history of the park. As the literature review shows, the park has been the subject of numerous historical studies, but no study of recent management or of cooperating association involvement has ever been published. Such a study is long overdue. The creation of new environmental plans and the recent abandonment of the top down management approach has placed Yosemite at an important crossroads, 113 years after its founding (Runte 1990).

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Using historical data including academic articles, government documents, interviews, visual and journalistic media, and various reports it explores the park’s management history from its formation in 1864 to approximately 2002. Chapter Two provides a review of literature, including background information on NGOs and cooperating associations. This chapter emphasizes the fact that cooperating association’s involvement in park management has been all but ignored by scholars working in this area. Chapter Three recounts a brief history of the National Park Service. The history will focus especially on the early management of the emerging park system from 1864 to the 1930s. The growth of Yosemite National Park and its early
Fig. 7. Yosemite National Park budgets from 1978-2001 (NPS Budget Report for Yosemite NP 2002).
Fig. 8. Yosemite National Park visitation 1902-2001 (NPS 2002).
management, as well as defining moments in the park’s history are discussed in Chapter Four. A review of defining moments in Yosemite’s history provides a foundation upon which an analysis of park management can be constructed. A specific focus of the chapter is the birth and development of Yosemite’s first cooperating association, The Yosemite Association. In addition, conservation issues are brought to the forefront. It was at this time that concern was first raised over the physical integrity of the park due to explosive growth in visitation and development.

Chapter Five assesses Yosemite’s planning efforts during the 1950s through the 1980s. This chapter provides historical information on other cooperating associations and discusses their contributions to an embattled park service that is faced with budget cuts, diminished employment opportunities, and poor management. Chapter Six focuses on the role cooperating associations are playing within the management regimes of the 1970s to present day. This chapter discusses the significance of what is taking place in Yosemite today, and the partnership cooperating associations have forged with Yosemite. The final chapter stresses the significance of the study and provides critical insights into the way in which cooperating associations are influencing management of our national parks. Throughout the study historical and contemporary photographs will complement research.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Non-Government Organizations

The definition of a Non-Governmental Organization is elusive because of the wide range of organizations to which this label is applied. Kerstin Martens defines NGOs as “formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or international level” (Martens 2002, 282). Martens further states that NGOs are societal actors because they originate from the private sector, meaning that they are composed of individuals who could be involved with local, regional, or national branches of associations. However, the NGO is not usually composed entirely of governmental officials, representatives, or governmental institutions, although the organizations have individual members who occupy such positions (Martens 2002).

Another aspect of NGOs is that their missions are centered on promoting common goals related to the greater public good. Ultimately the promotion results in profit for the NGO and/or the general public. NGOs are professional because they are run by paid staffs with specific skills all working in a non-profit capacity. They may be funded in part by official institutions but only to the extent that they cannot be considered under the financial control of government. NGOs have at least a minimal organizational structure which allows them to work in their specialized area. This structure often includes a headquarters, permanent staff, a mission, and a distinct legal status. In conclusion Martens states that NGOs have been traditionally thought of as international organizations that are composed of members from more than one country, although many NGOs today operate on the national level only (Martens 2002).
The definition of a NGO is further complicated by the fact that they can vary greatly in size and function. “They are more goal oriented than government agencies, less rigidly bureaucratic, opportunistic and expansive in style” (Wilson 2002, 50). Furthermore, “the past few years have seen a remarkable growth in the number and prominence of such groups and their ability to precipitate change. They have cajoled, forced, joined in with, or forged ahead of governments and corporations on an array of actions” (Runyan 1999, 13). More specifically, NGOs work alongside governments, or in some cases against them, to effect change. It is unclear where the definition can formally distinguish a special interest group from an NGO. I believe that a NGO must be involved in a relationship with some governing body. In this thesis I adopt Martens’ definition and develop a deeper understanding of the concept.

International NGOs are the most studied because of the high profile work they conduct (Draper 2000). Some of the best known NGOs today are the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, the Sierra Club, and The Nature Conservancy. For the purposes of this thesis I am omitting study of the Sierra Club, which was formed in Yosemite in 1892 (Demars 1991). I choose to omit this national NGO because although it has a long standing history of promoting preservation in Yosemite National Park, it does not actively contribute to the park through a formal agreement with National Park Service managers. For the most part NGOs work with local, national, and international governing bodies. According to the Union of International Organizations a total of 985 NGOs devoted to environmental and humanitarian efforts existed in 1956. By 1990 the number of NGOs operating in the world had grown to 6,000 (Levine 2002). Six years later the number of NGOs operating worldwide exceeded 20,000 (Wilson 2002). Over the past 10
years NGOs have received more attention and support because of an increased awareness and need for conservation. In 2002 the Yearbook of International Organizations listed over 48,000 registered NGOs. This does not take into account the organizations that have failed to officially register themselves (Yearbook of International Organizations 2003).

The missions of these organizations vary greatly, but most appear to be dominated by humanitarian and environmental concerns. As the exposure of NGOs increases, their political power and effectiveness are amplified. Much of their success can be attributed to the broadening of mainstream environmental consciousness. Sometimes called the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), the concept can be broadly defined as public concern for and commitment to environmental protection (Floyd, Jang, and Noe 1997). Studies worldwide explain the steps NGOs are taking to preserve, protect, restore, and sustainably plan for the future. Significantly, national and local NGOs have received less attention, despite the fact that the roles they play are just as significant as the larger NGOs. Although less attention has been focused on NGOs at the local and state levels, they still can provide useful information to the international community (Draper 2000).

A study of 25 NGOs operating in the Squamish Forest District of British Columbia shows how they are intimately involved in supplementing the provision of goods and services around two national parks. For the most part, they are funding environmental initiatives, providing education, and offering technical assistance to help the Canadian government properly manage the forests and parks. The NGOs are comprised of clubs, associations, environmental schools, and conservation groups. Though the author’s inclusion of these local groups may not fit the formal definition submitted by Martens, they are still committed to supporting day-to-day operations in the
area and have a vested interest in how the Canadian government is managing its resources. This study exhibits just how elusive the definition of a NGO can be. It also shows the important advocacy, economic, and educational roles the organizations play (Reed 1997).

A study of parks and reserves in the Congo Basin reveals some of the challenges countries face when it comes to protecting and operating protected areas. The authors explain that biologically sensitive areas are being exploited because the nations of the Congo Basin cannot afford the management costs. In addition, the growing cost of setting aside protected areas is “increasing the incentives to local communities and national governments to illegally exploit economically valuable resources within parks and reserves.” As the parks and reserves face chronic under-funding, which has obstructed effective management and resulted in “progressive ecological impoverishment,” international NGOs are proposing substantial additions to the area’s present network” (Wilkie, Carpenter, and Zhang 2000, 691).

In this case the NGOs are working to create more protected areas, a critical step in conservation. However, the ability of the organizations to provide long-term assistance may not be sufficient. The authors call for the NGOs to work with national governments to reach an agreement on the creation of optimal protected areas which are mostly undisturbed and biologically diverse. The authors explain that to be successful the governments with landholdings in the Congo must receive long-term financial support to ensure effective management. This means that the NGOs must be willing to “shoulder” the costs of conservation efforts. Furthermore “if donors continue to under-finance protected areas rather than make the hard choices associated with prioritizing protected
area spending then most if not all protected areas within the Congo Basin will continue to exhibit reductions” (Wilkie, Carpenter, and Zhang 2000, 691). This study is valuable because it highlights successful approaches to park management in a highly sensitive political and economic context. Even though NGOs are providing some assistance, it is not enough. The authors argue that establishing protected areas is critical, but long-term management is the only way to ensure that parks will remain unimpaired. Methods for achieving long-term support are not discussed.

Another relevant study assesses global conservation of coral reefs and the need for NGO partnerships. It stresses the importance of reversing the global degradation of coral reefs. It also identifies some of the stakeholders belonging to the International Coral Reef Initiative, including Australia, France, Jamaica, Japan, the Philippines, Sweden, the U.K., and the United States. Due to a “growing skepticism that governments alone can bear the responsibility for managing and protecting the environment,” a priority of the organization is to establish partnerships with NGOs (Dight and Scherl 1997, 143). The authors also state that “not only do governments not have the resources to make development and/or resource management projects work in most cases, but there is growing consensus that this approach is not appropriate and that those stakeholders who are directly affected by management decisions need to be involved and have ownership of decisions which directly affect their livelihoods” (Dight and Scherl 1997, 143). The concept of “ownership” or of power for that matter is not directly mentioned in the formal definition adopted by Martens, but is significant nonetheless.
Cooperating Associations (NGOs of the Park System)

In addition to international and national organizations, we can identify a third type of NGO, one that has not been classified previously. Collectively these are referred to as “cooperating associations” by the government. More specifically, they are non-profit groups operating in and around U.S. national parks. Unfortunately, the aforementioned emphasis research focus on international NGOs has eclipsed the study of these important entities. To understand their significance we must first reacquaint ourselves with national park history.

Early on, park managers realized that the federal government could not provide adequate educational and interpretive services to the growing number of national park visitors. To address this shortcoming, the director of the National Park Service lobbied to create a service-wide organization dedicated to supporting national parks. This led to the creation of the National Parks Association in 1919. The original goals of the service-wide association (now the National Parks Conservation Association) were to protect and enlarge the national park system and to promote public enjoyment without compromising the scenic beauty of the parks (Sellars 1997). In addition, the National Parks Association specifically stood to “promote, in part, the interpretation of the scientific resources of the parks, encourage school groups to be brought to the parks, provide educational materials to schools, and to encourage the general development and distribution of information regarding the national parks” (NPS Website August 2003).

Over time it became apparent that just one organization could not adequately serve the needs of the entire park system. In 1923 the Yosemite Museum Association was established, making Yosemite the first park to create an organization dedicated solely to
ensuring an individual park’s future through education, interpretation and fundraising. While the original missions of the organizations appear to be similar one should bear in mind the importance of the park-based approach in sustaining an individual unit. In Yosemite we find the earliest example of an association created solely to confront the challenges facing an individual park. Yosemite was the logical place to launch the cooperating association idea because it was the park that faced the greatest challenges from tourism and development (National Parks Steering Committee 1993; NPS Training Manual 2002). In many ways the National Park Association and the Yosemite Museum Association fit the profile of a NGO as defined by Martens; however, the title of “cooperating association” works to conceal this point. Perhaps this is why they have received little attention until now.

Today there are a total of 66 cooperating associations operating in the national park system. These non-profit associations range in size and function, according to the magnitude of the challenges facing the parks they serve. They support the educational, scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of the park service. Some of the bigger associations draw funding from activities such as field seminars, bookstore sales, memberships, mail order sales, and donations. In some cases, smaller organizations have combined to form larger associations that serve more than one national park. Examples include the Southwest Parks and Monuments Association and the Eastern National Association. Through shared resources their revenues are supporting regional programs and individual park units (Mainella 2001; NPS Training Manual 2002).

All cooperating associations operate under a formal agreement with the National Park Service and in accordance with the requirements of the state in which they operate.
Congress has accorded these groups tax-exempt status under the internal revenue code 501(C)(3) to operate in areas of the national park system. Furthermore the groups also sign contracts that are reviewed by the NPS every five years (NPS 1998). Usually the associations are governed by volunteer boards of directors comprised of individuals from the community. The proceeds and revenues the organizations generate help fund publications, museum exhibits, libraries, and research activities, as well as other education or conservation initiatives. In 1997 the National Park Service received $19 million in financial support from all cooperating associations working under a formal agreement with Yosemite to advance the NPS mission (NPS Training Manual 2002; Yosemite Association 2002).

The park service has not limited itself to partnerships with cooperating associations. The service has recognized it needs help on all levels to achieve its mission. No longer can it afford to operate on government budgets. Infrastructure maintenance, restoration initiatives, interns, services, and equipment are all costs above and beyond the appropriated dollars parks receive. “The future of the National Park System is how we organize to get the greater community involved in accomplishing the mission… there simply aren’t sufficient funds in park budgets to run our parks; in some cases we have less than half of what we need” (NPS Training Manual 2002, 4). Another way of involving the community and channeling funds from the private sector is through the establishment of foundations or “friends groups” which provide volunteer labor, undertake fundraising projects, and coordinate campaigns to benefit the parks they support.
According to the service-wide National Park Foundation more than 150 friends groups are operating in the national park system. Like cooperating associations, they are committed to helping the park service achieve its mission; however, they are not under formal agreement with the NPS. This places the organizations in the public participation arena (NPS Training Manual 2002). Public participation has been a goal of the park service since the late 1970s when it abandoned its top down management approach. It was the park service personnel who realized that the key to success involved working closely with the public (Clarke and McCool 1996). Together the cooperating associations and the foundations allow non-government perspectives to be heard in forums, planning meetings, and through various media (NPS Training Manual 2002). In recent years these organizations have increased in number. Today they play an integral role in the management of the entire national park system.

This literature review has shown that while some studies have focused on the role international NGOs are playing in resource management today, relatively few focus on the work of nationally or locally-based NGOs. No studies have focused on the roles of cooperating associations. I submit that an examination of the U.S. National Park Service provides us with fertile ground for such a study. An investigation into the management decisions, planning initiatives, and restoration efforts that have been carried out at Yosemite National Park, in particular, should prove a welcome addition to the literature. The international community may also benefit by learning about the biggest obstacles that the park service has grappled with in the past and is struggling to overcome today. To assess why these cooperating associations have become so important a review of the history of the National Park Service is necessary.
Chapter III: History of the National Park Service

“Many of our problems are historical, but history can’t be wiped out”

John A. Carver Jr.,
Assistant Secretary of the Interior,
To the National Park Superintendent’s “Conference of Challenges,”
Yosemite National Park, October 1963.

The National Park Service was created on August 25, 1916 (USC 1916). However, the national park idea has a much longer history. In 1864 President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant which protected the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias for all time. Eight years later, Yellowstone became America’s first national park (Johnston 1995; Sellars 1997). By the time the National Park Service was established a total of 16 parks had already been created. Places like Yosemite, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, and Glacier parks - set aside for their scenic beauty and recreational opportunity - were cornerstones of an expanding system (Clarke and McCool 1996; NPS 2002).

At about the same time boosters began to promote travel to the national parks (Wyckoff and Dilsaver 1997). Railroad companies like the Great Northern, the Southern Pacific, and the Northern Pacific busied themselves building hotels and shuttling tourists. A symbiotic relationship developed between the railroads and America’s parks. The companies hoped that wealthy eastern visitors would support the creation of new parks, for which new hotels and railroads would have to be constructed. The fledgling park service wanted to promote tourism to justify its existence and secure its future. At a time of unprecedented environmental alteration the growing system of national parks provided
tourists with places to retreat where they could enjoy America’s most scenic and historic landscapes (Clarke and McCool 1996; Sellars 1997).

Since its inception the park service has struggled to maintain sufficient levels of funding (Lowry 2001; YNP Budget Report 2002). Clarke and McCool describe the park service as an agency that merely “muddles through” in the shadow of more generously funded agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Forest Service (Clarke and McCool 1996, 69). Financial support for the park service has been inconsistent at best, with only two main eras exhibiting adequate funding: the period immediately following World War II (when visitation in Yosemite increased) and during the time of the Mission 66 infrastructure improvement program (Clarke and McCool 1996). While budget cuts have undermined the performance of the park service, the popularity of the country’s national parks has grown since the turn of the century (Sellars 1997).

Today a total of 384 national parks are administered by the National Park Service, an agency guided by the following mission statement set forth in section one of the Organic Act of 1916: to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (Congress 1916; NPS 2002). The agency charged with responsible stewardship of what some call “America’s crown jewels” (Dilsaver 1994, 1) was put in a position where it had to balance preservation with use. The dual mission of the park service has been criticized by many who argue that the two goals are not compatible (NPS Steering Committee, 1993; Dilsaver 1994). Geographer Lary M. Dilsaver notes that in recent decades, “new
interpretations, changes in public and government attitudes, and the maturation of ecological science have added to the confusion” (Dilsaver 1994, 2).

Section three of the Organic Act may be just as important as section one in which the agency’s mission statement was articulated: “What some don’t realize, or bother reading, is section three of the Organic Act; it’s got a few surprises in it” (Snyder 2002). More specifically, it identifies regulations for managing the parks and accommodating visitors. According to section three the Secretary of the Interior can allow timber cutting if it can be shown that the standing timber poses a risk to visitors (Figure 9). The secretary also has the authority to permit the destruction of animals and plant life that impair park use (Organic Act 1916).

Fig. 9. Logging in Yosemite Valley is allowed under section three of the Organic Act (photo by author, summer 2002).
Throughout the twentieth century section three has been interpreted differently by
different park managers (YNP Wild Bear Project 2002). As time passes the political
pendulum swings, managers come and go, and the nature of tourism changes (Runte
1990). Because of the two drastically different principles outlined in sections one and
three of the Organic Act a dualism exists that delicately balances preservation and
recreation. While the duality of the park service mission poses problems for managers, it
is the interpretation of section three that presents the greatest challenge (Runte 1990;
Dilsaver 1992). Resolving these and other issues may well depend on public participation
- an element which has only recently been incorporated into NPS planning (GMP 1980;
NPS 2000).

Stephen T. Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, is responsible
for perpetuating the idea that park policy should be based on providing “the greatest good
to the greatest number of people” (Sellars 1997, 47). From 1916 to 1929 Mather built the
park service from the ground up. Most notable are his efforts to build tourist
infrastructure, construct unified road systems, and establish visitor services in all parks.
He worked hard to establish new parks, such as Mt. McKinley, Zion, Grand Teton, Grand
Canyon, and Bryce Canyon. Mather also worked diligently to build organizational
strength within the park service. He developed rangers and park superintendents into a
working force that shared a “common understanding of how national parks should be
managed.” Throughout his tenure he believed that the “success or failure of the national
parks depended on the rangers….the core of park management” (Sellars 1997, 53).

In the early years Mather directed the park service as it struggled to compete with
the U.S. Forest Service for money and prestige. “From 1918 to 1932 the system and the
parent agency fended off challenges to their existence” and established a unified
governing body over parks, monuments, and battlefields previously governed by the
Secretaries of War, Agriculture, and the Interior (Dilsaver 1994, 2). During these
formative years the federal government truly entered the “business of scenery” as retired
NPS historian Richard West Sellars recently put it (Sellars 1997, 28). Critics have argued
that the service has, at times, violated the principles set forth in its mission statement,
especially during the period from the 1950s through the 1970s. However, a closer
examination reveals that the founding ideals were “the preservation of scenery, the
economic benefits of tourism, and the efficient management of parks” (Sellars 1997, 29).
Today the cornerstone parks (Yosemite in particular) that were established before
passage of the 1916 Organic Act are struggling to provide “for future generations”
because they are built upon tourism-based foundations established long before the
mission statement was articulated. This study shows that park service history has affected
current management, and furthermore, that cooperating associations in Yosemite - the
park with the most intense management history - are responsible for enabling the park
service to carry out its mission.

It is said that Mather’s favorite park was Yosemite (Roney 2002). Indeed his
personal and professional attempts to improve the park’s infrastructure are clearly on
display. With his own money Mather paid for the construction of Yosemite’s Ranger’s
Club, which became famous throughout the park system as a gathering place for rangers
and visiting park superintendents. Mather also used his own money to help purchase land
for the construction of the Tioga Pass Road, which cuts through the heart of Yosemite,
connecting the eastern and western sides of the park. Under Mather Yosemite turned into
a year-round resort. Improved year-round road systems and tourist facilities (including
the construction of the luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel in 1926) eventually led to more
commercial development. In time, meadows were converted into parking lots and forests
replaced by toboggan runs, ice rinks, and a ski area (Figures 10 and 11) (Runte 1990;

Fig. 10. The Ahwahnee Hotel completed in 1926 (Runte 1990).
In response to negative comments in the press, a conference was held at Yosemite in 1922 to discuss the role of the park service in providing for the public. The conclusion was that there was “no sharp line between necessary, proper development and harmful over-development.” However, it was agreed that “overdevelopment of any national park, or any portion of a national park, is undesirable and should be avoided” (Sellars 1997, 63-4). Concern over the future of the park was echoed years later by a prominent Washington, D.C. businessman, Dr. John C. Merriam, President of the Carnegie Institution. After a visit to the park he urged Mather to create a plan for the future of Yosemite, one which would reestablish preservation over recreation as the primary mission of the park. In 1928 Merriam’s voice along with others like Fredrick Law Olmsted, Jr. (a prominent landscape architect from Massachusetts), was heard and the
first National Park Board of Expert Advisors was inaugurated to assess development in all national parks, especially Yosemite (Runte 1990).

From 1916 to the early 1930s the most visited national parks, Yosemite in particular, experienced tremendous growth (Sellars 1997). Mather and his park staff worked diligently to enhance the visitor experience. “An analysis of that experience in terms of visitor behavior and preferences sheds light on visitor perception and utilization of the Yosemite landscape….In Yosemite, perhaps more than in any other national park, the notion of the national park as an outdoor vacation paradise achieved its fullest expression” (Demars 1991, 101). One could argue that Mather’s preoccupation with improving visitor enjoyment caused problems that rangers continue to struggle with today.

According to Dilsaver there are moments in park service history which show how the bureaucratic decisions made at the highest government levels impact decisions made at individual parks (Dilsaver 1994). Before identifying trends in park management, one must ask why parks have struggled and how they are learning to succeed. At the same time the park service has been criticized for exhibiting poor management practices, it has suffered from “declining morale,” severe fiscal constraints and “personnel and organizational structures that often impede its performance” (NPS Steering Committee 1993, 2).

Park managers have also been reluctant to accept change (Runte 1990; NPS Steering Committee 1993). “When you really think about it what other government organization is as protective of itself as the National Park Service? For so long we have sheltered ourselves from the public, we don’t even advertise our emblem! Other agencies
do, but we are very concerned about it” (Mihalec 2002). If the park service promoted itself as effectively as the parks it protects, perhaps it would improve its public image which has suffered due to internal strife and public scrutiny in recent years (Vail Agenda 1993). Greater awareness could stimulate greater involvement on many levels, including a strengthening of cooperating associations support for parks.

The National Park Service is a product of its history. The ideology of the time in which it was founded called for places to be preserved, protected, and used. In Yosemite tourism had already been established as the primary purpose of the park. The park’s well-developed infrastructure serves as proof of this point. At the same time that park managers strive to achieve their mission, they struggle with problems that have deep historical roots. Only recently has the park service implemented new management approaches. Current managers utilize cooperating associations to fund park projects and staff park information centers. Slowly, managers are learning to deal with budget shortfalls and to recognize the importance of public participation in management decisions. The associations are not only allies to the parks but are increasing their presence as the park service directs non-government support through them (NPS Steering Committee 1993; Clarke and McCool 1996). To fully understand the role of cooperating associations in the national park system I choose to start at the place where the idea was born: Yosemite National Park.
Chapter IV: History of Yosemite

In 1864 President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant making Yosemite Valley and the surrounding grove of Giant Sequoias the nation’s first protected lands to be “held inalienable” for all time. Sixty acres were set aside as tourist destinations and promoted as such. Thus, even before the Yosemite Grant was signed tourism was being developed (Johnson 1995). After the valley was “discovered” by Dr. Lafayette Bunnell and the Mariposa Battalion in 1851, writers, painters, and photographers came to the valley to capture its beauty and broadcast it to a wider audience. Their portraits influenced a generation of travelers; mostly elites who could afford to make the journey to Yosemite Valley. First accounts of the valley present it as a place of sublime beauty, with waterfalls plunging from granite walls 3,000 feet above the grassy valley floor. The valley was projected as a place of breathtaking scenery, which should be enjoyed by visitors (Figures 12 and 13) (Sanborn 1989; Demars 1991).

Fig. 12. Albert Bierstadt, Lake in Yosemite Valley (Runte 1990).
Fig. 13. Tourists on Glacier Point’s Overhanging Rock, 1887 (Runte 1990).
Romantic views of the valley not only enticed tourists, they fostered growth and exploitation of resources in the valley (Runte 1990; Demars 1991). In the early years representations of Yosemite Valley fostered an “imaginative geography” solidifying Yosemite Valley’s principal use as a tourist destination. During the mid to late 1800s the field of photography became a preferred medium to promote tourism. As Joan Schwartz notes, “photographs insinuated themselves into the relationship between travel and Geography in two ways, as the pre-texts of travelers and as a surrogate for travel” (Schwartz 1996, 16). Photographs had the ability to present an “unmediated truth” which added to the public perception that photographs were representations of how landscapes really looked (Schwartz 1996, 18). Of course Schwartz argues that this reputation for unmediated truth was unfounded. Photographs can be deceiving, for they can be manipulated to accomplish specific tasks. Photographers were creating pictures that molded the way Yosemite became viewed by the public. For example, the first photograph ever produced in Yosemite Valley in 1859 was the work of Charles L. Weed who was commissioned by innkeeper James Hutchings to make a photograph of his hotel, which was later published in his own magazine, The Hutchings California Magazine. Early photographs of Yosemite Valley were used to promote the area as a tourist destination for the world to enjoy, a theme that runs throughout the photographic record of the park (Runte 1990; Snyder 2002).

Early management efforts in Yosemite Valley were guided by the ideals of preservation. While still a goal of today’s park managers, preservation has proven increasingly difficult to achieve because of high tourist numbers and budget cuts. The most important preservationist in Yosemite’s history was John Muir. He first came to the
valley in 1869 as a naturalist and worked to promote Yosemite’s preservation until his
death in 1914 (Runte 1990). Muir played a prominent role in the establishment of
Yosemite National Park in 1890. His writings, in particular, touted Yosemite as unique
and significant to American heritage. This is most evident in several controversial articles
he wrote for *Century Magazine*, in which he discredited the Yosemite Valley
Commission’s (then in charge of preservation of the park) preservation policies (Runte
1990, 53). Led by Muir, preservationists were able to convince the public and the
Southern Pacific Railroad Company to support the first Yosemite Park Plan. Thanks to
Southern Pacific’s influence over politicians in Washington, a national park was
established in 1890. Thus the framework for the preservation of Yosemite had been
established; however, it was challenged by those who favored development over
preservation. The dual nature of the park’s mission has hindered the planning process
ever since (Runte 1990).

The most controversial development within any National park to date was the
construction of the O’Shaughnessy dam which flooded the Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1913.
A long battle led by Muir to conserve the valley, considered comparable in natural beauty
to Yosemite Valley, was lost when California granted the city of San Francisco rights to
water of the Tuolumne River watershed with passage of the Raker Act. The development
of the reservoir marked a turning point in not only the history of Yosemite, but the entire
national park system. The action of flooding a valley within the boundaries of a national
park for utility is still controversial today as efforts to remove the dam are gaining
support. Nonetheless, the flooding of Hetch Hetchy exemplifies the battle for
preservation in a park that has exhibited a history of development (Nash 1967; Runte
1990).

In 1906 the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove were ceded to the Federal
Government, after they had been in control of the state of California since the park’s
creation. At this time no formal institution governed Yosemite National Park, so the U.S.
Cavalry was entrusted as caretaker. Major H.C. Benson was named acting
superintendent, a job that required far more work than anticipated. Until then the cavalry
had been responsible primarily for protecting the high country where their main duties
included apprehending trespassers and poachers. Life in the valley was a bit more
complicated. Benson had to deal with David Curry and a group of concessionaires who
challenged his attempts to manage the valley. Benson’s attempts to manage the valley
lasted until 1914 when the third group of caretakers, the civilian rangers, gained control
over the entire park. Perhaps Benson’s most important legacy was that he recognized the
problems that were brewing between people and wildlife - especially bears - within the
valley.

At this time, issues of safety - from fire, flooding, and wildlife - had guided
management. Benson argued that wildlife, as well as wild nature, should be allowed to
flourish in the valley. Bears were a part of the wilderness experience, not a menace.
Although Benson had good intentions with respect to improving wildlife conditions in the
valley, he lacked the staff and funding to do anything about it (Runte 1990). By 1916
Yosemite Valley had already been altered significantly to accommodate guests.
Hutchings’ commercial venture was followed by others who began to settle in Yosemite
Valley. In 1899 David Curry established what would become the biggest commercial
concessionaire in Yosemite Valley today, Camp Curry. The Curry Company was significant because it provided inexpensive tent cabin accommodations for all visitors, not just the affluent hotel traveler. Like Hutchings, David Curry had mastered the art of promotion by enticing visitors with alcohol, cheap accommodations, spectacular firefalls\(^1\), and a family camping experience (Figure 14) (Runte 1990). At the end of its first season the Curry family had entertained more than 300 guests, and in 1910 the camp had grown to accommodate 3,600 visitors per year (or one-third of all visitors to the park that year) (Demars 1991). From 1899 to the present day, Camp Curry has grown to become the most popular camping area in Yosemite Valley (Hales 2002). Since 1850, the valley has seen a total of six hotels in operation, including Camp Curry. Today two hotels, the Ahwahnee and the Yosemite Lodge, offer luxury guest services while Camp Curry offers the traditional tent cabins that have made the camp the most popular in the valley (Demars 1991; YCS 2003).

The first alarm of mismanagement was sounded by Fredrick Law Olmsted in 1865 when he urged the California commissioners “not to allow anything in Yosemite Valley that might distract visitors from their natural surroundings” (Runte 1990, 90). Olmsted’s advice was never taken and in subsequent years Hutchings and Curry led the charge to develop Yosemite into a year-round pleasure resort. The Curry Company would later achieve this goal with the completion of the Badger Pass Ski Area in 1935 (Figure 15) (Runte 1990).

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\(^1\) The firefall originated in the 1870s as a cascade of glowing embers pushed over the edge of Glacier Point and falling to the valley floor 3000 feet below. The fall was revived by the Currys to attract guests and lasted until 1968 when the park service eliminated the firefall because it was an artificial attraction.
Fig. 14. Advertisement for Camp Curry promoting the firefall (Runte 1990).
This initial phase of commercial exploitation of the park set the stage for further development. Whether it was the installation of a swimming pool or the addition of other amenities, the valley started to be altered to accommodate visitors. As David Curry prodded park officials to accept further luxuries, he repeatedly appealed to the Secretary of the Interior, Congress, and the general public. His actions were driven by greed and the urge to out compete smaller concessionaires in the valley. In October 1906 Major H.C. Benson, then acting superintendent of the park, went so far as to call David Curry “a detriment to the valley” and added “he has now been in the valley for ten years and has
reaped a good harvest, and in my opinion, the valley would be very much better off without his presence in the future” (Runte 1990, 95-96). The actions of the Curry Company would continue to disrupt the goals of preservation, even after the establishment of the park service in 1916. In time, David Curry, as outspoken as he was, would come to be viewed as a respectable businessman while acting in the best interests for his guests (Demars 1991).

A Developing Yosemite

The most important factor responsible for the development of Yosemite Valley was large scale transit. In 1900 Oliver Lippincott drove his new steam-powered locomobile into the park along the original Wawona Road, a bumpy and pothole-strewn carriage path (Figure 16) (NPS 1993). Lippincott’s journey was soon followed by others with motorized vehicles including motorcycles. At this time, the National Park Service felt that automobiles and motorcycles were “incompatible with the predominant horse-drawn conveyances still in use.” Park officials were of the opinion that “allowing them to use park roads would result in accidents” (NPS 1992, 3-4). In 1907 Benson banned all motor vehicles from Yosemite. But the ban was short-lived. Under pressure from the California Automobile Association the park’s gates were opened to automobile traffic in 1913 (NPS 1993).

The advent of cars necessitated the reconstruction of the roadway system. At this time Yosemite’s transportation system included a railroad which connected visitors to a stagecoach ride to the west entrance of the Yosemite Valley and the new Tioga Road which cut through parts of the high country of the park (this road was eventually completed in 1961) (NPS 1992). In retrospect, the construction of roads appears to be
part of the normal progression of transportation in Yosemite. However, the first roads constructed passed directly through highly sensitive ecosystems in the park. For example, cars were able to pass through giant sequoia trees in two of the park’s three Giant Sequoia groves and meadows in the valley were bisected by asphalt (Figure 17) (Demars 1991).

Fig. 16. Lippincott’s steam-powered locomobile, Yosemite 1900 (NPS 2003).
Fig. 17. Wawona Tunnel Tree 1926 (NPS 2003).

To this point parking and camping in Yosemite went unregulated. Cars, buses, and motorcycles were allowed to roam freely throughout the Yosemite Valley. Besides haphazard camping arrangements, driving across the open meadows resulted in trampled meadows (Figure 18). Echoing his father’s concern for the natural integrity of Yosemite, Fredrick Law Olmsted, Jr. (son of the late Olmsted, Sr.) observed that “radical changes in the meadows by filling on them for roads or parking spaces” would “so extirpate the existing biological conditions that if every shovelful of filling were subsequently removed a scar would remain for generations” (Runte 1990, 156). Olmsted took action and headed the Yosemite Advisory Committee, a group devoted to keeping development of the valley floor to a minimum (Runte 1990).
In 1925 the National Park Service signed an agreement with the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) under which the BPR would be responsible for reconstructing and maintaining roads within Yosemite and all national parks. Several major projects were undertaken, all of which created better access to Yosemite Valley. A new road from Wawona entered the valley from the south, another road approached from El Portal in the west. Then there was the Big Oak Flat road which entered the valley from the north. In addition, a new road to Glacier Point (some argue the most scenic view of the park) was also constructed to link visitors to the newly created Badger Pass ski area. This
foundation of roads was finally completed in Yosemite Valley in the early 1930s (Figure 19 and 20) (NPS 1993).

Fig. 19. Construction of the Wawona Tunnel for the new Wawona road entering Yosemite Valley from the south. Workers here are painting the granite above the tunnel August 24, 1933 (Runte 1990).
The valley was now structured for mass transit and recreational enjoyment. Stephen Mather, the first director of the park service had always chosen to allow as much freedom as possible with regard to transportation. Mather “foresaw a time when the national parks would be accessible to every American family. He viewed the automobile, with its versatility and relative economy as an important means of facilitating this goal” (Demars 1991, 83). Mather may have been encouraging the concessionaries without knowing it, as he attempted to secure the park service’s role as guardian of the national parks. It was only as time passed that people realized that the natural qualities they came to enjoy were being degraded by overuse.

Even with the introduction of mass transit, the seed of conservation, planted by Stephen Mather and other park service officials, had started to sprout. In 1919 Mather inaugurated the first interpretation program in Yosemite Valley. Although Mather was seen as official leader of interpretation it was by all accounts the brainchild of Joseph
Grinnell, a Berkeley zoologist dedicated to educating the public about wildlife and conservation. The interpretation program was pushed relentlessly by Grinnell who collaborated with and praised the efforts of Mather. Grinnell was able to convince Mather that education was the key to ensuring Yosemite’s future. Grinnell’s vision was realized by Mather who recruited the park service’s first interpreters from the Lake Tahoe region. This group of interpreters worked in Yosemite Valley and performed regular walks and talks to educate the public about Yosemite’s biology, geology, wildlife, and natural processes. Both men realized that “the key to the future of national parks was public knowledge and awareness” (Runte 1990, 117). This shows that Mather was not just envisioning the importance of interpretation for Yosemite but for all parks nationwide. Yosemite was the ideal place to test such programs because it was the park with the longest tourism history and the first destination to receive repeat visitors who now wanted to understand the park, not just visit it (Figure 21) (Demars 1991).

There is no doubt that interpretation has played a vital role in educating visitors across the national park system. Every park now has a division of interpretation that is responsible for enhancing visitor enjoyment (NPS 2002). Grinnell and Mather were interested in something more than just visitor education. They believed that “the informed park visitor would become more curious and more protective” (Runte 1990, 118). They hoped that the informed visitor would insist on sound management techniques and learn how to minimize impacts to preserve Yosemite Valley. Above all the park service now had educated visitors leaving Yosemite Valley. Officials hoped that visitors would become catalysts for change and influence politicians in Washington to further enhance programs in national parks. Joseph Grinnell’s work not only solidified education
in national parks, it also promoted national parks as areas in need of help, areas that the public should be concerned about for their sake and the sake of future generations (Runte 1990).

Fig. 21. Early park interpretation in Yosemite Valley led by ranger Harold C. Bryant, 1920 (NPS 2003).
The Birth of the Yosemite Association

Just when rapid development and increasing tourism were beginning to overwhelm the park service, a critical event took place, one that would eventually affect all national parks. Ansel F. Hall, a first-generation ranger working in Yosemite realized early on that the service the park was providing to visitors was not adequate given the number of tourists. As Mather put it, “visitors to the parks were formerly satisfied to admirable scenic features, now they want to understand them” (Demars 1991, 95).

According to Ralph Lewis, an expert on NPS museum curatorship, the development of naturalist interpretation and the construction of park museums go hand-in-hand. Lewis recounts the early history of park naturalists and states that a series of coincidental meetings led to the formal establishment of interpretive rangers and professional museums (Lewis 1993).

At the close of 1921 Harold Bryant, an employee with the California Fish and Game Department, was in his second season of conducting interpretive nature guide services in Yosemite. Bryant recommended that the park commit to developing a full-time interpretive staff and construct a base of operations. At the time Hall had been working to secure non-government funding to develop a fire-proof museum in Yosemite Valley which would also serve as a base of operations for interpretive rangers. Hall took Bryant’s advice and in 1922 supervised the first group of naturalist rangers. Hall convinced a young landscape architect named Herbert Maier to make and donate sketches for the construction of the new museum. By the summer of 1923 Maier’s sketches were completed. Meanwhile Hall had secured more than $7,000 in local donations for the new
museum (a substantial $75,000 contribution from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial fund assured completion of the project) (Burns 1938; Lewis 1993).

In early 1922 Hall learned that he would go to Europe in September of 1923. Before he left he set up a fund-raising body called the Yosemite Museum Association to safeguard the funds he had raised. This marks the beginning of the first cooperating association in any national park. On June 10, 1923, just before leaving for Europe, Hall hired a high school biology teacher from Reno named Carl P. Russell who would complete the development of the Yosemite Museum Association. Soon after taking the job Russell obtained a leave of absence to take on duties as a full-time naturalist ranger responsible for the new museum. On August 4, 1923 the Yosemite Museum Association was formally established. Later in 1923, Hall was promoted and transferred out of Yosemite to become chief naturalist for the park service, a position that enabled him to develop interpretive rangers service-wide. In his short time at Yosemite, Hall was responsible for pushing the park service in a new direction. In addition to developing the first park museum, he developed the first cooperating association - one that would serve as a model for years to come. In doing so, Hall successfully built a new museum in Yosemite Valley which became a base of operations for the nature guide service. It remains the base of operations for park rangers today. The act of creating an organization to support and aid park staff at Yosemite has had a profound impact on the park (Burns 1938; Kirkland 1928; Lewis 1935; NPS 2002; NPS Steering Committee 1993).

The Yosemite Museum Association lacked organizational structure from 1923 to 1924. The association existed only in the files of chief naturalist Hall and in his correspondence with park officials. James Oliver, a member of the association, could find
no evidence of the group’s legal standing prior to 1925. By 1925 the Yosemite Museum Association had been replaced by the Yosemite Natural History Association which had taken on the responsibilities of fundraising and more. One document, written by Oliver addressed to the board of trustees of the Yosemite Natural History Association in 1935 shows that the former Museum Association did have organizational structure and loosely consisted of a board of trustees and donors including Ansel F. Hall, Joeseph Grinnell, Barton W. Weavermen, and William F. Bade who possessed a total purse of $8,433.21 in donations. After Hall left Yosemite in late 1923, naturalist ranger Carl P. Russell expanded the mission of the Museum Association to include more than just fundraising and curatorial services. The newly established Yosemite Natural History Association began publishing educational literature and incorporating guided naturalist programs. The Yosemite Natural History Association was officially named in late 1924, although no official date can be ascertained from the historical records (Oliver 1935; Burns 1938; Lewis 1993).

Budget records and notes kept by naturalist Russell suggest that by 1925 the Yosemite Natural History Association (YNHA) was well established with an active board of trustees. Burns states that the articles of the YNHA were drafted and on August 24, 1925 subscribed to by 15 members of an advisory council and the board of trustees. The objectives of the original association are as follows:

1. To gather and disseminate information regarding birds, mammals, flowers, trees, Indians, history, geology, trails, scenic features, and other subjects so well exemplified by nature in Yosemite National Park and elsewhere in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.
2. To develop and enlarge the Yosemite Museum (in cooperation with the National Park Service) and to establish subsidiary units, such as the
Glacier Point Lookout and branches of similar nature. (3) 
To contribute in every way possible to the development of 
the educational activities of the Yosemite Nature Guide 
Service. (4) To publish (in cooperation with the National 
Park Service) Yosemite Nature Notes, a periodical 
containing articles of scientific interest concerning the 
matters referred to in this statement of purposes. (5) To 
promote scientific investigation along the lines of greatest 
popular interest and to publish from time to time bulletins 
or circulars of a non-technical nature. (6) To maintain in 
Yosemite Valley a library containing works of historical, 
scientific and popular interest. (7) To study the living 
conditions, past and present, of remaining Indians of the 
Yosemite region, for the purpose of preserving their arts, 
customs, and legends. (8) To strictly limit the operations, 
business, property, and assets of the association to purposes 
which shall be scientific and educational, in order that the 
association shall not be organized, constituted, or operated 
for profit, and so that no part of the net income of the 
association shall inure to the benefit of any member or 
other party thereto.

Variations of these guiding principles later appeared in Yosemite Nature Notes, first 
published in 1925 (Burns 1938, 18-19).

The Yosemite Natural History Association would later be shortened to its present 
day name, the Yosemite Association, although there are no records which pinpoint when 
this official designation occurred. Nonetheless, the success of the Yosemite Natural 
History Association prompted other parks to develop cooperating associations. It is also 
possible that the advancement of Ansel F. Hall to the position of chief naturalist for the 
park service encouraged the growth of cooperating associations service wide. Many parks 
followed Yosemite’s lead. For example, from 1931 to 1932 the Zion-Bryce, Rocky 
Mountain, and the Grand Canyon Natural History Associations were formed. The 
Yellowstone Library and Museum Association was organized on January 26, 1933. The 
Mesa Verde Museum Association was established in 1934. In 1936, the Shenandoah
Nature Society, Jackson Hole Museum and Historical Association (Grand Teton National Park), and the Hot Springs Natural History Association were all formed (Burns 1938).

The rapid development of cooperating associations caused the Director of the National Park Service, Arno B. Cammerer, to recognize them as non-profit entities. He further declared that park employees could legally collaborate with them (NPS 2002). The signing of the Interior Department Appropriation Act approved on June 22, 1936 made it official (Burns 1938).

*Conservation in Yosemite National Park*

By 1920 it was apparent that the preservation of Yosemite Valley was an idea whose time had passed. However, the rest of the park stood a great chance of remaining in a natural state. An examination of ecosystems functioning within the park was initiated during this decade. At about the same time, Joseph Grinnell (director of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California) launched a study of Yosemite’s biological world. Grinnell was another Yosemite visionary. In retrospect he was responsible for the first collaborative work between park staff and academics. The linkage he developed in Yosemite eventually spread to other keystone parks (Runte 1990). “Inevitably, Grinnell’s research of the natural history of Yosemite National Park motivated his immersion in its resource and management issues” (Runte 1990, 121).

It was this “immersion” that led him to work closely with then superintendent of Yosemite, Washington B. Lewis, on the management of carnivores. At that time the public and the park service had very little knowledge of the animals of Yosemite. Viewing wildlife was a form of entertainment promoted by concessionaries. For over a decade live Tule elk were kept in an animal corral for visitor enjoyment. As the herd
grew so did concerns over the health of the meadow where they grazed. The corral was later removed by the park service for two main reasons: 1) the elk were an exotic species that did not belong in the valley and 2) the meadow was severely overgrazed (Demars 1991). More was known about the black bear, a “considerably less dangerous” animal than the grizzly bear which had been eradicated from the Sierras in 1919 (Runte 1990, 87; NPS 2002).

The Yosemite Black Bear, *Ursus Americanus*, had been hunted since the native Ahwahneechee tribe and Miwok Native Americans inhabited the Yosemite region. Its decline accelerated throughout the early 1900s with the arrival of white people to the Sierra Nevada. “To see bear or deer, or any other animal life at times required days of travel,” wrote Gabriel Sovulewski, one of Yosemite’s first civilian rangers in 1936 (Runte 1990, 87). In 1910 Sovulewski advocated the elimination of the bear population, stating that if bears remained in Yosemite (especially the valley) “camping would be a very serious proposition” (Runte 1990, 88). Lack of knowledge about black bear, even among rangers, persisted until Grinnell’s research helped rangers understand how to cope with people and bears (Runte 1990).

During this tumultuous period, Yosemite was forced to confront major management issues. Decisions were made based on the best known practice of the time. In retrospect, the decisions proved to be flawed. The management of black bear in Yosemite Valley serves as a prime example. In 1922 the regular feeding of bears in the garbage dumps was a part of the visitor experience. At first, park rangers saw this as an opportunity to control bears and keep them from disrupting campgrounds. Feeding platforms, lights, and lectures became part of the “camping experience” every summer
evening in the vicinity of Curry Village. However, park officials soon realized that the problems between people and bears were increasing, especially in areas outside of the feeding pits. “Bear accidents” from hand-feeding “tame” bears resulted in countless injuries and all feeding was stopped in 1940 (Demars 1991, 99). That season the park service removed forty-five bears from the valley to outlying areas (Figures 22 and 23) (Demars 1991). Today rangers are still working to educate people about bears, which are no longer considered a problem. Instead “people are the problem” (Madison 2002).

Fig. 22. Bear feeding pit near Curry Village (NPS Photo courtesy of YNPRL).
In the late 1920s a report entitled *Conservation in Yosemite National Park* was submitted to park officials. Although there is no evidence to show whether the report was commissioned by the park service, it was typewritten on Department of Interior letterhead and cites interviews with rangers and park managers. While the report contains many factual errors regarding the biological world of Yosemite, it reveals an attempt to incorporate sound science into the decision-making process. The significance of the report is that it shows what was occurring on the ground in 1930. In this way it can be used to better understand longstanding challenges that park staff have faced in Yosemite (Kirkland 1929).
The report recognizes anthropogenic change in Yosemite as a constant. It stresses that ease of access is a major reason why “modifications to natural systems have taken place” (Kirkland 1929, 2). The report goes on to acknowledge that areas already at “playground stage” continue to be used so that other areas “may yet be preserved in a natural state” (Kirkland 1929, 2). This is an early indication that despite the upsurge in tourism park officials were aware that major problems associated with overuse were starting to affect the park experience of visitors. The report discusses how park rangers were arresting the process of natural succession. Pine trees encroaching on meadows in the valley as a result of fire suppression were being cut as a way to preserve the meadows. In addition problems with invasive species (trees, plants, and mammals) were introduced. As geographer Alfred Runte (1990, 102-3) states “the urge to accommodate every class of visitor had nothing whatsoever to do with protecting the park….Yosemite, in retrospect, had come to another crossroads. What potential effect would pandering to tourists have on the long-term integrity of the park and its resources?”

The period from the 1930s through the 1940s is best characterized as a tumultuous period marked by management extremes. During the early 1930s the park obtained greater funding, made infrastructural improvements, and successfully brought more tourists to the park. During this time the park established a park-wide unified road system, established the “Government Center” as the park headquarters in Yosemite Valley, and increased recreational opportunities for visitors, including the construction of unified trails throughout the park (NPS 1933; Runte 1990). The Great Depression and World War II brought dwindling budgets, deteriorating facilities, and low visitation. After 1946 all parks were in financial crisis (Clarke and McCool 1996).
During this period preservation ideals were once again pushed aside. Most parks at the time were promoted heavily, “when postwar prosperity brought record numbers of visitors to the parks” (which brought further physical damage to the parks) (Clarke and McCool 1996, 72). During that time the National Park Service saw its budget dwindle from $21 million to $5 million. The total number of employees in the service before Pearl Harbor was 5,963. By June 1944 the total number was 1,673. Yosemite, like other parks, was not prepared for the postwar surge in visitation. Short staffed and overwhelmed the park staff placed faith in the federal government and did nothing to utilize its partnerships with the Yosemite Association or expand partnerships with cooperating associations. The government would not heed Yosemite’s plea for adequate funds until the 1950s (Clark and McCool 1996; Sellars 1997).

By the close of the 1940s the park service was at a crossroads. The director of the park service, Newton B. Drury, who criticized park service expansion and development in the 1930s, now redirected the park service to preserve nature despite budget cutbacks. Drury’s conservative approach “fit the times” of the war era as he successfully stabilized the park service to a “protection and maintenance basis” until his resignation in 1951 (Sellars 1997, 150-1). In Yosemite, under the leadership of Superintendent Carl P. Russell, the park staff reflected on the management decisions they had made during the 1920s and 1930s. Rangers realized that by creating such impressive visitor services and improving the recreational experience they had relegated preservation to a secondary priority. It was time to refocus and reign in control of the “playground atmosphere” of previous decades (Runte 1990).
Chapter V: Park Management and Cooperating Associations 1950-1980

The Yosemite Association did not play a significant role in the day-to-day operation of Yosemite in the years immediately following the Second World War. As problems associated with increasing numbers of tourists came to the attention of the general public, few people were aware that a support organization even existed in Yosemite. Apart from the monthly publication of *Yosemite Nature Notes*, which ran from 1922 to 1961, the Yosemite Association received little official recognition until the 1970s. Its role was masked by programs initiated at the federal level. One of these programs was the Mission 66 program, a decade long, system-wide infrastructure and development effort designed to improve the parks for visitor enjoyment. Once again, another park development plan shunted preservation to the side. In Yosemite, park naturalists (interpretive rangers today) still promoted preservation and explained the impacts of human carelessness to visitors. This is where *Yosemite Nature Notes* had the greatest impact because it cast light on Yosemite’s environmental status. Alas, most of the two thousand subscribers were from local communities who were already aware of the changes taking place in Yosemite. Transient visitors needed to be targeted and educated. This would not happen until decades later when the association attained greater status and responsibility (White 1962; Duncan 1969).

The popularity of the *Yosemite Nature Notes* increased after its publication ceased. Members and tourists who asked for back issues years later found that they were only available for purchase at the Yosemite Association’s headquarters, the park research library and some souvenir shops in Yosemite. *Nature Notes* provided information to visitors on a variety of subjects including local flora and fauna. It also contained self-
guided tours. Histories of park areas, such as the construction of the Tioga Road, were also recounted. With respect to its history *Yosemite Nature Notes* started out as a mimeograph published for eight weeks in 1922. In 1923 it was published weekly from June to August (during the peak season) and then monthly from September to December. In 1924 *Nature Notes* was published as both a monthly and a weekly. In 1925 it was produced as a magazine for the first time. It continued to be printed in this form until 1961. Most of the articles in *Nature Notes* were written by rangers, most of whom contributed in their spare time. A total of 493 issues were printed, 43 of which were special editions (White 1962). Publication of *Yosemite Nature Notes* was eventually halted due to “a lack of subscriber and donor interest.” According to the assistant business manager at that time, this “killed the project, although the Association continues in a healthy state (partly because the magazine was discontinued).” *Nature Notes* was significant because it provided a means by which the park could promote its operations and give readers a glimpse into the first 40 years of the park service’s custodianship of the park. At the same time it documented natural and biological phenomena (Duncan 1969).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s visitation to Yosemite increased tremendously, as did environmental concern. The environmental concern stemmed from the increasing strain that was placed on America’s resources, especially national parks. Parks were seen by members of congress as places that protected America’s heritage and “added to the health of the nation” (Dilsaver 1994, 225). Part of securing the nation’s health involved improving and expanding the park system. Mission 66 was put into action and major changes at Yosemite were launched. For instance, regional newspapers like the *San
*Francisco Chronicle* ran stories on Yosemite’s environmental problems, such as the garbage burning that was still being practiced in 1956 (Pearlman 1956).

In 1957 an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* identified Yosemite as a park “fraying under use” and stated that the park was the most visited of any in the country. Stating that over 20,000 sleep in the valley on a given summer night, the article pointed to tourism as a major problem (Associated Press 1957). Other articles such as the one appearing in a 1956 edition of the *Christian Science Monitor* focused on the poor facilities that employees lived in and the poor condition of facilities that tourists frequented (Gilstrap 1956). The Mission 66 development and improvement plan seemed to offer some partial solutions. Other reports followed, posing questions about the possibility of saving national parks. An article printed in *National Parks Magazine* in July 1959 pinpointed the problems all parks were experiencing: overcrowding, traffic, and environmental destruction. The author posed the question “What will our national parks be like by the year 2000?” (Clawson 1959, 3).

Thanks to the Mission 66 program Yosemite was landscaped for mass tourism. An improved village comprising a new visitor center, stores, shops, a post office, backcountry permit station and new parking pattern created a user friendly atmosphere. Locally, some were critical of the success of the Mission 66 program, claiming it resulted in “overdevelopment” of the park. One of the most outspoken critics in Yosemite at the time was Ansel Adams. Adams often spoke out against park management stating that “not many of the individuals in the park have the vision to grasp what is actually happening” (Runte 1990, 186). What was actually happening was overuse and overdevelopment of resources during the 1950s and 1960s. “One situation begets another
- a rapidly ascending curve of exploitation and ‘development’ has now brought Yosemite to the brink of disaster - and the insensitivity in evidence here threatens to spread to other parks” Adams stated (Runte 1990, 186). In short, Adams was speaking out on behalf of a Yosemite that was being overused by concessionaires and the general public. He specifically pointed out that buildings, events, and unneeded operations should be removed from the valley. His attempt to rid Yosemite of development echoed Fredrick Law Olmsted’s 1865 address (Runte 1990). According to Adams “It is not so much what is wrong with Mission 66 as what is missing!” (Runte 1990, 193). Instead of reaffirming the principles of the national parks, the plan directed management toward recreation at the expense of preservation. Outraged, a middle-aged Adams continued to chastise Yosemite officials and would forever question management practices by the park service (Szarkowski 2001).

Preservationists during the 1960s dealt with a park staff that lacked the commitment to ban development within Yosemite Valley, failed to recognize the goals of their own mission and, most importantly, lacked the ability to apply scientific principles and adequate resources to resource management problems, such as a properly funded bear management plan (NPS 2002). Academia had always had a link to Yosemite; it just did not have a link to its caretakers. For instance, the Leopold committee (another environmental group created to advise Yosemite planning) released a report in 1964 that proposed removing the dam at Hetch Hetchy, and limiting access to Yosemite Valley. Both ideas were never adopted by the park service and environmentalists found themselves back at square one (Runte 1990; Demars 1991).
During the 1960s Yosemite Valley evolved into a management nightmare. Every time the valley became overcrowded, park rangers found it increasingly difficult to maintain visitor and traffic flow because they were busy dealing with traffic accidents and criminal offenses. Smooth traffic and visitor flow was especially difficult because the firefall had become such a popular event. Eventually the park service was forced to abolish it. It simply “brought too many spectators, who brought too many cars, and who left behind too much litter, automobile exhaust, and trampled vegetation” (Runte 1990, 202). This was the first victory in a long struggle that would rage until the early 1980s (Runte 1990).

In 1969 Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act into law. This required all government agencies to involve the public when considering any environmental action. This has been the most important tool used by environmentalists in their battle to save not just Yosemite Valley but the entire park. At the start of the 1970s Yosemite’s future was uncertain. The public, the park service, and environmentalists disagreed on almost every management action proposed. Every group had their own vision of what Yosemite Valley should look like. In 1971, preliminary reports produced by the park service considered seriously limiting and eventually prohibiting all automobiles in the valley. Preservationists voiced their strong support but did not agree with the second proposal - that a cable tram be constructed to shuttle visitors from the valley floor to Glacier Point. Some felt that without a cable tram in place tourists were being unfairly denied unrestricted access to national lands. A further dispute erupted over the growing amount of traffic within the park, which was now causing severe congestion (Runte 1990; Dilsaver 1994).
The Curry Company adamantly opposed any plan to limit access to the park, especially one that would result in the removal of the automobile. They felt that in addition to creating the glacier point tram the park service should construct more adequate parking facilities. At this time development in the valley was at its peak. There were over 1,000 structures including a full service gas station, hospital, and market. On an average summer night over 12,000 tourists would crowd into a valley seven miles long and barely one mile wide. Once again preservationists pointed out with increasing success that traffic was causing pollution. Indeed a haze blanketed the upper canopy of trees in the valley. Park managers in Yosemite were confronted with a dilemma. Should they reduce all automobile traffic in the valley and construct the aerial tram or should they continue to allow vehicles to enter Yosemite Valley? Either way, conservationists and preservationists pointed out that the Curry Company would still run its full-scale year round resort and that this concessionaire would continue to influence all planning efforts because of its role in facilitating visitor enjoyment. After all this was how the park service had always measured its success, by the number of tourists who visited the parks (Runte 1990; Demars 1991).

Criticism of park service management in Yosemite National Park would continue for decades to come, but small steps to improve the situation were being taken behind the scenes. For instance, park managers unveiled a new traffic management plan to reduce pollution and congestion on park highways, especially in Yosemite Valley. On October 4, 1972 a ceremony was held in the newly rebuilt Yosemite Village (formerly the government center). In attendance was NPS director George B. Hartzog. Among other things the occasion celebrated the successful implementation of free shuttle buses
throughout the valley and other highly visited areas, such as the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias (NPS 1972).

The first step to reduce traffic was taken in 1969 when the two main roads on the opposing sides of the valley floor, North and Southside drives, became one-way routes. This improved the flow of vehicles tremendously and reduced the number of accidents. In 1970 the eastern portion of Yosemite Valley (Happy Isles loop) was restricted to shuttle bus, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic only. In 1972, the park had a fleet of twelve buses, eight of which were double-deckers with a capacity of 120 persons. All the buses and trams used alternative fuels to reduce pollution. The new transportation system resulted in less traffic and improved visitor enjoyment. This is best illustrated by the increased amount of foot travel, as well as the increased number of bicycle rentals which doubled from 250 in 1971 to 500 in 1972 (Figure 24) (NPS 1972).

Fig. 24. Fleet of Yosemite shuttle buses retired in 2001, in use since the early 1980s (Photo by author, summer 2002).
The direct control of limiting automobile access and providing a free shuttle bus was so successful that other parks followed suit. Later in 1972 tram services began in the Everglades, Grand Canyon, and Mount McKinley National Parks (US News and World Report 1972; Dilsaver, 1992). Despite the progress, diesel exhaust from the tour buses, car emissions, and campfire smoke were still choking the valley. Nonetheless, Yosemite was the first park to limit access and implement a public transit system (NPS 1972).

At this point in history Yosemite was the most visited park in the world. As a result, it faced problems related to pollution, overdevelopment, and environmental degradation. But just how bad was it? According to Demars the Mission 66 program had not only failed to improve visitor enjoyment, it failed to protect the environment: “By the middle 1960s conditions in the valley, in particular, were approaching the crisis stage. It was generally acknowledged that, despite the best of intentions, Mission 66 was not providing the answers to Yosemite’s steadily increasing visitation problems” (Demars 1991, 130). The best description of those “visitation problems” comes from Edward Abbey who traveled to Yosemite in search of the Park That Caught Urban Blight. In 1971 Abbey spent two nights in the valley and witnessed firsthand the challenges of policing the valley, which included arresting drug dealers and car thieves. Records reveal an increase in police intervention, which culminated in the Yosemite Riot of 1970. In 1952 there were 55 arrests; in 1958 182; and in 1970 there were 765 arrests, ranging from narcotics trafficking and prostitution to runaways (Abbey 1971; Demars 1991).

Then there is the lack of wilderness. According to one seasonal ranger working in the valley during the late 1960s and early 1970s Yosemite was:
a fair-sized city (40,000 to 60,000 people), complete with smog, crime, juvenile delinquency, parking problems, traffic snarls, rush hours, gang warfare, slums, and urban sprawl. This city, despite valiant efforts by the National Park Service, has all but destroyed the atmosphere of peace, wildness, and beauty in the loveliest of valleys. The roar of gigantic waterfalls is drowned out by the roar of motorcycles and hot rods echoing off the cliffs; the deer, plentiful up to ten years ago, have largely moved out to avoid getting heckled by people and their dogs; four thousand campfires morning and evening, produce a pall of smoke which, combined with the automobile and stove fumes, hangs in the upper end of the valley.

The ranger goes on to add that Yosemite is “only slightly less crowded, commercial, and honky-tonk than Coney Island or Disneyland” (Demars 1991, 130).

While environmental degradation was a major problem in the park, an even more disturbing controversy was brewing over treatment of Yosemite’s black bears, which caused approximately $113,197 in property damage in 1975 (Figure 25) (Thomas 1974; NPS Wild Bear Project 2002). All over Yosemite Valley and the backcountry bears were breaking into backpacks and campgrounds to obtain food. In the backcountry, hanging food on cables between trees (installed by the park service in the early 1980s) was the preferred method to store food. Soon, however, bears were performing high-wire acts. Preoccupied with policing Yosemite’s urban environment, the preferred way for rangers to deal with “problem bears” was to kill them. In the early 1970s over 200 bears were killed by bullets or lethal injections of sucostryn tranquilizer. Not until Ursula Fassi, founder and president of the San Francisco Wildlife Conservation Coalition, challenged Yosemite’s chief ranger Jack Morehead on the issue did public concern produce a transformation of the bear program. Money was diverted to controlling bears and nine rangers were trained to relocate or humanely administer non-traumatic tranquilizers to
problematic bears. By the fall of 1974 all unnatural food sources (such as garbage cans) were made inaccessible to bears. However, problems between bears and people continued to plague Yosemite for years to come. Nevertheless, Yosemite was the first park to employ a wildlife management program for bears (Thomas 1974).

By the end of 1974 preservationists were speaking out, holding community-based meetings, generating thousands of letters, and voicing their opinions about what to do with the Yosemite Valley. They especially voiced their disapproval of the newly released Yosemite Master Plan, which they believed catered heavily to the interests of the concessionaire, now a subsidiary of the MCA Corporation. Preservationists used NEPA...
to gain leverage in policymaking, and successfully argued that the “Master Plan” did not take into account public participation, which was mandatory under the act. The New York Times featured the controversy which prompted the Secretary of the Interior to order Ronald Walker (then director of the park service) to “junk the $750,000 master planning effort and start all over, this time in full public view” (Carpenter 1976, 26). Over 60,000 letters were received opposing park planning efforts, and in 1974 all planning was rejected. Despite the redevelopment of the transportation system in 1972, preservationists gained little ground. With conditions deteriorating at Yosemite all parties once again found themselves at square one (Runte 1990; Demars 1991).
Chapter VI: Cooperating Association Growth and NPS Management 1970-2002

During the 1970s, NGOs sprang to life in Yosemite. According to the 1973 yearly report submitted by acting Superintendent Lynn Thompson, the Yosemite Institute now shared a cooperative agreement with the park service. Established in 1971, the Yosemite Institute offered the “ideal environment for learning about the natural and cultural history, and resource issues” of Yosemite (Yosemite Institute Annual Report 2002, 2). Thompson states that the establishment of the Yosemite Institute was “the first environmental education project ever located in a National Park,” serving over 1200 students in the 1971-72 school year (Thompson 1973, 2).

To this day, the Yosemite Institute acts as “an educational non-profit organization that provides experiential field science programs in nature’s classroom to inspire a personal connection to the natural world and responsible actions to sustain it.” It was “developed in response to: the beginning of a local and national environmental consciousness; a growing demand from teachers interested in utilizing the parks as classrooms; and the National Park Service’s interest in encouraging private partnerships to help expand its educational and interpretive mission” (Yosemite Institute Website 2003). Today The Institute describes the evolution of its role within the park management regime in the following manner: “Yosemite Institute operates in support of the “mission statement” of the 1916 Organic Act. Having used the park as a classroom for over 25 years, the function of Yosemite Institute is to encourage the conservation and enjoyment through educating people about the workings of natural systems, and the effects of people on those systems” (Yosemite Institute Website 2003).
From the beginning the park service saw this particular partnership as a way to help them achieve part of their mission. By targeting the young audience, who would one day (as Steven Mather predicted decades earlier) become the informed park visitor, the Yosemite Institute sought to plant the seeds of future stewardship (Runte 1990). This point is confirmed by the Institute officials who remark that “our work as environmental educators is to build parks, and to encourage an environmentally literate society. By educating citizens about the parks, and about the workings of natural systems we hope to inspire stewardship of the national park ideal and its natural, cultural, and research values” (Yosemite Institute Website 2003). Yosemite now had two partnerships to help them achieve their guiding mission. Once again, Yosemite was in the vanguard, this time for the development of the first ever educational organization inside a national park.

Today the Yosemite Institute has expanded its programs to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and to Olympic National Park (Yosemite Institute Annual Report 2002; Yosemite Institute Website 2003).

At the time the Yosemite Institute was formed, the Yosemite Natural History Association was just emerging from a period of economic uncertainty. During the 1960s it had seen membership decline. It was also forced to cut back its publication program and to limit the operation of the park museum and library. The Association devoted most of its resources to helping the park service (which also faced budget cutbacks in the interpretation division) meet the “tide of new visitors, most of them urban people who needed assistance in understanding the park environment” (Automobile Club of Southern California 1970). As the 1970s approached, the Yosemite Natural History Association’s fortunes took a turn for the better. By 1971, after 50 years of service to the park, it had
boosted its membership from 600 to 10,000. At that time membership dues were five
dollars per year, ten dollars annually for an entire family, and lifetime membership cost
one-hundred dollars. All dues were tax deductible and entitled members to a 20 percent
discount on the 12 publications it distributed on the flora, fauna, and history of the
Yosemite area (Automobile Club of Southern California 1970; Fresno Bee 1971).

Also in 1971 the Yosemite Natural History Association began offering field
seminars within the park. Five week-long seminars limited to groups of twenty-five
people were sponsored by the association and commended by the park service that
summer. The first programs offered were taught by rangers working within the park. The
courses were approved for college credit by the University of California at Davis. An
“Alpine Botany and Ecology” class was offered two times in August of 1971. Similarly a
course on “Living Glaciers of the Yosemite,” another entitled “Yosemite a Laboratory for
Teaching,” and one on “Interpretive Techniques” were offered (NPS 1971, 30). The
Superintendent of Yosemite, Wayne B. Cone, felt that the seminars would “interest the
layman wishing to expand his knowledge of the Yosemite area…appeal to the teacher or
professional interested in learning the National Park Service’s interpretive techniques or
wanting to develop skills in using the park and its resources as an explicit area for
modern environmental studies” (NPS 1971, 1). In the larger view Cone felt that Yosemite
was a place where “the impact of man on nature, the response of nature to man’s
demands, problems of wilderness management, can be studied ….and applied throughout
the world” (NPS 1971, 1). The field studies were an ideal way to improve understanding
of all aspects of the park, from management to history.
By 1978 all planning proposals had been dropped. The “Master Plan” did not satisfy the needs of preservationists or the concessionaire. The park service had been at a planning standstill since 1974. Despite the planning setbacks, park managers were busy holding 48 public hearings across California and America. A total of 34 workshops were held in California with another 14 in six cities throughout the country (Seattle, Denver, Chicago, New York, Atlanta, and Washington D.C.) (Carpenter 1976). On November 27, 1978 the park service held a public hearing about the draft “General Management Plan,” which had been built upon the ideals of the “Master Plan.” This time, planning ideas were well received by the Yosemite community, including the Yosemite Natural History Association. The minutes of that public hearing show that Superintendent Les Arnberger graciously accepted the board of trustees’ full endorsement of the “concept set forth in the Draft General Management Plan” (NPS 1978, 52). In the end, an important lesson was learned. Yosemite became the first park to involve the public in the planning process (Carpenter 1976). In time other parks would follow the example set by Yosemite officials.

The data gathered during the first public planning efforts were incorporated into the revised draft environmental impact statement which was released September 17, 1980. The new General Management Plan (GMP) which was implemented in January of 1981 aimed to solve the myriad problems that had plagued Yosemite for so many decades (Binnewies 1982). With the advent of the General Management Plan the park service had successfully incorporated public views. The goals of the GMP were to reduce crowding and congestion, improve resource preservation and restoration, and improve visitor enjoyment (NPS 1980; NPS 1999). Specifically the plan aimed to “markedly reduce
traffic and congestion” by removing all vehicles from the valley and the Mariposa Giant Sequoia grove, “reclaim priceless natural beauty, reduce crowding,” and “promote visitor understanding and enjoyment” (NPS 1980, 2-3). But were these goals ever realized? The answer would later be obvious as the park service revised the goals and identified more specific methods for restoring Yosemite Valley. The General Management Plan was, in short, too general. Only the second major planning attempt in the park system, it was in large part an experiment. Creating a plan which satisfied all parties was a daunting task for park staff (NPS 1999). Also, Ronald Reagan’s administration stifled progress by curtailing funding.

In the annual park report for 1980, Yosemite Superintendent Bob Binnewies states that “budget reductions again this year forced us to either do more with less or discontinue some functions” (Binnewies 1981, 1). Some of the discontinued functions hit park interpretive divisions hard, forcing them to rely on volunteers and increase the park’s partnership with the Yosemite Natural History Association. For example, the Yosemite Valley visitor’s center was refurbished, including construction of a new information desk. The project was completed with funds from both the park and the Yosemite Natural History Association. In addition the Tuolumne visitor’s center was constructed, replacing the 1930s-era structure that had housed the former mountaineering center. The center was staffed by park service rangers working alongside Yosemite Association employees and volunteers who reported that YNHA publication sales were at a record high (Binnewies 1980).

In 1981 Yosemite experienced another “tight” fiscal year. However, the superintendent’s report for 1981 suggests that great progress was being made in the
implementation of the GMP and other environmentally friendly initiatives. For instance, new bear information brochures were released, the first ever out-of-park transportation system began shuttling visitors and employees to the valley, and the Mariposa Grove museum was restored. As a result more scientific studies of bears and people, the transportation system would expand significantly, and the museum would serve as another site where the Yosemite Natural History Association could sell educational publications and interact with visitors. During that summer the Association continued its interpretive support and was able to make substantial contributions to the Yosemite Valley Research Library. The Association appropriated funds to purchase “a large assemblage of rare, historic books, photographs, and Yosemite subjects. Other donations included an additional $2000 from YNHA for acquisitions” (Binnewies 1982, 4). In the summer of 1982 the YNHA successfully sponsored the High Sierra Loop trips it had inaugurated a decade before. Park Rangers were still leading loop trips but the financial responsibility and the management and advertisement was left to the association. This action received full support from the park, which was still struggling with budget constraints that negatively impacted interpretive services (Binnewies 1983). Overall, the role of YNHA was still relatively minor. This would change during the 1990s.

On October 31, 1984 Yosemite National Park became a UNESCO World Heritage Site (NPS 2003). The park was recognized as a place of irreplaceable natural and cultural value. This designation prompted more media attention including a 1985 National Geographic Magazine feature story. Although the article focuses primarily on traditions unique to Yosemite, it does provide the reader with a sense for the attitude of the park service at that time. When asked about the General Management Plan a ranger
replied, “our new plan at least holds a line….We’re reducing some of the pressures and some of the commercialism. We’re transferring some staff to outside the park. The Curry Company is too. Between us, we’ve got 3,400 employees and dependents. Part of the overcrowding was us” (Boyer 1985, 61). This proves that park service officials had finally come to realize that they too were contributing to the crowding of Yosemite Valley. The park service had made great strides in reestablishing itself as a competent caretaker of Yosemite Valley during the 1980s. For the first time the park service began implementing a serious plan to improve conservation in the valley. Even though many of the goals outlined in the general management plan were not fully realized, they were at least written down. The document would serve as a model for future plans drafted in the 1990s (Runte 1990; NPS 1999). Even with the aid of the Yosemite Natural History Association and the Yosemite Institute budget constraints hampered the work of the park service. The role of the Yosemite Natural History Association and the Yosemite Institute had primarily been to educate and perform interpretive tasks, with some funds donated to improvement projects. An organization solely devoted to fundraising was needed.

In addition to the Yosemite Institute and the Yosemite Natural History Association, which was becoming known as the “Yosemite Association,” Yosemite gained another ally. In 1987-88, Superintendent Bob Binnewies, Yosemite Association Chairman Tom Shephard, and YA President Henry Berry conceived of and launched The Yosemite Fund (Hansen 2003). The sole function of the Fund was to provide money for Yosemite National Park projects. Since 1988, over 19 million dollars have been directed to restoration, structure rehabilitation, and infrastructure improvements (such as new walkways in the meadows of Yosemite Valley). The primary mission of the non-profit
Yosemite Fund “is to help keep Yosemite National Park's beauty alive, now and for future generations” (Yosemite Fund Journal 1998). “We provide private funding for projects in the park that government funds just can't cover. Fund grants are given for managing wildlife, restoring habitat, repairing trails, providing new educational exhibits, and much more” (Figure 26) (Yosemite Fund Website 2003).

Fig. 26. Growth of cooperating associations in Yosemite National Park (By author).

To truly grasp the extent to which the Yosemite Fund aids the park service one must reflect on its accomplishments. By no means are these accomplishments insignificant; almost every project can be seen by anyone visiting Yosemite. The Yosemite Fund has provided funding for so many projects that one may ask just how much (or how little) the park service is actually providing to improve the park since the Fund was created. From the outside it seems like the park is merely directing and supervising park improvement initiatives. However, from the inside it is clear that although the federal government does not give Yosemite enough funding, the employees of the park express their concern and will to make Yosemite a better place by submitting grant proposals to the Yosemite Fund. Rangers and the public are encouraged to submit
grant applications to improve Yosemite. Park projects receive funding that the Yosemite
Fund and park officials feel are worthwhile (Yosemite Fund Journal 1998; 2002).

Since 1988 the Yosemite Fund is responsible for helping the park service
complete 150 projects. Most of the improvements were directed to improving visitor
services and restoration efforts. All of the funds appropriated by the Yosemite Fund can
be broken down into several categories. To date, $3 million has been devoted to habitat
restoration, $1.7 million for furthering scientific research, $3.6 million for visitor services
and education, $2.2 million for trail repair, $1.6 million for wildlife management, and
$685,000 for cultural and historic preservation. These numbers total close to $13 million
but altogether the Yosemite Fund has committed over $19 million to Yosemite (Yosemite
Fund Journal 1998; Yosemite Fund Website 2003). The discrepancy in the amount
donated to the park is due to the method by which funds are distributed. In most cases the
Yosemite Fund directly applies money to park projects, in other cases it diverts funds to
the park itself, which sometimes results in a better value. For instance, the government
may be able to purchase an item at a discounted rate, whereas the Yosemite Fund could
not. Therefore the Yosemite Fund would donate money directly to the park (NPS Budget
Report 2002).

Some of the highlights include redesigned services in the Mariposa Grove of
Giant Sequoias such as installing new walkways, wayside exhibits, and viewing
platforms to prevent erosion at the tree bases and to relieve undue stress to their shallow
root systems. In 1996, a similar project aimed at rehabilitating the landscape was applied
to the Glacier Point viewing area (one of the most scenic lookout points in the Sierra
Nevada). A new amphitheater was created which improved interpretive services, and new
bathrooms were built. On the valley floor two of the valley’s largest meadows, Cook’s and Stoneman’s, were restored after years of abuse left a haphazard array of footpaths, scarring the delicate area. The Yosemite Fund provided money to revegetate damaged areas, remove invasive species, and construct boardwalks that greatly improved the health of the meadow ecosystems (Figure 27) (Yosemite Fund Journal 1998, 2003).

Fig. 27. Boardwalk installation in Yosemite Valley, 2002 (Yosemite Fund 2002).

The most important contribution to the park has been the appropriation of bear-proof food lockers to prevent bears from breaking into vehicles, campsites, and hard-sided structures in search of food. The park service had finally come to the realization that people were the problem and took action to prevent bears from obtaining food. Over the last ten years the Yosemite Fund has provided over 2,000 new bear-proof food
lockers throughout the park, including the backcountry (Figure 28). Through donations from the Yosemite Fund rangers have been able to educate more visitors and employ seasonal rangers who are part of the “bear team.” The bear team consists of interpretive rangers and wildlife rangers who work to educate and enforce rules daily. The rangers often work at night when bears are most active. Most of the salaries of the “bear techs” and the gear they use (such as night vision goggles, noisemakers, and rubber bullets) to scare bears out of the campgrounds has been provided by the Yosemite Fund in conjunction with the park service. In 1998 an all time high of $656,135 in property damages including 1,355 car break-ins were reported. In 2002 damage from bears was reduced, totaling $85,303 with only 559 incidents (Yosemite Fund 1998, 2003; NPS Wild Bear Project 2002; NPS 2003). Only because of this partnership between the park and NGOs has the success of the bear program been ensured (Figure 29 and 30).

The Yosemite Fund has its own journal titled *Approach*. Originally published as a newsletter, it became a journal in the spring of 1990 (Yosemite Fund 1990). This journal is distributed to over 22,000 members who donate a minimum of twenty-five dollars yearly to receive “Friend” of Yosemite status. This entitles the member to receive 10% off accommodations in the park, a subscription to *Approach*, and the inclusion of the patron’s name to the Honor Wall located at the visitor center in Yosemite Valley. Contributions of $1000 or more every year entitle members to attend the Yosemite Fund’s special events held at the Ahwahnee Hotel, Honor Wall listing and listing in *Approach*, and a twelve-month park pass or Yosemite related book. A “Guardian” level member donates $2,500 or more and receives a twelve month National Parks Pass as well as an invitation to the yearly high country outing. All this in addition to the benefits
Fig. 28. Bear-proof food storage lockers have been the greatest success in reducing bear damages. Most lockers were purchased with money provided by the Yosemite Fund (NPS photo).
Fig. 29. A bear technician readies a bear trap in Yosemite Valley. Most work is done at night when bears are most active (Photo by author, summer 2002).
Fig. 30. Recent bear incidents in Yosemite (NPS 2003).

offered at the “Friend” level. A “Sentinel” level member enjoys all of the benefits a “Guardian” member has and receives an Ansel Adams special edition print as well as an invitation to a spring event. The highest level is the “Benefactor” level which requires a donation of $10,000 or more. In addition to all the benefits discussed the “Benefactor” will receive an invitation to an intimate Sierra Nevada trip and their choice of a premier Yosemite photograph. That said who are the donors? Most of the major funding comes from big corporations, who, despite their vested interests, provide a substantial amount of money to Yosemite. Most of these donations are made at the yearly “donor day” held in the park every fall at the renovated Glacier Point amphitheater (Yosemite Fund 2003).
One of the largest donors is the Yosemite Concession Services Corporation. I do not classify the Yosemite Concession Services Corporation a true NGO despite the fact that they annually donate 10% of their total revenue to the park, which doubles its budget (Hales 2002). They are a profit oriented entity although they fit some profiles of an NGO such as promoting common goals for the greater public good. Of course, this has not always been the case. Yosemite’s history shows that the concessionaire has been publicly targeted as an entity that turned Yosemite into a “carnival atmosphere” and “never took no for an answer” in regard to their ability to turn a profit (Runte 1990, 190, 214). This was especially true when the Curry Company operated in Yosemite. The MCA Corporation, which took over in 1973 and was led by Edward C. Hardy, ran the concessions much the same way that the Yosemite Park and Curry Company had, with an iron fist. MCA is best known for “pushing vigorously, to turn the valley into a staging area for a wide range of commercial activities” (Runte 1990, 204). MCA strongly backed the idea of an aerial tramway from the valley floor to Glacier Point, which preservationists strongly opposed.

MCA also successfully filmed a television series in the park called “Sierra.” In 1982 MCA proposed rafting on the Merced River and pressured Superintendent Bob Binnewies into allowing rafters to safely enjoy the river. In a letter to Binnewies from Hardy, MCA thought that providing raft rentals would “improve guest safety, by assuring that guests are riding with puncture resistant rafts…and that all riders are equipped with Coast Guard approved life jackets” (Runte 1990, 213). The reality was, as Charles W. Wendt (chief ranger for Yosemite) stated in his recommendation to Binnewies, that “from a resource protection standpoint fewer numbers of people on the river will mean a
reduced amount of trash along the shores and less disturbance of wildlife. Even with life vests people get into trouble and the persons in the rental boats, will still have problems and require rescue.” Wendt added that “the more spontaneous user who would rent rafts if they were available, tends to drink more alcohol, use more drugs, and is generally more disorderly from a law perspective standpoint. Furthermore they are dirtier from a litter standpoint and more destructive from a resource management standpoint” (Runte 1990, 213-14). Today, rafting is allowed on the Merced River (Figure 31).

On October 1, 1993 Delaware North successfully bid for a 15-year contract to operate concessions in Yosemite. “A big part of getting the contract was convincing the park service that we (Delaware North) were committed to protecting Yosemite’s environment” (Hales 2002). The Yosemite Concession Services Corporation (YCS) provides almost all visitor services in Yosemite, ranging from hotels and retail operations to food and beverage, transportation, guided tours, and recreation services. In 2002 they also provided interpretive programs for visitors, despite the fact that the park service has traditionally offered such programs. From an environmental perspective YCS is the best concessionaire that park managers have ever allowed to operate in the park because of their commitment to improving the park through environmental stewardship. The company is internationally recognized for its environmental leadership. Delaware North is the first hospitality company in the United States - and the first operating within a national park - to be registered with the International Organization for Standardization as an “ISO 14001” organization. The certification requires lengthy environmental audits, constant assessment of environmental impacts, and a dedication to impact reduction (YCS 2002).
In 2002 YCS received the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Environmental Achievement Award for its progressive environmental programs. These programs include a park-wide recycling program, waste-diversion programs, water and conservation plans, employee and guest interpretation, and the *Greenpath* program (a program that teaches employees how to reduce impacts to the environment). YCS has removed over 30 underground storage tanks and mitigated pollution at a cost of $8 million dollars which has prevented pollution in the ground and river water of Yosemite Valley. Another accomplishment has been using alternative fuel in the tour buses and tram tours, such as natural gas and electricity. In 1997 YCS partnered with the NPS and the Yosemite Fund to renovate the Glacier Point area, a $3.2 million dollar restoration project, of which $2.6 million was YCS money (YCS 2002). In 2001 the Yosemite Concession Services made an annual
contribution of ten percent of its gross revenue equivalent to approximately $18 million dollars. Delaware North was so successful in Yosemite that it was awarded contracts in Grand Canyon and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks and recently won the Yellowstone National Park contract (Hales 2002).

At the time Delaware North successfully bid for the park concessions a critical document was released by the National Parks Steering Committee. In 1993 top NPS and DOI officials, superintendents, park managers, academics, leading NGO officials, and executives from the private sector formulated a report that to date, is the most comprehensive recommendation to renew organizational strength within the NPS. The Vail Agenda is a document that realistically and sometimes bluntly assessed the history of the National Park Service and provides recommendations for the future success and management of the National Park Service and the lands they protect (NPS Steering Committee 1993).

Just as the Leopold Report called for a redirection of management techniques in 1963, the Vail Agenda sets goals and objectives to increase preservation and effectiveness of the park service (Sellars 1997). The report emphasizes the role that the National Park Service must play in the future if it is to successfully function nationally and internationally. More specifically the report calls for the park service to renew organizational structure, increase scientific studies, and most importantly, learn from its mistakes. The goal is to create a model that will serve the international community. With regard to the role of cooperating associations the Vail Agenda stresses the importance of cooperative agreements stating, “The National Park Service should form strong public/private partnerships with states, local governments, and non-profit organizations”
(NPS Steering Committee 1993, 107). Such partnerships could improve visitor education and experience while providing “ecologically and culturally sound management.”

By the time the report was released Yosemite was a leader in establishing park cooperating associations to improve the park for visitors and help the NPS successfully carry out its mission. In a sense the Vail Agenda was promoting what was already taking place in parks across America, the addition of cooperating associations to support a park service that “suffers from an increasingly diffuse set of park programs,” and “serious fiscal constraints, and personnel and organizational structures that often impede its performance” (NPS Steering Committee 1993, 2). At the time it seemed that cooperating associations were gaining recognition for the important fiscal, interpretive, and managerial contributions they were making across the park system.

In 1995 the Clinton Administration implemented components of the Vail Agenda when it called for increased efficiency by reducing the size of the “federal bureaucracy” in the park system (Sellars 1997, 289). The park service’s hierarchical management system in place since 1937 changed. Instead of parks reporting to regional offices, which in turn reported to the headquarters in Washington D.C., the new system attempted to reduce bureaucratic red tape. The efficiency of the new arrangement was questioned by the NPS because smaller central offices meant less “capability to oversee park operations” and the Washington office lacked oversight capabilities it once had (Sellars 289, 1997).

Despite federal changes, Yosemite was able to overcome inadequate federal budgets because it had entered agreements with cooperating associations and the concessionaire. In doing so the park was able to draft new environmental plans. The
environmental plans included a Yosemite Valley Housing Plan, restoration of Mirror Lake, and redesigning the Glacier Point lookout area. The projects were completed with aid and volunteer support from the Yosemite Fund and the concessionaire (Yosemite National Park Public Information Office 1996). In 1997 the park experienced the biggest flood in its history, just when the new draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan was released for public comment. This plan was built upon the ideals of the General Management Plan of 1980, the concessions plan released in 1992, and the Yosemite Valley Housing Plan of 1996. The Valley Implementation Plan proposed four alternatives to remove unnecessary structures, restore park lands, relocate facilities away from hazardous areas, and reduce traffic and congestion in the valley (NPS 1997). The flood, in essence, gave the park service a clean slate to work with. Years later park Superintendent David Mihalec admitted that “the flood gave us a chance to rethink before we rebuilt.” New Environmental Plans had to be drafted to address the amount of damage that the park had sustained. It was forecasted that the new plans would be implemented over a fifteen-year period, with many of the projects being completed with aid from the park’s cooperating associations and concessionaire.

By 2000 the three major cooperating associations in Yosemite - the Yosemite Association, Yosemite Institute, and the Yosemite Fund - were well established organizations responsible for millions of visitor contacts (Figure 32). The release of the final Yosemite Valley Plan was a product of over 30 years of planning efforts by Yosemite managers. In many cases the plans had failed to materialize. In the case of Yosemite’s GMP it was recognized that “the 1980 General Management Plan was a really good plan, but it would have cost a lot of money to implement and there was no
money. There wasn’t any money because there was no political will” (Yosemite Association 2000, 4). Buildings, roads, traffic, pollution, and environmental degradation were still plaguing the park in 1997, although improvements had been made since 1970. “Yosemite is more natural now than it was one-hundred years ago” says a park interpretive ranger (Fry 2002). Officials at the Yosemite Association and the Yosemite Fund would no doubt concur.

Fig. 32. Yosemite Association volunteers in Yosemite Valley (Photo by author, summer 2002).

The 1990s was the period of greatest growth for the Yosemite Association. By the end of 1999 its membership had increased to 8,500. In 2002 it was estimated at 8,900 (Yosemite Association 2000; Pratt 2002). The decade also brought an increased role for the cooperating association within Yosemite National Park. In addition to yearly
monetary donations, the Yosemite Association was regularly staffing 30 volunteers in the park on month-long rotations. These volunteers were located in Tuolumne Meadows, Wawona, and Yosemite Valley (the largest group). The park designated approximately 30 sites in the Lower Pines campground for the volunteers to stay, free of charge. Yosemite Association volunteers also took on the responsibility of operating the museum in Yosemite Valley, which hosts over 50,000 people annually. In addition, the volunteers assisted the park service in presenting the introductory park video, *The Spirit of Yosemite*, in the newly remodeled theatres in the valley which was funded in part by the Yosemite Fund (NPS Wild Bear Project 2002; Pratt 2002; Yosemite Association 2003; Yosemite Fund 2003).

Yosemite Association volunteers in the valley also worked alongside rangers in the visitors and wilderness centers, providing information on the park and backcountry trails. The Association also was responsible for implementing the pilot bear canister program, the goal of which is to keep food properly stored so backcountry users do not get food taken by bears while hikers rest. In 1998, the first year of implementation, bear incidences in the backcountry decreased by 95%. For the 18th season Yosemite Association volunteers also staffed the Yosemite Valley Art Activity Center. In keeping with the traditional educational initiatives the Association has become known for, over 450 members attended the association’s yearly forum, a daylong series of workshops focusing on bears, sierra birds, alpine ecology, and park history. Over seventy Yosemite Association members dedicated their time to increasing the effectiveness of the Yosemite resources management division by participating in six work trips which successfully rebuilt trails and revegetated areas in the Yosemite Valley, Tuolumne Meadows,
Wawona, and the backcountry. Their efforts totaled over 2000 hours of volunteer labor (NPS Wild Bear Project 2002; Pratt 2002; Yosemite Fund 2002; Yosemite Association 2003).

The Yosemite Association reinstated the field seminars which had been discontinued for financial reasons. After “several years of erratic winters and springs the seminar program enjoyed both a normal weather pattern… and a profitable financial year in 1999” (Yosemite Association 2000, 12). A total of 721 students signed up for the 65 classes that were offered. During the 1990s, Tuolumne volunteers expanded their role to aid park officials in opening the parson’s lodge daily for the public in the summer (the place where the Sierra Club held its high country base of operations during the group’s early years). Volunteers also helped educate the public about proper food storage to prevent bear incidents. Outside of the park the Yosemite Association was responsible for opening a new bookstore at the Groveland ranger station just outside the park, initiating the first ever external agency cooperation for the Association. It also continued to consult with other cooperating associations in other parks, including Golden Gate and Grand Canyon, marking the first inter-association cooperation (Yosemite Association 2000).

The Yosemite Association has continued to meet these and other challenges in 2002. In a recent interview with Vice President Beth Pratt of the Yosemite Association I was able to gain a better understanding of the role the organization was playing in the park. At the time Pratt provided insight into the status of the Association over the past ten years. She stated that ten years ago the association was able to offer more money to the park service; however, in recent years, the monetary aid has decreased. When asked about the decline she attributed the losses to their commitment to publishing the most
comprehensive study of the Sierra flora to date, *An Illustrated Flora of Yosemite*. She also commented on the diminished sales at the “hard to reach” visitor center in the valley, where most in-park sales originate. Nevertheless, the Yosemite Association currently has 8,900 members and is still looking to expand its volunteer and member services to the park service. Despite some setbacks, history has proven that the Yosemite Association is resilient and will persevere through tough economic times (Figure 33) (Pratt 2002).

Fig. 33. Yosemite Association headquarters in El Portal, CA (Photo by author, summer 2002).

By the end of the millennium the park service was praising and encouraging the Yosemite Association and the Yosemite Fund for their contributions to the park. The park was in the process of finalizing the Yosemite Valley Plan and welcoming a new superintendent, David A. Mihalec, who would guide the park through the first years of the implementation process. According to Mihalec “The park service has been saying
since the ‘50s that we are loving our parks to death. If the NPS and its interpretive programs and the Yosemite Association and its educational programs haven’t gotten people to the point where they have learned how to love this park to life, that’s when I say we’ve failed our charge” (Yosemite Association 2000, 3). When asked about the Yosemite Association Mihalec replied “I think YA is a wonderful example of a partnership. YA doesn’t look at publications and programs from the standpoint of the bottom line, you instead relate them to your mission, to Yosemite. There’s a misconception that the job of cooperating associations is to sell books. Well that’s not YA’s job, YA’s job is to instill values into people about the park” (Yosemite Association 2000, 4). Based on Mihalec’s responses and the recent actions of the Yosemite Association it is easy to see that from the top down, Yosemite managers are relying on the cooperating associations to help them achieve management goals, educational initiatives, and most importantly a longstanding bond with the associations to further the mission of the NPS.

The 1990s can be classified as a tremendous period of growth for the Yosemite Fund. The Fund has been actively contributing large amounts of funding for a variety of park projects, and recently is aiding the park service in restoring the Lower Yosemite Falls area in Yosemite Valley, a place of intense visitation as it is the tallest waterfall in North America. The Yosemite Fund actively cooperates no only with the NPS but has increased partnership with the Yosemite Association and the Yosemite Concession Services Corporation making all groups more effective (Yosemite Fund, 2003).

New initiatives to be completed in upcoming years are closely tied to the current goals and objectives of the Yosemite Valley Plan. For example the plan calls for the
rehabilitation of the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center at a cost of $94,000. The Fund has taken action to raise funds to match NPS funding that becomes available to complete this project. In addition, the Fund hopes to restore wetlands in the valley, realign trailheads, and develop a research station in Yosemite. Currently, many studies are being conducted within the park but no research station exists. The grant for this project involves renovating unoccupied residential space in the southern part of the park at Wawona. The Fund will also continue sponsoring California Conservation Corps trail crews who work in the front and backcountry to rehabilitate worn trails. The program is currently in its 24th year of operation. Another large-scale project already underway is the complete restoration of one of Yosemite Valley’s most scenic meadows, Cook’s Meadow. In addition to removing the earthen dams to improve water flow, the Fund will complete installation of new boardwalks which will replace asphalt pathways. The project will be complemented by a self-guided tour book of the meadow area (Yosemite Fund 2003).

Other projects that will become a reality in the near future or will continue to be funded are the junior ranger program (supplies that the park cannot provide will be contributed by YA), Indian pictograph project, construction of new wayside exhibits in the valley, rehabilitation of the historic Yosemite Cemetery, and scientific studies of the Yosemite black bear and the endangered bighorn sheep. Due to the loss of horses during the 1997 flood, new patrol horses for the NPS will also be purchased with funding from the Yosemite Fund. Furthermore the Fund will provide money for projects such as fine art conservation in the Yosemite Museum, creation of a railroad exhibit just outside the park, making new exhibits of wildlife at Happy Isles Nature Center, and funding scientific study of Yosemite’s bat population as well as its fire and climate history
Yosemite Fund 2003). Clearly there is a tremendous amount of work that has needed attention for years, and the fund is dedicated to accomplishing those tasks that the park service has only been able to do in part, or not at all.

In the time that the Yosemite Association and the Yosemite Fund have experienced expansive growth, the Yosemite Institute has remained a satellite association, not involved with the day-to-day operations of the park. Although it does not provide the financial and volunteer support that the other cooperating associations do, the Yosemite Institute is perhaps making the greatest contribution relative to the mission of the NPS, “to provide for the benefit of future generations” (Organic Act 1916). Every year the Yosemite Institute is graduating new environmentally aware students who have learned their skills in Yosemite and will, no matter what, remember their time and hopefully make positive contributions to the park’s future. In 2002 the Yosemite Institute was offering K-12 Field science school programs, which serviced over 13,045 children, adults, teachers, and families. The Yosemite Institute also disbursed over $150,000 in scholarships that enabled low-income and culturally diverse students to attend their programs (Yosemite Institute 2002).

The Yosemite Institute also has developed a stewardship program which placed 3,475 students in a variety of projects. The projects included; removing asphalt along the Merced River near the popular upper pines campground, collecting acorns for the Yosemite Museum, clearing apple trees, removing non-native plant from the valley, revegetating Cook’s Meadow, surveying giant sequoias and river ecosystems, destroying illegal fire rings in the backcountry, collecting trash, and removing nails from wood damaged in the 1997 flood so it could be reused or recycled. As Leigh Davenport,
executive director of the program, states from “Evaluations and anecdotal feedback [indicate] that learning experiences in Yosemite National Park deepen our visitors’ understanding of the natural and cultural significance of the region and its complex resource management issues” (Yosemite Institute 2002).
Chapter VII: Significance

The problems that have beset Yosemite throughout its history are representative of the problems that have plagued the park system in general. In most cases Yosemite was the site where problems first surfaced, forcing the park to develop strategies to overcome them. Recounting history provides a general overview of how the park management faced tough decisions when confronted with such problems. Park managers have been able to overcome most of the problems and provide some guidance for other parks which are confronted with similar situations. I believe that Yosemite can serve as a model for management in today’s park system. The development of cooperating associations across the park system has stemmed from Yosemite, a place where problems relating to bureaucratic inefficiencies, fiscal constraints, and improper management sparked change in the type of service that the NPS has been able to offer. Now more than ever the ability of the park service to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations,” depends on the role that cooperating associations are allowed to play in Yosemite’s management regime. Currently the role of the organizations is steadily expanding, and the current status of the park reflects the great accomplishments of these organizations.

In the past decade cooperating associations have been encouraged to actively aid in the day-to-day and long-term operations of the park which has enabled park personnel to carry out their mission. It is easy to see by the amount of work that cooperating associations are accomplishing that the role of the park service has been reduced. No
longer are park employees restoring and protecting the park’s resources. Instead the park service has concentrated its efforts on directing development initiatives, restoration projects, and servicing millions of visitors each year. Park projects that were formerly paid for by the federal government are now being funded, in part, by cooperating associations. In some cases park projects or seasonal jobs have been completely funded by these groups. For example, the park was recently able to hire a summer climbing ranger to educate climbers and improve the safety of Yosemite’s vertical world. This position was funded entirely by the Yosemite Fund. In addition the Yosemite Falls viewing area (the highest waterfall in North America) is slated to be rebuilt using an “environmentally friendly” approach. The project is largely funded with money from the Yosemite Fund. These current examples further demonstrate the park’s dependence on the Fund.

There is no question that the roles cooperating associations play in Yosemite are increasing. However, one must ask, is the increased dependence by the park service on cooperating associations a form of privatization? Is the National Park Service allowing large corporations to contribute money to Yosemite through a series of transactions made possible by a cooperating association? If so, does funding from large corporations influence the type of services that the association offers to the park service? Are these large corporations improving their public image by contributing money to Yosemite? To gain a better understanding of the “privatization” concept I have identified a few major corporations that donate large sums of money to the Yosemite Fund and in turn, Yosemite park managers.
The Yosemite Fund has many levels of donors that contribute to Yosemite. I found that large corporations, known as “Corporate Protectors,” are responsible for making some of the biggest contributions to the Fund. Today there are a total of 31 Corporate Protectors giving money to the Yosemite Fund. Some of the most well known include Chevron, Delaware North, Coca-Cola, Bank of America, Hewlett-Packard, and Sun Microsystems. Although it is unclear if these companies influence the type of services that the Yosemite Fund provides to the park it is possible to conclude that by donating money to the park the corporations are benefiting publicly. In some cases a company could even be considered “green” for contributing to Yosemite. Such is the case with Chevron which provided money to restore Stoneman’s meadow in Yosemite Valley (Yosemite Fund 2002).

Another question also arises when discussing the growth of cooperating associations across the park system. Should the parks continue to expand partnerships with cooperating associations in the first place? Do larger parks stand a better chance of acquiring a cooperating association than a smaller park? Does the expansion of the associations mean that the parks will never be adequately funded? Will congress decide that the parks have enough funding because of the budgetary and staffing voids that cooperating associations fill? At this point these questions are unanswerable, but there is growing concern about the establishment of partnerships with cooperating associations. In Yosemite, protesters voiced their opinions over a series of weekend rallies during the summer of 2002. They spoke out against the involvement of cooperating associations in the management of the park and park planning efforts (Figure 34). The protests are no
doubt the first-ever organized resistance to the current management practices that the park service has adopted.

Fig. 34. Protesters of the Yosemite Fund and park planning, summer 2002 (Photo by author, summer 2002).

Yosemite’s history shows that it is the site where changes take place, and those changes, for better or worse, ripple throughout the park system. Yosemite was the first park to create a cooperating association dedicated solely to providing services that helped the park carry out its mission statement. Other parks followed suit. Yosemite was the first
park to develop a unified road system, which other keystone parks soon replicated. Yosemite was the first park to experience problems with wildlife, which caused officials to draw up a variety of management plans. Over time, these plans changed drastically as new scientific techniques and principles were applied. The history of black bear management exemplifies this the best, and soon after other keystone parks experiencing high visitation drafted plans based on experiences learned at Yosemite.

Yosemite was also the first park to draft environmental plans to cope with challenges to its mission. Yosemite managers learned the hard way how to successfully incorporate the general public into the planning process, something that other parks were able to accomplish without experiencing the tribulations Yosemite did. Yosemite was also the first park to introduce an “environmental” concessionaire, which has greatly improved the park. Other parks followed suit, and most recently Yellowstone selected Delaware North as its primary concessionaire (Hales 2003). Now, lessons learned from Yosemite’s history can be transferred to other parks. Some believe that the entire system already serves as a model for the international community: “In a global context, the service is being looked to as a model of conservation and preservation management – a model that can teach valuable lessons to a world increasingly concerned with environmental degradation, threats to wilderness values and rapid cultural and historical change” (NPS Steering Committee 1993, 1).

Richard West Sellars, the foremost expert on the history of the NPS, takes a pessimistic view when predicting the future of the National Park Service. He states that “the organization’s most deeply imbedded assumptions are far more difficult and slower to change than the organizational structure. The history of development and use of the
parks for tourism extends for more than a century and reflects an entrenched perception of the purpose of national parks. Even a whole generation of leaders may not succeed in changing the core values of the Park Service to establish what the Vail Agenda termed a “strong ecosystem management culture.” Such changes are not impossible but they are improbable” (Sellars 1997, 290).

I believe that the changes Sellars describes have already taken place in Yosemite, and managers have realized they must enter into cooperating agreements to provide adequate and improved services. Yosemite managers realize, from the superintendent to the trail worker, that what they are doing is contributing to the greater good, and ensuring the future of the park. “I hope that everyone in this park realizes, no matter what job they have, that they are involved in the management of this park, that’s what I would like to become reality” (Mihalec 2002). By involving the public and giving them an opportunity to become more intimately involved in the management of the park change is occurring. The public is becoming “part of the solution instead of being part of the problem” (Yosemite Association 2000, 3). At the turn of the century we are not loving the park to death, we are starting to learn how to love Yosemite to life (Yosemite Association 2000).


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