

River's 'wild and scenic' designation may impact Yosemite

By Joshua Emerson Smith, Merced Sun-Star

A well-intentioned plan to preserve the natural beauty of the Merced River may wind up limiting the number of visitors U.S. national parks can have at any one time.

A 1987 federal law designated the river as a "wild and scenic" location that needed to be preserved. To do that today, however, it seems that restrictions could be imposed on the number of visitors allowed into Yosemite and, ultimately, all other national parks.

Under a federal court order, Yosemite National Park officials will have to limit the number of people allowed in park locations at any one time. The ruling is aimed at protecting the Merced River under its "wild and scenic" designation.

Once approved, the plan probably will set a precedent for how all national parks regulate protected lands and waters around the country.

Public comments on the plan can be made until Dec. 14.

Based on a decision by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 2009, the Merced River Plan must include specific numbers for how many people can be in areas of the park at one time. This will be the third proposed plan by park officials after more than a decade of legal wrangling, plus \$50 million in court costs and other expenditures.

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