

Human impact on Yosemite may be reduced

By Norimitsu Onishi, New York Times

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK – Far humbler corners of America have faced a similar dilemma: How much human activity should be allowed in a natural setting that is also promoted as a tourist destination?

The National Park Service is proposing a significant makeover of Yosemite National Park that would change the way future generations of visitors experience the park, especially the seven-mile-long Yosemite Valley at its heart. The Park Service's plan would restore more than 200 acres of meadows, reorganize transportation and reduce traffic congestion. To shrink the human presence along the Merced River, park officials are also proposing closing nearby rental facilities for bicycling, horseback riding and rafting, as well as removing swimming pools, an ice rink and a stone bridge.

As with most things related to one of the nation's most beloved national parks, the plan has ignited fierce debate among environmentalists, campers, and officials in California and Washington.

Rep. Tom McClintock, a Republican whose district includes Yosemite, said at a recent House hearing that the idea of removing commercial facilities was meant to satisfy "the most radical and nihilistic fringe of the environmental left." But some environmentalists said the plan did not go far enough in protecting Yosemite Valley and the Merced River, which flows through 81 miles of the park.

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