

Yosemite: Famed hotel name to change

By Scott Smith, AP

The names of iconic hotels and other landmarks in the world-famous Yosemite National Park will soon change in an ongoing battle over who owns the intellectual property, park officials said Thursday.

The luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel will become the Majestic Yosemite Hotel, and Curry Village will become Half Dome Village, said park spokesman Scott Gediman.

The move comes in an ongoing dispute with Delaware North, the company that recently lost a \$2 billion bid – the National Park Services largest single contract – to run Yosemite's hotels, restaurants and outdoor activities.

Delaware North demands to be paid \$51 million for the names and other intellectual property. The New York-based firm filed a lawsuit last year, saying that when it won the contract in 1993, the park service required the company to buy the former concessionaire's assets.

Park officials are making the name changes to avoid any disruptions to visitors with hotel reservations during the transition to a new concessionaire on March 1, when they go into effect, Gediman said. He said the park service is fighting for the rights to the original names.

"We're clearly in disagreement with Delaware North," he said. "We're taking this action to ensure the seamless transition."

The Yosemite Lodge at the Falls will turn into Yosemite Valley Lodge; Wawona Hotel will become Big Trees Lodge; and Badger Pass Ski Area will be called Yosemite Ski & Snowboard Area.

Yosemite National Park – another name which is also claimed by Delaware North and remains in dispute – will stay put, Gediman said.

National Park Service says the names and other intellectual property are worth about \$3.5 million, according to the government's response to a lawsuit that Delaware North filed with the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.

DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite Inc., a subsidiary of Delaware North, said in a written statement that it was "shocked and disappointed" that the park service is using the beloved names as a "bargaining chip."

The company defended its demands, saying that it hopes Yosemite and the new concessionaire decide not to change the names. "All we want in this is fair and just treatment," the company said.

Justice Department attorney John Robertson wrote in court papers that the company "wildly inflated" the value of the trademark names. He added that Delaware North has "breached its duty of good faith and fair dealing," a claim the company denies.

The trademark dispute at Yosemite is similar to disputes at Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas and the Grand Canyon in Arizona and with other iconic pieces of Americana owned by the U.S. government, such the Space Shuttle Atlantis.

The park service says it belatedly learned of the trademark issue when it prepared to open bids for the concessionary operation. Yosemite awarded a 15-year contract to Aramark last year.

Delaware North also runs concessions at the Kennedy Space Center and has a trademark application for "Space Shuttle Atlantis," government court papers say.

Delaware North “apparently embarked on a business model where by it collects trademarks to the names of iconic property owned by the United States,” Robertson wrote.

The name changes don’t sit well with park admirers like John Lenau, an amateur historian and president of the Conference of California Historical Societies.

Now 76, he’s visited Yosemite since childhood and says when somebody mentions Curry Village he can picture it in his head. That will be lost with the change, he said.

He also worries about stripping away the Native American heritage by turning the Ahwahnee to the Majestic Yosemite Hotel and the Wawona Hotel to Big Trees Lodge.

“I don’t see the advantage of doing that,” Lenau said, speaking for himself rather than the society. “I’m just a little bit against changing something that has been around for so many years.”