



November 12, 2010

Superintendent Don Neubacher  
Yosemite National Park  
Attn: Tuolumne Planning  
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Yosemite, CA 95389  
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**Re: Access Fund Comments on the Tenaya Lake Area Plan EA.**

Dear Yosemite Planning Team:

The Access Fund is pleased to continue its participation in the planning processes for Yosemite National Park with these comments on the October 2010 Tenaya Lake Area Plan Environmental Assessment (“the EA”).

### **The Access Fund**

The Access Fund is the only national advocacy organization whose mission keeps climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. A 501(c)3 non-profit supporting and representing over 2.3 million climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing—rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering—the Access Fund is the largest US climbing organization with over 10,000 members and affiliates.

The Access Fund promotes the responsible use and sound management of climbing resources by working in cooperation with climbers, other recreational users, public land managers and private land owners. We encourage an ethic of personal responsibility, self-regulation, strong conservation values and minimum impact practices among climbers.

The Access Fund has a long history of participation in Yosemite National Park management initiatives, and represents the interests of the nation’s climbers, for whom Tuolumne Meadows, including the climbing areas around Tenaya Lake, is a resource of national and international significance. Climbers likely represent a significant portion of the visitors in the Tenaya Lake area on any summer weekend day.

The following are our comments on the proposals in the EA

### Access to East Beach under the Preferred Alternative Eliminates the Possibility of a Quiet Experience and Should Be Revised

The current pattern of use at East Beach presents the visitor with a pleasing choice of beach experiences. The visitor can choose the crowded, noisy, social and convenient environment near the road or the quiet, private and distant environment at the far end of the beach. This situation allows the visitor to choose the experience that best suits their needs. It is also consistent with the need to preserve wilderness character on the east side of the lake.

The Proposed Alternative 2 (and alternatives 3 and 5) would effectively destroy this range of experiences and homogenize the beach experience for all visitors. In particular, it would eliminate the possibility of having a quiet and private experience on the beach by dumping all beach-goers in the middle of the beach. On busy weekend days in the peak season, those seeking a quieter experience would have nowhere to go. It would make no sense for them to be on the road side of the central social area because that would have more traffic noise and many people on the trail alongside the road. They could still try the south end, but the noisy families and raucous groups in the center social area would sprawl south, crowding the quiet seekers into the far end of the beach and effectively eliminating the possibility of a quiet and private experience in that direction. Nor would the West Beach serve as a replacement. The south end of the west beach is closer to the road, narrow, and shorter than the east beach, and is in shade in the later part of the day when beach use is highest. It simply doesn't have the pleasant and expansive ambiance of the East Beach.

To preserve this range of visitor experiences at East Beach, the access to the beach should follow the design in Alternative 4, with a trail parallel to the road from the parking area to the beach. The Communal Picnic Node in Alternative 4 should be moved to the north, across the former stream channel. This way, the crowded, social, noisy, environment of convenience-seeking visitors would be spread along the northern part of the beach and continue to be separated from those seeking a quiet, more private experience at the southern end. Another way to emphasize the difference in experiences would be to provide no tables on the southern side of the beach, because the tables invite a more socially-focused experience, where people eat and engage in face-to-face conversation. A third way would be to preserve the log crossing over the inlet creek, as proposed in Alternatives 2, 3, and 5, rather than build a bridge, as proposed in Alternative 4. In sum, to preserve a range of visitor experiences for beach-goers, we strongly urge you to implement the beach access proposal in Alternative 4 but with the central picnic area moved north, no tables on the south side, and no bridge.

### A View Turnout with Short-Term Lakeside Parking Should be Provided

We are concerned that the Proposed Alternative 2 provides insufficient accommodation for visitors who just want to pull off to the side of the road, have a brief look at the lake, take a photo and be on their way. In particular, we are concerned that these sorts of visitors will slow down and stop in the middle of the road (the way people often do when looking at bears and deer), park in the undesignated sites on the north side of the road that would otherwise be used by climbers, or clog up the parking areas and trails, where they would really prefer not to be in the first place. While we certainly support encouraging visitors to get out of their cars and into the park, we still feel it is important to accommodate those who just need to look and go.

We therefore suggest that an area on the south side of the road between Sunrise and Murphy Creek, or in the Murphy Creek area, be signed, designed and designated as a view turnout with 10-minute parking specifically to accommodate these types of visitors. (Yes, we know the park doesn't generally have or enforce parking time restrictions, but hopefully people would obey the signs.) Olmstead Point is a good example of the need for, and the success of, this type of parking area. We do not believe this type of parking should be provided near East Beach, as in Alternative 5, because it simply results in the current situation, where these spaces are used by long-term beach visitors, with heavy visual and soil impacts in the area.

#### We Support Other Features of the Proposed Alternative 2

We support other features of Alternative 2 that encourage primitive uses at the lake, including no tables at Sunrise, no bridge over Tenaya Creek at the Sunrise Trailhead and reduced speed limits (and attendant noise) on the road. As to the parking, we appreciate that the climber parking at the base of Stately Pleasure Dome has been preserved. As to the overall parking scheme, we hope it works.

#### We do Not Support the Camping Proposal in Alternative 5.

We have consistently supported efforts to provide more camping opportunities in the park, including more primitive camping in tightly configured walk-in sites that can fit in the space between roadways and the wilderness boundary. We therefore very much appreciate the park considering this type of facility in the Tenaya EA, and we consider this as a statement by the park that such sites can and will be considered in other locations in the park and in other planning efforts. We do not support the camping proposal in Alternative 5, however, because it is too close to the highway to provide a quality camping experience. We strongly urge the park to consider providing this type of camping facility along the segments of the Old Tioga Road leading to May Lake and Yosemite Creek, where traffic noise would be much less of a problem.

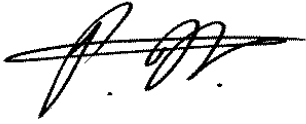
#### Miscellaneous Notes and Corrections

The names attached to the alternatives are meaningless in the context they are used: "confluence," "ecotones," "loop," "immersive." The reader strains to discern the hidden meaning or policy direction in each of these. Environmental documents already have enough repetitive, droning and near-meaningless text; there is no need to go out of your way to add more.

At page 1-5 is a listing of applicable NPS Director's Orders. Missing is Director's Order 47 (NPS 2000) *Sound Preservation and Noise Management* (mentioned at p. 3-101).

We heartily support the initiative to improve the visitor experience in the Tenaya Lake area, and we look forward to the development of the Proposed Alternative with the addition of the suggestions in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Minault', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Paul Minault  
Northern California Regional Coordinator

Cc: Brady Robinson, Access Fund Executive Director  
Jason Keith, Access Fund Policy Director  
Joe Sambatoro, Access Director  
Armando Menocal, Access Fund Yosemite Task Force  
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