

**TESTIMONY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
YOSEMITE VALLEY PLAN**

April 22, 2003

**For consideration by the Subcommittee on
National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
United States House of Representatives**

**Submitted by Paul Minault, Northern California Regional Coordinator
The Access Fund
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Dear Chairman Radanovich and Members of Subcommittee on National Parks,
Recreation and Public Lands:

The Access Fund, America's largest national climbers organization, is pleased to submit this testimony for inclusion into the public record regarding the implementation of the Yosemite Valley Plan. Specifically, this testimony concerns the failure of the National Park Service to provide campgrounds within Yosemite National Park as set forth in the Yosemite General Management Plan ("GMP"). The Access Fund respectfully recommends that the National Park Service replace campsites lost to flooding and bring the total number of campsites in the Valley up to the level prescribed in the Yosemite GMP.

THE ACCESS FUND

The Access Fund is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit advocacy group representing the interests of approximately one million rock climbers and mountaineers in the United States. We are America's largest national climbing organization with over 15,000 members and affiliates. The Access Fund's mission is to keep climbing areas open, and to conserve the climbing environment. For more information about the Access Fund, log on to www.accessfund.org.

THE ACCESS FUND HAS BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN YOSEMITE PLANNING

The Access Fund submitted extensive comments on the Valley Implementation Plan, Yosemite Valley Plan, Merced River Plan, and Lodge (Camp 4) Plan with a particular reference to the need for more camping opportunities in Yosemite Valley. These comments were too long to attach, but I have brought copies of them with me for your reference. We also submitted suggestions to the consultant team preparing the Parkwide Out of Valley Campground Study which are in your attachments

YOSEMITE HAS A SHORTFALL OF 1,000 CAMPSITES, 300 OF THEM IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

In our letter to the Chip Jenkins of the Park Service dated July 11, 1999, which is also attached, we pointed out that the park is almost 1,000 campsites short of the number projected for the park in the 1980 Yosemite General Management Plan, with a shortfall in Yosemite Valley of almost 300 sites. We feel strongly that these campsites should be built as soon as possible to comply with Yosemite National Park planning documents and National Park Service Management Policies

CAMPING FURTHERS PARK MANAGEMENT POLICIES

National Park Service management policy is to "encourage visitor activities that . . . foster an understanding of, and appreciation for, park resources and values, or will promote enjoyment through a direct association with, interaction with, or relation to park

resources.” Management Policy 2001- 8.2 Visitor Use (emphasis added). In our comments to the Valley Plan, we listed the ways in which camping enhances the visitor experience, furthers park values, and promotes the enjoyment of Yosemite National Park through a direct association with park resources.

- First, we pointed out that camping is a form of recreation, unlike lodging in developed accommodations, which is a form of leisure.
- Second, camping promotes a closer relationship to park resources than any other form of overnight accommodation.
- Third, camping distances the visitor from the commercial values of comfort and convenience and the expression of social status through consumption that pervade American society. Camping brings the visitor closer to nature, the simple necessities of daily life, and the way people lived in the past.
- Fourth, camping is democratic. In campgrounds, social distinctions account for little, and camping has the potential to bring people together in shared appreciation of their natural surroundings in a manner that reduces social barriers. The nations’ great parks present an opportunity to be a force for social equality. Unfortunately, the lodging picture in Yosemite preserves the social distinctions of the greater society, rather than leveling them, which we believe should be a goal of the parks.
- Fifth, camping is inherently communal. Campers have an enhanced opportunity to associate with other people, develop new relationships, and broaden their social horizons. Unfortunately, the Valley Plan largely ignored these values, with the result that camping suffered the loss of 300 campsites in the Valley. Instead, the park now emphasizes exclusive and expensive lodging over traditional camping accommodations that are more in line with NPS management policies.

THE PARK SERVICE SHOULD COORDINATE CAMPGROUND PLANNING WITH NATIONAL FORESTS OUTSIDE THE PARK

We also pointed out the need for the Park Service to coordinate the development of new camping facilities with the National Forests outside the park. In recent years, the Sierra National Forest Service has eliminated approximately 50 campsites along the Merced River west of the park. Just last fall, the Inyo National Forest closed all the informal camping areas along Highway 120 east of the park and along the road to Saddlebag Lake, eliminating about 100 informal overnight parking and camping areas. These actions have increased demand for camping opportunities inside the park and need to be taken into account in the park’s planning for new campgrounds.

PARK PLANNING FOR OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS SHOULD FOCUS ON NEW CAMPGROUNDS AND SHIFT DEVELOPED LODGING TO THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR OUTSIDE THE PARK

The Yosemite Valley Plan noted that over 1200 new lodging units are proposed for construction outside the park. Valley Plan at II-55 - II-57. No new campgrounds were proposed, however. This suggests to us that the park should focus on developing new

campgrounds and shift the provision of developed accommodations to the private sector outside the park. Such a shift is supported by the values we discussed earlier.

Chairman Radanovich and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands, the Access Fund appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on the Yosemite National Park Parkwide Out of Valley Campground Study. We hope you will acknowledge the problems caused by the 1000 campsite shortfall in Yosemite National Park and direct the National Park Service to construct new campsites.

Thank you,

Paul Minault
Northern California Regional Coordinator
The Access Fund

Attachments: July 11, 1999 letter to Chip Jenkins

PERSONAL INFORMATION FOR PAUL MINAULT

Paul Minault is a founding member of the Access Fund, a former member of the Board of Directors of the Access Fund, the former National Policy Analyst, and Land Use and Environmental Counsel to the Access Fund. For the last 14 years, Mr. Minault has also served as Regional Coordinator for Northern California, a region with very significant Access Fund membership.

Mr. Minault has submitted extensive comments on camping issues in regard to various Yosemite planning initiatives, including the Valley Implementation Plan, Valley Plan, Merced River Plan, the Lodge Plan (which governed planning for historic Camp 4) and the Parkwide Out of Valley Campground Study. Mr. Minault also spearheaded the Access Fund's effort, in conjunction with other climbing interests, to preserve Camp 4 from commercial development. He has also participated in Access Fund environmental projects in Yosemite Valley, including construction of the Sunnyside Jamb Crack climbers' access trail.

Mr. Minault received a bachelor's degree in history from Princeton and his law degree from the University of California at Berkeley. He is currently in private practice as a land use and environmental lawyer in San Francisco.

Mr. Minault has been an active rock and alpine climber for 20 years and has climbed throughout the United States and in Canada. He is a member of the American Alpine Club and the Cragmont Climbing Club, whose members first brought modern rock climbing techniques to Yosemite in the 1930's and made many of Yosemite's Valley's first ascents. Mr. Minault still climbs actively in Yosemite the Cragmont Climbing Club. For the last ten years, Mr. Minault has camped in Yosemite or in the adjacent national forests approximately 30 days a year.

SUPPLEMENTAL SHEET

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PAUL MINAULT:

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SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:

The Access Fund is the nation's largest climbing organization.

The Access Fund has been actively involved in Yosemite planning.

Yosemite has a shortfall of 1,000 campsites, 300 of them in Yosemite Valley, from projections in the park's General Management Plan. More campsites are needed.

Camping furthers park values and the visitor experience by: promoting a closer relationship to park resources; distancing the visitor from developed facilities; bringing the visitor closer to nature, the simple aspects of life, and historical ways of living; reducing social and class barriers and fostering social equality; and enhancing social exchanges among park visitors.

The Park Service should coordinate campground planning with the national forests outside the park.

Park planning for overnight accommodations should focus on new campgrounds and gradually shift developed lodging to the commercial sector outside the park.

DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENT
Required by House Rule XI, clause 2(g)
And Rules of the Committee on Resources

A. This part is to be completed by all witnesses:

1. Name: Paul Minault
2. Business Address: 120 Montgomery St., Suite 2290, San Francisco, CA 94104.
3. Business Phone Number: 415-397-6152
4. Organization you are representing: The Access Fund
5. Any training or educational certificates, diplomas or degrees or other educational experiences which add to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing. I have a law degree from the University of California at Berkeley and am in private practice specializing in environmental and land use law.
6. Any professional licenses, certifications, or affiliations held which are relevant to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing. I am a member of the American Bar Association, Section on Environment, Energy and Resources; California Bar Association, Environmental Law Section; and Bar Association of San Francisco, Environmental and Water Law Section.
7. Any employment, occupation, ownership in a firm or business, or work-related experiences which relate to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing. On behalf of the Access Fund, I have submitted extensive comments on camping issues in regard to various Yosemite planning initiatives, including the Valley Implementation Plan, Valley Plan, Merced River Plan, the Lodge Plan (which governed planning for Camp 4) and the Parkwide Out of Valley Campground Study. I also spearheaded the Access Fund's effort, in conjunction with other climbing interests, to preserve Camp 4. I have also participated in Access Fund environmental projects in Yosemite Valley, including construction of the Sunnyside Jamb Crack climbers' access trail.
8. Any offices, elected positions, or representational capacity held in the organization on whose behalf you are testifying. I am a founding member of the Access Fund, a former member of the Board of Directors, the former National Policy Analyst, and Land Use Counsel for the Access Fund. For the last 14 years, I have also served as Regional Coordinator

for Northern California, a region with very significant Access Fund membership.

B. To be completed by non-governmental witnesses only:

1. Any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which you have received since October 21, 2000 from the National Park Service: None.
2. Any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) which were received since October 1, 2000 from the National Park Service by the organization which you represent at this hearing, including the source and amount of each grant or contract: None
3. Any other information you wish to convey which might aid the members of the Committee to better understand the context of your testimony: For the last 10 years, I have camped in or just outside Yosemite National Park approximately 30 days a year.