

Ed Hartouni comments on Yosemite Overnight Big Wall Climbing Wilderness Stewardship

From: Ed Hartouni

To: Yosemite National Park, Jesse McGahey, climbing ranger

Re: Comments on the Yosemite Overnight Big Wall Climbing Wilderness Stewardship plan

Date: November 10, 2022

Summary

The plan fails to fully describe the “visitors” to the “big wall climbing wilderness.” In particular the “day users” must be considered in the impact to the wilderness character and to the natural resources. Requiring an overnight big wall wilderness permit affects only one of these groups of visitors. While it is stated that the severe impacts to Wilderness values are due to the cumulative effects of overnight big wall climbing, no evidence or data is provided in support of the assertion.

The subjects of the management of this wilderness are the visitors. Their experience of the wilderness, including what “wilderness values” are important to them, should be a part of the management considerations.

The plan fails to describe how current climbers view wilderness experience in contrast with traditional views from the time the Wilderness Act was passed. The Wilderness Act does not define specific values (e.g. solitude). How the plan bridges between its assumption of values and the values of the visitors is an important consideration in assessing the likelihood of success.

The plan fails to describe what “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation” exists in other parts of the park, and throughout the year. The focus appears to be primarily in managing high use routes at peak seasonal times.

The plan fails to address as a goal the management “efficiency—to maximize benefits (improved experience quality and protection of naturalness) relative to costs (including staff and funding, but also costs to visitors) over the long run.”

The plan fails to define the “natural condition” of the big wall wilderness. Climbing routes occupy a small fraction of the total wilderness, and while impacts may be large on climbing routes, they may be small or non-existent on those other parts of the wilderness. No evidence or data is provided to assess if the plan would succeed in accomplishing the preservation of the “natural condition.”

The plan fails to describe the educational outreach in sufficient detail to assess whether or not it would be successful in conveying the desired set of values.

The plan fails to describe previous attempts to achieve the same goals and evaluate the outcome of those attempts, compare them with the current proposal, and to evaluate the relative efficiencies of each.

Recommendations

Restart the pilot study. The overnight big wall wilderness permit pilot study could have provided much more information for developing a stewardship plan. Unfortunately, the study launched coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the YNP management should allocate funds and resources to design a study to ensure it provides the important information required to formulate a stewardship plan.

Engage the climbing community. Many of the assertions of the current plan are unsupported, and particularly the identification of overnight big wall climbing cumulative effect causing “severe impacts” to Wilderness values. It is an important assertion to justify because the weight of the management plan falls on that subgroup of visitors, whose cooperation is required for the plan to succeed.

Review past stewardship activities. The remediation of climbing impacts has been addressed in the past using different plans (e.g. YNP and climber-volunteer cooperative projects). Identifying, describing and evaluating these plans should be an important part of the considering a new plan. In particular, evaluating the benefit-cost balance of different plans can help in the decision on what plan to implement.

Partner with outside climbing organizations. Collaboration with local, national and international climbing organizations and possible for-profit entities (i.e. the outdoor industry) can lessen the burden of managing a stewardship program and greatly increase the park outreach to the broader climbing community. This is especially useful when interacting with international climbers. Educational outreach, particularly conducted in multiple languages and across diverse climbing and social cultures could be greatly enhanced through such collaborations.

Use “social media” to communicate the plan. The climbing community responds positively when a clearly articulated plan is communicated. Communication can be through many types of media and reach many different audiences. It may also be possible to collaborate with “influencers” in the climbing community to help communicate the plans motivations and goals.

While I am not opposed to stewardship plans which aspire to achieve the goals of this particular plan, I do not believe that a required overnight big wall wilderness permit will be successful. The basis for this belief is provided in the following discussion.

The basis for my comments regarding Yosemite Overnight Big Wall Climbing Wilderness Stewardship plan.

1) The Plan

The “Yosemite Overnight Big Wall Climbing Wilderness Stewardship plan” has been discussed in a number of venues, one of which I attended (September 22nd , 2022 3:00-5:00pm Live Event at Yosemite Facelift). The meeting presentations did not clearly discuss a concrete plan for stewarding the “Big Wall Wilderness.” The details of the stewardship plan were not available, though generalities were presented.

The project home page <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=108441> does provide more information. In particular, the motivation for the plan is contained in the assertion that “the park fails to meet legal requirements for protection and enhancement of Wilderness character.” The legal requirements refer to the 1984 California Wilderness Act.

The proposed plan is to require a wilderness permit for overnight trips on Yosemite big walls.

The intention of the plan is to bring Yosemite National Park (YNP) into legal compliance where previous attempts to do so are stated to have failed. These being: “increased education, outreach, and law enforcement efforts.”

The goals of the current plan are:

- Protect and enhance the wilderness character of Yosemite's climbing areas while providing the public the opportunity to continue to climb big walls.

- Preserve the natural conditions for wildlife, vegetation, and water quality at the base of walls, on the walls, and on their summits. This requires reducing the amount of litter, abandoned property, fixed ropes, fire rings and other structures, and improperly disposed of human waste.

- Improve opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation by educating climbers on best practices for Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and preventative search and rescue.

- Provide climbers with information to enhance opportunities for solitude in wilderness areas

- Further develop a collaborative relationship between the NPS and climbing community to promote shared objectives of stewardship and safety.

There is no discussion about how the proposed wilderness permit system will help to accomplish these goals. Permitted entry is a restriction and the Wilderness Act requires “opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.”

2) California Wilderness Act of 1984

Public Law 98-425 <https://www.congress.gov/98/statute/STATUTE-98/STATUTE-98-Pg1619.pdf>
The "California Wilderness Act of 1984":

SEC. 106. The following lands are hereby designated as wilderness in accordance with section 3(c) of the Wilderness Act (78 Stat. 890; 16 U.S.C. 1132(c)) and shall be administered by the Secretary of the Interior in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Wilderness Act.

(1) Yosemite National Park Wilderness, comprising approximately six hundred and seventy-seven thousand six hundred acres, and potential wilderness additions comprising approximately three thousand five hundred and fifty acres, as generally depicted on a map entitled "Wilderness Plan, Yosemite National Park, California", numbered 104-20, 003-E dated July 1980, and shall be known as the Yosemite Wilderness;

The map defines the YNP wilderness. It is stated in the act that:

SEC. 107. A map and description of the boundaries of the areas designated in section 106 of this title shall be on file and available for public inspection in the Office of the Director of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and in the Office of the Superintendent of each area designated in section 106. As soon as practicable after this title takes effect, maps of the wilderness areas and descriptions of their boundaries shall be filed with the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate, and such maps and description shall have the same force and effect as if included in this title: *Provided*, That correction of clerical and typographical errors in such maps and descriptions may be made.

However, the map "Wilderness Plan, Yosemite National Park, California", numbered 104-20, 003-E dated July 1980 does not seem available to the public at this time.

The Foundation Document, Yosemite National Park, California December 2016
https://www.nps.gov/yose/getinvolved/upload/YOSE_FoundationDocument_2016_508.pdf
states that:

"The overall wilderness boundary was drawn to the 4,200-foot contour in Yosemite Valley,..."

As indicated in the Foundation Document, the wilderness boundary was drawn on the relevant Yosemite Valley 1990 issued 1:24000 quadrangles: Yosemite Falls, Half Dome, and El Capitan.

These are available at the USGS web portal

<https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#4/40.01/-99.93>.

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Most big walls in Yosemite fall in this designated wilderness area except Lower Cascade Falls, Pat and Jack Pinnacle, Arch Rock, down to Parkline Slab north of the Merced River, and Pulpit Rock, Super Nova Wall, The Rostrum, and Elephant Rock and various other cliffs south of the Merced River. In this region of the park, the wilderness boundary is 200' above Big Oak Flat Road to the north, and similarly 200' above Wawona Rd. to the south.

As a historical note George Whitmore, a noted Yosemite Valley climber, is credited with the passage of the California Wilderness Act of 1984 through his lobbying efforts on its behalf.

The California Wilderness Act of 1984 specifies that the designated wilderness areas be administered in accordance with the Wilderness Act.

The Wilderness Act, Public Law 88-577 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg890.pdf>

SEC. 4. (b) Except as otherwise provided in this Act, each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to preserve its wilderness character. Except as otherwise provided in this Act, wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.

The definition of “wilderness character” is contained in the definition of wilderness:

SEC. 2. (c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

3) Foundation Document, Yosemite National Park, California December 2016

https://www.nps.gov/yose/getinvolved/upload/YOSE_FoundationDocument_2016_508.pdf

In the Foundation Document Appendix C: Basics for Wilderness Stewardship for Yosemite National Park we find: “...five qualities of wilderness character – *natural, untrammeled, undeveloped, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and other features of value* – in the context of the Yosemite Wilderness.”

Each of these qualities are discussed, and some specific references to climbing are made.

“Natural: When necessary, visitor use exclusion zones are employed to help restore natural communities at impacted areas. Such efforts include temporarily closing climbing routes to protect peregrine falcon habitat...”

“Undeveloped: Field staff also strives to reduce the overall number of campfire rings and signs, campground infrastructure, and other installations from the wilderness.

Established climbing routes are marked by countless permanently installed climbing bolts and hangers in rock faces. Each of these developments, from camps to trails, serves recreational and administrative uses and balance visitor use and safety against their respective impacts to wilderness character.”

“Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:

Others travel to Yosemite seeking world-class climbing,...

Although permitting benefits the natural quality of the wilderness, it can simultaneously impose confinements on recreational options even as it provides improved opportunities for solitude. Group size restrictions are imposed in order to minimize impacts to solitude and natural qualities. Larger groups are asked to stay on maintained trails, while smaller groups may choose to traverse the wilderness cross-country. Permits are not required for climbing or most day use and regulations have been kept simple to the extent possible. Staff uses education as their primary tool to develop a sense of stewardship within visitors and achieve compliance with regulations, while enforcement staff use the minimum action required to ensure compliance with these policies.”

Where I have added emphasis.

4) **Long-Range Interpretive Plan - Yosemite National Park February 2012**

<https://www.nps.gov/yose/upload/LRIP.pdf>

We find additional references to climbing.

“13. The connection between climbers and Yosemite is historical, physical, and spiritual. Rock climbing immerses people in this place, which can promote appropriate, sustainable, and direct connections to Yosemite.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its significant association with the growth and development of rock climbing, Camp 4 has provided a place for the climbing community to foster ingenuity, creativity, and perseverance; which has led to many advances in climbing technique and technology.

Climbing in Yosemite embodies the passion and spirit of adventure that has led countless people to hike, backpack, explore, and climb in this wild national park. The inspiring nature of climbing also compels thousands of visitors to watch and admire Yosemite’s climbers in action.

Climbing is an outgrowth of the human spirit of exploration, challenge, adventure, competition, and courage; which, for some, leads to a strong sense of place, spiritual (or peak) experiences, self actualization, and ultimately to a profound sense of stewardship.

While only a small fraction of Yosemite’s search-and-rescue incidents involve climbers, the advent of big wall climbing in Yosemite gave rise to a world-class Search-and-Rescue (SAR) unit, which continues today.”

Where I have added emphasis, and in particular refer to the important support that the climber, George Whitmore, gave to the passage of the California Wilderness Act of 1984 as an example of a “profound sense of stewardship.”

“Interpretive Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Though the NPS has overall responsibility for managing Yosemite, such a dynamic and complex park cannot be fully supported by one agency or organization. While continuing to expand opportunities provided through long-established partners, ongoing partnerships with local non-profits like Yosemite Renaissance, emerging relationships with UC Merced and new non-profits such as the Yosemite Climbing Association, Balanced Rock Foundation, and others create exciting new potential for future collaboration.”

5) Managing Wilderness

This topic has a very large literature discussing various aspects of wilderness management. It has long been realized that the Wilderness Act contains a number of apparently contradictory attributes of wilderness that it requires to be managed. In particular, the idea of “wilderness” seems at odds with the idea of “management.”

A well written paper by T. E. Hall, “Use Limits in Wilderness: Assumptions and Gaps in Knowledge,” USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P-20. 2001

https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs/rmrs_p020/rmrs_p020_039_048.pdf

discusses many of the issues regarding management that are relevant when considering the current Overnight Big Wall Climbing Wilderness Stewardship plan. This paper points out that effective management cannot begin from a set of unexamined assumptions. Hall asks the following questions:

“(1) Which types of experiences (and thus, which user groups) should be the focus or beneficiaries of management?

(2) What temporal and geographical scales should be relevant in analysis and planning? and

(3) What can be learned from use limit systems already in place in other areas about the ability of use limits to accomplish the objectives for which they are established?”

6) Who?

The vertical wilderness of Yosemite Valley is accessed almost exclusively by climbers. In considering the issues of “wilderness character,” the experience of the climbers would be important input for determining, e.g. the value of solitude, what constitutes an acceptable experience? Further, climbers from different eras may experience solitude and wilderness differently, requiring a change in management policy. It is possible that “solitude” is not an important value anymore. As an example, Yvon Chouinard wrote in *Ascent* 1972, “Coonyard Mouths Off”

“I’m trying to say that maybe Yosemite and El Capitan are not the Ultimates. It was a spaced-out adventure once, when the odds were more stacked against you, but it’s not such a big deal anymore. George Lowe thought that his winter ascent of the north face of the Grand Teton was a far more difficult climb than the Salathé Wall. If you want to experience the same adventures and the same difficulties that the El Cap pioneers had, then you’ve got to go somewhere else, where there are virgin walls, where you are going to feel the same loneliness of being five days from the bottom and five days to the top.”

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So even as early as 1972 the idea that Yosemite Big Walls retained the wilderness character was questioned. Chouinard's experience of the vertical wilderness is likely very different from contemporary big wall climbers.

It is possible that climbers don't climb Yosemite big walls to experience the wilderness.

Another aspect of the plan is its focus on overnight use. In 1975 The Nose was climbed in a day, and so another class of climber came into existence, the "day user." Currently the logistics to pull off a big wall free involves a lot of practice, particularly if the intention is to climb the route in a day.

Free climbing big walls also has a history in Yosemite. And the development of techniques to accomplish a free climb have evolved and been passed down from climber generation to climber generation. This has an impact on wilderness stewardship even if, or perhaps especially if, the climbers are practicing without overnighing on the wall.

Paul Piana, American Alpine Journal 1989, "The Free Salathé"

We decided that a series of "camping trips" would allow us to gain the necessary knowledge and to become accustomed to life so far off the ground. Our strategy was to spend six or seven days at a time working on different sections of the wall. These trips were also used to cache water and the occasional can of beans at critical sites. After our work low on the route—that is up to Pitch 24—it became difficult to haul enough water and food to points higher. Our tactics changed and we carried an enormous amount of gear up the twelve miles of trail to the top of El Capitan. From a reconnaissance camp on the rim, we began the outrageous rappels which put us in position to work the upper sections of the climb. What had seemed like hideous exposure on Pitch 24 suddenly was no worse than the void experienced on short free climbs. We went down as far as Sous le Toit Ledge, leaving fixed ropes that were ultimately anchored to a big block just over the rim. We then climbed back out to a stance just at the lip of the Great Roof and began work on the crack in the Headwall. Several days were spent on these Headwall pitches as we top-roped or led them or figured out protection. We just got used to being in such an exposed place.

Lynn Hill, American Alpine Journal 1994, "El Capitan's Nose Climbed Free"

The timing was perfect. Brooke had the free time and was more than motivated to give the Nose another try. We would hike to the top of El Capitan, rappel down to the Great Roof for the photo shoot and spend a few extra days checking out the free climbing possibilities on the pitch above Camp Six.

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Brooke and I met the following week, hiked the nine miles to the summit of El Capitan, set up camp and began exploring different free climbing possibilities on the pitch...

Alex Huber, American Alpine Journal 1996, "Freeing the Salathé, the greatest rock climb in the world"

Loaded down with 250 meters of rope, bivouac equipment and food for five days, I hike alone to the top of El Cap to work on the Salathé Headwall. One week earlier, I had spent three days on the Salathé, checking out the climb. My goal is to redpoint every pitch in a minimal number of days...

While camping on top of El Capitan is not allowed for wilderness users who hike in, prominent climbers set up camp expressly to rappel into the upper pitches of the routes they were working to practice the moves that would allow them to achieve their goals.

Often, having achieved their goals, they returned with a crew to obtain images and or film/video records of the climb. For many climbs this activity does not require overnighing on the big wall if camps on the top are established and climbers and crew rappel into the climbs.

This use of the vertical wilderness definitely affects the wilderness experience of other climbers on the wall, for instance, the interaction of overnighing parties with day use parties. An example of this is shown in the YouTube video "Free as Can Be" with Jordan Cannon and Mark Hudon at the boulder problem on Freerider:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJ2Np9wqTAc&t=1093s>

it would seem that the presence of the Cannon-Hudon team, and the supporting crew making the video, might have had some effect on the wilderness quality of the team climbing the aid route which shares many of the same features on that wall.

The increased ability of contemporary climbers has made the "day use" of climbing routes on big walls in Yosemite possible. This increased ability, coupled with the desire to undertake a difficult climbing challenge has resulted in increasing "day use" activity.

On the plan homepage the assertion is made: "Cumulative effects of overnight big wall climbing have led to severe impacts to Wilderness values. Issues include proliferation of litter, human waste, abandoned property, improperly stored food, illegal fire rings and wind breaks, and preventable accidents." This begs the question: what is the contribution of the different user groups to these "severe impacts to Wilderness values?"

A follow up question might be: do the users experience a degraded wilderness?

At a minimum, it is not clear that sufficient supporting information exists to determine if a required wilderness permit plan for overnight big wall climbs would accomplish the stewardship goals.

Further, to assess the effectiveness of the stewardship plan, a baseline of “severe impacts” has to be established. This baseline could then be compared to the wilderness after the plan had been implemented to determine if it successfully mitigated the impacts. No such baseline data has been provided.

7) When?

As climber experience of the vertical wilderness changes what definition of wilderness character should define the management plan? The Wilderness Act has no definition of “solitude.” The experience of wilderness character may also change. How does this plan establish any of these attributes?

Another consideration is the timing of use of the wilderness, “outstanding *opportunities* for solitude” exists on Yosemite big walls during the year, though at times considered “out of season.” Climbers engaged in big wall climbs in winter, for instance, will almost certainly have the entire wall to themselves. This *opportunity* exists without management intervention through a plan. Will the wilderness permit be required throughout the year?

Data of big wall wilderness use with time would be an important bit of data for consideration, especially if considering if “the park fails to meet legal requirements for protection and enhancement of Wilderness character.”

Climate change puts another time dependent variable into wilderness management considerations. Over the past 30 years the big wall “season” has been in the months of September and October. Rising temperatures have already pushed this to October, however, a lengthening fire season in the Sierra Nevada has greatly affected climbing access.

It is expected that climate change will continue to alter the Sierra Nevada and in particular, Yosemite Valley local climate. The drought conditions of between roughly 2000 and 2010 provided reliable winter access to climbers. To a large extent those climbing in YNP could experience “solitude” even on the most popular routes.

Management plans will have to consider how various climate change scenarios affect the plan.

8) Where?

Climbing occurs along specific routes on specific cliffs. While climber impacts may be large on those routes, the vast area of the wilderness is unaffected by the presence of climbers. The Foundation Document specifically mentioned that “Established climbing routes are marked by countless permanently installed climbing bolts and hangers in rock faces. Each of these developments, from camps to trails, serves recreational and administrative uses and balance visitor use and safety against their respective impacts to wilderness character.”

One of the plan's goals is to "preserve the natural conditions for wildlife, vegetation, and water quality at the base of walls, on the walls, and on their summits." It would be useful to see how degraded the base and summits are due to climber impact. But more difficult is to assess the wilderness on the walls, which encompass a much larger area than the climbing routes. No documentation was provide assessing the impact that climbers on climbing routes have on the other parts of the walls.

Where such impacts are known, for instance raptor nesting on cliffs, the "...temporarily closing climbing routes to protect peregrine falcon habitat..." has been effective and resulted in increased peregrine populations.

Similar programs for other wildlife, vegetation and water quality await the necessary studies identifying the nature of the impacts and developing programs to mitigate them.

As Chouinard suggested in his 1972 Ascent article, climbers could look elsewhere, both within YNP and outside of the park for "wilderness experience." One interesting aspect of big wall climbing in YNP is the extent that it serves to prepare climbers to go to these other places. The easy access, reliably mild weather, challenging climbs and knowledgeable climbing cohort provides an ideal training ground. Using the knowledge and experienced climbers gain in YNP, they are more likely to achieve success in other remote area, e.g. the Baffin Island fjords, Patagonia, Kichatna Spires, Biafo Spires, etc.

The use of YNP big walls as a training ground to other areas may be a factor in climber experience expectations.

9) Will the stewardship plan be effective?

This is an important question that must be answered to impose required big wall wilderness permits. At the Face Lift town hall, the bare details of the plan's implementation were discussed. Currently the YNP contracts an outsider vendor to handle its reservation system. This costs a certain amount per reservation to cover the contract cost, the amount was not available. We assume that the minimum is \$2 per permit (the cost of 2022's automobile day pass). At the present, no limits on the wilderness permit have been proposed. The operating cost of the management of the plan was not available.

Importantly, the procedures for obtaining a wilderness permit were also not discussed, but could be similar to the pilot program which existed 2020-2022. However, this period coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and visits to the park, including climbers, may not be representative of future use.

However the operating costs are charged, creating and running a program requires additional effort by the YNP, presumably the climbing rangers. An effective plan would take into account the costs associated with alternatives to creating a mandatory big wall wilderness pass program.

The proposed plan home page makes reference to past attempts to accomplish the stewardship plan:

Cumulative effects of big wall climbing have led to degradation of wilderness values. Issues include: proliferation of litter, human waste, abandoned property, improperly stored food, illegal fire rings and wind breaks, and preventable accidents. Despite extensive efforts by Yosemite climbing rangers and climbing stewards to improve education and outreach to climbers, increase patrols, and coordinate targeted clean-ups, there are still unacceptable impacts to the wilderness character of Yosemite climbing areas.

Past outreach efforts, and education with the climbing community are not documented. And while the “overnight big wall” climbers are the subject of the wilderness permit plan, no demographic breakdown of that climber group has been provided. This is particularly important because of the influx of climbers both nationally and internationally who come to climb big walls in Yosemite. The extent of the outreach would have to target a very large group of people, not all English speakers, not all internet connected, not all in contact with YNP local climbers and park managers.

The climber impact on El Capitan summit has been a particular issue. There is a historic account that remains on the SuperTopo Forum site discussing the requirement for wilderness permits as they apply to climbers. The user “Link” is Lincoln Else, the climbing ranger at that time in 2005. This is an “outreach” effort using the then active climber internet forum. The response to a question about needing wilderness permits comes from an experience Yosemite climber Jerry Dodrill.

http://www.supertopo.com/climbing/thread.php?topic_id=84256&msg=84320#msg84320

Else points out that there is a posting on the Camp 4 Information Board explaining the wilderness permit requirements, and the goals of the wilderness permit system.

Using the SuperTopo Forum we also learn that in October 2004 Lincoln Else lead a cleanup party to the top of El Capitan to remove “ten full haul bags worth of trash.”

http://www.supertopo.com/climbing/thread.php?topic_id=42387&msg=42387#msg42387

This was accomplished through volunteers and corporate sponsorships. Lincoln what hoping to “get some credit to the climbing community for stepping up to the plate and leading by example.”

Some of the trash had been in place for over a decade.

Another example of climber response to park regulation is the adoption of “poop tubes” on overnight big wall climbs. The problem of waste management was beginning to be discussed in the climbing literature in the mid 1990s. See Climbing (153) page 154 July 15- August 1, 1995 article “The poop scoop” under the Conservation by Yale Lewis byline.

In response to the YNP park requirement that “all trash, including human waste, must be carried down from the cliff and disposed of appropriately.” John Middendorf wrote a “Quick

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Clip” item in Climbing (160) 134 May 1 – June 14 1996 entitled “Bombs away; making a big-wall poop tube.” This was the first instruction on how to make a poop-tube in order to comply with climbing regulations.

Climbing (214) 78, August 1, 2002 followed up with a “Techtip Aid Climbing” item entitled “Super dooper – how to build an alternative poop tube” which provide additional instruction on how to poop in the vertical wilderness.

Yet another article appeared in Climbing (218) 89, February 1, 2003, in which Mark Synnott reviewed the “Metolius Waste Case and Mountain Tools Big Wall Can waste disposal units.”

This illustrates the climbing community response to regulation, coming up with viable solutions to implement the requirements. In addition, the manufactures responded to the potential market of overnight big wall climbers by producing a product.

Aside from setting the rule, the YNP management team had no involvement in the implementation of solutions which climbers used to satisfy the regulation. During this period, the base of the big walls, especially around El Capitan, ceased to have various containers of human waste hucked from the parties on the walls. A huge success.

10) Plan efficiency

T. E. Hall writes: “One possible goal of public land management is efficiency—to maximize benefits (improved experience quality and protection of naturalness) relative to costs (including staff and funding, but also costs to visitors) over the long run.”

The examples in this section show possible alternative plans which have been demonstrably successful in the past. While the “relative cost” of implementing the plan are not yet known for staff and funding, there are costs to the “visitors” of this vertical wilderness, both monetarily and in terms of wilderness character. The Wilderness Act specifies these wilderness areas are managed to provide, among other things, “*a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.*” Requiring wilderness permits is confining.

So the efficiency that Hall proposes balances the benefits of the plan against the costs of the plan.

The proposed “Yosemite Overnight Big Wall Climbing Wilderness Stewardship” plan lacks the necessary information to make an assessment. It is not clear how the required big wall wilderness permit will meet the goals of the plan (which are the benefit) and no accounting for the monetary costs of implementing the plan. The cost to the big wall climbers wilderness experience is the loss of “an unconfined recreation.” Perhaps other responses to this request for comments will provide answers to what these climbers value.

However, the alternative path is worth pursuing. The YNP has effectively partnered with non-profit organizations, and specifically the Yosemite Climbers Association (YCA), in co-sponsored cleanups of YNP. As has been described previously, cleanup can work on big wall routes, at the base and summit, using climbing volunteers under YNP supervision. This could be undertaken in collaboration with the YCA coordinating the climber-volunteers. The YCA has also been successful in attracting sponsors from the climbing and outdoor industries.

The YNP can also take advantage of organizations like the YCA, the Access Fund and the American Alpine Club (for example) and through those organizations contact international climbing organization to undertake educational outreach regarding big wall climbing and vertical wilderness practices. This outreach should not be limited to overnight climbs but also good practices for engaging in free-in-a-day ascents as far as they involve being in the wilderness.

It is possible that a voluntary wilderness permit program, largely managed by these organizations, would accomplish the educational goals of a wilderness stewardship plan.

Further, the YNP could encourage outreach through the various climbing media outlets. First by improving its web presence. But also in association with guidebook writers, social media and podcasts, the climbing literature and the climbing cinema.

In particular, climbing cinema, now including online video, is a powerful medium for getting out a message. It is possible that current, prominent climbers who have adventured into the big wall wilderness might be open to making compelling videos describing the importance of preserving that wilderness.

These sorts of activities have led to realizing many of the benefits in a manner minimizing the costs. They have enhanced the wilderness experience of the “visitors” to that particular wilderness.

11) Opportunity for alternative plans

To repeat the words from the Yosemite Long Range Interpretive plan: *“Climbing is an outgrowth of the human spirit of exploration, challenge, adventure, competition, and courage; which, for some, leads to a strong sense of place, spiritual (or peak) experiences, self actualization, and ultimately to a profound sense of stewardship.”*

In seeking an alternative to requiring overnight big wall wilderness permits the YNP has an opportunity to work with the climbers to achieve a better overall outcome as has successfully demonstrated in the past.