



RESTORE HETCH HETCHY

Yosemite National Park

February 6, 2025

The Honorable Tom McClintock
2256 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Proposed Hetch Hetchy legislation

Dear Congressman McClintock:

On behalf of Restore Hetch Hetchy, I want to express my appreciation to you and your cosponsors for introducing H.R.177, which seeks to expand access to the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir and Lake Eleanor Basin for recreational purposes. I urge you to further develop this bill or include principal provisions in other legislation to bring about long-overdue improvements to the visitor experience in Yosemite National Park.

For too long, the National Park Service has neglected access and recreation opportunities in the Hetch Hetchy area, despite increasing visitor demand. Improvements to the visitor experience are supported by the public, by the Congressional Record and by law. Substantial supporting documentation is listed below and posted online.¹

While many improvements can and should be administratively implemented by the National Park Service and/or Department of Interior, legislation is warranted. Legislation has the potential to guarantee the public access and recreation opportunities at Hetch Hetchy that Congress fully expected when it passed the Raker Act in 1913 allowing San Francisco to build a dam in the valley.

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Legislation could also require that San Francisco pay a fair price for the use of the valley and make funds available for improved recreational access, enhanced fire mitigation practices and other purposes.

We ask that you consider the following key areas as you further develop legislation:

1. Expand Recreational Access: Boating & Fishing

- Boating is currently prohibited at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, despite Congressional intent under the Raker Act of 1913 to allow it. San Francisco's own materials promoted boating when it was advocating for the Raker Act's passage.
- Fishing is effectively banned since visitors cannot access areas below the high-water line.
- The National Park Service recently changed its rationale for prohibiting these activities after learning that its Raker Act-based justification was explicitly illegal. NPS's new rationale, adopted in 2024, appears to rely on specious legal authority at best.
- Large reservoirs in California allow both activities. Of the 38 reservoirs in California holding over 200,000 acre-feet of water, only Hetch Hetchy prohibits boating and fishing (See Recreation Summary for Large Reservoirs in California).
- Proposed Solution: Legislation should mandate that the National Park Service allow boating. Boating could take many forms, including concessionaire-operated quiet, non-polluting electric tour boats and rentals of kayaks and canoes.

2. Improve Camping Opportunities

- Currently, camping at Hetch Hetchy is restricted to backpackers, even though a designated campground exists.
- The campground lacks potable water, despite Section 9(p) of the Raker Act requiring San Francisco to provide it.
- Meanwhile, San Francisco maintains private recreational cabins for select guests, with questionable legal authorization.
- Proposed Solution: Legislation should require campground improvements, ensure potable water access, and repurpose city-privileged facilities for public use.



The water at the Hetch Hetchy campground is non-potable, despite the Raker Act's requirement that "the grantee shall ... provide a good and sufficient supply of water for camp purposes."



3. Remove Unjustified Access Restrictions

- Unlike all other entrances to Yosemite, Hetch Hetchy is only open during daylight hours, preventing visitors from enjoying sunrise and sunset in one of Yosemite’s most spectacular landscapes.
- Proposed Solution: Legislation should mandate 24-hour public access, aligning Hetch Hetchy with Yosemite’s other park entrances.

4. Expand Hiking Trails

- Hetch Hetchy has fewer hiking trails compared to other areas of Yosemite. While the existing north-side trail is popular, additional trails would allow visitors to more fully explore and appreciate the spectacular canyon.
- Proposed Solution: Legislation could prioritize new trails, such as:
 - A short, scenic trail from the Hetch Hetchy–Lake Eleanor saddle to the canyon rim, offering breathtaking views.
 - A trail extension connecting Hetch Hetchy to the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, creating a world-class backpacking route.

5. Introduce Public Transportation to Hetch Hetchy

- Yosemite’s other major entrances are served by the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS), but Hetch Hetchy has no public transit access.
- With Yosemite implementing a reservation system, visitors without a private vehicle will be unable to access Hetch Hetchy, further limiting public enjoyment.
- Proposed Solution: Legislation should require the expansion of YARTS or similar public transit services to Hetch Hetchy.

6. Funding & San Francisco’s Financial Obligations

- Currently, San Francisco pays only \$30,000 per year in “rent” for exclusive rights to the reservoir—a figure set when the Raker Act was passed in 1913. (The City also reimburses Yosemite National Park for costs related to security and watershed protection.)
- Proposed Solution: Legislation presents an opportunity to ensure San Francisco pays a fair price for its use of the valley. Increasing this payment could help fund necessary improvements, such as trail expansions, visitor services, and fire mitigation efforts.

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Page 4



Legislation has the potential to transform Hetch Hetchy into the world-class recreational destination that its natural landscape warrants. Including specific provisions to enhance access and recreation in legislation would guarantee meaningful and lasting improvements.

Restore Hetch Hetchy stands ready to collaborate with you and other members of Congress to advance legislation on this important issue.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Spreck Rosekrans
Executive Director

CC: Rep. Ken Calvert
Rep. Doug LaMalfa
Rep. David Valadao

¹ The following documents are available at <https://hetchhetchy.org/access>. Please do not hesitate to contact Restore Hetch Hetchy (spreck@hetchhetchy.org) for more information.

1. [Support letter for legislation to improve access at Hetch Hetchy](#) (2023), signed by 5 conservation and recreation groups
2. [Public comment letter on Yosemite Visitor Access Management Plan](#) (2023), signed by 781 citizens
3. [Group letter to YNP re fishing at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir](#) (2024), signed by 22 fishing groups and businesses
4. [Keeping Promises: Providing Public Access to Hetch Hetchy Valley, Yosemite National Park](#) (Restore Hetch Hetchy, 2021)
5. [Petition to Improve Public Access to the Hetch Hetchy Area of Yosemite National Park](#) (Restore Hetch Hetchy, 2023)
6. [Recreation Summary for Large Reservoirs in California](#) (Restore Hetch Hetchy, 2024)
7. [Bay Area Water Taste Test Summary](#) (Restore Hetch Hetchy, 2024)