



Legal Arguments for Visitor Improvements at HETCH HETCHY

Restore Hetch Hetchy is committed to improving long overdue access. Doing so will provide substantial opportunities for hikers, paddlers, picnickers, climbers and fishermen who want to wholly enjoy the upper reaches of the canyon. When park visitors are able to appreciate Hetch Hetchy and learn its history, most will support returning the valley to its natural splendor.



When San Francisco pleaded with Congress for permission to build a dam in Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley, it openly promoted boating on the reservoir and asserted there would be "no reason to exclude campers and picnickers". Once the reservoir was built, City leaders suffered a collective amnesia and virulently opposed the National Park Service's plans to welcome visitors.

The National Park Service blinked. As a result, the public has not only lost Hetch Hetchy Valley, but it has lost practical access to explore most of the canyon.

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In a 1928 editorial, the San Francisco Chronicle brazenly supports the City's flip-flop after the Raker Act was passed, opposing NPS Director Stephen Mather's plans to make recreation available at Hetch Hetchy. The Chronicle went further—also suggesting that Hetch Hetchy be "fenced off" to prohibit visitors! For more than a century, at the behest of City leaders, the National Park Service has explicitly and illegally limited access at Hetch Hetchy.

Restoration Update: Ackerson Meadow and Hetch Hetchy

Our April tour of recently restored Ackerson Meadow was both an inspiration and a revelation.

Ackerson Meadow lies along the Evergreen Road not far from Hetch Hetchy. For decades, cattle, searching for water during summer months, scoured and deepened the meadow's streambed—destroying habitat for amphibians, birds and other critters.

Restore Hetch Hetchy toured Ackerson Meadow shortly after it was acquired by Yosemite National Park in 2016 and again this spring. What a difference! The restoration process transformed a mostly barren field into a vibrant, living meadow.



Reveling in the restoration of 100 acres of wetland habitat in Ackerson Meadow reminds us of the project to come in Hetch Hetchy Valley—or might we call it Hetch Hetchy Meadow?

We often call Hetch Hetchy the sister of Yosemite Valley and note how both were carved by glaciers and feature waterfalls cascading from granite monoliths onto a serene valley floor. But there are differences.

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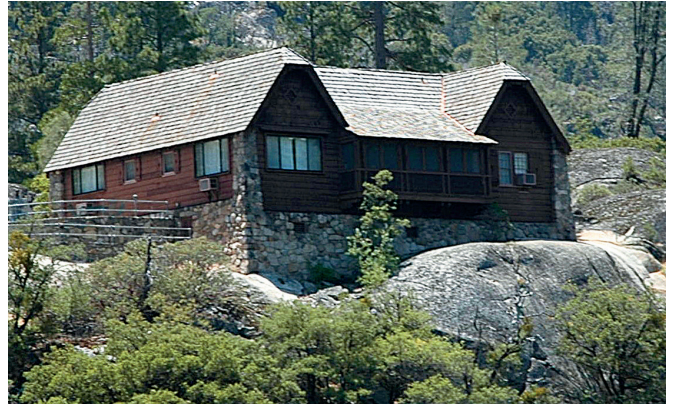
There are strong arguments that the National Park Service not only should improve access at Hetch Hetchy but also must do so. These arguments include:

- ❖ The Raker Act specifies San Francisco must “provide a good and sufficient supply of water for camp purposes” at the current site of the backpacker’s camp. It has never done so as the water at the campground is not safe to drink—so it can hardly be considered “good”.
- ❖ The National Park Service allows only backpackers to use the campground, but allows recreational use of cabins and the Chalet overlooking the reservoir for special guests of the City—despite the Raker Act’s criteria that use of the buildings must be “properly incident to the construction, operation, and maintenance” of the dam.
- ❖ The National Park Service allows boating and fishing on water bodies throughout Yosemite but not at Hetch Hetchy, in spite of the Raker Act’s express prohibition of special treatment for Hetch Hetchy. (The National Park Service changed their rationale for prohibiting boating and fishing in response to our communications in 2024, but retained the prohibition nonetheless.)
- ❖ Under normal conditions, the Big Oak Flat, Tioga Pass, South and Arch Rock entrances are open 24 hours per day, but the entrance to Hetch Hetchy is open only during daylight hours.

Restore Hetch Hetchy has been patiently working with the National Park Service and Department of the Interior for more than 4 years to help them comply with the spirit and letter of the law. If administrative progress does not come soon, Restore Hetch Hetchy is prepared to seek relief in the courts.



The bow of a kayak traverses Jenny Lake in the Grand Tetons. National parks typically allow boating, as does Yosemite. Hetch Hetchy is a stark exception. Further, there are 38 reservoirs in California which hold more than 200,000 acre-feet of water. 37 of these allow boating and fishing—only Hetch Hetchy does not.



Elite guests of San Francisco are allowed recreational weekends at the “chalet” and other cabins, while the public cannot even camp at Hetch Hetchy.

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HETCH HETCHY VISIONARIES

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The Restore Hetch Hetchy board, staff and friends dodge snowflakes at Ackerson on a beautiful day in the Sierra.



Hetch Hetchy Valley is ***much wetter than*** Yosemite Valley. It is about 1200 acres, narrower than Yosemite and only about 1/3 of its area, but its Tuolumne River is almost 50% larger than Yosemite's Merced River. Further, the terminal moraine (glacial debris) in Yosemite Valley was destroyed to open land for grazing in the 19th century—before we truly began to value wetlands. So, we can expect a restored Hetch Hetchy to include much more meadow than what we see in Yosemite Valley. A restored Hetch Hetchy will be wonderful for wildlife and people alike.

Frank Perez, Superintendent for the restoration of Ackerson and board member Mark Cederborg describe the process and value of recreating a meadow.



The endangered red-legged frog will be at home in both Ackerson and a restored Hetch Hetchy

Photo: Julia Butler Hanson.

Restore Hetch Hetchy welcomes Barbara Andrews as our newest board member!



Since 2020, Barb has supported Mexico's community-based sea turtle organization, Grupo Tortuguero de las Californias, and has served on the boards of a number of sea turtle conservation non-profits and also currently serves on the board of SEE Turtles. Barb loves the outdoors and is an avid hiker and mountain climber, promoting the regeneration of California's biodiversity while spending most of her summers at her family's cabin in Lassen National Forest.

Barb's day job is in the Legal Department at the California Academy of Sciences located in Golden Gate Park. It's always good to have folks with San Francisco connections!



Please Contribute.

Return Hetch Hetchy Valley to its natural splendor.

The vision of Restore Hetch Hetchy is to return to the people Yosemite Valley's lost twin, Hetch Hetchy—a majestic glacier-carved valley with towering cliffs and waterfalls, an untamed place where river and wildlife run free, a new kind of national park.

Use attached envelope or contribute online.



Restore Hetch Hetchy

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Robel Fessehazion's composite image "A Tale of Two Valleys" illustrates Yosemite Valley buried under a reservoir and highlights the passion of our campaign to return Hetch Hetchy to its natural splendor.

Robel is a self-taught African-American photographer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. His work, focusing on the natural environment and identity, can be found online at <https://robelkf.com>.



All seasons are beautiful at Hetch Hetchy. In summer, the trail to Wapama Falls is typically in full sun, with heat radiating from the canyon's north wall. Our April trip was sublime amid late season storms that flickered between rain and snow. The best part was sharing it all with new and old friends alike.

As we encourage people to experience Hetch Hetchy, we continue to reach out to leaders in San Francisco, Sacramento and Washington DC (in spite of the budget cuts presently threatening our national parks). Indeed, our parks belong to us all—they can and should bring us together. Restoring Hetch Hetchy is something we will ultimately celebrate as a nation.



*Spreck Rosekrans,
Executive Director*

"There is nothing so American as our national parks. The fundamental idea behind the parks... is that the country belongs to the people, that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

