



Restore Hetch Hetchy & National Park Service
Preliminary Meeting Notes
January 16, 2024

Mark, Mark, Mecia & Lucho – great to have you all there. Let me know what should be added or changed.

Attendees:

National Park Service

- Cicely Muldoon (first hour)
- Joe Meyer, COS.
- Ed Dunlavey, Hetch Hetchy liaison
- Jeff Webb, Deputy Chief Ranger
- Mark Krebs, Tuolumne Ranger

Restore Hetch Hetchy

- Mark Palley
- Mecia Serafino
- Lucho Rivera
- Spreck Rosekrans
- Mark Cederborg (on phone)

Ed Dunlavey began by discussing the 7 bullet points on page 3 of our September petition (Joe noted that our pre-meeting email included 10 items). The meeting lasted almost two hours with the Superintendent staying for the first hour. The discussions were mostly good but we were not able to go into as much depth for some of the items as we would have liked.

Campground

Ed first addressed bullets 1 and 4 – camping, and both short-and-long term efforts to provide potable water to the Hetch Hetchy campground. It is SF's responsibility to pay and maintain. Short term is filtration which hopefully will help – longer term is a pipeline. (Note sanitation for poop is necessary to use it as a real campground.) See note from SFPUC's Steve Ritchie below –

they hope to have work done by summer 2025. They are eager to provide potable water in part to avoid liability concerns. We can certainly take credit for putting pressure on both parties.

Improving the campground itself is another matter. The NPS will need to deal with ADA compliance and is having an internal conversation about the occupancy of the campground. – I will follow up with Yosemite Conservancy (YC) and Congress – and maybe with NPS.

They have not fully promised the campground would be available to folks other than backpackers – it seems likely but not guaranteed. Time to fix up campground is ASAP but needs to be incorporated in Yosemite’s Visitor Access Management Plan (VAMP).

Improving communications will be part of the plumbing upgrade – that funding will be part of the new MOA with the SFPUC.

Joe Meyer emphasized that evaluating the campground’s wastewater system will be SFPUC’ obligation. NPS manages the campground but the city manages the water and sewage. NPS wants nothing to do with the funding of the water and sewage. The MOA will not address water, sewage and campground upgrades because SFPUC’s commitments for water and sewage are separate from the MOA, as are NPS’s commitments to upgrade the campground.

NPS endorsement of filtration exemption eliminated

Both the new Superintendent’s Compendium and the new (4 year) MOA between SFPUC and NPS will not include language referencing any obligation to SFPUC’s filtration exemption. This is a victory for Restore Hetch Hetchy and may help eliminate barriers to access at Hetch Hetchy.

(That said, we saw the new proposed MOA shortly after the meeting as it was on SFPUC’s agenda. It does have some important changes to the operative language. The MOA still, however, really does not clearly reflect Raker Act provisions. We have followed up re substance and lack of public input. The new MOA is better but still has problems. We have stated it may be illegal.)

Joe Meyer explained that SFPUC expenditures in the park are not included in the MOA as they are not monies that are passed through NPS. He told us what additional SFPUC expenditures include (see email below from Steve Ritchie on these points):

- Short and long-term costs of providing potable water and sanitation at the Hetch Hetchy campground.
- Fixing the boat ramp. (NPS said they had been unable to use their boat for 2 years.)
- Replacing the unsafe bridge at Wapama Falls.

While the filtration language will no longer be used as an excuse to ban boating at Hetch Hetchy, boating will likely still not be possible. The boat ramp is considered an SFPUC asset – not an NPS asset. There is no other way (at present) to allow boating on the reservoir.

We will want to find a way to allow the public to use the ramp or otherwise boat on the reservoir

– right now NPS may say there is no public access.

NPS said there is money in the new MOA for improved communications.

SF's Cabins

Joe Meyer told us that they had asked SFPUC for justification of its policies for use of the cabins at Hetch Hetchy. (When asked, they will provide that info to us if we do a FOIA (federal) or Public Record Act (Cal.) request.)

They are still looking in their archives for information related to SFPUC's permission of use the cabins.

Dunlavey told us they expect construction workers to use the cabins perhaps this summer for what would be purposed intended by the Raker Act – i.e. work on the dam. He made it sound like a big deal but was not specific. We should follow up and see exactly what they will be doing. (Maybe the answer is to make the cabins public except when SF needs them for real work.)

Trails

NPS presented a piece of paper showing the Raker Act's provisions re trails and roads, along with a map, and asserted everything had been accomplished, at least to the letter of the law. They said the 1930s' era compliance with trail-building did not prevent any Secretary of Interior from modifying the lengths of some trails.

- We talked about the never – built trail to Pate Valley, and asserted that its veering off around Rancheria Mountain did not satisfy the stated condition in Section 9(p) of the Raker Act that SF construct “on the north side of the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir site a scenic road or trail, as the Secretary of the Interior may determine, above and along the proposed lake to such point as may be designated by the Secretary” in that the “designation” of the trail away from the reservoir was not what Congress intended and was contrary to the two routes under consideration at the time that would have continued on the north side to the eastern end of the reservoir; that even if the Secretary had made such a “designation,” the little-used trail around Rancheria was unreasonable; and that even if not required by the Act, NPS should consider replacing the long and circuitous loop around Rancheria and through Peasant Valley with a more popular trail that continues on the north-side of the Valley and from there to the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne.
- We also talked about a trail to the top of Tueeulala and Wapama the benefits they would bring backpackers and day hikers respectively.
- We asserted the Hetch Hetchy Loop Road had never been built (contrary to law). They said it had shown only a trail. We will follow up with copies of old maps and letters (although we are not asking this road to be built – perhaps we can ask other Hetch Hetchy

access be substituted for it).

- Park officials acknowledged deficiencies in the existing trails and seemed open to formal proposals for consideration, but noted that changes in trails would take time given wilderness, public comment and funding issues.

Visitor Use and parking

NPS told us there are 192 parking places at Hetch Hetchy and it was full at times last spring. We talked a bit about how a shuttle might work – and should follow up with recommendations.

Visitor use is up since the pandemic (see table below). Note Hetch Hetchy is not included in the Yosemite National Park’s reservation system

NPS also said one of the barriers to an open gate policy was it is unsafe to take large vehicles on the road – e.g. two campers cannot pass each other in some sections. They did not explain why they couldn’t resolve this problem by strong warnings at the gate or even prohibitions on larger vehicles, nor explain whether this has ever been a problem.

We asked for more specific data on usage. They were uncertain about whether they would be able to provide it (the internet includes monthly data by entrance station – although good records are not always kept)

Interpretation

Interpretive Signs: Dunlavey said that they and SFPUC are engaged in Phase 1 now, looking at changing and improving the existing signs on the dam and beyond on the trail. The interpretive staff are move forward with more wholistic approach to the signs that are out there. Bringing those other voices – the park and the tribes to be more inclusive and more complete. Next 2 years replacing and improving the signs. Conservancy and SFPUC are working in the next 6 months on message design. We have an opportunity to contribute suggestions for the content of the signs and can ask to be included in the review process.

NPS is looking at a Phase 2 for adding new signs in the day-use area near the public toilets, maybe in the parking lot, maybe in the backpackers camp. This Phase 2 would be in fiscal years 2027 and later.

We emphasized SFPUC should not have inordinate control over the content of signs.

Handouts: NPS officials thought that rangers at the park entrance were only handing out SFPUC's advertisement if a visitor wanted additional information about Hetch Hetchy. (Not so; Mark P was handed it along with NPS's handout at the entrance without asking for it.) Jack Webb acknowledged that SFPUC handout contained exaggerated information; Joe Meyer thought (without really reading the handout) that it was just informational. Meyer suggested we provide written materials explaining why NPS should not hand it out.

NPS suggestions

NPS suggested we talk to Congress about some of our requests (then restated that recommendation carefully).

Superintendent Muldoon said Congress's renewal of the Great American Outdoors Act would likely supply additional funds that could apply to some of the projects we want. She emphasized she was not in a position to lobby for passage of the renewal.

NPS also suggested we talk to Schuyler Greenleaf, who is in charge of projects for the Yosemite Conservancy.

Follow up

Oodles of follow up to do, including:

- Letter to NPS re recommended signage (Spreck will circulate draft with interested board members)
- Letter re SFPUC brochure distributed by NPS (Spreck work with Palley)
- Objections to new MOA (Spreck has done)
- Trails (Spreck will send)
- Cabins (Spreck w Palley)
- Thank you notes (Spreck has done)
- Campground (YC, Congress, public, NPS)?
- Yosemite Conservancy – Spreck will contact Schuyler Greenleaf and maybe ask for meeting with board chair – note Frank Dean is retiring.
- Congress Spreck contracting, starting w Huffman staff (Spreck has emailed staff, waiting for response)

Email from Steve Ritchie regarding projects underway at Hetch Hetchy with time frames.

Spreck – here is the project information you requested. We are making progress

Steve.

- 1) Wapama Bridge: This was a request from the NPS we funded in 2020-2022. (NPS has been slow to accomplish, blaming helicopter availability etc – hopes to install in Summer 2024)
- 2) OSH Boat Ramp Repair Project: This is a HHWP R&R Project.
 - a) Background: The existing O'Shaughnessy Boat Ramp at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is deteriorating. The ramp and supporting gabion design does not meet current standards of engineering practice. Access to the lake is necessary to perform required water quality sampling from the reservoir. Access is also needed by NPS for law enforcement and patrol activities.
 - b) Scope of Work: This project will assess the adequacy of the existing ramp and dock and provide new replacement and repair to improve access and operation. Professional Engineering Services (AECOM) will perform all Assessment & Design activities in close collaboration with Hetch Hetchy Water & Power's Engineer & Project Management Team.
 - c) The project is being built in two phases. We are in construction for the gabion design and construction is expected to be complete by April 30 2024. Resurfacing the access road is still in design, but construction is expected to be completed by fall 2024.
- 3) OSH Backpacker water system: This is a HHWP R&R Project.
 - a) Background: The Backpackers Campground and NPS Law Enforcement Office at the Hetch Hetchy Compound are serviced by the Backpackers Well. Water from this well is not deemed potable and has measured radionuclides above drinking water standards. Yosemite National Park has requested that a potable water source be developed for these sites.
 - b) Proposed Work: Tie in O'Shaughnessy Domestic Water System to two bathrooms in the backpacker's campground and the Law Enforcement Office. Piping will run from the closest location in the existing system, along the road to the campground area. While installing the plumbing, there will be an opportunity to lay conduit for communications or electricity from the main camp to the LEO.
 - c) The project has just begun design phase. We are targeting to have construction completed by the start of summer 2025.

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| TRAFFIC COUNT AT HETCH HETCHY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|---------|
| 2023 | 0 | 1,082 | 0 | 3,057 | 6,535 | 9,873 | 8,183 | 4,491 | 4,215 | 3,444 | 2,142 | 1,548 | 44,570 | 31.5% |
| 2022 | 547 | 1,082 | 1,483 | 2,841 | 6,040 | 5,141 | 4,457 | 3,987 | 3,335 | 3,527 | 1,176 | 284 | 33,900 | 15.1% |
| 2021 | 0 | 1,000 | 1,249 | 4,446 | 5,764 | 4,211 | 4,244 | 2,358 | 3,058 | 2,014 | 663 | 449 | 29,456 | 3313.2% |
| 2020 | 479 | 330 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 54 | 0 | 0 | 863 | -96.2% |
| 2019 | 122 | 92 | 1,119 | 0 | 4,063 | 5,405 | 3,845 | 2,984 | 2,996 | 2,056 | 0 | 297 | 22,979 | 10.4% |
| 2018 | 733 | 0 | 1,021 | 2,884 | 2,996 | 3,745 | 2,869 | 1,078 | 2,154 | 2,049 | 1,174 | 102 | 20,805 | -13.2% |
| 2017 | 258 | 646 | 1,412 | 0 | 0 | 6,617 | 4,478 | 3,466 | 3,202 | 2,418 | 857 | 620 | 23,974 | -14.7% |
| 2016 | 277 | 837 | 1,516 | 2,773 | 4,686 | 4,065 | 3,738 | 2,686 | 3,020 | 2,382 | 1,373 | 746 | 28,099 | 33.4% |
| 2015 | 79 | 1,066 | 0 | 2,491 | 3,326 | 3,225 | 3,144 | 2,703 | 2,180 | 1,743 | 764 | 349 | 21,070 | -5.0% |
| 2014 | 604 | 542 | 1,069 | 2,120 | 3,245 | 3,027 | 2,858 | 2,835 | 1,933 | 1,789 | 1,273 | 877 | 22,172 | 33.9% |
| 2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,936 | 3,846 | 4,187 | 3,151 | 1,510 | 0 | 269 | 1,077 | 578 | 16,554 | -15.1% |
| 2012 | 405 | 613 | 784 | 1,969 | 0 | 3,763 | 3,658 | 3,186 | 2,498 | 1,715 | 775 | 141 | 19,507 | -32.5% |
| 2011 | 275 | 271 | 270 | 0 | 5,312 | 6,475 | 5,360 | 3,892 | 3,194 | 2,351 | 918 | 574 | 28,892 | 14.6% |
| 2010 | 283 | 364 | 896 | 1,076 | 5,110 | 4,328 | 3,809 | 3,392 | 3,038 | 2,033 | 667 | 213 | 25,209 | 13.8% |
| 2009 | 257 | 148 | 626 | 1,502 | 4,160 | 3,812 | 3,290 | 3,112 | 2,034 | 1,851 | 1,141 | 220 | 22,153 | 8.2% |
| 2008 | 154 | 295 | 1,090 | 1,847 | 3,779 | 3,209 | 2,826 | 2,560 | 1,916 | 1,534 | 1,047 | 218 | 20,475 | 1.8% |
| 2007 | 155 | 316 | 719 | 2,142 | 3,221 | 2,985 | 2,883 | 2,668 | 2,096 | 1,662 | 864 | 402 | 20,113 | -1.1% |
| 2006 | 161 | 270 | 269 | 1,352 | 3,873 | 4,616 | 3,247 | 2,813 | 2,297 | 1,187 | 0 | 243 | 20,328 | 3.2% |
| 2005 | 142 | 236 | 555 | 1,326 | 3,035 | 5,020 | 3,568 | 2,486 | 1,811 | 1,187 | 0 | 328 | 19,694 | -3.1% |
| 2004 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,331 | 1,908 | 4,200 | 4,340 | 1,984 | 3,000 | 2,325 | 1,240 | 0 | 20,328 | -12.6% |
| 2003 | 0 | 0 | 465 | 1,500 | 4,340 | 4,200 | 4,340 | 3,100 | 3,000 | 2,325 | 0 | 0 | 23,270 | 31.2% |
| 2002 | 155 | 420 | 465 | 1,229 | 2,497 | 1,831 | 2,714 | 3,100 | 3,000 | 2,325 | 0 | 0 | 17,736 | -15.5% |
| 2001 | 155 | 420 | 465 | 1,500 | 4,340 | 3,397 | 2,468 | 3,100 | 3,000 | 939 | 1,200 | 0 | 20,984 | -16.3% |