

July 26, 2019 Yosemite West Community Meeting Minutes
National Environmental Science Center at Yosemite (NESC)

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Mike Reynolds, Yosemite NPS Superintendent
Frank Dean, President Yosemite Conservancy
Jerry Edelbrock, Vice President Yosemite Conservancy
Kristina Rylands, Yosemite Regional Director NatureBridge
Mike Healy, Director Mariposa Department of Public Works
Tom Lambert, Chair Yosemite West District Advisory Committee

Rosemarie: Meeting Purpose

Begin a conversation regarding the National Park Service's interest in connecting the National Environmental Science Center (NatureBridge) campus to the Yosemite West water system and development of a secondary water source for the Yosemite West (YW) community, NatureBridge and housing developed for Conservancy and NPS employees

Tom Lambert: Brief History

This meeting is the third time this proposal has come around. Moose Mutlow from NatureBridge approached Peter Rei (former Public Works Director), but the community was never notified. Later, a new Director, Tony Stobbe, approached Moose but NatureBridge said, "no, alternate arrangements have already been made" and the community was never notified. Now we're at Round 3 - the first time the community has been notified and had an opportunity to provide input.

Mike Healy: YW Well Performance

Well performance through past decade, even during drought and fire, stayed about 85 GPM. We have 300,000 gallons of water storage (+ 200,000 gallons of storage at NatureBridge, should it be joined to the system). Current demand in YW runs about 65,000 gallons even on the hottest day. We have 176 active accounts and 296 lots at full build out. During the Ferguson Fire, the United States Forest Service (USFS) ran over a valve resulting in a loss of 300,000 gallons of water during the peak of the

Fire's approach on Henness Ridge. NatureBridge allowed use of their stored water while the Yosemite West well refilled. Yosemite West is a pretty strong well!

Comment: "We have a duty to preserve water for the development of future lots. Also CA law requires a second water source." **Answer:** This conversation could start us down the road to getting in compliance for 2nd water source.

Question: "- last system wide assessment regarding available water vs what we pump and quality?" How much water are we losing due to leaking? **Answer:** The well is monitored daily for changes, we've had a few violations lately due to run off. Leakage of over 40 year-old system is expected.

Question: We have two storage tanks, is one only for drinking water and one only for firefighting? **Answer:** No, water for both purposes is drawn off equally.

Question: What's the well capacity? **Answer:** The Yosemite West community water system has NOT reached capacity, but the Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) has reached capacity (current capacity is 60k gal/day treatment). The problem with new water hookups is that 90% of the water coming out of Yosemite West faucets ends up at the WWTP: this problem is not relevant to NatureBridge, because the campus has its own wastewater treatment system (i.e. leachfield) and is not connected to the WWTP.

Question: 117 unbuilt lots -- will current well support that? **Answer:** If those lots are built out it would change Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU) number. If we're at capacity at the sewer plant, we will still have to restrict water use.

Mike Reynolds: Park Information

On the job for 15 months and has recently completed hiring permanent division chiefs (of which, only 1 had been permanent when he arrived). His biggest issues today are

- Traffic and congestion #1 issue
- Employee housing #2 issue
- Other big deal stuff: The NPS spent \$4 million drilling wells during 2006, including the Chinquipin area well system. They've also drilled various wells over the past year - none have been productive. Mike decided to pause drilling wells and decided to approach Mariposa County to ask if the idea of working with the Yosemite West community had been explored.

His goals-

- (1) build trust and get to know you, and
- (2) is there a win/win possible?

NPS is responsible for providing a water system to the NESC. Is there a process for NPS/NatureBridge to become a long term, steady paying customer of the YW water district? Mike wants to figure out if there are legal ways for NPS to help fund infrastructure improvement in Yosemite West. If it's okay under law/regulation/policy, we will do it. NPS National Interagency Fire Center officials have said we need a fire station in this area of the park; NPS included the fire station as part of the NESC full master plan.

NPS is willing to partner with whomever is necessary to explore options for a second water source for the larger Yosemite West community.

Regarding housing, NPS has a shortage of about 100 units. We expect most of our efforts to focus on El Portal/surrounding communities, but we are 100% on board with partnering with Yosemite Conservancy on their employee housing future developments, and perhaps will lease from them in future.

TRUST. Surprised at how little Yosemite West and NPS interact. Park developed out; Yosemite West developed out until waste water treatment issues arose. Mike will sign any agreement that will help maintain good relationships with the community and the County. There is more of a potential for success and ability to do good when more of us work together. Examples of partnering to benefit the community--

- NPS provides law enforcement for private, non-NPS lands
- Can we talk about plowing, equipment issues and staffing issues?

We have an agreement with Yosemite West regarding snow plowing - we can expand on that but we're very limited due to the small number of plow drivers.

Question: How deep were the three drilled Wells? **Answer:** ~800 feet deep. There are still hundreds of thousands of dollars on the Park's well drilling contract- should we really continue?

Question: Yosemite West is the owner of the well - we built it, we own it. Does NPS want to have the same level of ownership?

Answer: No.

Question: In what meadows were your wells drilled? They were not drilled in meadow areas. They were located just downslope within eyeshot of the NatureBridge campus.

Question: Can see lots of benefits for NPS/NatureBridge/Yosemite Conservancy - how can we prevent Yosemite West from becoming part of the park? **Answer (RS):** Yosemite West is within the administrative boundary of the Sierra National Forest, and is considered an inholding within the Sierra NF. Exercise of eminent domain by the Park would literally take an act of Congress and in the current environment, there's minuscule to no chance of it happening.

MR: The Park has no interest in taking over Yosemite West. It's not part of our mission and we don't have the money.

Kristina: NatureBridge

NatureBridge wants to be a good neighbor to Yosemite West. We're an Official Park partner and have been for over 50 years. The Yosemite Crane Flat Campus has outlived its useful life. When we start operation at the Henness Ridge campus, the initial group of kids (56) will be the same as at Crane Flat. Water consumption there is 25 gallons/person/day; that's capped by NPS. NatureBridge has data that shows we've met that. NatureBridge wants the Yosemite West community to start thinking of

their 200,000 gallons of stored water as a community resource. NatureBridge engaged with Mariposa County to provide water during the Ferguson Fire and that ability to contribute to the community would continue into the future.

Our mission is to inspire kids to decide this is a place for them - give messages of stewardship to save planet and become more aware of their effect/usage to be sustainable. This campus will reflect that ethic as well. It's designed to LEED platinum standard. The bathhouse has waterless urinals, low flow fixtures. To take a shower, kids have to push a button for water (so it's limited) and they keep the water temperature "tepid" to encourage short showers. They also have a grey water recycling system (use shower water to flush toilets). There is no laundry service on site. With these sustainable features, water usage is expected to decrease to about 15 gallons/person/day. The current build-out of the campus is set at 56 students maximum plus 3 resident staff.

Question: What's full capacity? **Answer:** 224 beds (no timeline or target to achieve that). Phase 2 construction has been approved to move forward. That will bring the number of beds to 112 in about 3 years.

Question: What's the NatureBridge seasonal flow? Any plans for adult summer programs? **Answer:** The majority of programs are during the school year -- September through June currently, but operate year-round at Crane Flat (and eventually the NESC). Yosemite Valley school-year programs are based at Curry Village. The campus will also be an educational convening space for other partners, universities, and community members to discuss environmental and education topics. Under NatureBridge's cooperative agreement with the NPS, the facility must be used for educational purposes, in keeping with the park's education mission. As part of a business plan, NatureBridge is looking at possible meeting convenings with adults. Also, there are active discussions with UC Merced about hosting university students/researchers in summer for various educational purposes.

- Must have educational component in all we do

- This facility is built for kids (i.e., bunk beds)
- But, there is potential for a partnership with Yosemite West vacation rentals to provide lodging during possible on-site meetings involving adults.

Note: Q&A re Fire Station moved to “Fire Station” heading

Jerry: Yosemite Conservancy Update

Yosemite Conservancy purchased the Yosemite West property to help address housing problems for Yosemite Conservancy and NPS employees. Otherwise- no plans! At the very beginning stages, no concept design. Yosemite Conservancy also owns 300+ acres that surrounds the county-owned well.

Step 1 - reducing fuel load on lot, have chipped up 900+ trees so far
Potential benefit to Yosemite West - if we establish a relationship with this contractor logger, he could help with private lots. The Conservancy could help facilitate that.

Yosemite Conservancy grants are sometimes affected because NPS staff aren't available to do projects. Housing is a huge reason for that. Yosemite Conservancy has about 50 staff in Yosemite; not all need housing, but many do.

Question: What's the Conservancy's intention with 300+acre lot?

Answer: We do not anticipate construction on the 300 acre parcel that we purchased surrounding the community well. We are open to working with Mariposa County to identify a site on the 300 acres to drill a well to provide the independent redundant well required by the state. Our staff housing plans will focus on the 37 acre parcel below the existing condominiums.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTNERSHIP

Question: What are the potential benefits to Yosemite West on partnering with NatureBridge? **Answer:** If NatureBridge were added as a customer to the water system, they would be paying customers to bring money into

Yosemite West. That also could include some sort of agreement to develop secondary water source. The NPS storage tanks on the NatureBridge campus would also provide 200,000 gallons of additional water storage capacity for the greater Yosemite West water system.

Mike Reynolds (MR): This is unprecedented in Yosemite, that's why we talked about contracts and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Question: How will this ultimately be decided? (to partner with NatureBridge)? **Answer:** honestly not sure, several possible legal paths that could be taken

RS: I won't go to our Board of Supervisors to recommend something the Yosemite West community does not support

Question: Is NPS interested in partnering on second well without getting access to the first? **Answer (MR):** What we have to do, is to continue to try to find a water source. NatureBridge has no water and can't move forward without it, but they need something immediately in order to open to students. So, sounds like NatureBridge will need at least some water from the current well. We must think about it in stages.

FIRE STATION

Question: For the past 2 years, we've asked NatureBridge to set up an account so Yosemite West residents can assist in fundraising for Fire Station. Can we finally do that? **Answer:** As a non-profit, NatureBridge cannot accept money from the public for an undefined period of time for an undefined project. When Yosemite West residents first approached NatureBridge about accepting donations, they were in the middle of raising money for and building Phase 1. It was not possible to collect funds for the fire station, since it was not part of any board approved phase OR part of an existing fundraising strategy where the fire station was called out as a component. If there is interest from the NPS is prioritizing the fire station, a discussion about elevating it can take place with NatureBridge leadership. A fundraising strategy would need to be identified and ultimately approved by the national board.

Question: Timeline for Fire Station? **Answer:** If it's incorporated in next round of construction, it could take 2-3 years (starting construction in spring assuming there is access to water).

Question: Will the Fire Station also come with EMTs? Will the fire station be staffed year round or only seasonally? Will it be staffed in winter?

Answer: The fire station will be an NPS facility with NPS staff. Decisions about the personnel needs of the fire station have not made. Estimated cost of the fire station is \$2 million, including 2 bays, classroom, and storage. The NatureBridge board is unlikely to move forward on fundraising until the water situation is solved.

WATER PAYMENTS

Question: Who will Yosemite West folks pay for their water? **Answer:** Continue to pay the County.

Question: If we sell the Yosemite West water, how will Yosemite West benefit? Does it come back to Yosemite West or to a County general fund?

Answer: It goes to Yosemite West accounts within the County accounting structure.

Question: If NPS buys water, what will rate structure be? I currently pay 10 cents per gallon for water and sewer, so less because no sewer needed. How does NatureBridge paying the County for water help the Yosemite West community? Will they see the money? **Answer (RS):** Yes, the community will receive the money. Possible rate structures need to be investigated.

Question: How much money will NatureBridge pay? **Answer (RS):** That's not the focus of the meeting, but a legitimate question. We'll need to contact experts on possible payment structures. NatureBridge currently pays NPS for water use at all of their existing facilities. This would have been the case had the Chinquapin water system continued to be viable.

WATER GENERAL

Question: Current County ordinance shuts down rentals first. Another states no water can leave the system. How would this change if NatureBridge and Yosemite West is low on water. Would the county consider adjusting those ordinances? **Answer:** We'll need to review existing relevant ordinances.

Comment: State law/DPH requires the water system to meet the needs of current customers before adding customers, meaning they must have a second water source before they add NatureBridge

Question: What happens when water runs out? **Answer:** We have no idea!

Question: There was a well drilled but was it contaminated?

Answer: Had functional well in 2006, started going downhill in 2010. Current wells being drilled have water quality issues but they are treatable.

EXPERTISE NEEDED

Question: Yosemite Conservancy wants to be new best friends because they want our water - no studies have been done about the amount of water in aquifer. **Answer:** We know more investigation is needed!

Comment: Need a hydrologist to evaluate. **Answer:** We all agree we need more expertise - hydrologists, geologists, plus attorneys who understand water law/rights

Question: Would the three entities interested in joining the system be willing to sign long-term binding agreements that they will be the first to immediately disconnect from the system if the Yosemite West Community sources was affected? **Answer:** No answer until lawyers are consulted

HOUSING

Question: Is any of the NatureBridge housing going to be used as vacation rentals? **Answer:** No, the NESC on-site housing units are for four resident employees only.

Question: Is this also true for the Yosemite Conservancy? **Answer:** Intent is employee housing not vacation rentals.

Question: NPS employee housing - how many homes proposed? **Answer (MR):** housing and water usage are two totally separate issues. There are no hard and fast proposals for Yosemite West, we are unclear on focusing on other areas right now.

Question: Why not focus on housing in Mariposa/Midpines which already may have utilities in place? Why not consider paying your employees more so they can afford to live in adequate housing? **Answer:** The County is aware of the housing crisis. We are moving forward with a 42 unit facility in town where they've partnered with a non-profit, Self-Help Enterprises. The Board of Supervisors and County staff are trying to put tools in place to allow developers to come in and build new housing, including revising our zoning and subdivision ordinances.

TOT

Question: Does NatureBridge pay Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT)? **Answer:** Yes - They are one of the largest contributors because of the volume of operations at Curry Village through Yosemite Hospitality; TOT is not charged at their Crane Flat facility nor will it at the NESC because both are federal government buildings, and NatureBridge is a non-profit education partner and not a concessioner.

INGRESS / EGRESS

Question: Currently owned lot owners are having large houses built, plus 224 beds - we still only have one way - in and out. What is being done about that? **Answer:** That's an area of concern for the County and CalFire we have no answers. It's also an issue at Jerseydale and other communities - we are working on it.

OTHER COMMENTS

- These people are making proposals that benefit our community, we should consider it!
- Assumption seems to be that adding NatureBridge will make us run out of water, but what if we run out of water regardless? It's better to have partners who have resources.
- Yosemite Conservancy is the organization that has the land that has the water - there's none in the neighborhood. So we need Yosemite Conservancy and we need County to deliver the water. NPS can drill on their land - lots of moving parts.
- We should consider creating or partnering with a 501(c)3 to accept funds now for the fire station, so that when NatureBridge is ready to accept the funds for the fire station some are already collected.
- One benefit of a fire station - it would change the neighborhood from class 10, which would lower fire insurance rates.
- Suggestion: organize a workshop to try to be more productive. Residents need more time to ask questions and provide input. .
- Last Memorial Day, Moose said a fire station would really only help with a house fire, not a wildfire.
- Schedule meeting to discuss TOT.

OTHER QUESTIONS

- **Question:** Yosemite West hasn't had an ideal relationship with Mariposa County, why should we believe things will be different/better now? **Answer (RS):** I regret mistakes the county made in the past but I can't take responsibility. The only way I know to get the best deal we can is to work together.
- Last time a vote was taken, only residents were allowed to vote, not part time residents who live elsewhere. Can voting structure be changed so people who live elsewhere, but are Yosemite West property owners can vote?
- **Question:** Has a stress test been done on our own pumps? Recommends doing over a year to see all the different effects.
- Why were wells drilled on NatureBridge campus, on top or near the Ridge? Who proposed the locations?
- Extra traffic - will there be a turn lane built on Highway 41?

- Will the Yosemite West sign be moved from the Wawona side on 41 to across 41 from the Yosemite West entrance?
- How about bringing water up from Badger Pass?
- What about the Old Muir Motel and the trailer court in El Portal for low income housing?
- How much water does the State require for operation of NatureBridge or do they have a requirement?