

# YOSEMITE WEST COMMUNITY MEETING WITH YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- What is the impetus of the discussion that started at the 7/26/2019 meeting?
  - The NatureBridge campus NESC (Natural Environmental Science Center) was developed planning on using water from their well drilled in 2006, but that well has since experience significantly diminished flows. Alternative well sites within Yosemite National Park (YNP) land have not panned out due to insufficient quantity or quality.
- What is the relationship between NatureBridge and YNP?
  - NatureBridge is a non-profit charity running environmental educational programs for children and teenagers. NatureBridge has had a >50 year partnership with YNP, including operation of their Crane Flat campus. The buildings of the NESC were built with money from NatureBridge donors, but the land is owned by YNP, and the supply of water is a YNP responsibility.
- Why is YNP proposing more partnership with the Yosemite West community?
  - The Yosemite West residential area already has many characteristics of “inholding” land areas like Wawona and Foresta. Our Yosemite West area already is dependent on YNP roads and fire defense. Good public/private cooperation is important for many future neighborly issues. The CA state water board is also specifically trying to encourage communities to work together for larger more-redundant water supplies, and lessen the number of small independent well systems.
- What are the benefits to Yosemite West residents of direct agreements with YNP?
  - YNP has broader resources than Mariposa county alone. Agreements with YNP have potential to make improvements on some of the perennial problems of our community, such as quality of road repair, timely snow-plowing, redundancy of water supply, and trash collection. Agreements could involve cost-sharing with Mariposa County or other ways that force the County to better address these issues.
- Has cooperation for water supply been previously discussed?
  - Yes, going back 10 years, there were 2 previous discussions between NatureBridge and the Mariposa county Public Works’ prior two Directors; however, this is now the first time that Yosemite West residents were informed of the possible partnership proposals to reduce risk from individual fragile water systems.
- What is the capacity and consumption of the current well for the Yosemite West water supply?
  - Flow tests indicate a projected well capacity of 122400gpd (gallons per day). The maximum peak water demand has been observed at 65000gpd. Future growth for Yosemite West residential usage is already limited to 60000gpd due to the regulation capacity of wastewater treatment. For purpose of budgeting water supply, the CA water board proscribes a factor of 1.5x in MDD (Maximum Day Demand) water usage, so our residential usage should therefore be budgeted at 97500gpd (thus about 80% of capacity). The projected full-occupancy consumption for NESC (also by the MDD method) is 12645gpd (about 10% of capacity). So, adding NatureBridge reduces the

- “buffer” in well capacity from 20% now to only 10%, which would be reduced further if the well capacity diminished or other additional future customers were added.
- The CA state water board will also require a formal “source capacity planning study” before allowing any expansions.
  - What are the risks and benefits of expanding the Yosemite West Maintenance District for water?
    - Committing to providing additional customers with water will increase the possibility that there will be a time when increased consumptions or reduced well flow (due to drought or other causes) could lead to water rationing. However, insufficient flows might occur even with just the current residential Yosemite West community customers. If YNP also becomes a water customer for the NESC use, they would have more resources and motivation to find solutions.
    - One way to view the tradeoff is that by agreeing to a consumption increase of 13% (ratio of the NESC projected consumption to Yosemite West residential consumption, both MDD), the Yosemite West Maintenance District could get the benefit of the support of YNP for infrastructure maintenance and finding a second water source, instead of being alone in dealing with future water challenges.
  - What additional water uses might also be considered if the Yosemite West Maintenance District were expanded?
    - The NESC fire-station would have some additional usage, not yet quantified.
    - The Yosemite Conservancy might make proposals for water use on their residential parcels, not yet quantified.
    - These additional uses are not included in the calculated water budgeting, and could reduce the reserve water capacity buffer to zero or negative.
  - Is there a “second well” or second independent source for Yosemite West?
    - No, even though the Yosemite West Maintenance District was “required” to procure a second well according to the CA state Water Board since Dec 2012, Mariposa County Public Works has taken no action to seek a second well site for Yosemite West.
    - A second well site would reduce risk to water interruption by adding redundancy and avoiding a “single point of failure”. State Water Board guidelines require either source to alone have enough capacity to supply the full consumption demand.
  - Could the County agree to expansion of water customers before a second well source is developed?
    - No. Without a second well site being located and shown to have sufficient flow, CA state Water Board and public health rules would not normally allow a water system to commit to additional use for new customers.
    - Funding and commitment from the NPS could accelerate the search for a second well site, though Mariposa County should have this obligation anyway based on collecting the rate increases since February 2018.
    - A contract could be structured that allows for joint funding of a second well, and with contingencies that do not allow additional water customers until after a second well is secured.
  - Does Yosemite West need additional water storage?
    - Yes, adding a third storage tank in addition to our 2 standing water tanks (total 300K gallons) is a component of recommended improvements, and was listed in the Engineer’s report justifying the utility rate increases that begin in February 2018. There has been no action taken by Mariposa County Public Works to plan for building of additional storage.

- If NESC were connected to the Yosemite West water system, then the additional 2 water tanks (total 200K gallons) existing at NESC would be additional water storage that would satisfy this desired storage expansion and redundancy, without having to build another tank.
- Does the water infrastructure need replacement?
  - Yes, our current water main piping is 50 to 60 years old, and generally had an expected lifetime of 40 years. Long-term budgeting for infrastructure replacement was included in the justification for the utility rate increases.
- What is the timeline for Mariposa County to take action to build a second well, and gradually replace water main piping?
  - The rate increases that began in 2018 were based on a 5-year plan of improvements. However, Mariposa Public Works has not taken steps to begin any specific work.
- Does considering water supply expansion involve any changes for the Wastewater treatment facility capacity or usage?
  - No, the Yosemite West WasteWater Treatment Facility (WWTF) continues to be capped at 60000 gpd (gallon per day) capacity.
  - The definition of an EDU (equivalent dwelling unit for building permit authorization) of 250 gpd per parcel is based on WWTF capacity, not well capacity, and remains unaffected.
  - NatureBridge has their own septic system, so water usage at NESC would not involve the Yosemite West WWTF.
- How would additional water fees paid by YNP benefit Yosemite West?
  - YNP would both purchase water at usage rates, and pay some additional “buy-in” or hookup fees to be negotiated, including paying for all the capital costs involved in expansion.
  - Like all utility fees collected in Yosemite West, the funds would go into accounts of the Yosemite West Maintenance District that are part of the Mariposa County accounting system.
  - There has not yet been discussion about whether YNP or other potential customers like Yosemite Conservancy would pay an annex fee equivalent to the 2004 special \$3M assessment on all Yosemite West parcels (similar to purchasing EDU credits).
  - There has not yet been discussion about whether water fees paid by YNP would allow any rollback of the 2018 utility rate increases.
  - Additional funds from YNP paid into the Yosemite West Maintenance District could lessen the need for future utility rate increases in coming decades.
- Is the NESC campus currently operating?
  - No, the NESC campus cannot operate student programs without a potable water source.
  - NatureBridge does currently run student programs year-round at the Crane Flat campus and during the school-year periods at Curry Village.
- What is the status of the NESC fire-station planning and construction?
  - The NESC fire-station is an approved \$2M component of the NESC master plan, and is thus a “shovel-ready” project. However, NatureBridge and YNP have considered the fire-station low priority, and there is not currently a timeline to solicit donations to fund the construction. A YNP partnership relating to supplying NESC with water could include a contingency on beginning construction of the NESC fire-station, funded either by

NatureBridge or YNP. If there were funding, it would be feasible to begin construction in spring 2020, with construction lasting 2 or 3 years.

- Who would staff a fire-station at NESC?
  - There are already approximately 10 firefighters using the aging white Chinquapin house.
  - An NESC fire-station would be used by additional YNP fire personnel, and the station would be a resource for equipment and staging. The YNP fire division does not necessarily make any “permanent” staff allocations to any fire-station for firefighters, nor the YNP ranger division for EMT (emergency medical technician) assignments, since they are dynamically assigned where needed.
  - NatureBridge staff might also be trained as volunteer firefighters.
- How would a fire-station at NESC affect YNP and Yosemite West?
  - Fire experts for the National Parks have already recommended that more YNP firefighting staff and equipment be centered in the Chinquapin/NESC area due to its centrality to service all the areas along the Glacier Point Road ridge.
  - Having an NESC fire-station could improve response time to single-house fires and medical emergency events in Yosemite West.
  - Proximity of a fire-station is also a component that fire-insurance companies use in determining the “ISO mitigation class” rating for a community, which affects insurance rates. However, there are many factors determining both the ISO mitigation class and fire rates, so there is no assurance on whether or how quickly they would change after the NESC fire-station were built.
- What will happen to the NESC campus and fire-station without a suitable solution for water?
  - The NatureBridge board of directors could choose to close/abandon the NESC, and then the buildings might be re-purposed by YNP. NatureBridge would be unlikely to be able to attract any donors for building the fire-station or any other NESC activity without a plan leading to operation of the NESC campus.
- What specific agreement documents are being proposed?
  - YNP is in general ready to discuss what agreements would be “win/win”, and could engage in contracts or MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with either/both of Mariposa County and the Yosemite West community homeowners’ organization.
  - Part of the process is to jointly agree on what commitments and contingencies are appropriate, and the timelines.
- What legal process could be used to authorize and approve expanding the Yosemite West Maintenance District for water?
  - Voting rules on a contract with YNP would depend on the exact legal structure chosen to achieve fair goals. Our county Supervisor mentioned several possibilities, and pledged that the Mariposa Board of Supervisors would not take unilateral action without a structured community approval. We have expressed that voting ought not to be a “majority protest” Zone-of-Benefit vote, but rather should be based on counting the proportion of votes cast; however, County counsel still would need to evaluate the right process.
  - All paths to an approval process will require a formal official public hearing, in addition to the current informal communication.
  - There would be many steps to a process to agree on a proper contract and contingencies, and current meetings are just the start. Many homeowners need more information and specifics, since there is no need to rush judgement.

