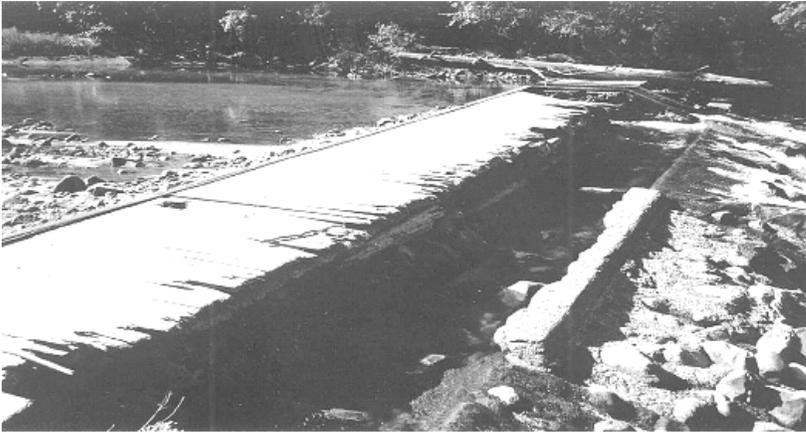




Cascades Diversion Dam Removal



Before Removal



After Removal

What is the history of the dam?

The Cascades Diversion Dam was located on the main stem of the Merced Wild and Scenic River at the far west end of Yosemite Valley. The dam itself consisted of “cribs” formed by logs or square timbers spiked together. These cribs were then filled with boulders and rocks and were anchored by concrete facing some 18 feet below the crest of the dam. The cribs were sheathed with rough-hewn redwood boards, which were visible during periods of low water. The dam spanned 184 feet, with a crest height of about 17 feet, flanked by 30-foot high concrete abutments.

After 68 years of operation, the hydroelectric facility associated with the dam was taken off-line in 1985-86 due to the deteriorated and outdated condition of the entire power system. The National Park Service determined that the Cascades Diversion Dam should be scheduled for deactivation and removal. This process would involve removal of the dam's structural elements (including abutments, foundation, and screenhouse) along with removal of some portion of the sediment behind the dam.

A 1999 lawsuit on the El Portal Road Improvements Project resulted in halting plans to remove the dam until completion of an approved comprehensive management plan for the Merced Wild and Scenic River. A record of decision on the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* (Merced River Plan) was signed in August 2000 and was revised in November 2000. In keeping with the prescriptions established in the Merced River Plan, the *Yosemite Valley Plan* calls for removal of the dam in order to restore natural channel grades and hydrologic processes along this segment of the river.

Why was the dam removed?

Dam removal was necessary for several reasons. It served as an impoundment on a Wild and Scenic River. Removing the dam was part of the park's overall intent to restore free-flowing conditions to the Merced Wild and Scenic River. In its deteriorated condition, the dam also represented a significant public health and safety hazard due to potential uncontrolled collapse, a condition exacerbated by structural damage and weakening caused by the 1997 flood. Additionally, during periods of average to low water flow, the dilapidated wooden structure of the dam was exposed, creating a visual intrusion on an otherwise popular scenic location.

What is the status of the project?

The dam and its associated structures have been removed from the river. This project also included restoring native vegetation, removing an abandoned transformer, reinstalling the existing stone guardwall, removing the road detour and returning the road to its original alignment. Work was completed by the end of April 2004. Revegetation efforts and continued monitoring of the river channel will be ongoing throughout 2005 and into the future.

What previous planning occurred for this project?

A range of alternatives was presented in an environmental assessment for the project, released for public comment in February 2003. After all comments were analyzed by the National Park Service, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was approved in late spring 2003. This document determined that the dam removal (as analyzed in its environmental assessment) would not significantly affect the quality of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. Copies of the environmental assessment and decision documents may be viewed on the park's web site (*see below*).

Public Participation

Add your name to the planning mailing list (to address/fax/email below) and receive the *Planning Update* newsletter, as well as other planning- related announcements. You can also submit your email address to receive the park's periodic electronic newsletter.

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For more information on this and other Yosemite National Park projects, visit the park's planning web site at www.nps.gov/yose/planning.