

Restore Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite National Park

Hetch Hetchy and the media

The good, the bad and the good in the San Francisco Chronicle

Restore Hetch Hetchy closely watches all media coverage of our campaign. Newspapers still play a fundamental role, even in today's internet era, and the San Francisco Chronicle has a clear interest in all things Hetch Hetchy.

While many San Francisco residents understand the singular destruction their City has wrought on Yosemite and support Hetch Hetchy's restoration, the City is the belly of the beast—the home of our staunchest opponents. Past Chronicle coverage has often seemed to reflect a collective “we stole it fair and square” attitude-aligning itself with the City's parochial interests rather than broader public good.

Like any good newspaper, however, the Chronicle does not require staff to adhere to a single view. Over the past few months the Chronicle has produced some positive articles that explore brighter future for Hetch Hetchy.

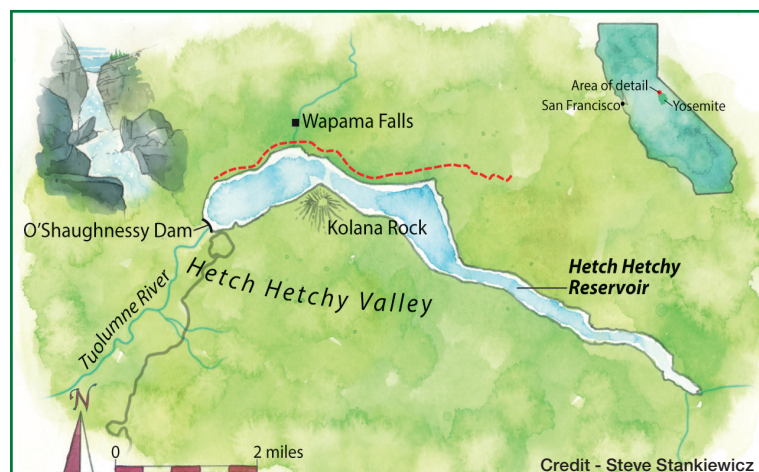
“If we could return Hetch Hetchy to a more natural state — of the variety that stirred John Muir's soul a century ago — would we be clearing a path for the emergence of Yosemite Valley 2.0?”

San Francisco Chronicle, August 1, 2019

(Continued on page 3)

Exploring Hetch Hetchy by Boat

It's time to welcome the public back to Hetch Hetchy



“The hike to Wapama falls is wonderful, but it is one of the few experiences available at Hetch Hetchy today.”

Until the reservoir is emptied and the valley restored, Restore Hetch Hetchy supports improved recreation in Hetch Hetchy's spectacular canyon. Partnering with **California Trout**, we have asked the National Park Service to operate a ferry on the reservoir.

A ferry, quietly powered by clean electricity, could provide tours of Hetch Hetchy with views that are not now possible, even by trail. Hikers, picnickers, fisherman and rock climbers could disembark at locations along the reservoir's shore and return later in the day—exploring Hetch Hetchy's many nooks and crannies just as park visitors do in Yosemite Valley.

Accessing Hetch Hetchy by boat would undoubtedly be popular. It would also help tell the story of the Hetch Hetchy's inundation, **and inspire visitors to support the valley's restoration.**

When San Francisco lobbied Congress for permission to build the dam, it promised Hetch Hetchy would be used “for park purposes and for water supply purposes” **and** that there would be “no reason to exclude campers and picnickers”. That promise has not been kept. The gate at Hetch Hetchy is open only limited hours each day. Trails are few. Campsites and lodging are not available. The only boat permitted on the water is San Francisco's own.

Boating is a popular and successful activity on many of the few man-made reservoirs in our national parks, including Glacier and Grand Teton, as well as on reservoirs used for municipal water supplies. It can work at Hetch Hetchy too.

As Restore Hetch Hetchy continues to campaign vigorously for the reservoir's removal, we will simultaneously pursue other ways to improve the visitor experience at Hetch Hetchy. A campground, more trails and 24/7 public access should all be considered.

San Francisco has long received the benefits it sought a century ago, but the public has been shortchanged. It's time to welcome the American public back to Hetch Hetchy.

Sweeping Back the Flood



“Sweeping back the flood”, published in 1909 by the San Francisco Call (not the Chronicle), showing John Muir dressed as a woman. The caricature was consistent with City Engineer Marsden Manson's derisive description of Hetch Hetchy's defenders in thinly-veiled homophobic terms as “short haired women and long-haired men.”

Yosemite's Accidental Wilderness

Hetch Hetchy Valley is a stain on the map of American environmentalism—and an oasis of solitude

The previous winter had been a season full of storms that dumped copious amounts of snow on the Sierra Nevada, and I heard that the waterfalls were roaring. So my 10-year-old son and I decided to make an impromptu June trip to the mountains to see the spectacle for ourselves. Our destination: Wapama Falls, a thousand-foot cascade that John Muir once described as “roaring and thundering, pounding its way with the weight and energy of an avalanche.”

Muir's description was spot-on. A mile from Wapama Falls, we could hear its thunderous bass, as if the very rock overhead was being torn asunder. Before we'd started the 2.5-mile hike along the Hetch Hetchy Trail, a ranger had told us to be careful. “There's lots of water in the streams,” she said, gesturing to a poster of a hiker who had been swept away while crossing the Wapama footbridge days earlier. “We're still looking for him.”

An hour into the hike, we crested a ridge and were hit with a heavy mist from the falling water. We donned rain jackets and pressed on. When we reached the footbridge, we were confronted with churning pinwheels of foam. The Wapama was a white torrent, smashing against the wooden bridge, which was hitched to the cliff below, with deadly force. Several steel support cables had come unmoored and were snapping to and fro. Water streamed from the brim of my son's ball cap as he surveyed the scene. “We're not going to try to cross that, are we?” he asked, smiling wildly, teeth chattering.

“Not today,” I replied. “Next time.”

I expect that next time will be soon, because I've come to believe that Hetch Hetchy Valley is among the underappreciated gems of Yosemite National Park. In more than a decade as an environmental writer, I've become a tourist of ecological carnage. I've wandered amid the hydrogen sulfide stench of oilfields and circumnavigated the calderas of pit mines. But until I visited Hetch Hetchy, I'd never seen a landscape desecration that elicited such feelings of ambivalence. On the one hand, Hetch Hetchy Reservoir is an incontrovertible stain on the map of American environmentalism. On the other, the drowned valley has become an oasis of solitude in a national park that, in many places, has come to resemble a shopping mall parking lot more than a nature reserve.

Those two words, Hetch Hetchy—which come from a Miwok word that translates roughly to “edible grasses”—have become a sort of shorthand for ecological destruction. San Francisco leaders used the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire that destroyed the city as political leverage for a water-diversion project that they had been unsuccessfully trying to get built for years. The object of their desire was a valley teeming with waterfalls and rushing streams. In its depths grew tall pines and thigh-high grasses among which the Tuolumne River meandered. In the eyes of the dam builders, the valley was a massive water-storage basin, eight miles long and in some places as much as 2,000 feet deep.

In 1908, as surveyors staked out the valley, Sierra Club founder John Muir wrote, “Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.”

And yet, for all the force of his rhetoric, Muir could not stop the reservoir; in 1923, O'Shaughnessy Dam was completed. There's no doubt that a bathtub of impounded water is not, in any true sense of the word, wild. Yet more than a century after the valley's damnation, Hetch Hetchy and its surroundings have become an unlikely sanctuary, an accidental wilderness that is free of the commercialization and overcrowding that today's visitors encounter throughout so many national parks.

Walking in the calm of Hetch Hetchy, it's easy to see why early-20th-century conservationists wanted to protect it from the dam. Even drowned, the glacier-carved valley is stunning. Here, days pass slowly, measured by the clockwork wheeling of golden eagles overhead and the blooming of wildflowers from granite fissures underfoot. No car engine sounds reverberate from the canyon's fortresslike walls. Nor are boats allowed on the reservoir, leaving its surface unbroken by any wake. The mirrorlike reflection of the cone-shaped Kolana Rock—little brother to Yosemite Valley's Cathedral Rocks—gives an illusion of the canyon's former depth.

During the recent hike with my son, one of the few sounds we heard, apart from the roar of the falls, was the glissando call of a lone canyon wren echoing from the cliffs. This corner of the park is a welcome respite from the clamor and clatter of Yosemite Valley. While Hetch Hetchy suffered the fate of being submerged, the wildlands above the waterline have been spared being flooded by people.

It is, of course, possible to love a place without acceding to the forces that created it. O'Shaughnessy Dam should be torn down; Hetch Hetchy should be restored to the valley paradise it was for millennia. And in the course of that ecological restoration, we might also rethink our ideas about wildlands recreation, and strike a better balance between public access and private solitude. In the process, we might end up creating a wilderness by design.

Written by Jeremy Miller for Sierra Magazine. Restore Hetch Hetchy thanks the Sierra Club for permission to reprint.

Miller's article addresses a key question: **How do we strike a balance between public access and private solitude in a restored valley?** When access is not artificially restricted by a reservoir, how would we ensure people can enjoy the valley, without losing the tranquility that has been the result of its forced isolation? Supporters of Restore Hetch Hetchy love Yosemite National Park, but few of us like the over-development and over-tourism of its eponymous valley today. Striking the right balance for the Hetch Hetchy Valley will be a challenge but, as **Jeremy Miller** suggests, the opportunity exists to restore the valley to its natural splendor for wildlife, for our children, and for posterity. Of course, first, there is a reservoir to empty.

Roger Williams, Restore Hetch Hetchy Board Chair

It's the Tuolumne

Having been a regular at Tuolumne Meadows since age 2, board member **Craig Reynolds** has Tuolumne in his blood. He and his wife **Cass** named their son **Samuel Tuolumne Reynolds**, who in turn, named his son **Enzo Tuolumne**. Craig and Cass now spend their summers as volunteer NPS campground hosts at Tuolumne Meadows, hoping some day to move downstream on the Tuolumne where they can welcome visitors to a restored Hetch Hetchy



Yosemite Facelift

In September, after the large summer crowds go home, the Yosemite Climbing Association and the National Park Service host Facelift—the largest cleanup in any of our national parks. Volunteers in 2019 included Restore Hetch Hetchy's **Julene Freitas** and board member **Peter Van Kuran**, who brought along a bevy of schoolchildren.



Holiday Gift Ideas

A few select specialty items are available directly from our office: Call **510.893.3400** or email **admin@hetchhetchy.org**. Trucker's hats, T-shirts, hoodies, water bottles etc. are available at **hetchhetchy.newheadings.com/**.



Suggested contributions:

Green Mug (\$15)

Chapstick (\$3, 5 for \$10)

Postcards (10 cards for \$10)

11"x14" Posters (\$5)

Hetch Hetchy and the media, *continued*

On Aug 1, in response to Restore Hetch Hetchy's release of **Valuing Hetch Hetchy Valley: Economic Benefits of Restoration in Yosemite National Park**, the Chronicle published "Weighing the Value of Hetch Hetchy". Travel editor **Gregory Thomas**, newly arrived from Outside Magazine, provided thoughtful insight as he raised profound questions about Hetch Hetchy's future and opined that the report had created "new dimensions" in our campaign for restoration. We've forwarded the article, and *Valuing Hetch Hetchy Valley* of course, to public officials at all levels of government.

The Chronicle **editorial board's** Pavlovian response came a week later, concluding "Hetch Hetchy should stay as it is: a reliable system that serves the public well in a state of serious water scarcity." As usual, the editors fail to recognize that the water supply at stake is relatively minor, particularly when compared to what other water agencies have done to reduce harm to California's streams and wetlands. Furthermore, the editors continue to ignore, let alone justify, their double standard: They oppose restoration of Hetch Hetchy but have supported restoration at Mono Lake, in the Bay-Delta and on the Klamath and Trinity Rivers. The clear difference is that those projects affect other communities, not San Francisco.

Lastly, on September 29, **Tom Stienstra**, the Chronicle's award-winning outdoors writer, wrote "A historic bid for limited boating at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir". Those who read Stienstra's column know he is an indefatigable advocate for outdoor recreation of all kinds, often extolling its values for family bonding. Stienstra describes boating as a "landmark" proposal and, based on his own conversations, believes federal officials are excited about the opportunity.

We'll continue to encourage the editorial board to broaden its perspective. All in all, however, it's great to have the Chronicle's attention.



**Please support
Restore Hetch Hetchy.**
*Together we can make
Yosemite whole again.*

**Use the attached envelope or
contribute online.**

Ways to give include contributing
appreciated stock, donating your car, or including
Restore Hetch Hetchy in your estate planning.



*Restore Hetch Hetchy is grateful to
Patagonia for its ongoing support.*

Save the Date 🌿 May 16, 2020 🌿 Restore Hetch Hetchy Annual Dinner



Reprinted from *The State of Water: Understanding California's Most Precious Resource*. Painting and poem by Obi Kaufmann.

Creating a **better** Yosemite

Restore Hetch Hetchy's vision has always been to create a **better** Yosemite—to recreate the valley in a way that its natural splendor can be fully appreciated and not diminished by the congestion that so often besets world famous Yosemite Valley.

Thinking about how we want Hetch Hetchy restored has challenged some of our preconceptions. The high-end value of \$178 million dollars in recreations benefits annually, reflected in the findings of **Valuing Hetch Hetchy Valley: Economic Benefits of Restoration in Yosemite National Park**, presented a vision of restoration that some supporters did not embrace.

Similarly, some supporters found the idea of boating on Hetch Hetchy Reservoir peculiar, at least initially. I include myself in that group—my most special Sierra experiences have been hiking the high country and boating on its rivers—not reservoirs.

Our goal, however, is to help the National Park Service accomplish its mission of preserving “unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” Balancing human use with preservation of natural resources is no simple task but one that must be undertaken.

I am wildly optimistic that we can get it right. Restoring Hetch Hetchy Valley will provide us an opportunity to protect the land and its wildlife, while also embracing park visitors. Together we can create a **better** Yosemite.



Spreck Rosekrans
Executive Director