

## 10 REGIONAL TOURISM

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The presence of Yosemite National Park, rivers, lakes, national forests, rural scenery, scenic routes, and historic sites within Mariposa County makes the County an attractive destination for visitors. As a non-theme park visitor destination, Mariposa County ranks third nationwide, behind New York City and Los Angeles. Millions of tourists visit Mariposa County each year, and tourism accounts for the largest share of Mariposa County's economy. Over half of private economic activity and private sector jobs in Mariposa County can be attributed to tourism, primarily from visitors to Yosemite, and a significant share of governmental expenditures also relate to tourism. Many visitors are also attracted to the unique features offered by the Sierra National Forest and Stanislaus National Forest.

The five fastest growing outdoor recreation activities through the year 2005 as measured by number of participants (nationally) are projected to be: cross-country skiing (95 percent growth), downhill skiing (93 percent growth), visiting historic places (76 percent growth), sightseeing (71 percent growth), and biking (70 percent growth). The five slowest growing outdoor recreation activities as measured by the number of participants are projected to be rafting, backpacking, off-highway vehicle driving, primitive camping, and hunting (Sierra Nevada Forest Plan, 1999 Cordell Survey). Wilderness recreation is forecast to grow between 0.5 to 1 percent annually for the next 50 years (Cordell 1999). Many of these activities are potentially important to regional tourism in Mariposa County.

### 10.1 YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Yosemite National Park is 1,200 square miles of scenic wild lands set aside beginning in 1890 to preserve a portion of the central Sierra Nevada that stretches along California's eastern flank. The park ranges from 2,000 feet above sea level to more than 13,000 feet and contains attractions such as alpine wilderness, three groves of Giant Sequoias and the glacially carved Yosemite Valley with its impressive waterfalls, cliffs, and unusual granite formations. Between 1985 and 2001, annual visitation to Yosemite ranged from 2.9 to 4.2 million individuals. Visitation at the Park peaked in 1996 at 4.2 million. Visitation was 3.5 million in 2001.

Yosemite offers opportunities for visitors worldwide to experience the Valley's scenic, natural, and cultural resources. Among the attractions in and near Yosemite National Park are:

- seven major waterfalls
- dozens of vista points
- giant sequoia tree groves
- many species of wildlife and sensitive habitats for endangered species
- botanizing (viewing wildflowers and other plant species)

- bird watching
- unique rock formations for viewing and climbing
- trails for day hiking, backpacking, biking, skiing, and equestrian use
- museums, historic sites, and cemeteries
- lakes and rivers
- scenic drives
- valley and mountain meadows
- resort communities
- camping
- river rafting
- swimming
- star gazing

## 10.2 NATIONAL FORESTS

Two National Forests are located within and around Mariposa County. Sierra National Forest lies on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada range for which it was named and is best known for the giant sequoias and John Muir wilderness area. There are hundreds of miles of trails maintained in the Mammoth-High Sierra area. The County's highest peak, Mt. Humphrey (13,986 feet), is on the Sierra crest. Stanislaus National Forest, west and north of Yosemite National Park, encompasses a three wilderness areas and a major ski resort. The broad spectrum of recreational opportunities provide by the national forests has been organized into a classification framework called the Resource Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). Each ROS class is defined by a combination of size, setting, distance from roads, and likely recreational activities and experiences. Table 10-1 summarizes the ROS for the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests.

Table 10-1: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes (in acres)

Forest	Primitive	Semi-Primitive/ Non-Motorized	Semi-Primitive/ Motorized	Roaded	Rural	Undesignated	Total Acres
Stanislaus	249,433	123,411	521,608	2,199	0	1,329	897,978
Sierra	491,409	131,752	45,307	562,958	86,709	358	1,318,493

**Source:** USDA Forest Service Land Resource Management Plans.

Visitors to the national forests use forest roads to reach destinations for hiking, sightseeing, horseback riding, skiing, bicycling, or off highway vehicle (OHV) travel. Roads shape the wild land experience for most visitors by determining where they will go and what they will see. Even wilderness and unroaded areas would generally be inaccessible without roads to their trailheads. Closed roads often become trails. Winter sports, such as cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, frequently take place on unplowed or groomed roads. Table 10-2 displays the 1995 trails inventory for each national forest.

Table 10-2: Miles of Trails in the Sierra Nevada Forests (1995)

Forest	Non-Motorized Trails	Motorized Trails	Designated Trails	Wilderness Trails	Total Trail Miles
Stanislaus	258.5	1,453	11.5	376.0	1,042.0
Sierra	109.9	103	41.1	825.1	1,257.4

Source: USDA Forest Service Land Resource Management Plans.

## 10.3 OTHER REGIONAL ATTRACTIONS

Mariposa County has many attractions within and outside the national park and forest system that bring tourists to the County. Most of these attractions depend on the County’s natural resources, but there are also man-made attractions. Below is a partial list of resource-based tourist attractions and activities (other than those described above in Yosemite and national forest lands). This list excludes cultural, historic, and agricultural attractions described in other chapters of Volume III.

Table 10-3: Summary of Regional Tourist Attractions in Mariposa County

Tourist Attraction	Activities
Merced River	White water rafting (approximately 30 miles) Wild and Scenic River off-road access (hiking, backpacking, off-road bicycling, horseback riding, limited off-road motorized vehicle access) Fishing (between Foresta Bridge on Highway 140 and Yosemite Park boundary, and along the north and south forks) Hunting Gold Panning Rafting Kayaking/canoeing Swimming Camping
Various Trails (inside and outside of national park, national forest, and other public lands): Merced River Yosemite Trails Jerseydale Forest Service Roads Old Yosemite Valley Railroad	Hiking Backpacking Horseback riding Off-road bicycling On-road bicycling
Lake McClure-Lake McSwain	Fishing Boating Water skiing and other water Sports Hiking Picnicking Wildlife Viewing

Tourist Attraction	Activities
Mariposa Creek	Gold Panning
Maxwell Creek	
Various Campgrounds and Recreation Areas	Tent Camping Hiking Recreation Vehicles

**Sources:** Parsons, [www.yosemite.com](http://www.yosemite.com), [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov), [www.r5.fs.fed.us](http://www.r5.fs.fed.us),  
[www.mariposa.yosemite.net](http://www.mariposa.yosemite.net).

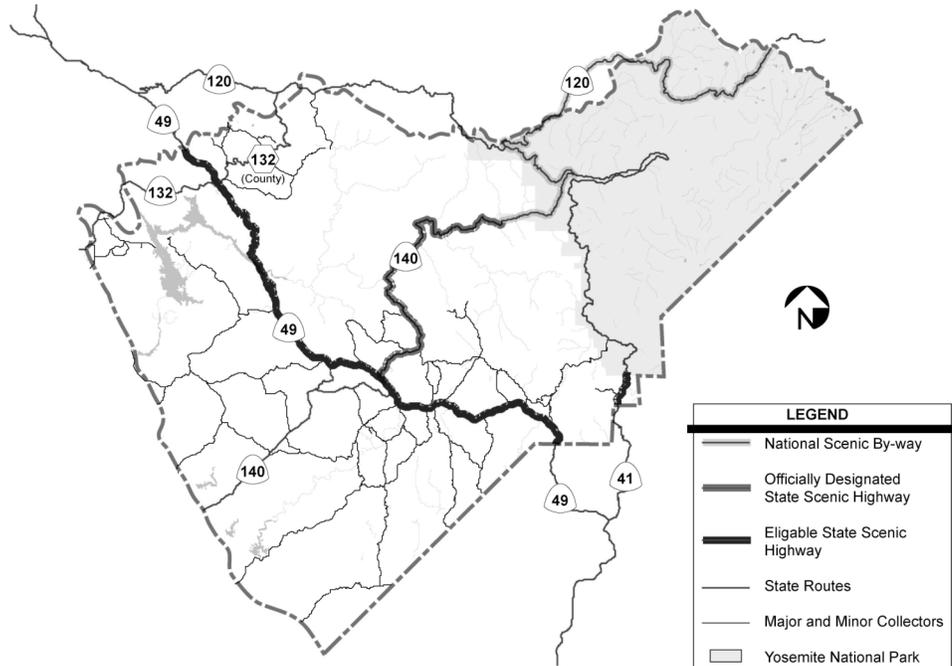
## 10.4 FISCAL IMPACT OF REGIONAL TOURISM

The most direct fiscal impact of regional tourism to the County’s revenue is through the generation of transient occupancy taxes (TOT), sometimes referred to as the “bed tax”. This tax represents nearly half of the County’s General Fund revenues. Between the 1996-97 and 2000-2001 fiscal years, annual TOT revenues rose from just under \$5 million to \$6.8 million. Among California counties, Mariposa County has the highest rate of TOT collection in relation to other revenue sources and year-round population.

## 10.5 SCENIC ROUTES

Mariposa County is home to an officially designated scenic highway segment, two eligible scenic highway segments and a national scenic by-way. Figure 10-1 shows the locations of these scenic routes.

Figure 10-1: Scenic Routes in Mariposa County



**Source:** California Department of Transportation

Scenic routes in Mariposa County include:

- State Route 140, from the junction of State Route 49 in the Town on Mariposa to the Yosemite National Park entrance;
- State Route 49, between the Madera County line and the Tuolumne County line;
- State Route 120 within Yosemite National Park; and
- State Route 41 between Oakhurst and Yosemite National Park.

## **10.6 TOURISM AND TRANSPORTATION**

Regional tourism is heavily impacted by access along state highways and county roads. For tourism to thrive, visitors need access to points of interest. Some parts of Mariposa County that have great tourist potential are served by state routes or local roads that cannot be used by the larger-sized tour buses that are becoming increasingly common. Tour buses transport a significant number of visitors in the County. Visitor attractions such as Coulterville, which are served by state routes or county roads not suited to these larger vehicles, have witnessed a decline in the number of visitors in recent years.