

Historic Yosemite names on negotiating table

By Mark Grossi and Carmen George



Yosemite National Park's historic Ahwahnee Hotel, constructed from stone, concrete, wood and glass, opened in 1927. JOHN WALKER — The Fresno Bee |[Buy Photo](#)

Yosemite National Park will take bids next month on a contract worth nearly \$2 billion to run the Ahwahnee Hotel, Badger Pass Ski Area and other retail outlets, but the high-stakes jockeying is already happening.

Delaware North Companies, the park's concession operator for 21 years, last week announced that its "intangible" assets — including names, such as the Ahwahnee Hotel — are worth \$51 million.

And Delaware North says that if a new company takes over the Yosemite concession, it'll have to pay to use the names.

The National Park Service says the names of historic hotels and other properties are as much a part of the park as Half Dome. But to protect other contract bidders from the added cost, the Park Service is allowing the possibility that names could be changed. It's a hedge against a dispute later on, federal officials said.

Park spokesman Scott Gediman said, "We are simply trying to conduct a fair and transparent bidding process."

The back-and-forth is part of the competition for the highly coveted Yosemite contract. By far, Yosemite has the largest single national park concession contract in the country, exceeding \$120 million in gross revenue each year.

The competition was lively in the early 1990s when Delaware North won the contract and took over for the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. The 15-year contract was supposed to end in 2008, but extensions have been granted as park

leaders wrestled with the Merced River protection plan.

Delaware North, a hospitality industry titan known as DNC, has broadened its national park concession business. It has won park contracts at such places as Grand Canyon, Yellowstone and Sequoia and Kings Canyon. The Buffalo, N.Y.-based company also owns the Tenaya Lodge in Fish Camp, just outside Yosemite's south entrance.

For now, the Park Service is not directly addressing the issue over the value of a name, instead focusing on the bids. The contract is expected to be awarded in mid-2015.

Gediman said name issue had not been a part of past contract discussion in Yosemite. Federal leaders and many park advocates do not want to see name changes.

"These names are historical," said Gediman. "They are part of Yosemite. The Ahwahnee dates back to 1927, and Curry Village goes back to 1899. These places and their names belong to the American people."

George Whitmore of the Sierra Club asked whether it's possible for anyone to "own history."

"How could this particular concessionaire now decide that they 'own' the names?" he asked. "Some corporations are concerned about how they are perceived by the public. Has DNC really thought this one through?"

Yet concessionaires laying claim to business names within national parks is not new. In one instance in Glacier National Park, a previous concessionaire refused to sell the logo for Red Bus Tours to its successor, said Jim Stellmack, director of marketing for DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite. It resulted in the development of a new logo.

Stellmack said a similar scenario won't play out in Yosemite. Delaware North's 1993 contract with the Park Service required the company to acquire all assets — and to sell them all, if not chosen for the next contract, Stellmack said. Delaware North said those purchased assets include the names to the properties.

He said the National Park Service has long recognized the existence of intellectual property rights in concession contracts, and that Delaware North owns the names of the Yosemite businesses it operates to protect them, "so others don't use them inappropriately."

The company has a lot of famous names in its Yosemite deck: Along with the Ahwahnee Hotel and Badger Pass, there's the Wawona Hotel, Yosemite Lodge, Curry Village, Yosemite Village Store and Housekeeping Camp, to name a few. Total, DNC operates 1,542 guest rooms, 25 dining and 19 retail locations in Yosemite.

The assets in Yosemite are described as both physical — things like furniture, buses and equipment — and "intangible," such as registered place names, websites, mailing lists and guest data bases.

Lisa Cesaro, spokeswoman for DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, said Delaware North decided on the \$51 million price tag after a third-party contractor appraised the company's intangible assets. The Park Service was advised of the amount prior to July, Cesaro said. A final figure has not been decided on.

As companies around the nation prepare for the Jan. 21 submission deadline for the next Yosemite concessionaire contract, it's not certain whether Delaware North will be in or out of the running.

On Tuesday, maneuvering continued as Cesaro said DNC "hopes to continue our work" in Yosemite but that the company has not yet confirmed it is bidding — which is still "to be determined."

Contact Mark Grossi: mgrossi@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6316 or [@markgrossi](https://twitter.com/markgrossi) on Twitter. Contact Carmen George: cgeorge@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6386 or [@CarmenGeorge](https://twitter.com/CarmenGeorge) on Twitter.

Copyright

© 2014 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>

