

Park Service says controversial Yosemite contract bidding is now closed

By Mark Grossi and Michael Doyle



The Ahwahnee Hotel is included in the concession contract that the National Park Service expects to award next year.

MARK CROSSE — The Fresno Bee [Buy Photo](#)

Without fanfare or much explanation, the National Park Service on Wednesday announced the close of bidding for the controversial contract worth \$2 billion to run the concessions at Yosemite National Park.

Federal officials would only say that there were bids, opting not to reveal company names or even the number of bidders.

Typically, no announcements are made at this point in the Park Service contract process, but Yosemite's contract has made headlines over the value of such intellectual property as the Ahwahnee Hotel and the possibility icons such as it and other sites in the park could be renamed.

"In the next several months, the offers will be reviewed," said Yosemite spokesman Scott Gediman. "By March 1, 2016, a new concession contract will begin."

Delaware North Companies, the park's main concession operator for 21 years, has not announced if it was one of the bidders. But the operator has said its "intangible" assets — including names, such as the Ahwahnee and Wawona

hotels — are worth \$51 million. Delaware North also has said that if a new company takes over the concession, it'll have to pay to use the names.

The 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.

Federal officials said they value Yosemite's intangible property at \$3.5 million. Both the Delaware North and Park Service estimates include registered place names, websites, mailing lists and guest databases. The breakdown of costs has not been made public.

The congressman who represents Yosemite, conservative Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, said he is "not in a position to judge" the trademark dispute and concession renewal, but suggested someone might have to.

"It looks like a property rights issue for the courts to sort out," McClintock said.

The Park Service in December also included revised language that would avoid a repeat of the trademark dispute. The new proposed contract states that at its expiration, the "intellectual property will transfer" to the park service so that a new concession operator won't have to buy it out.

Underscoring how the trademark dispute has started to roil the parks, the [Denver Post reported](#) two weeks ago that another park concession company, Xanterra, has filed for trademark protection of nearly 20 names at Grand Canyon National Park, including the well-known likes of Bright Angel Lodge.

The Park Service also has modified the proposed new contract since first putting it out for public consideration last May. The franchise fee, originally set at 8.6% of gross revenues, was dropped to 8% of gross revenues in a December amendment — a difference that could add up.

Over the past three years, the average gross revenues for the Yosemite concession operator reached \$131.5 million a year. The reduction in franchise fee percentage amounts to the government giving up \$789,000 a year, or \$11.8 million over 15 years.

Doyle reported from Washington, D.C. Contact Mark Grossi: mgrossi@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6316 or [@markgrossi](#) on Twitter. Contact Michael Doyle: mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com, (202) 383-0006 or [@MichaelDoyle10](#) on Twitter.

Copyright

© 2015 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>