

Volunteer Trip Report Yosemite National Park May 17- 23, 2026



Yosemite Volunteer Trip Report, May 2026 Conservation Projects in Yosemite National Park

Executive Summary

In May 2026, Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) led a volunteer conservation trip in Yosemite National Park. The travelers and ConservationVIP trip leaders partnered with the National Park Service (NPS) to complete trail restoration and infrastructure improvements in Yosemite. The Projects included repairing fencing near Yosemite Falls and constructing granite stone steps along the Mirror Lake Trail.

Over the course of one week, the ConservationVIP group contributed 234.5 volunteer hours on projects which improved visitor safety and preserved park ecosystems.

Detailed Trip Report

Sunday, May 17th: Volunteer Group Arrival and Orientation – Yosemite National Park

The **Spring 2026 Yosemite** trip kicked off on Sunday, May 17th, at Yellow Pine Campground, Site C. The group this year was a mix of returning travelers, as well as first timers eager for the experience. During the group's initial rendezvous, trip leader Danielle Simpson set expectations for the week's projects, discussed camp protocol, emphasized safety and talked about the goals for the week – **to stay safe, have fun, and accomplish some great projects!**

As the group made introductions on the first evening together, our travelers expressed their desires for the upcoming week - sleeping outside under the stars, completing the week without injuries, seeing wildlife, *giving back* to the national park, and enjoying the camaraderie were a few of the things most mentioned. This excitement was mixed with some apprehension, especially with the new travelers joining for the first time. A few items mentioned included being able to keep up physically, vigilant of safety at all times and making an intentional effort to enjoy the projects and gorgeous surroundings versus task focused.

There were two exciting events that defined this year's trip: Tioga Pass and Glacier Point were open and available to visitors! In years past for the Spring Yosemite trip, these parts of the park usually remained inaccessible with snow covered roads until later in the spring or early summer. We were thrilled to have access to these remote parts of the park!

Ready for the campers!





Monday, May 18, Day 2, Yosemite Falls Trail Restoration (Fence Installation Project)

The morning started off smoothly with coffee and a hot breakfast, with all travelers awake and ready to hit the project early. As is protocol for our mornings, NPS Trail Crew Leader, Eamon Schneider, and his team joined our ConservationVIP group at camp for a briefing of planned activities for the day. The plan for the day was to repair split rail fencing posts along the public walkways at the Yosemite Falls area of the park. This is a high-use area with a lot of visitor activity for one of the most popular waterfalls in the park (includes Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls). This very important project continued efforts from prior ConservationVIP efforts of prepping local fallen cypress and cedars trees to create the split rails and the sturdy posts. These hardy woods are harvested directly from the park, thus saving money and sourcing locally from readily available material. The group used various tools – shovel, rock pick, log tongs, and a very large dolly for moving the heavy posts.

Rail post project – before and after:





Views from our project site:



The project started with identifying the most vulnerable posts along the paved walkway leading to the base of Yosemite Falls. Once identified, the posts were removed either by digging or simply pulling them out. A 3-foot hole was prepared by digging using the necessary tools. Then

came picking out the appropriate cedar post to use. Some of the available posts lent themselves for corner orientation so there is a science to choosing the best post! After selecting the new post and verifying it fit at the given location, slots were cut in the sides with an electric chainsaw to fit the rails. The new post was then set into place and backfilled with soil, compacting evenly all around. Once placed, the top of the post was trimmed for height consistency across the line of fencing.

This first day was enjoyable and fulfilling for the group. By the end of the day, they had installed 17 new fence posts along the Yosemite Falls area, clearing out the National Park Service (NPS) truck of all available posts! As we were returning tools to the NPS truck and restoring the walkways by removing debris, Eamon commented, "*I should have brought more posts.*" He did not underestimate the travelers for the rest of the week!

Tuesday – Thursday, May 19th – 21st, Days 3-5, Mirror Lake Trail Improvement (Granite Stone Steps Project)

The next large project on Eamon's agenda was a major stone project to create large stone steps on an incline trail at the back end of the Mirror Lake trail. During the morning briefing, Eamon also introduced us to other volunteers helping at the park under his direction the same week, members of the former Planet Granite organization now known as Movement.

Eamon took time at the beginning of our day to share his plan and vision for the stone stairway along a steep portion of the Mirror Lake Trail. The project location was right off the paved bike path with easy access to visitors' restrooms. He pointed out potential slabs and jut-outs on large boulders that were potential prospects for the stone steps which would make the incline easier and safer for hikers. He said the desired step would be approximately 36" in width with a 5" riser, if possible. We also needed to create a large hole and setting bed in the trail to accommodate the the new rock steps, digging about 12-18", removing other smaller to medium sized rocks and dirt to secure the new step.

We learned a new technique to split nearby granite boulders using a power drill with *plugs and feathers* to get a clean split in the stone. We strategically drilled holes in large boulders, evenly lined up about 10-12" apart. Then we placed the feathers in the holes and then placed a plug. With a handheld tool, we hammered the plugs until a seam appeared across the large stone eventually splitting it at the seam.



This technique was also used to remove a large slab from a huge boulder positioned near the trail. The cut side was usually level and perfect for our step, so we moved it into position using the grip hoist and large rock bars. Once in place, the rock might need to be trimmed so that additional stone slabs would have contact in three places to make sure the steps were secure.

Using the grip hoist to move boulders and stone slabs

We continued this same process over the next 3 days as we installed the ascending steps. Our team split naturally into two teams. A few participants, led by Danielle, were positioned at the top of the trail, to scout out large boulders to create stone slabs for placement around the top of the new stairway to have one large slab secured and in place where the bottom slabs would meet.

Stone steps in process



During our project on this portion of the Mirror Lake Trail, communication and safety awareness was of the utmost importance. Because of our close proximity and the different and varied tools we were using, we all were consciously aware of our fellow travelers and park visitors to stay safe.



Other projects at this location included a temporary alternative trail set up so that park visitors hiking along this section could bypass our in-progress project. We were extra cautious to watch for hikers and then made sure they navigated the realigned trail safely on their way to Mirror Lake.

On our final day of this large project, we focused on finalizing the steps already placed and ensuring they were secure with small rocks and crushed stone for the summer visitors to the park.

In total, we created and placed 11 large new stone steps along this trail during our full 3 days on this project! At the end of Day 3, we closed the temporary trail which we had initially established and rehabbed the area back to its natural state.

We reclaimed the original trail just in time for the summer visitors!

Before and after - lower stone steps:



Before and after - upper stone steps



Friday, May 22nd – Day 6, Rest Day and Additional Volunteer Contributions: McGurk Meadow Trail Clearing

As is customary for our Yosemite National Park trip, the travelers look forward to their rest day and the opportunity to explore the park's many beautiful trails. With the gorgeous weather this year we expected many varied plans and adventures for this day. Instead, a group of our travelers, already primed and still engaged from their incredible contributions, volunteered on their rest day to assist Eamon with clearing blowdown (trees and limbs) along the McGurk's Meadow Trail. The destruction occurred from a recent windstorm that had passed through the area. The small group of dedicated travelers arose early and spent the day on the trail clearing and helping the NPS crew!



What a great testament to the caliber of participants on our trips!

Final Thoughts on our time in Yosemite National Park

We held daily debriefings every evening around our campfire, all the while getting to know our fellow campers even better. The access to cured wood and low humidity made for a wonderful blazing fire at the end of the day. Hearing stories and experiences from national parks to international destinations is always better when shared by a fire!

Wildlife was abundant this year with many sightings throughout the park, from beavers in the Merced, to a bobcat at the Yosemite Falls trail to a couple bears close to camp! Each encounter was enjoyed at a distance and was even more special against the backdrop of the impressive granite structures. In most instances, it was better to enjoy in the moment versus trying to capture a picture. The mental images will stay with us for a long time!

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Our ConservationVIP Yosemite trips would not be complete without the delicious gourmet meals at the beginning and end of our project days with homemade dessert shared around a roaring campfire. We thank our amazing caterers, [Willow Creek Catering](#), for their continued partnership and dedicated service over the years. A special part of our participants' experience

is the nutritious hot meals to sustain them from morning to evening. The attention to detail and unique cuisine is always a favorite for our travelers. Whether it's Tuscan Salmon, Prime Rib, Thai Chicken or Grass-fed Burgers grilled on site, our campers retired to their tents very satisfied! Willow Creek also accommodates any dietary concerns or restrictions, so no worries about ingredients or meal concerns. **Thank you Dawn and Kearey!**

Once again, this year participants thoroughly enjoyed the fireside chat with [Brian Shoor](#), Yosemite Conservancy's storyteller extraordinaire. His remarkable knowledge and engaging storytelling made for a truly memorable evening. With a deep understanding of Yosemite's history, Brian brought our suggested topics to life through his stories. A true professional, his presentation was a wonderful way to end the day. **Thank you, Brian!**

Our Yosemite trips would not occur without the dedication and coordination of many different parties. This begins well in advance of our scheduled weeks in the park. Ed Eads leads our ConservationVIP® team in coordination with Lydia James, Volunteer Program Manager at Yosemite National Park. Their tireless communication makes sure all items are covered for a seamless experience for our travelers. **Thank you, Ed! Thank you, Lydia!**

Our day-to-day NPS Volunteer contact, Eamon Schneider, is a steadfast and patient advocate for our organization. His leadership continues to shape and elevate our Yosemite trips year after year. Without his professionalism—and his sense of humor—the experience simply wouldn't be the same. **Thank you, Eamon!**

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all our travelers this spring. You contributed an incredible **234.5 volunteer hours** in support of the National Park Service at Yosemite National Park. On behalf of your ConservationVIP trip leaders, Danielle and Pam, well done, Spring Team! We truly enjoyed sharing this week with you and are so impressed by all that we accomplished together. Your contributions to the park will be enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of hikers for years to come. On your next visit to this spectacular place, we hope you'll return to our project sites and take pride in the impact you've made. **We would be honored to have you join us again.**



Join ConservationVIP® on our [Fall Yosemite National Park trip on September 13-19, 2026.](#)