

Josh Matthews, Placer High School

Blue skies above, manzanetta on both sides, the winding river below, and miles of trails weaving through the hills. Whether a hiker, biker, runner, horseback rider, or kayaker; these are the unique sights that can be experienced in the American River Canyon. I have been lucky enough to grow up in this beautiful area, spending countless hours exploring the trails, enjoying the rivers, and taking in the scenic views. Because of my love for this canyon, I feel that we all must do our part to ensure that future generations can also benefit from all that it has to offer. Growing to appreciate venturing outdoors from my activity in the American River Canyon, I have learned the importance of protecting and improving these recreational areas.

As the awareness of human environmental impacts begins to rise, it is important for my generation and the next to ensure the prosperity of nature. Through the use of outdoor programs and school field trips, the young can be educated about how to create a strong and sustainable canyon. In this way, the public can continue to explore and stay outdoors while increasing their understanding. I consider it important to keep outdoor recreation areas in their natural conditions so as to not harm the wildlife and their habitat. In order to assist with this cause, I have volunteered my time the last two years to help at the annual American River Clean Up. I found this event to be both beneficial and fun. Although piles of trash can be taken out with just a few volunteer hours, some bigger items cannot. Scattered through the canyon are remnants of old projects such as roads, dams, and bridges. Although these items cannot be taken out, my vision is to increase strategic planting around them. This would allow for decreased erosion, plant restoration, beautification, and increased animal habitats. Finally, we must be aware of the fire dangers in the canyon especially with drought conditions. Continued brush thinning, pruning, and fuel breaks can help to decrease destruction.

Because of my experiences in the American River Canyon, I am majoring in the dual forestry and civil engineering program at Oregon State University. This major focuses on how to protect and sustain our natural resources and is the only dual program offered in the country. I will also be taking extra classes on the weekends to become a Wilderness First Responder and Outdoor Leader. I want to be an active voice and enthusiast for outdoor experiences. As I learn about natural resources, I will remember my roots and times spent in the Auburn State Recreation Area hiking to "No Hands Bridge," running to Chili Bar, and kayaking at Lake Clementine. I hope in the future that with my degree, I will be able to implement this type of mitigation on a much higher level, aiding in the overall well being of the environment. As John Muir put it, "in every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."