

Vance Byer, Placer High School

The beautiful scenic trails, the refreshing river on a hot day, and the crisp fresh air is all a part of who I have become today. As a current student at Placer High School, a cross country runner since elementary school, and an avid runner in the community, the American River Canyon is home to me. I have always enjoyed the traditions, such as runs to Tamaroo Bar, racing up Stagecoach, and swimming in the river after a long run down the Quarry Trail. Some of my most enjoyable memories with my friends and teammates have taken place on the endless beautiful trails in the canyon.

In addition to enjoying the canyon as an athlete, I also appreciate its educational uses both for the public and for students. At a young age I remember participating in a river safety PSA with the Cal Fire Information Officer Daniel Berlant, as I modeled life vest and river safety. In school I spent a research day down at the PCWA pump house and learned the history of the proposed dam and the science behind the American River Canyon watershed. I have also collected plant samples for an AP environmental plant research project which studied the different ecosystems that make up the canyon.

In the past year the number of visitors and tourists has exponentially increased. The quarantine due to Covid-19 is one of the main factors for this increase. Being stuck at home in a confined space can be depressing and claustrophobic. Going on a hike in the canyon creates natural healing sensations, as well as relieves feelings of stress and anxiety. The quarantine has also given the public more time to get out and explore the alluring sights of where we live. Although the pandemic undoubtedly is a major factor in the increase, I believe there are also other factors. One of these is the social media influence and the attention the stunning pictures and stories produce, which lead visitors to certain spots like Yankee Jim's, the Confluence, and Windy Point Trail. The number of increasing visitors and the social media attention is not necessarily a negative for the future of the American River Canyon system; however, the effects that it has on the ecosystem as well as wildlife, is definitely a concern.

As someone who spends countless hours in the canyon every week, I have definitely noticed that with the surges of people comes an increase in pollution in the form of littering, as well as an obstruction of the ecosystem. I have noticed an increase in garbage on the waterfront, the pristine rock beaches, and there are bottles and cans sparsely scattered on the sides of the trails. Recently I witnessed a squirrel with what appeared to be a plastic rapper of some sort in its mouth.

While I strongly encourage tourists to come and visit this amazing landmark, ecosystem, and environment, I believe that respecting visitor etiquette and park rules will help ensure that the beautiful American River Canyon can be enjoyed for generations to come.