

## Lara Macon, Placer High School

It's the minute details that make a place beautiful. The small Pipevine Swallowtails bouncing from flower to flower, moss creeping up the amphitheatre of rock, manzanita's bright bark shining through the underbrush make the American River canyons a beautiful place to live. But these canyons represent more. The American River and its canyons stand as a symbol of my youth and provide me with a refuge, and I want to help preserve this environmental treasure for generations to come.

The American River tells many stories. It tells it's own geologic history where the water carved away the earth. It tells tales of Native Americans like the Nisenan-Maidu and fortune-seeking miners during the Gold Rush. But the American River also tells another history: mine. The canyon embodies my experiences growing up in Auburn.

When I was little, the river was where I splashed around on hot summer afternoons. As I got older, the river became the place where I learned to fish with my dad. In middle school, the river was where my friends and I hung out during summer vacation. Now, the American River Canyon is where I train for half marathons and go hiking with my friends. Remarkably, much of this land looks exactly as it did when I was a child. The breathtaking scenery, the rushing river, the vast canyons have remained the same, contrasting the all the changes that have taken place in my own life.

The stress of high school academics, extracurricular activities and sports has made the river and its canyons increasingly important in my life. The canyon serves as my escape. When I feel overwhelmed, I simply take a hike down to the river, sit along the shore, and let the sound of the water calm my mind. When I feel stressed, I throw on my running shoes and wind my way down the curving trails of the canyon, letting the surroundings ease my tension. The river serves as a safe haven and an escape from the pressures of everyday life.

But we take this amazing ecosystem for granted too often. I want to be able to share the serenity of the American River and its canyons with others for many generations to come. My vision for improving the Auburn State Recreation area is to control invasive plant species. These weeds, including yellow starthistle and Himalayan blackberry outcompete beneficial native grasses, such as purple needlegrass and blue wild rye. There are several management options for controlling invasive weeds, including livestock grazing, prescribed burning, and reseeding with native plants. Controlling these weeds would allow for a continued natural state of the American River canyons for visitors to enjoy, as well as provide ecological benefits to the environment.

The American River is a symbol of the transitions in my life and a safe haven for me when I feel overwhelmed. My vision is that future generations will be able to experience the beauty and wonder that we have in our backyard.