

## Paige Roper, Placer High School

The American River and its natural surroundings has been a central theme in my life and has helped to shape me into the person I am today. My vision for improving the Auburn State Recreation Area is to promote access to the parts of the canyon that have been so significant to me growing up here.

A river, by its very nature, connects things. It carries water from the mountains to the ocean, and connects the past to the present and the present to the future. The American River has flowed through my personal story and has connected many meaningful moments in my life together. When I think back on why the river is important to me, it is hard to pick just one experience that holds more value than the others. I remember being in elementary school and walking from Skyridge to hike down the Cardiac Trail and then walking back home. Countless memories of weekend and summer vacation days spent at the river flood my mind, no day better than the next because each brought new adventures. I will always hold in my heart the place where my best-friend's mother's memorial bench overlooks the North Fork, and the river bank at Oregon Bar where my childhood dog spent the last few hours of his life swimming in the cool turquoise water. I have spent hours running in the canyon's trails, first as a mandatory training for sports, but more recently for my own enjoyment. I am certain that my experiences living in Auburn on the American River are the main factor in my decision to pursue Environmental Studies next year in college, and will be a constant force flowing through and influencing me into the future.

I feel privileged to have grown up living about ten minutes from the gate leading to China Bar. Because of this and my family's enthusiasm for outdoor activities, I have spent more time than anyone I know exploring and enjoying that portion of the canyon. Unfortunately, most of my friends' experience with the river has been at the Confluence, which certainly has allure, but is only one location among many of the special places in the Auburn State Recreation Area. My vision for the Area is that more people are able to enjoy other parts of the river and the canyon as I have. Increasing the hours that the gate at the China Bar entrance station is open, enabling people to take advantage of parking closer to the river, would be a good start. This, along with plans for kayak access and a hiking bridge across the river, will go a long way to exposing others to the wonder of this part of the American River.

The inspiration and appreciation that I have gained from the American River and its canyons will influence me for the rest of my life, and it is my vision for the Auburn State Recreation Area that others are able to share this experience.