

## **Kristine Dunn, Granite Bay High School**

I see the shimmering, prism-like waters that diffuse beams of light. I smell the earthy air that casts a sheen of dust upon my skin that mingles with my sweat. Manzanita trees with their twisting gnarled branches reach wherever the light draws them. The American River canyon serves as a place of peace for myself, a reminder of how small I truly am within the vast and endless expanse of the Earth. Out on the winding trails, away from the noise of the roads and my thoughts, I feel tranquil and calm. Time slows, life pauses.

Places like this are exceedingly rare, yet are filled with such raw beauty to be experienced in our own backyard. The trails are where I have grown to love hiking with my friends, momentarily escaping the demands of daily life and swapping out our studies for sunscreen. Over the years, the canyons have been where I have made some of my favorite memories. Recently, I hiked Stevens trail with my friends. Towards the middle of our hike, we reached a large boulder that looked out over the whole canyon. The moment gave us pause, speechless, as we looked out in awe at the incredible landscape.

As the number of visitors to the area increases, my vision for the park is to increase recreational opportunities by adding more organized programs, especially in the summer. More youth camps that incorporate activities such as hiking, camping, or kayaking would be beneficial in many ways. They would continue to expose children and their families to all of the exciting ways to enjoy the area, encourage a healthy, active lifestyle, and expand education of environmental conservation. With the numbers of park visitors increasing every year, the land is more likely to become worn down and polluted. By increasing education and awareness, we can protect the park and keep it clean so that others will be able to enjoy the area and its indescribable beauty as much as I do. As well as increasing opportunities for recreation, these programs could allow for volunteer or job opportunities for local teens. For high school students such as myself who are passionate about enjoying and protecting the natural landscape of our area, programs could provide a window for teens gain valuable job experience while sharing their passion for nature and giving back to the local community.

Encouraging people to experience the American River canyons is vitally important to me. I want to shine light on and allow individuals to witness the same natural wonders that have become so tightly woven into my own life because of this incredible area: an area that paints peace, stirs splendor, and amplifies adventure.