

On a blazing Thursday evening, I hopped out of the car onto a rocky parking lot. The American River glistened like a mirage before me and to my left, the Quarry Trail snaked around the hillside. The group of runners I came with ran onto the trail and I followed, the sound of crunching gravel loud in my ears. My feet began to burn from the hot gravel and my legs were begging me to stop. Despite this pain my mind was elsewhere, lost in the beauty of nature: the way the water slipped over and around the rocks in the river, the variety of trees that offered sparse shade and interesting patterns created by intertwining of branches, and the abrupt change of terrain from the gravel trail to the untamed hillsides sporting only the toughest plants.

I was nearly ready to pass out from the heat when we passed Hawver Cave which blasted cold air at us. It was like jumping into a pool of cool water and such refreshment allowed me to push on. After about five grueling miles of running, we were allowed to slip into the river. I had never felt such relief as I surrendered myself to the river. As I basked in its coolness I observed the patterns the flowing water made on my skin. I realized I never fully appreciated the importance and beauty of water until this day. The American River Trails are where I learned that any physical limits you set for yourself can be overcome. The American River is vital to me and my community because it provides a variety of activities that enable people to escape society and reconnect with nature.

The American River is immensely important to me and my community and needs protecting. Encouraging more people to experience the American River will inspire more people to protect it. Social media accounts that promote the beauty and opportunity of the American River would raise awareness among youths in the area. Events like the Great Sierra American cleanup could be advertised on social media to encourage the people of Placer County to protect the American River.

During my time with the Placer Cross Country team, I learned that the ecosystem of the American River is delicate. The residents and visitors of Placer County are unaware of the threat they pose to this ecosystem. Littering, dumping, hiking off trails, and feeding wildlife all severely damage the American River, making it less enjoyable for visitors. We need to educate future custodians, my generation, on how they can protect the American River so it can continue to be enjoyed. High schools in Placer County should have speakers talk to students about how to help conserve and safely enjoy the American River.

The American River connects so many people to a natural environment with a rich variety of flora and fauna. It provides a peaceful sanctuary for those in need of stability in their lives as well as an adventurous landscape for those who require a more energizing experience. A region that possesses such restorative and revitalizing properties requires protection by eager schoolkids who will advocate for the American River for many years.