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Auburn is a place I've been blessed to call home since I was born here 18 years ago. Living a mere 5 minute drive from Folsom Lake's Rattlesnake Bar and having direct access to the China Bar trail from my backyard, I've been fastened to the scenic destinations and remarkable landscapes of the American River Canyon forever. There is nothing more revitalizing than a hike down to Calcutta Falls, jumping off the rocks into Clark's Hole, or admiring the canyon's magnificence from Overlook Park. I've spent many days and nights at the North and Middle Forks' confluence, swimming to escape the heat before laying on the sand to watch the stars. I learned to skip rocks and kayak in the North Fork, as well as caught my first fish; memories I will cherish forever.

Unfortunately, the American River Canyon and its tranquility are at risk. Climate change and the part we play in it threatens the habitats and natural beauty that the canyon provides for us all. Just five months ago, the Bridge fire destroyed another beautiful hiking destination: the Fuel Break Trail. The landscape is scorched black, a 411 acre blemish on the exquisite ecosystems it supports. While an arsonist did light the spark, increasing temperature and drought from climate change made the canyon vulnerable to this tragedy. The root cause of this problem lies with human carelessness. We must take responsibility and reverse climate change to save our canyon, but also to save our planet.

Furthermore, the canyon is exploited in other ways. The sides of roads, trails, and the river collect various forms of waste. Plastic and glass bottles, wrappers, aluminum cans, fishing gear, and more litter the ground. Especially rampant due to the Covid-19 pandemic are disposable masks, left behind by those too lazy to respect the land. As part of the Placer High School Environmental Club, my peers and I work to reduce the amount of debris that plagues the canyon. Switching weekly between the canyon and Placer High's campus, we spend hours of our weekend cleaning up the contaminants. Sadly, our numbers are far too little to preserve the whole canyon. As a community, we need to step up, not only to remove the pollutants, but to stop this abuse altogether.

The American River Canyon supports relaxation, adventure, and serenity for us all. But what it provides, we must respect and defend. Destructive actions like climate change and littering harm our breathtaking environment, and we should do our part to end it.