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Environmentalist Edward Abbey said "Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit", and anyone who has visited the American River knows this is true. The River has given me more recreation than I can recount: from punishing Auburn runs during cross country, to spontaneous post-bike ride swims at the confluence, to white water rafting in Coloma, it has always been a source of great enjoyment. Providing an amazing backdrop for fond memories, it serves as an escape from daily stressors.

It has also been a great source for education and action. As a child, my parents took me to the Nimbus fish hatchery, introducing me to the actions required to sustain a healthy river ecosystem. In 2020, I spent a warm morning picking up trash in a mask in Folsom. This year, I picked up trash on the American River Parkway, cleaning up abandoned homeless encampments. I saw living arrangements and garbage strewn about, filled with reminders of our wasteful, consumerist culture. This made me consider how environmental concerns about the American River intersected with local social concerns. It bothered me to see how our society turned its back not only on people with mental health problems, but also on the River. The American River has helped so many of us when it has been acutely needed, yet it often fails to receive necessary protection from us. Given education and resources, residents of the American River would never choose to pollute it, this only comes when they lack these things. While this may not have been upstream of Folsom Reservoir, the principle remains the same: we must support our sacred river by supporting those who live by it.

Trying to combat social injustices, like those behind the environmental degradation I saw on the parkway, I founded the Student Action Club. We have participated in projects to raise clothes and hygiene products, plus volunteering for the local food bank. I organized thousands of pounds of food donations through soliciting, picking, and delivering to food banks. This has led my peers to better understand local food sources and volunteer opportunities. I do my best to educate my family and friends on environmental issues, who I teach about the destructive impacts of the meat and fashion industries, and I have begun a project to collect compost at my school.

The relationship between our society and our natural world is reciprocal. We must protect our environment in order to secure well being for all, and vice versa. Any breakdown in this system will result in collapse, both of our environment and society.

The solution to problems the American River faces, like pollution, fires, and more, comes from our actions. By educating those around us on responsible recreation and environmentalism, as well as supporting our communities, we can protect this natural gem for those who can benefit from it in the future. This can only be done through constant, vigilant action, coupled with awareness about the problems that threaten our River.