

## **Jade Biittner, Colfax High School**

### **Not Just A River**

Some say it's just a river, but I see so much more. From the smallest speck of sand to the massive canyon walls, everything in between is impacted by us as a community. The river is often admired for its crystal clear waters and used for endless recreational activities, but few look long enough to see the damages we as people have caused.

I myself enjoy swimming, hiking, and biking around the American River. It not only gives me a chance to be physically active, but it is also very mentally freeing. Whenever I need a place to relax and let my anxiety of the day disperse, the river is where I go. When I'm feeling a little too warm in the summer months, I'll swing by the river. If it's raining, well that's no problem, a hike seems like the perfect way to get outside. Feeling like I'm stuck in a funk, a winter cold plunge will do the trick. Wanting to watch the sunset? Chances are you can catch a breathtaking one from the top of the canyons.

Being able to escape from the noise and bustle of town just 15 minutes away is something we all take for granted. While I enjoy the outdoors and encourage others to do the same, I strongly believe in recreating responsibly. I cannot count the amount of bottles and cans I see thrown off the side of trails, at the bottom of the river, or jammed underneath a rock. To me, this really shows the lack of education and effort of those who leave trash behind. I ask myself, "How do they not see the damage they cause?" or "Why don't they care?". The reality is there will always be people who don't care as much as you and I do.

It's sad to see this beautiful place being taken advantage of, but luckily there is something we as a community can do about it. I myself have led cleanups along the American River through the Colfax Environmental Club, as well as participated in events led by other organizations that focus on the conservation and preservation of the land surrounding the American River. As President of the Colfax Environmental Club, it's obvious I have a passion for caring for the environment, however the issue is getting those involved who don't share the same passion. You cannot make people care, but you can provide them with ideas and ways to save this amazing place.

As I said before, the river is so much more than a place to recreate. Thousands of species and habitats are negatively impacted by human activity. I call upon those that visit the American River to advocate and participate in conservation efforts, because the river is not just a river, it is so much more, and as Dr. Suess once said, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not".

**PARC High School Essay Contest Winner, 2024**